

BEYOND *CRÓNICA*:
JOURNALISM IN CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICAN
DOCUMENTARY NARRATIVES

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In one of the final scenes of Cristian Alarcón's *Cuando me muera quiero que me toquen cumbia. Vidas de pibes chorros* (2003), the journalist is visiting Sabina, one of his sources, in a poor neighbourhood of Buenos Aires, when a shooting occurs. The male neighbours take their guns and run out to the streets, encouraged by the women to defend their *villa*. Crouching down behind the curtains, spying from the window, the journalist notices that, except for a child, he is the only one who remains in the house, "amariconadamente escondido" (112).

There is a double notion of field in this image of the journalist at work. Alarcón's self-representation in this scene illustrates the medial position of the documentary author in two fields in which the other is encountered. First, there is the physical space of the encounter with the informant, whose background differs from that of the narrator. Alarcón marks this difference, and thus his outsider position, by representing a surprised narrator, hiding cowardly, while his source experiences the shooting as an almost natural event. Second, there is the imaginary space of writing, in which the encounter with the reader takes place. The author is writing for an ideal reader. This ideal reader, it can be assumed, is from a social background closer to his than that of his informant. The exhibition of the journalist's feeling of fear or insecurity in such environments is a narrative technique used to connect to the reader in an emotional level. As neither the author nor the reader belong to the informant's context, the reader would hardly be in a position to experience for himself a scenario like the one he reads about. Therefore, the narrator acts as a mediator between both others, the informant and the reader.

According to the Latin American authors analysed in this paper¹, one of the most exciting things about journalistic investigation is the possibility of getting out of their comfort zone in order to meet people and to be in places where they would not usually be. Towards the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, there has been a trend among Latin American testimonial authors to narrate the stories of others, emphasizing the subjective perspective of the journalist as a first-person narrator. This trend might be seen as anachronistic in comparison with other similar narrative practices around the world,

¹ This paper derives from my doctoral research at University of Cambridge. From 2013 to 2015, I conducted interviews with Cristian Alarcón, Martín Caparrós, Arturo Fontaine, Francisco Goldman, Leila Guerriero, Elena Poniatowska, Santiago Roncagliolo and Juan Villoro. All quotes from these interviews come from the official transcripts in Chávez Díaz (2017), pages 193-301.

particularly in United States.² This trend might be a response to their particular context: in unstable societies, such as the Latin American one today, journalism becomes a dangerous profession. When the media are censored, transmitting the other's truth is always a risk. As opposed to the American New Journalism, which has a long tradition of first-person narrative, the Latin American journalist cannot aim to tell the truth of others without risking censorship, or even death.

In this paper, I explore the conditions that make the use of metafiction possible, or even necessary, as a recurrent narrative technique by the latest generation of Latin American authors working with testimonial-based stories. My corpus considers authors who have also worked as journalists: Cristian Alarcón, Leila Guerriero, Santiago Roncagliolo, Juan Villoro and Martín Caparrós.

Although recognizing the long tradition of the *crónica* genre as a unique Latin American version of literary journalism, I wish to go beyond this term because it became so broad and over inclusive of all sorts of texts that it was difficult to apply for my specific corpus. I propose, therefore, a term that could be considered as a subgenre of the *crónica*: documentary narratives. Under this term I consider texts which employ journalism as a literary and ethical response to times of uncertainty, published under circumstances in which the writer might be at risk. Documentary narratives, particularly meta(non)fictional ones, are never unmediated testimonies. They are neither biographies, nor conventional journalistic profiles, but a collective product, a mix of several accounts of dialogues between at least two participants. These dialogues can be read as a metaphor for contemporary attempts at communication between strangers.

In these texts there is a rhetoric of alterity that highlights values such as empathy and altruism. Nevertheless, a close reading of this kind of works³, focusing on the representation of the dialogues as products of real encounters, shows that there is an unsolved tension between the self and the Other. I believe this is due to the stylistic and ethical challenges that a text dealing with at least two fields – the journalistic and the literary – inevitably imposes on the author.

This paper offers a transdisciplinary analysis to approach to literature based on true stories. Focusing on the encounter between the journalist and the informant, both as journalistic practice and literary strategy, my perspective is framed within the dialogic worldview of Mikhail Bakhtin and its theory of speech genres. It also borrows some other useful concepts from Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Adriana Cavarero regarding the accounts of the self in relation to truth telling.

