

“You Could See Rage”: Visual Testimony in Post-Genocide Guatemala

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Abstract.

Since the Guatemalan genocide against Maya populations (1981-1983), domestic and international human rights groups have organized truth commissions, forensic exhumations, and legal cases. These efforts to secure justice have achieved minimal success, prompting a reconsideration of the relationship among narrative testimony, visual testimony, and institutional standards of truth. Engaging the ideas of visual studies scholar, Nicholas Mirzoeff, I argue for the political importance of testimony that is critical of such standards, including those enforced by human rights’ legal paradigm. Following Mirzoeff’s understandings of “visuality” and “countervisuality,” I analyze “visual testimony” as that which acknowledges the dynamic interplay between word and image, as well as various power relations. More specifically, I explore how genocide survivor Rigoberta Menchú and performance artist Regina José Galindo employ this type of testimony to express rage, which I associate with witnesses’ right to testify on their own terms, beyond institutional processes and imperatives.

Keywords.

Guatemala, genocide, visual testimony, human rights, rage

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“You Could See Rage”: Visual Testimony in Post-Genocide Guatemala

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Introduction

Evidence of the Guatemalan genocide is expansive, including narrative testimonies, forensic exhumations, institutional records, and documentary footage. From 1981 to 1983, the Guatemalan military waged scorched earth campaigns against Maya populations in the country’s highlands. According to defenders of this violence, such populations were conspiring with the Guerrilla Army of the Poor, a leftist movement against whom the military had waged a 36-year-long war (1960-1996). Yet both of Guatemala’s truth commission reports, *Guatemala, Never Again* (1998) and *Guatemala: Memory of Silence* (1999), demonstrate an intent to exterminate Maya peoples simply because their existence disrupted the establishment of a colonial and capitalist order.¹ Identifying indigenous populations as an “internal enemy” in their own right, the military executed widespread massacres designed to eliminate even the “bad seeds,” meaning even innocent children.²

Despite this abundance of evidence, as well as the support of international human rights organizations, legal victories in post-genocide Guatemala have been few and fleeting. In May of 2013, Guatemala’s congress nullified a brief court conviction of President José Efraín Ríos Montt for charges of genocide. This ruling would have been the first domestic conviction of a former Latin American dictator but, in a regressive change of events, the Guatemalan congress thereafter began debating whether a genocide had occurred at all.³ Ríos Montt was eventually exonerated from retrial on account of his late age, yet President Otto Pérez Molina was impeached and jailed on charges of fraud in 2015. Since Pérez Molina is also a former military officer and suspected génocidaire, his pending prosecution has offered new hope to some human rights activists. Though Guatemala’s judicial system still struggles to imprison prominent culprits, its multiple trials do at least garner domestic and international recognition of the country’s violent history.

At the same time, some survivors and activists have begun to doubt human rights’ legal paradigm, which maintains that sufficient evidence can prove past war crimes, condemn their perpetrators, and thereby secure justice. Even if all of the genocide’s perpetrators were indeed convicted, this paradigm does little to challenge the neocolonial policies and practices that continue to oppress certain Guatemalan populations, particularly indigenous and female ones. Critics of this legal paradigm’s insufficiency encourage a reimagining of truth beyond juridical standards, as well as a rethinking of justice beyond mere retribution. This conceptual turn coincides with the trajectory of scholarship on testimony, which has expanded its strict focus on narrative testimony to also account for visual possibilities of representation. Much of this scholarship understands visual testimony to be more complex and open to interpretation than its narrative counterpart, often identifying it with extralegal modes of witnessing. I acknowledge these claims, yet side more closely with scholars who argue for the need to consider narrative testimony and visual testimony as existing in a dialectical relationship. In this article, I show how narrative testimony can be read and represented in visual ways, thus complicating their distinction and revealing both modes of testimony to be more critical of human rights’ legal paradigm than heretofore acknowledged.

To do this, I turn to testimonies by two different but complementary witnesses: genocide survivor Rigoberta Menchú and performance artist Regina José Galindo. More than simply demand human rights, Menchú and Galindo claim a right to express rage, which I associate with witnesses’ right to testify on their own terms, beyond juridical processes and imperatives. Menchú identifies as a human rights activist, yet she nevertheless expresses rage against the ways she and fellow Mayas

¹ Eglá Martínez Salazar, *Global Coloniality of Power in Guatemala: Racism, Genocide, Citizenship* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2012), 101.

² *Ibid.*, 103.

³ Juan Carlos Pérez Salazar, “Guatemala: ¿Por qué el congreso dice que no hubo genocidio?,” *BBC Mundo*, May 16, 2014, accessed April 12, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2014/05/140515_guatemala_genocidio_resolucion_congreso_jcps.

have been rendered inaudible by various institutional authorities, including legal and academic ones. Though Galindo did not experience the genocide as intimately or intensely as Menchú, she describes a similar sense of indignation against injustice in post-genocide Guatemala. Repurposing narrative testimony in many of her performances, Galindo foregrounds how Guatemala's history of genocide relates to ongoing violence against women, indigenous and not. While analyzing the work of Menchú and Galindo, I explore the relationship between narrative testimony and visual testimony, using both to reimagine truth and justice beyond institutional frameworks, including that of human rights.

The Turn to Visual Testimony

The relationship between narrative testimony and human rights' legal paradigm is historical, yet it only dates back to the 1960s. As Fernando Rosenberg notes, verbal accounts of genocide survivors were first used as judicial evidence in the trial against Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann.⁴ In addition to helping secure Eichmann's guilty sentence, and eventual death penalty, these narrative testimonies seemed to imbue survivors with an unprecedented authority over historical memory. Discussing a later debate concerning curatorial matters at the United States Holocaust Museum, Deborah Lipstadt recounts how survivors' opinions trumped those of fellow museum committee members, including psychologists, historians, and other experts.⁵ Yet, as widespread as this authority may have appeared, it was never considered absolute.

Scholarship on the Holocaust and its aftermath tends to focus on the particular deficiency of survivors' narrative testimony. Because juridical processes valorize eyewitness testimonies as most credible, such witnesses are often the firsthand victims of crime, and thus trauma. According to Sigmund Freud, trauma escapes narrative by definition, referring to violent experiences that overwhelm the subject with "large amounts of stimulus" that appear entirely senseless.⁶ In an influential study of various Holocaust testimonies, ranging from literary accounts to audiovisual archives, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub corroborate psychoanalytic claims that narrative testimony indeed fails to coherently and comprehensively represent the traumatic events that it references. As Laub observes in his study of survivors interviewed at the Yale Video Archive, "there are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time."⁷

Considering this impossibility of narrating the Holocaust, Laub, Felman, and other scholars deem it an event that resists its own witnessing. Indeed, it is precisely the inadequacy of narrative testimony that prompts these scholars to also consider visual modes of representation. In an analysis of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985), a 10-hour film comprised of numerous survivor testimonies, Felman claims that the visual medium only further foregrounds the Holocaust as a limit-experience, or what she calls "a historical assault on seeing."⁸ Many of the survivors do not wish to be filmed, causing Lanzmann to include a variety of walls and screens that mimic the very structures and logics employed by Nazi génocidaires. Yet, while Lanzmann also argues for the absolute unintelligibility of the genocide, other scholars appeal to visual images as at least partially informative.

