

# Culturas: Mujeres y Guías

Guatemala (“place of many trees” in Nahwiki language) is a country inhabited by 22 indigenous groups descendant of the Mayan, which represent around 40% of the population. A coup in 1954, orchestrated by the CIA, was followed by a series of military dictatorships, always backed up by the United States. The three documentaries by Pamela Yates are a wonderful tool to understand Guatemalan history (starting in 1983 with “When the Mountains Tremble”, followed by “Granito,” until “500 años” in

presentations of violence, racialized and gendered approaches to knowledge, and alternative research methods, while also re-examining mainstream beliefs about structural power.

It should be noted from the start that the richness of the material in the book is immense. I first read *Beyond Repair* in Spanish and found the language very clear and accessible. I then read it in English and found it equally engaging and clear. The complex theoretical concepts are explained in a way that is easy to understand in both languages.

In reading *Beyond Repair*, it is immediately striking how the authors and their protagonists—women who have overcome the limits of both “victims” or “survivors”—have been able to find a way to nurture a process of common knowledge and mutual accompaniment. It is clear that the opportunities provided by their differing backgrounds to produce shared meaning have led to a better world.

The book’s foundations are based on careful consideration of the diverse forms of work, feminist participatory action research, community approaches to development, and the role of women. The authors’ research emphasizes respect for the collective autonomy and the role of women as protagonists as these indigenous women move between their individual and collective emotions that bring them together. The “candor” (Farmer, Gardner, Hoof, &

2011) in this book, refers

the readers to the needed focus on the process and the respect for the accounts of the people, when doing work in settings impacted by death and the purposeful humiliation and extermination (applicable to genocide).

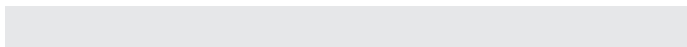
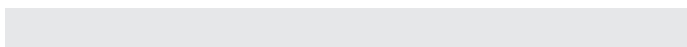
This community praxis—based on pathways that the Mayan women and the authors traveled and explored over a period of decades—serves to advance important local agendas and leads to learning for everyone. Critical to achieving these goals were the underlying negotiations that took place around issues of trust and ethics. It is important to note that many of these women—from several ethnolinguistic groups—were involved in the Sepur Zarco trial, a historic criminal case against soldiers accused of sexual violence and enslavement during Guatemala’s years of armed conflict.

Both authors have a long and impressive history of work in Guatemala. For decades, they have reflected on genocide, sexual violence, and the impact of war on the different groups of Mayan people living in the country and in exile. Their book demonstrates how deeply they care about how to listen, how to avoid damage-centered research, and how to enable the voices of protagonists to be heard. Both of them are also well known for the

support they offer younger generations of scholars. I have heard from Alison Crosby's students of her masterful educational use of shadowing in the field. I have watched Brinton Lykes present approaches to "photovoice," and I have seen the projects she inspired with Otomí women in Queretaro, México and with migrant women from the Middle East in Athens, Greece. Nowadays, Borja Gonzalo's work at Melissa's Network in Athens (2018) follows this path and fuels the consideration about the need of qualitative and creative methods to describe complex emotional processes of support in women's communities that are symbolic and material spaces of resistance.

The comparative perspective in *Beyond Repair* is enriched by the authors' consideration of the challenges of truth commissions and reparations practices in several other transitional justice initiatives (e.g., South Africa, Chile, Argentina). Many of the colonial practices present in these processes are questioned and compared with the protagonists' own views on justice-

and



**REFERENCES**

- Borja Gonzalo, A. (2018). Melissa Network, a material and symbolic space where migrant and refugee women's narratives become acts of emancipation. *Teknokultura: Revista de Cultura Digital y Movimientos Sociales*, 15(2), 311–324.
- Farmer, P., Gardner, A. M., Hoof, H. C., & Mukherjee, J. (2011). *Haiti after the earthquake*. New York: Public Affairs.

Arancha Garcia del Soto  
Independent practitioner and researcher