Naming the real

Deciding upon a name for narratives based on true stories has long been a source of debate among practitioners and researchers. It seems that the former are less worried than the latter about assigning a label to their work. For Peruvian author Santiago Roncagliolo, for example, there is no difference between *no ficción*, *reportaje*, *crónica* or *periodismo*, but they are all

² A reading of the reflections on *crónica* by the most popular authors of the genre today can give us an idea of the importance that the discussion of whether or not to use the first-person narrator holds in the Latin American journalistic field. These reflections can be found in Jaramillo (2011) and Angulo (2014).

³ For the development of my main arguments in this paper, I am based on the following works as some examples of documentary narratives: Cristian Alarcón's *Cuando me muera quiero que me toquen cumbia* (2003), Leila Guerriero's *Los suicidas del fin del mundo* (2005), Santiago Roncagliolo's *La cuarta espada* (2007), Juan Villoro's *8.8: El miedo en el espejo* (2010) and Martín Caparrós's *Una luna* (2009).

different from the novel in methodology: “uno implica salir a buscar y el otro implica encerrarte en tu cuarto e inventar” (Chávez Díaz 2017: 280). Argentinean journalist Leila Guerriero defines her work as that of a documentary film, “es un documental, pero escrito” (257), while Chilean author Cristian Alarcón considers himself a “cronista” and a “narrador de lo real” (196). Although considered the *cronista par excellence* in contemporary Latin America, Martín Caparrós confessed that he still cannot decide how to define his writing: “me gustaría dar con una palabra o con un concepto que lo englobara... Yo usaba esto de un ensayo que cuenta, una crónica que piensa o la crónica-ensayo” (216).

From the academic perspective, the American scholar Linda Egan (2001) collected some names used for this type of discourse. In Spanish, these texts are called *periodismo de autor*, *ficción documental*, *sociología auxiliar*, *crononovela*, *socioliteratura*, *metaperiodismo*, *periodosía*, *periodismo cultural*, *relato de no-ficción*, *periodismo interpretativo*, *neocostumbrismo*, *no (crónica)vela*. In English the related concepts include transfiction, faction, transformation journalism, creative nonfiction, documentary narrative as art, apocalyptic documentary, paraliterary journalism, mid fiction, metareportage, liminal literature, radical news analysis, higher journalism, journalit, postmodern journalism, parajournalism, participatory journalism, the New Nonfiction, poetic chronicle.

For John Bak (2011) the differences in the terms, across languages and eras, are the result of the intentions of the texts, and also of the cultures in which they are embedded. Latin American documentary-like narratives demand to be read in their specific context. In the first place, because they claim to be produced in a field that expands beyond the realm of the literary. Their writers usually claim not to have artistic intentions, but rather a commitment to truth-telling. At the same time, while they are published in journalistic spaces, these works employ more flexible ethical standards than American or British journalism, for instance. Secondly, these authors are well-known fiction writers too. Additionally, they are usually socially and politically committed to issues in their countries, and most of them act as public intellectuals.

Beyond the specialised Latin American studies on specific, related genres – which I will discuss briefly in this section – critics have identified a trend towards the documentary effect that could have particular resonance for the region. Nevertheless, the names applied to similar narratives diverge. For example, David Foster’s concept of documentary narrative includes “those texts in which a credibly real story is given an explicit narrative framework by an intervening narrator” (1984: 53). Foster’s corpus focuses mostly on fiction, for he considers the best practitioners of this trend to be well-known novelists. On the contrary, Julio Rodríguez-Luis thinks that “la narrativa documental relata ciertos hechos –que pueden organizarse de modo que conformen una biografía– que han tenido lugar y cuya autenticidad quiere el autor que resulte evidente” (1997: 84). His taxonomic study, therefore, focuses on the degree of intervention of the author, who he calls *mediador*. For the critic, this narrative is opposed to the traditional concept of literature because it is not its intention to transform reality in any artistic manner. What follows is a brief critical description of three major concepts which I have identified as the most influential for the kind of writing I am focusing on.

Crónica

Crónica, as it was originally practiced by the *modernistas*, can be defined as “a short piece, published in a journalistic venue and produced in a polished literary style” (Reynolds 2012: 3). A broader and more contemporary concept of the genre, however, is given by Ignacio Corona

and Beth Jörgensen: “the genre is adaptable and elastic in form, an invitation to writers to mix an extratextual reality with artful fictional touches” (2002: 5).

Egan views the chronicle as a synonym of what in the US is called *literary journalism*, which for her would be a subgenre of nonfiction. Nevertheless, by using the Spanish word, *crónica*, critics such as Aníbal González and Susana Rotker (2005), highlight the difference between any type of *chronicle* and the kind of writing that refers to a particular Spanish-American literary tradition.⁴ Moreover, Viviane Mahieux (2011) expands awareness of the genre to the 1920s-1930s, to acknowledge that the phenomenon was shared with Brazilian authors writing in Portuguese, such as Mário de Andrade, Machado de Assis, and later Clarice Lispector.