In his reading of four photos from Auschwitz, Georges Didi-Huberman argues for a dialectical relationship among narrative and visual testimony. As he states, "An image often appears where a word seems to fail; a word often appears where the imagination seems to fail."⁹ While Didi-Huberman also understands narrative and visual testimony as necessarily incomplete

⁴ Fernando Rosenberg, *After Human Rights: Literature, Visual Arts, and Film in Latin America, 1990-2010* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016), 126.

⁵ Deborah Lipstadt, *The Eichmann Trial* (New York: Schocken Books, 2011), xi.

⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920-1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 14.

⁷ Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 63.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁹ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 26.

representations, he claims their lacunae to exist in a reciprocal exchange that is illustrative of historical violence, both past and present. Siding with Didi-Huberman in noting that images “appear to dominate the historical record precisely where words fail,” Sharon Sliwinski asserts the need for more investigations into how visual testimonies contribute to public domains of history and memory.¹⁰

In her own study of photos from the Holocaust, as well as the genocides in Congo and Rwanda, Sliwinski explores the ways in which the mass circulation of images has challenged institutional understandings of humanity and human rights. Contrary to documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Sliwinski does not recognize human rights as universal by nature. For her, visual testimony has been critical to the creation of a worldwide network of witnesses, which she situates as necessary to the judgement and enforcement of human rights. As she explains, photos of violence represent dehumanization in a way that “anguishes” viewers, thereby activating a shared sense of humanity and associated ethical behavior.¹¹ These photos interpellate cosmopolitan spectators, compelling them to bring those deprived of human rights back into the protection of a global community.

While Sliwinski does acknowledge the historical relationship between human rights and narrative testimony, she privileges visual testimony as a more affective, and also more urgent, mode of witnessing.¹² This argument coincides with much of the scholarship on visual testimony and human rights in the field of Latin American Studies. Having sustained lengthy debates on the differences between literal and literary testimony, this field also began exploring the personal and political importance of alternative modes of testimony. In *Pushing the Boundaries of Latin American Testimony: Meta-morphoses and Migrations*, an edited volume, multiple scholars examine the way testimony has expanded “from text to textiles, radio and graphic art; from transcribed and written to spoken, public and performative; [...] and from nonfiction to fiction and film.”¹³ For these authors, such expansion is especially significant amid institutional impunity, which refuses to recognize victims’ narrative accounts of injustice as indeed veridical. Likewise, books on postwar Peru, Argentina, and Guatemala, among other countries, argue that testimony’s varying forms facilitate the sharing of manifold memories, emotions, and politics.¹⁴

In *War by Other Means: Aftermath in Post-Genocide Guatemala*, editors Carlota McAllister and Diane Nelson claim that this Central American country still suffers from military, political, economic, and spiritual projects aimed at thwarting “hopes for structural transformation.”¹⁵ This counterinsurgent network involves international policies such as the Central American Free Trade Agreement (2005) and the Mérida Initiative (2006), which purport to benefit Central America but meanwhile increase the United States’ control over the region, thereby functioning as neocolonial policies.¹⁶ Additionally, domestic practices of state terrorism, structural racism, and institutional impunity continue to harm the same populations that were most victimized by the genocide, including the indigenous, women, and children. Coining this phenomenon an ongoing “war by other means,” McAllister and Nelson argue for a rethinking of truth and justice beyond human rights’ legal paradigm, which they recognize as insufficient to acknowledging and resisting this war. Though post-genocide truth commissions and associated legal cases have gathered thousands

¹⁰ Sharon Sliwinski, “Visual Testimony: Lee Miller’s Dachau,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 9, no. 3 (2010), 404, accessed July 10, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412910380358>.

¹¹ Sharon Sliwinski, *Human Rights in Camera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 138.

¹² Sliwinski, *Human Rights in Camera*, 7.

¹³ Louise Detwiler and Janis Breckenridge, eds. *Pushing the Boundaries of Latin American Testimony: Meta-morphoses and Migrations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

¹⁴ Brenda Werth’s *Theatre, Performance, and Memory Politics in Argentina* (2010); Cynthia Milton’s *Art from a Fractured Past: Memory and Truth-Telling in Post-Shining Path Peru* (2014); and Diane M. Nelson’s *Reckoning: The Ends of War in Guatemala* (2009) are three books that make this argument.

¹⁵ Carlota McAllister and Diane M. Nelson, eds. *War by Other Means: Aftermath in Post-Genocide Guatemala* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 16.

¹⁶ CAFTA is a bilateral free trade agreement eliminating tariffs on trade between Central America and the United States. The Mérida Initiative is a security cooperation agreement between the United States, Mexico, and Central America, with the stated purpose of mitigating transnational drug trafficking and organized crime.

of survivor testimonies, McAllister and Nelson claim that such testimonies have been limited and devalued by juridical epistemologies and processes.¹⁷

While these scholars make a cogent argument that I will soon address further, it is first worth noting their edited volume's limited engagement of visual testimony in post-genocide Guatemala. Though these authors point out the importance of expanding "scholarship's sensorial range" to include image and sound, they focus predominantly on narrative testimonies.¹⁸ In doing so, they neglect to acknowledge one of the most internationally recognized witnesses of the Guatemalan genocide. As an employee of various news agencies, as well as Guatemala's first truth commission, photojournalist Daniel Hernández-Salazar was responsible for documenting the genocide, as well as its aftermath. Commissioned to create the cover for *Guatemala, Never Again*, he shot a quadriptych consisting of four images, each of the same angel as he covers his ears, eyes, and mouth before ultimately cupping his mouth and screaming.

