

## **Brisna Caxaj-Rowe, a victim of Guatemalan repression in the 1980s, comments on TESTIMONIO: Canadian Mining in the Aftermath of Genocides in Guatemala**

<https://mailchi.mp/rightsaction/commentary-on-testimonio-by-brisna-caxaj-rowe>

Testimonio gives the voiceless communities in Guatemala the opportunity to tell their stories of horrible crimes committed against them by Guatemala's powerful and corrupted economic, political and military elites with the support of the United States, and in conjunction with the economic interests of Canadian mining companies.

During the Internal Armed Conflict in Guatemala (1960-1996), or as Testimonio names it, "the U.S.-backed state repression and genocide", these crimes against humanity were committed with the excuse of fighting communism.

However, this book provides evidence that the real motivation, ultimately, was to eliminate communities whose lands and territories were of interest to the Guatemalan economic elites and their international business partners, including US and Canadian extractive industries, especially mining companies.

Individuals and entire communities were criminalized, dispossessed, forcibly displaced, tortured and or massacred.

The articles and direct testimonies ("testimonios") woven together in the book show clearly, and with ample documentation, that the Guatemalan elites, the United States, Canada, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank placed profits before the wellbeing of Guatemala's majority population, including the Maya Indigenous majority living predominantly in rural areas, the very places where coveted mineral and other resources are.

These elites and their international partners contributed to, participated in, and/or benefitted from the repression 'needed' to get access to the resources.

Testimonio presents the struggles of communities against harms and violence caused by Goldcorp Inc.'s Marlin mine; Tahoe Resources' Escobal mine; Hudbay Minerals' Fénix mining project; and the struggle at La Puya against Radius Gold / Kappes, Cassidy & Associates' El Tambor mining site.

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I relate very well to this book. My own story has points in common with those of the victims talking about their struggles in Testimonio.

When Carlos Leonel Caxaj and I were studying at the University of San Carlos during the seventies, we met, fell in love, and formed a family of two daughters and a son.

Manuel Galich described the context in which we lived then: 10 years of democratic spring (1944-1954) with revolutionary, elected governments, as an exception to the norm in Guatemala, a country of eternal tyranny, with military dictatorships and economic elites supported by the United States. But for the ten years of democracy (1944-1954) and the initiation of long needed changes and reforms, this "was a long period of violence (...), the expression of total power without controls."(1)

Carlos and I understood then, as I understand now, that our problems in Guatemala started before the U.S.-backed military coup in 1954 ousted our only truly democratic governments. They began with the on-set of European Imperialism around the world, including the Spanish conquest of much of what is now known as "Latin America". During this entire time, the majority population in this country now called Guatemala have lived under European imperialism, colonialism and the interests of a small powerful elite and their international partners.

Carlos and I thought about the future of our family and the future of all people, and we dreamed about a world free of injustice and exclusion, in which everyone could have access to housing, nutritious meals, health, education, jobs, recreation, dignity and respect. We both participated in groups and organizations of Guatemalan women and men with similar dreams.

Carlos' activism participation focused on the students' and teachers' union movements and Mutual Support Group (GAM) that was founded in the early 1980s by family members of the ever increasing number of people – ordinary citizens – who were being kidnapped and disappeared by government forces.

We were also searching for Carlos' brother Marco Antonio who had been supporting and working with peasants (small farmers) in Chimaltenango and Sacatepéquez (2). On December 29, 1982, he was forcibly disappeared by the illegal, repressive structures of the corrupted Guatemalan State.

As a family we continued with our struggle and demands for the whereabouts of Marco Antonio, and so many other forcibly disappeared people. Carlos continued with his political activism on all fronts.

On July 29, 1985, the same illegal structures and forces that disappeared and eliminated Marco Antonio, and anyone questioning the Guatemalan State, tried to kidnap Carlos. When he tried to escape, they assassinated him.

Along with two other brothers of Carlos and Marco Antonio, and their families, I came with my three children to Canada as political refugees in 1985. Some of us continued with Marco Antonio and Carlos's struggles and work and we founded the London Guatemala Solidarity Committee, and have participated with different groups that support popular struggles ever since then – related to Guatemala, Canada and elsewhere.

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As a victim and survivor of the U.S.-backed state repression and genocide in Guatemala, as a human rights activist and political refugee in Canada, I am grateful to the people whose writing and voices are published in Testimonio. I thank them for providing so much information about the struggles of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Guatemala against U.S. and Canadian extractive companies.

I am particularly grateful for the principal focus of the book's editors to provide clear evidence and information pointing to the direct responsibility and complicity

of the Canadian government and companies in these matters. This is a reality that not many Canadians know.

It is inspiring to see publications like this one that invite people to learn more about and continue in the struggle to achieve the necessary transformation of the unjust, unequal, and environmentally harmful global economic order.

Without these transformations at both the national and international levels, these repeated patterns of violations of human rights will continue. In other words, progressive people who have struggled for the liberation of Guatemala since the coup d'état in 1954, have the same reasons as people struggling against the U.S. and Canadian extractive companies today. The same elites, and their international partners, remain in power.

Extraction of nonrenewable resources is one of Canada's most important profitable economic activities and in many cases these operations harm and destroy ecosystems and impact violently on the lives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples around the world. Guatemala is only one of them.

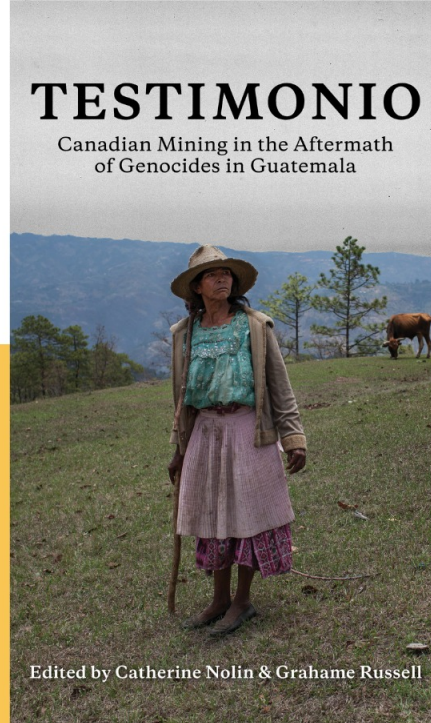
Brisna Caxaj lives in Montreal and carries on with her human rights and justice work with: Plataforma Canada de Guatemaltecs Exiliadxs por Terrorismo de Estado; Elders for Environmental Justice; Todos por Guatemala.

- <https://www.facebook.com/GuatemaltecsExiliadosCanada>
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### **Testimonio Book Launch**

- Monday, October 25, 2021, 4pm PT / 7pm ET
- To register: <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/testimonio-virtual-book-launch-tickets-194614897397>



*“This is a book that demands to be read; the collective voices cannot and must not be silenced... it is a thoroughly documented mediation on the horrific violence imposed by a callous industry and those who resist.”*

– James Tyner, professor of geography, Kent State University

**RELEASE DATE:  
OCTOBER 25**

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