According to Hernández-Salazar, *Clarification* demonstrates the process of proclaiming truth in post-genocide Guatemala. Having created the angel's wings by transposing a photo of a shoulder blade exhumed from the country's highlands, this self-identified "artist," or artist-activist, intended for *Guatemala, Never Again's* cover to be just as evidentiary as its content.¹⁹ Explaining the screaming angel, which Hernández-Salazar called *So that all shall know*, he states, "I made it because ODHA, with its reporting on [human rights] violations was going to break the silence."²⁰ Yet, two days after *Guatemala, Never Again* was publicly released by Monsignor Juan José Gerardi, an organizer of this truth commission, members of the Guatemalan military murdered him.²¹ When the anniversary of this assassination occurred with its perpetrators still benefitting from impunity, Hernández-Salazar posted enlarged versions of *So that all shall know* throughout Guatemala City. As he states, "Years pass. They peel away like pages in a book. Everything remains unpunished. I must scream it."²²

As even more years have passed, and impunity has continued to reign, Hernández-Salazar has installed additional versions of his screaming angel, both in Guatemala and in other sites of mass violence, including Auschwitz, Poland and Hiroshima, Japan. Having also appeared in multiple international exhibitions, *So that all shall know* has attracted the scholarly attention of Macarena Gómez-Barris, Steven Hoelscher, and Magdalena Perkowska, among others. For Gómez-Barris, Hernández-Salazar's photos demonstrate how visual testimony provides "a wider set of representational strategies" for the public sphere.²³ Whereas legal standards place restraints on narrative testimony to be as direct and reasonable as possible, this scholar joins Sliwinski in valorizing visual testimony as less objective and more open to "affective" and "experiential" complexity.²⁴

Hoelscher and Perkowska also view Hernández-Salazar's photos as a more emotional, and notably extralegal, mode of witnessing; yet they focus on the particular significance of visual screaming. For Hoelscher, these images "scream for the memory of the dead," effectively speaking

¹⁷ Fernando Rosenberg's *After Human Rights: Literature, Visual Arts, and Film in Latin America, 1990-2010* (2016) and Kate Jenckes' *Witnessing Beyond the Human: Addressing the Alterity of the Other in Post-Coup Chile and Argentina* (2017) also critique human rights' legal paradigm as incapable of adequately addressing ongoing political and social violence in Latin America.

¹⁸ McAllister and Nelson, *War by Other Means*, 95.

¹⁹ Daniel Hernández-Salazar, "Así me convertí en Daniel Hernández-Salazar," *ContraPoder*, December 31, 2014, accessed February 6, 2015, <http://www.contrapoder.com.gt/es/edicion7/actualidad/337/>.

²⁰ *La Palabra Desenterrada*, directed by Mary Ellen Davis (New York: Cinema Guild, 2001), DVD; ODHA refers to Oficina de Derechos Humanos del Arzobispado en Guatemala (*Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala*).

²¹ In 2001, three army officers were convicted of committing Gerardi's assassination. This trial marked the first time that members of the Guatemalan military were tried in a civilian court.

²² Oscar Iván Maldonado. *So that all shall know/Para que todos lo sepan: Photographs by Daniel Hernández-Salazar* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 1.

²³ Macarena Gómez-Barris, "Visual Testimonies of Atrocity: Archives of Political Violence in Chile and Guatemala," *Journal of Visual Culture* 9, no. 3 (2010), 417, accessed July 10, 2017, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412910380345>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 417.



Figure 1. Daniel Hernández-Salazar, *Clarification*, 1998, © 1998 Daniel Hernández-Salazar, www.danielhernandezsalazar.com

on behalf of those who did not survive the genocide.²⁵ In contrast, Perkowska understands such screaming to figure the ongoing inaudibility of those who did survive, including the witnesses who have shared their narrative testimonies. Noting how viewers likely identify with the angel's screaming, as well as its silence before institutional authorities, she claims the image to evoke feelings of "frustration, indignation, and rage."²⁶

Throughout this article, I further investigate the significance of rage as a mode of visual testimony within post-genocide Guatemala. While doing so, I demonstrate the importance of analyzing visual testimony and narrative testimony together, showing them to be more closely connected than commonly acknowledged. While many scholars, including those mentioned above, distinguish visual testimony as an alternative to narrative testimony, few have followed Didi-Huberman's example in examining their dialectical relationship. What does Hernández-Salazar's cover image reveal about the narrative testimonies within *Guatemala: Never Again*? Is the rage that *So that all shall know* expresses the same as that experienced by genocide victims, as well as survivors? Instead of addressing these exact questions, I turn to two of Hernández-Salazar's contemporaries and explore related issues. Though the narrative testimony of Rigoberta Menchú and the performance art of Regina José Galindo are just as well known as Hernández-Salazar's photography, neither has yet been read as a mode of visual testimony.

Doing so requires an understanding of "visual" that differs slightly from "visible." While visual testimony can include image-based media such as photography and film, it is not reducible to them. Throughout this article, I scaffold my readings of Menchú and Galindo's work with Nicholas Mirzoeff's concepts of "visuality," "countervisuality," and "the right to look," which address the ways that institutional authorities try to limit what is "sayable" and "visible" as truth.²⁷ Informed by Mirzoeff, I here distinguish visual testimony as one that acknowledges the interplay between word and image, as well as various power relations. In *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality*, Mirzoeff conceptualizes visuality as a power complex that has been present throughout modern history, linking it to plantation slavery, imperialism, and today's military-industrial complex.²⁸ For him, authority justifies its own power by attempting to enforce a particular historical perspective. Identifying visuality as this hegemonic, or dominant, worldview, Mirzoeff also elaborates on its inherent instability and points out the ever-present possibility of countervisuality. As "dissensus with visuality," countervisuality includes an assertion of the right to look, which Mirzoeff defines as the assertion of one's own authority over truth.²⁹ While reading Menchú and Galindo's respective testimonies as countervisual, I focus on these witnesses' practices of "seeing rage" as indeed practices of claiming the right to look.

²⁵ Steven Hoelscher, "Angels of Memory: Photography and Haunting in Guatemala City," *GeoJournal* 73 (2008), 206.

²⁶ Magdalena Perkowska, "'Para que todos lo sepan': Poética visual de emoción y disenso del Ángel de Daniel Hernández-Salazar," *Esferas* 7 (2017): 198, accessed July 6, 2017, <https://wp.nyu.edu/esferas/2017/05/04/issue-7-velar-la-imagen/>; author's translation.

²⁷ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

Seeing Rage with Rigoberta Menchú

I am not the first scholar to argue for the importance of witnessing rage in post-genocide Guatemala. I am, however, the first to recognize rage as central to Rigoberta Menchú's internationally read account of the armed conflict, *My name is Rigoberta Menchú and this is how my consciousness was born*.³⁰ In this book, Menchú narrates the systemic oppression and eventual massacre of her family and fellow Mayas, as well as the gradual development of her critical consciousness. While this publication was understood to constitute a new form of *testimonio* literature, which differs from legal testimony by granting witnesses more expressive freedom, it has nevertheless been subjected to extreme scrutiny.³¹ Some critics argue that Menchú's testimony does not do justice to Guatemala's revolutionary movement and the passions that informed it, while others dismiss her account as communist propaganda. In this section, I review these viewpoints before analyzing the ways in which visuality and countervisuality play into this polemical narrative. By engaging Mirzoeff's concepts, I show how seeing rage in Menchú's narrative foregrounds this witness' subtle refutation of her critics' claims, as well as their attempted control over her own testimony.

According to Carlota McAllister and Diane Nelson, Menchú's testimony is more radical than most insofar as Menchú openly acknowledges her involvement with the revolutionary movement. Yet, McAllister also critiques Menchú for later abandoning her revolutionary commitments in favor of human rights ones. As the young activist recounts in *My name is Rigoberta*, she chose to follow her father's example in becoming a community organizer for the Peasant Community Committee, which collaborated with the Guerrilla Army of the Poor. Meanwhile, some of her siblings became guerrilla fighters. Having helped gather narrative testimonies in Guatemala's highlands, McAllister and Nelson first lament other survivors' reticence to acknowledge their similar participation in such efforts. According to these anthropologists, such reticence partially results from the way that human rights' legal paradigm only values survivors' testimonies insofar as they evidence such witnesses' absolute innocence. In this sense, such legal standards force survivors to identify as helpless victims, not one side of a grossly uneven, and indeed genocidal, war. At the risk of also being indicted for crimes such as treason and murder, former community organizers silence the very causes, including indignation against injustice, that motivated their self-defense in the first place.

In post-genocide Argentina, a similar devaluation of revolutionary militancy results from a hegemonic "theory of two demons," which squares political subversion with state repression as equally violent. Guatemala's defenders of genocide likewise foreground indigenous populations conspiracy with the Guerrilla Army of the Poor in order to exonerate the state army's scorched earth campaigns. Even when survivors do mention Guatemala's leftist movement, such references fall on deaf ears, and are often omitted in the circulation of printed materials, such as truth commission reports.³² Thus distinguishing unspeakable from inaudible testimony, McAllister and Nelson try to practice "nonhumanitarian forms of listening" in which they pay special attention to the otherwise unheard "revolutionary call to 'go on.'"³³ They describe this call as an affirmation of the passions, including suffering and rage, that propel Maya populations to continue fighting for their rights, be they through armed conflict or more peaceful methods. For McAllister and Nelson, remembering Guatemala's history of insurgency is especially important because the country continues to suffer from the aforementioned "war by other means."

Rather than recognize human rights' legal paradigm as adequate to acknowledging, let alone resisting, this war, McAllister and Nelson privilege "revolutionary testimony" as necessary to educating Guatemalans about "the enduring possibility of transformation."³⁴ For them,

³⁰ Menchú's book, originally titled *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983), was translated by Ann Wright into a version titled *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1984). I am using my own translations because they are more literal and more relevant to this article's arguments.

³¹ John Beverley, "The Margin at the Center: On *Testimonio* (Testimonial Narrative)," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 35, no. 1 (1989): 13, accessed February 2, 2015, doi: 10.1353/mfs.0.0923.

³² McAllister and Nelson, *War by Other Means*, 97.

³³ *Ibid.*, 98.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 114.

revolutionary testimony normally recounts the harmful state relations between indigenous people and *ladinos* throughout the 1960s and 1970s, stirring the development of the witness's political consciousness and eventual involvement in leftist organizations aiming to overcome oppression.³⁵ McAllister and Nelson briefly mention *My name is Rigoberta* as an example of this type of testimony, yet McAllister elsewhere critiques Menchú for describing Guatemala's revolutionary movement as entirely past.³⁶

Discussing Menchú's role as a survivor and witness in Pamela Yates' documentary film, *When the Mountains Tremble* (1983), McAllister notes the ways in which Menchú "ends up denying the power of the guerrilla experience."³⁷ In this film, Menchú summarizes select excerpts from *My name is Rigoberta* while dressed in traditional Maya clothing and staring softly into the camera. Poised as harmless and somewhat naïve, she recounts the murder of her brother and father, a direct result of their revolutionary commitments. Yet, while she does acknowledge her family's past involvement with the Guerrilla Army of the Poor, Menchú consistently distinguishes herself as more of a social organizer and human rights activist. This testimonial approach causes McAllister to question Menchú's commitment to the aforementioned "call to 'go on.'" As McAllister explains, "She says 'I used to be a romantic but, after genocide, what's the point of talking about that? Now I know that it was false hope.'"³⁸ For McAllister, this reframing of hope as false is problematic because it devalues Menchú's, as well as other genocide survivors', experiences with revolutionary projects, as well as the "passions" that informed them.³⁹

Yet, rather than blame Menchú herself, McAllister again notes how human rights' legal paradigm makes it hard for indigenous populations "to talk about their own history, which is a history of revolution."⁴⁰ In identifying themselves as guerrillas or militants, for example, genocide survivors are often understood as taking responsibility for their own victimization. Far from supporting survivors' cases for legal recognition and retribution, such information is said to corroborate claims about communism, as well as indigeneity, as internal enemies indeed worthy of counter-insurgency. Critics who contrarily claim *My name is Rigoberta* to be too radical to count as testimony at all, for example, read Menchú as a "Marxist terrorist" and liar.⁴¹

American anthropologist David Stoll is among the most vocal of these critics. In *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, he accuses Menchú of falsifying personal information and sociopolitical history throughout her book. Asserting that Menchú received more formal education than she claimed and recounted events that she never eyewitnessed, Stoll concedes that these contentions are beside the point or, rather, only part of a larger point. More than simply discredit Menchú as a witness, this scholar aims to defame the revolutionary movement in which she participated. Regarding the protest in which student and indigenous organizers, including Menchú's father, were burned to death by Guatemala's National Police in 1980, Stoll revises history to describe this event as one in which "the Guatemalan left's cult of martyrdom" set itself aflame.⁴² Acknowledging that most of Menchú's account is "basically true," he nevertheless concludes that the Menchú family's alliance with peasant movements and insurgent forces was not based on a legitimate attempt to overthrow Guatemala's government. Rather, he claims it was for their own economic and social benefit.⁴³

³⁵ In the Central American context, *ladino* refers to people of mixed race, usually involving more Spanish than indigenous ancestry.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

³⁷ "Granito: Film Screening Panel Discussion," filmed February 2013, YouTube video, 1:07:51, posted [February 20, 2013], accessed February 12, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5PSsgA1pVg&app=desktop>.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ McAllister and Nelson, *War by Other Means*, 97.

⁴⁰ *Granito: Film Screening Panel Discussion*.

⁴¹ Greg Grandin, "It was Heaven That They Burned," *The Nation*, September 8, 2010, accessed February 8, 2015, <http://www.thenation.com/article/it-was-heaven-they-burned/>.

⁴² David Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), quoted in Grandin, *It was Heaven That They Burned*.

⁴³ Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story*, 125.

Multiple scholars have rushed to Menchú's defense against Stoll's vitriolic attacks. Yet, in doing so, they often appeal to their own empirical research, or evidence, as necessary support for the survivor's ostensibly deficient testimony. In contrast, I show how Menchú's narrative can be read visually and, in doing so, foreground a rage that effectively defends itself. As aforementioned, visuality here refers to the ways in which institutional authorities, including seemingly benign ones, try to regulate what counts as truth and history. According to Mirzoeff, legal, military, and other institutions commonly do this in order to justify their own usage of force, making it appear more "real" and "right" than it actually is.⁴⁴ As he states, "Visuality sutures authority to power and renders this association 'natural.'"⁴⁵ Offering a concrete example, Mirzoeff references how police often cordon off crime scenes in an attempt to discourage witnessing. "Move on, there's nothing to see here," they demand.⁴⁶ In Menchú's own responses to criticisms of her testimony, she demonstrates a similar understanding of institutional authorities as police who try to control the memory of the genocide, indeed limiting the visibility and audibility of certain truths.

These authorities include scholars such as Stoll, as well as actual police and related law enforcers. As a human rights activist, Menchú first lead charges against Guatemala's National Police for silencing student and indigenous protestors by indeed burning them to death. When Pedro Garcia Arredondo was condemned for this crime, Menchú connected this especially brutal act of visuality with the ways in which other institutional authorities have likewise refused to hear these populations' legitimate complaints, including her own. Affirming the importance of proving the truth, she states, "they have told us lies, they have denigrated the memory of the victims, they have said that they have burned themselves."⁴⁷ Clearly referencing Stoll's remarks, Menchú proceeds to explain how she must "gather the record" and "guard the evidence," tirelessly consulting archival and forensic experts, instead of simply tell the truth as she witnessed it.⁴⁸ As she explains in a recent *Democracy Now* interview, "Every time I raise my voice, they say, 'Oh, you're a communist, you don't have to speak.'"⁴⁹ Here, Menchú also seems to address the critics who claim she is not radical enough, suggesting that defending Guatemala's revolutionary history would only render her testimony even more inaudible than it already appears to be. Had she upheld the insurgency's militancy, for example, her likelihood of becoming an internationally recognized spokesperson would have severely diminished.

As a human rights activist, Menchú knows that she indeed has to speak. Additionally, she acknowledges that such speech must comply with juridical standards and processes if it is to be institutionally recognized as truth. According to human rights' legal paradigm, such recognition is necessary to pursuing justice, which it equates with retribution. In *My name is Rigoberta*, this young genocide survivor commits herself to pursuing justice as indeed retribution, not revolution. Unlike other members of her family, she chooses words over weapons, and diplomatic compromise over armed conflict. Yet, this development of Menchú's critical consciousness does not restrict her to speaking *only* in words. Considering the witnesses' demonstrated awareness of how visuality works to police truth, limiting what is seeable and sayable, it should not be surprising that Menchú's narrative testimony also can be read as visual testimony, rendering it radical in ways that differ from those already acknowledged.

In fact, the very editor of *My name is Rigoberta*, Elizabeth Burgos, sets readers up for a visual reading of Menchú's testimony. In the book's preface, she details the first time she met Menchú, noting how the young Maya appeared timid and reserved. Nevertheless, Menchú soon after

⁴⁴ Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁷ "Le prometí a Guatemala que lucharía contra la impunidad": Rigoberta Menchú celebra el fallo por la quema de la embajada española y el juicio a Ríos Montt," *Democracy Now*, January 21, 2015, accessed February 8, 2015, <http://www.democracynow.org/es/blog/2015/1/21/le-prometi-a-la-memoria-de>.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ "A Watershed Moment for Guatemala: Nobel Laureate Rigoberta Menchú Celebrates Jailing of Ex-President," *Democracy Now*, September 4, 2015, accessed July 30, 2017, <https://www.democracynow.org/2015/9/4/a-watershed-moment-for-guatemala-nobel>.

narrated much of her life story, including her experience of the Guatemalan genocide, to Burgos, who then transcribed and revised such narration into *My name is Rigoberta*. Foregrounding the autobiographical nature of this book, Burgos encourages readers to envision themselves as being in Menchú's physical presence. As she states, "We must listen to the call of Rigoberta Menchú and be guided by this unique voice that transmits its internal cadence so powerfully that sometimes one has the impression of hearing her tone or feeling her breath."⁵⁰ For Burgos, this intimate hermeneutic is important because it allows the reader to imagine and experience otherwise repressed sensations. Describing the world as "inhuman and artificial," Burgos distinguishes Menchú's particular voice as capable of "showing us what we have always refused to see," including her and our own humanity.⁵¹

Yet, contrary to Burgos' seemingly empowering claims, multiple scholars have read her portrayal of Menchú as self-contradictory and inaccurate. Though Burgos encourages readers to imagine that they are seeing and hearing Menchú in the flesh, she also notes having corrected some of her language and grammar errors, which would have made her look "folkloric."⁵² Rather than allow Menchú to speak for herself, Burgos censors the survivor's account according to her own editorial standards. She wants Menchú to appear real but refined, approachable but articulate. Yet, as Burgos tries to regulate the sayable and visible in *My name is Rigoberta*, she instead exposes how visibility factors into seemingly more benign, and even humanitarian, projects. This exposure likely prompts readers to discern different ways of reading and hearing Menchú's account, paying particular attention to how the witness represents her own voice. Against Burgos' original intentions, therefore, her preface arguably attunes readers to a scene of seeing rage.

In this scene, Menchú both anticipates and critiques her own inaudibility before institutional authorities, including a merciless Guatemalan military. In doing so, she figures rage as a passion that can be witnessed visually or, to be more exact, countervisually. While Menchú cannot vocalize a direct denunciation of the very authorities threatening to censor, let alone kill, her, she nevertheless expresses herself through a narrative description of visible rage. I read this reaction as countervisual insofar as it condemns institutional authorities as being far less just, as well as absolute, than they claim it to be. As Mirzoeff explains, visibility inevitably produces its own resistance by founding itself on contradictory, and often violent, grounds. When an authoritative power uses brute force to control people and their truths, for example, it exposes itself as undeserving of such authority. According to Menchú's description of her younger brother's torture and murder by the Guatemalan army, such exposure is precisely what occurs when one indeed witnesses a genocide.

After mangling the bodies of Menchú's brother and his fellow guerilla suspects, the military put them on display in their own village. Shortly thereafter, they set such bodies aflame, causing them to desperately cry for help, only to be silenced by death itself. As Menchú states, "Some even screamed, many jumped, but their voice did not come out. Clearly, their breath was immediately blocked."⁵³ For Menchú, this is another scene of communists – or at least accused communists – being told not to speak. These suspects include more than just the captives themselves, for Menchú recognizes this public act of violence as a counter-insurgent maneuver. As she states, "More than anything, it was to fulfill [the army's] objectives of putting terror into the town so that nobody spoke."⁵⁴ As the victims finished burning, Menchú recalls how the army proceeded to celebrate and congratulate its own savagery, raising its weapons and yelling "Long live the homeland! Long live Guatemala!"⁵⁵ According to Mirzoeff's understanding of visibility, the fact that the military had to make this show of force is only further proof that its very power was indeed under threat. For him, visibility that becomes visible as such transforms into countervisuality, instead showing the ways in which institutional authorities try, yet fail, to completely control the truth.

⁵⁰ Rigoberta Menchú, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 10; author's translation.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 204.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

Recognizing that the military gathered witnesses only to then silence them through state terror, Menchú employs a more figurative form of speaking: seeing. That is, she privileges what she sees as more expressive than what she can say and make heard. Looking around at the crowd of her fellow Mayas, many of them unable to bear the sight of their murdered relatives any longer, she describes a reticence that nevertheless surfaces on their very faces. As she states, “You could see rage even in the children, but they did not know how to show it.”⁵⁶ Here, Menchú is slightly self-contradictory. The fact that she sees such rage means that her peers were already, in fact, showing it. To qualify her statement, such witnesses did not know how to make their rage recognizable to the very military that caused it, here exhibiting an understandable distrust of institutional authorities. Had they indeed vocalized their rage, Menchú notes that “the people would have been massacred.”⁵⁷ Yet, the fact that such witnesses nevertheless managed to display their anger, however subtly, shows the limit of this counter-insurgency’s control or, indeed, visibility.

Here, this limit is visual testimony in the form of countervisual rage, which visibility here fails to recognize, or repress, as truthful. Yet while this scene most directly condemns Guatemala’s military, it is important to remember that many of these same actors since have become leaders of this country’s post-genocide government: one that ostensibly upholds, and enforces, the very human rights that it here violates. More than simply express dissent with the army and its visibility, Menchú’s narrative description of her peers’ anger arguably functions as a hermeneutic for seeing rage into other scenes of violence. These scenes include those from the civil war itself, as well as their reframing and repurposing in the work of Regina José Galindo. As aforementioned, Galindo’s performances frequently reference narrative testimonies from Guatemala’s truth commission reports. Yet, like Menchú, Galindo does not employ narrative and visual testimony as simple representations of events. Rather, she uses them to display how violence and power continue to limit what is seeable and sayable in post-genocide Guatemala, pointing out the continuation of war in this seemingly postwar country.

Seeing Rage with Regina José Galindo

In first proposing the term “post-genocide,” McAllister and Nelson clarify that their understanding of “post” differs from “after.” Concerned with how the occurrence of a genocide, as well as its likewise violent legacy, continue to surface in Guatemala’s current reality, they mean “post” to convey “‘a place for displaying notices’ and ‘a strong timber set upright, a point of attachment.’”⁵⁸ As they note, death tolls in Guatemala are now at rates comparable to the worst years of civil war, resulting from a mixture of neocolonial policies, poor infrastructure, drug trafficking, land abuse, and forced migration.⁵⁹ More than Menchú, Galindo employs post-genocide visual testimony in this “displaying” and “attaching” sense, also situating her work as at odds with human rights’ legal paradigm insofar as it defies institutional standards of truth and justice.

While scholars unanimously recognize Galindo’s work as addressing issues of ongoing violence, none have identified or analyzed it as an example of visual testimony. Nevertheless, they often focus on the embodied, affective, and indeed visible nature of Galindo’s performances. According to Clare Carolin, Galindo’s aesthetic is distinct for its “unambiguous visual immediacy” and its “emotional proximity to its subject.”⁶⁰ Many of Galindo’s performances are not just public but also intriguing and shocking in ways that turn into spectacle. Sometimes she is naked; other times she is injured and bloody. In nearly every case, the artist subjects herself to some sort of symbolic or physical violence, thereby eliciting a variety of emotions from her viewers. As Jane Lavery and Sarah Bowskill point out, this approach challenges Galindo’s audience to “engage with, rather than look away from” the violence that her performances represent.⁶¹ Like Lavery, Bowskill,

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁵⁸ McAllister and Nelson, *War by Other Means*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁰ Clare Carolin, “After the Digital We Rematerialise: Distance and Violence in the Work of Regina José Galindo,” *Third Text* 25, no. 2 (2011), 214, accessed July 12, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2011.560636>.

⁶¹ Jane Lavery and Sarah Bowskill. “The Representation of the Female Body in the Multimedia Works of Regina José

and multiple other scholars, Emilia Barbosa focuses on the ways in which Galindo draws attention to the mistreatment of women, foregrounding the simultaneous hypervisibility and invisibility of female bodies.⁶²

Though scholars commonly discuss Galindo and women's rights, little scholarship explores her work's relation to human rights. Such oversight may seem a bit odd, especially considering the artist's repeated engagement of narrative testimony from truth commission reports and legal trials. Yet while Galindo's work obviously treats multiple human rights issues, she does not explicitly critique the aforementioned human rights' legal paradigm. Rather, she shows how certain feelings, and truths, cannot be made known within this paradigm's strict legal standards. In this section, I argue that such exposure renders Galindo's work even more radical, and elaborate on how she both critiques and supplants visuality's authority with her own practice of seeing rage.

This rage is personal *and* political. Distinguishing herself as an artist, not activist, Galindo claims, "I will not subscribe to the idea that art has to be political or focus on the defense of certain rights. Art is a completely free expression. I have chosen a trajectory that corresponds with my concerns."⁶³ Yet, as limitless as the expressive possibilities of art may be, Galindo's concerns are nevertheless very political, and indeed about rights. Rather than work toward human rights, this artist testifies to her own right to publically proclaim individual and social truths, which Mirzoeff deems "the right to look." As he explains, the authority of visuality tries to dispossess people of this right by usurping their autonomy, forcing them to witness according to predetermined, and limiting, institutional standards. While such standards are frequently enforced in the name of certain freedoms and protections, including those upheld by human rights' legal paradigm, Mirzoeff maintains that "the right to look came first, and we should not forget it."⁶⁴

For Mirzoeff, the fact that this right precedes the establishment of human rights discourse and institutions means that it is even more critical to democratic politics.⁶⁵ For Galindo, however, this right is first and foremost necessary to her, as well as other Guatemalans', very survival. Like Menchú, Galindo associates her personal truth with visual rage. As she pithily states, "Art is a scream, it's what one has inside."⁶⁶ Yet, rather than describe a desire, yet inability, to express her rage as explicitly as she would like, which Menchú does, Galindo uses visual testimony to publicly assume her own authority over truth. In doing so, she dismisses human rights' legal paradigm and its imperatives of institutional recognition. Throughout her performances, moreover, Galindo shows such imperatives to be ignorant of the ways in which victims of violence, especially those who are indigenous and female, remain invisible and inaudible before institutional authorities. Using this institutional ignorance to her own advantage, at least in avoiding censorship, Galindo instead appeals to public audiences for acknowledgement of her own capacity to rearrange power relations, which she uses to reframe war as indeed ongoing.

Yet, though Galindo's work testifies to genocidal and post-genocidal violence, her own rage is slightly different from Menchú's, as well as fellow genocide survivors. Unlike Menchú, Galindo was never the firsthand victim of genocidal violence. Born in 1974, she was too young to be politically involved during the war and, as she foregrounds in her own work, she is not indigenous. Aware of her sociopolitical privilege as a *ladina* woman, she is forthright about the risk she runs of upsetting actual victims and eyewitnesses, many of them self-identified human rights activists. While it is not clear what, if any, relationship exists between Menchú and Galindo, the performance artist has collaborated with Maya poet Rosa Chávez in multiple performances, including *Sister*. In this

Galindo," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 31, no. 1 (2011), 51, accessed July 12, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-9856.2011.00606.x>.

⁶² Emilia Barbosa, "Regina José Galindo's Body Talk: Performing Femicide and Violence against Women in 279 *Golpes*," *Latin American Perspectives* 14, no. 1 (2014): 59-71, accessed July 12, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X13492131>.

⁶³ Vinicio Chacón, "Los gritos de la psicomagia," *Seminario Universidad*, July 21, 2005, accessed December 1, 2013, <http://www.semanariouniversidad.ucr.cr/component/content/article/3902-Cultura/10213-los-gritos-de-la-psicomagia.html>.

⁶⁴ Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 2.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁶ Chacón, *Los gritos de la psicomagia*.

ironically titled piece, Chávez slaps and spits on Galindo. Such treatment is opposite of what one would expect, symbolically reversing centuries of colonial repression.

More than expose power relations, or visuality, Galindo clearly intends to challenge and undo them. In this sense, her work takes countervisuality one step further than *My name is Rigoberta* and continually asserts the right to look. Unlike artists who identify as activists in order to represent certain populations, Galindo does not claim this right on behalf of anybody but herself. Yet, as cautious as Galindo is of conflating her own rage with that of others, her feelings are indeed born out of a particular sociopolitical situation: one in which anger is everywhere, if only one knows how to look for it. As aforementioned, Menchú provides a hermeneutic for seeing rage by exposing the ways in which institutional authorities try, and fail, to completely control their witnesses. Yet, while Menchú uses her own inaudibility to foreground visuality and countervisuality, Galindo uses it to share her message – or, more specifically, her scream – in public space. For Mirzoeff, such publicity is crucial to an effective claiming of the right to look because it reasserts people's power to witness and validate each other's testimonies, beyond any concern for legal authorization.⁶⁷

Elaborating on how she understands her art as a scream, Galindo describes one of her earliest street performances. In 2003, Ríos Montt successfully challenged the constitutional ban on ex-dictators from presidential candidacy and was nominated by the party he founded. As an advertising consultant, poet, and occasional performance artist at the time, Galindo recalls feeling especially upset about news of this candidacy. In her words, "I suffered an attack of panic and depression. I cried out, I kicked and stomped my feet, I cursed the system that rules us [...] I decided then and there that I would take to the streets with my shout and amplify it. I had to do it."⁶⁸ On the same day that Ríos Montt's candidacy was announced, she performed *Who can erase the traces?*, during which she quietly yet audaciously dipped her bare feet in a tub of human blood and marched from Guatemala's Constitutional Court to the Presidential Palace.

Also traversing a crowd of fellow protestors, many of whom faced police and military censorship, Galindo managed to complete her performance without any resistance. Though her footsteps were clearly marking the ex-dictator's political maneuvering with bloodshed, she notes how art is commonly perceived as "trivial."⁶⁹ Unlike legal testimony and associated human rights activism, aesthetic modes of witnessing do not seem to assert or demand anything. Using such semblance again to her advantage in *I will scream it to the wind*; Galindo read her feminist poetry aloud while hanging from the archway of a building in Guatemala's historic city center. Gathering spectators stopped, took photos, and mistook her for a hysteric on the verge of committing suicide. According to the artist, she is most commonly mistaken as a madwoman, or as an actual victim of violence.⁷⁰ Yet, for Galindo, such misperceptions become part of her performances insofar as they make visible dominant relations of looking, allowing her the possibility of also visibly rearranging such relations.

Like Menchú, Galindo exhibits a basic understanding of how visuality and countervisuality function. Noting her work to entail "a triad of the victim, the victimizer, and the intellectual author," she adds, "it is very, very important to stress that I am the intellectual author."⁷¹ In other words, she is the one who frames the scenes of her performances, thereby deciding what is visible and sayable. As the intellectual author, Galindo also assumes the capacity to *reframe* certain scenes, notably exposing different ways of understanding witnessing, as well as war. Describing "frames of war" as the "normative conditions of recognizability" that state and other institutional authorities produce in order to regulate the public's perception of war, Judith Butler notes the possibility of reproducing such frames in ways that actually exceed them.⁷² As an example, she describes how

⁶⁷ Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 1.

⁶⁸ "Regina José Galindo," *BOMB – Artists in Conversation*, January 1, 2016, accessed July 28, 2017, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2780/regina-jos-galindo>.

⁶⁹ Regina José Galindo, "Central American Studies Lecture Series," (lecture, Northridge, CA, November 14, 2014), California State University Northridge.

⁷⁰ "Regina José Galindo," *BOMB – Artists in Conversation.m*

⁷¹ Galindo, *Central American Studies Lecture Series*.

⁷² Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London and New York: Verso, 2009), 4.



Figure 2. Regina José Galindo, *Who can erase the traces?*, 2003, © 2003 Regina José Galindo, <http://www.reginajosegalindo.com/>

when images of war circulate, they break away from their original contexts and thereby make recognizable what was previously unrecognized or misrecognized. Though Galindo's work is not commonly viewed as being about war, she often reframes scenes from Guatemala's civil war in ways that connect it to the ongoing war by other means.

In *Meanwhile, they remain free*, she does this by referencing and representing a narrative testimony from *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, one of Guatemala's truth commission reports. Here, she restages a scene of sexual violence against Maya women, citing one that reads, "They tied me and bandaged my eyes [...] they hit me and raped me. I began to bleed a lot, and in that moment I lost my baby."⁷³ Herself, seven months pregnant at the time, Galindo ties her parted legs and clasped hands to a small bed frame with real umbilical cords from a local abortion clinic. In doing so, she appears to anticipate this described violence, or the legacy of it. Because Galindo's body is both visibly pregnant *and* non-indigenous in *Meanwhile, they remain free*, her performance relates this genocide tactic to the more general violence now being waged against Guatemalan women.

This violence is likewise sexual and often fatal: according to Guatemala's National Police, there were 9.1 murders for every 100,000 women within Guatemala between 2007 and 2012.⁷⁴ In 2014, moreover, 846 women were murdered, mostly by men, in a population of about 15 million.⁷⁵ Yet, as Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano note, "rape as a tool of war" rarely receives the same recognition and condemnation as other modes of torture or declared warfare.⁷⁶ In their own act of reframing such warfare as a legacy of genocide, they coin this epidemic violence against women

⁷³ Regina José Galindo, "Regina José Galindo," accessed February 5, 2015, <http://www.reginajosegalindo.com/>; author's translation.

⁷⁴ Candace Piette, "Where women are killed by their own families," *BBC News Magazine*, December 5, 2015, accessed March 4, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34978330>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Rosa-Linda Fregoso and Cynthia Bejarano, eds., *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Americas* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 2.

a “femicide,” meaning a “genocide against women.”⁷⁷ Throughout her oeuvre, Galindo shows this violence to involve the simultaneous hypervisibility *and* invisibility of women: that is, they are visible only as sexual objects, not as human rights subjects. In *279 Blows* (2005), Galindo performs her most literal version of screaming, hiding herself from sight, hitting herself, and vocalizing cries a total of 279 times, once for every act of femicide that had occurred so far that year. The unseen nature of this rage starkly contrasts with much of Galindo’s oeuvre, suggesting the need for a particular type of looking.

According to Barbosa, Galindo’s strategic reenactment of this femicide provokes spectators to go beyond empathizing and likewise “rewrite history from a new, informed position.”⁷⁸ Such rewriting entails asserting their own right to look, thereby acknowledging not just a problem but also part of its solution. As Galindo explains, performative reenactments like *Meanwhile, they remain free* and *279 Blows* work to show that Guatemala’s civil war has ended but it has a “new face”: one that requires rearranging power relations so to expose the reproduction, and continuation, of genocidal practices.⁷⁹ As aforementioned, this artist rearranges such relations in a way that evades and exceeds legal recognition, instead appealing to the Guatemalan public. Yet rather than simply make herself seen as an intellectual author, Galindo works to connect the right to look with the right to survival, as well the right to rage.

According to Mirzoeff, the right to look is indeed “a right to existence.”⁸⁰ As a form of biopolitics, visibility works to police not only what is visible and sayable but also what and who counts as life. The fact that religious, educational, professional, and political institutions in Guatemala still do not recognize and empower female authorities closely, if not causally, relates to the country’s ongoing femicide. Since women are not seen or heard in life, they also go unnoticed and unprotected in death. For this reason, Galindo positions her rearrangement of power relations as indeed critical to the creation of another reality: a countervisual one in which the disempowered become equally authoritative. Aware that the full realization of this project is still very far away, Galindo also discusses the importance of endurance. Explaining her own capacity to continue producing testimonial performances, she states, “Rage has sustained me, and I’ve watched it grow since I first became aware of what was happening. It’s like an engine—a conflict inside me that never yields, never stops turning, ever.”⁸¹ According to Galindo, expressing rage in her artwork allows her to channel such conflict into something creative and collective, if not immediately world-changing.⁸²

In a later performance, titled *Earth* (2007), she equates the act of seeing rage to “a story of survival.”⁸³ Here, Galindo again engages a more official narrative testimony, this time from a witness testifying in Ríos Montt’s trial over charges of genocide. After being asked how indigenous populations were murdered during the war, the legal witness describes a process of excavating a hole, partially killing the victims, and then hastily burying them in mass graves. In *Earth*, Galindo stands naked on a small plot of land while a bulldozer digs nearby, forming an island around her visibly vulnerable body. Meanwhile, the artist stands completely still, staring straight ahead with a gaze that is reminiscent of that in *My name is Rigoberta*. With full but heavy eyes, she looks like she has just witnessed and closely survived a massacre. Just as Menchú describes of her fellow Mayas, who watched their loved ones being burned to death by the Guatemalan army, “You could see rage.” Menchú further describes such witnesses as unable to fully express their rage, yet Galindo indeed knows how to show it, using her own seeing and breathing body to claim the right to look as also the right to life.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁷⁸ Barbosa, *Regina José Galindo’s Body Talk*, 60.

⁷⁹ Galindo, *Central American Studies Lecture Series*.

⁸⁰ Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 1.

⁸¹ “Regina José Galindo,” *BOMB – Artists in Conversation*.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ “Regina José Galindo, ‘Tierra’ 2013,” filmed June 2013, YouTube video, 15:35, posted June 29, 2013, accessed February 12, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlteAI2P_98; author’s translation.

As Galindo states, “For me, this work is more utopian and hopeful because everything destroys your surroundings and you stay standing.”⁸⁴ In a later work, *Testimonies* (2014), Galindo again connects narrative testimony with visual testimony while emphasizing the truth and importance of survival. This time, she uses the words of Maya genocide survivors and legal witnesses, preserving some of their literal statements in wrought iron letters. Such statements include “They all raped us in the parish hall,” “The soldiers took away my shame,” and, finally, “I am alive.”⁸⁵ Having carried these letters throughout the city of Antigua, Guatemala and then hung them in a public gallery, Galindo claims that she created this performance so that the voice and memory of these women will not be forgotten.⁸⁶ Yet, more than function to preserve memories of the past, Galindo again connects this past to the current moment: a moment still replete with violence, as well as survival. In this performance, “I am alive” is emphatically worded in the present tense, showing how these witnesses continue to face and defy numerous threats of silencing them, including through death.

Yet, such defiance does not only occur through the tireless reassertion of these witnesses’ narrative testimonies, constantly appealing to the very legal authorities that fail to recognize such witnesses as worthy of any rights, including the right to look. As Galindo shows, political resistance also occurs through visual testimony: one that expresses rage without regard of any institutional authorities, including legal ones. Rather than subscribe to juridical standards and processes of witnessing, Galindo continually asserts her own imperative. Speaking about another performance, *I am alive* (2015), she summarizes this injunction as “You have to say it, express it, scream it [...] you have to release the truth, release your scream.”⁸⁷ In other words, you have to assert authority over your own truth, making it public in a way that practices witnessing beyond human rights’ legal paradigm. For as war by other means continues to dominate post-genocide Guatemala, inventing and enforcing new forms of visibility, contervisuality functions to foreground this war, as well as its resistance.

Such countervisuality, as Menchú and Galindo show, starts with seeing rage: that is, with recognizing institutional authorities as less just and more fallible than they claim to be. As a genocide survivor and human rights activist, Menchú foregrounds the inaudibility, yet slight visibility, of her own indignation, which she figures through looks of rage. Intent upon convicting the state criminals who murdered most of her family, however, Menchú neglects to acknowledge the insufficiency of a human rights’ legal paradigm that does not account for the genocide’s similarly violent legacies, as well as the multimodal ways of testifying to such legacies. In layered performances connecting genocide testimonies with an ongoing feminicide, as well as other neocolonial policies and practices, Galindo demonstrates a more explicit, as well as self-empowering, practice of screaming rage. As the artist anticipates, Guatemala’s legal institutions do not recognize such screaming as indeed testimonial. Yet, I argue that Menchú and Galindo’s rage could be enough to sustain another insurgency, if only more survivors and spectators were willing to look for it, and with it. This insurgency would differ from human rights’ legal paradigm in avoiding its emphasis on victimhood, removal of agency, and exclusionary standards of truth. In this article, I have argued for the importance of claiming the right to look, suggesting a necessary reexamination of visual testimony as more critical to post-genocide politics than heretofore acknowledged.

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