The concept was first used in the American colonies to designate the conquerors’ and missionaries’ reports on new discoveries to the Spanish kings. Later, during the first decades of the independent nations, the chronicle appears again, this time as a tool for constructing national identities and educating citizens. The writer as an intellectual mediating between *la ciudad letrada* and *el pueblo* found in the chronicle a way to represent and even to create the nation.⁵ Nevertheless, scholars agree that the *modernista* writers were actually the inventors of the contemporary *crónica*. Susana Rotker considers the Latin American *crónica* to be a mixed genre: the result of the encounter between literary and journalistic discourses. Based on Roman Jakobson’s communication theory, Rotker states that in *crónicas*, the poetic and referential functions have the same level of importance.

Criticism usually associates this genre with newspapers, for journalistic discourse has legitimised fictional authors who practice *crónica*, as well as established the standards for its writing (Reynolds 2012). Whereas in the literary field its study has been traditionally neglected, in the journalistic one, it has a privileged place as representative of the public opinion: “the chronicle, along with the literary article, became the most aesthetically elaborated section of the newspaper, serving a function of enlightened entertainment amid the predominant documentary information” (Corona and Jörgensen 2002: 7).⁶

The chroniclers have also theorised on the genre, perhaps in their aim to legitimize their own position within such an unstable field, or in substitution for the lack of literary prestige. For most of them, the main element involved in the concept is time. For example, Mexican author Carlos Monsiváis (1980) thinks that the chronicle reclaims literature in an anti-intellectual environment, that of the press, whereas Juan Villoro, also Mexican, defines *crónica* as “literatura bajo presión” (2012: 578). On the contrary, Peruvian editor Julio Villanueva Chang argues that “una crónica ya no es tanto un modo literario y entretenido de ‘enterarse’

⁴ From a wider perspective, the origins of this writing form can be found in Classic epic and in the work of the historical chroniclers of the Middle Ages in Europe (Benjamin 1999). However, I use the term “chronicle” as a literal, albeit imprecise, translation from the Spanish *crónica*.

⁵ This is the age of works such as Juan Domingo Sarmiento’s *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie* (1845) in Argentina and Euclides da Cunha’s *Os Sertões* (1902) in Brazil. These texts are not only literary but social proposals aiming to establish modernity in the continent (González 1983).

⁶ Carlos Monsiváis’s introduction to his own 1980 anthology of Mexican chronicles is recognised as one of the first formal attempts to legitimise the genre. Three years later, Aníbal González published the groundbreaking academic study *La crónica modernista hispanoamericana* (1983). It was followed by Susana Rotker’s *La invención de la crónica* (1992), which became very influential among practitioners, for it was reprinted in 2005 by the FNPI, as a handbook for journalists, with a prologue by Tomás Eloy Martínez. It is only in recent decades that the variety of academic books on the topic has increased. See, for example, Bencomo (2002), Jörgensen and Ignacio Corona (2002), Bielsa (2006), Aguilar et al (2014), Mahieux (2011), Reynolds (2012), and Angulo (2014).

de los hechos sino que sobre todo es una forma de ‘conocer’ el mundo” (2012: 590). According to Villanueva, the *crónica* should avoid the use of the first-person, while Colombian editor Darío Jaramillo describes these texts as “una narración extensa de un hecho verídico, escrita en primera persona o con una visible participación del yo narrativo, sobre acontecimientos o personas o grupos insólitos, inesperados, marginales, disidentes, o sobre espectáculos y ritos sociales” (17).

While *cronistas* coming from a more literary background emphasize how quickly these texts can be written, *cronistas* with a stronger background in journalism find the space and time in this genre that they cannot have in traditional news writing. These opposed perspectives are understandable, since the former may be comparing the *crónica* with the novel, while the latter compares it with the news. However, this further demonstrates the complex conception of the genre in terms of its production.

There are claims from some practitioners and academics that the Latin American chronicle remains a marginal genre. Nevertheless, by the end of the twentieth century, there was a renewal of interest in the *crónica*, that had not been seen since *Modernismo*.⁷ Furthermore, international publishing houses like Penguin Random House Group, Anagrama and Planeta have launched their own collections, some of them edited by renowned authors within the field; mass media and institutions related to the genre have also published selected *cronistas*.⁸ The current editorial boom in chronicle collections is thus an example of the way in which this hybrid form aims for literary prestige. In fact, in these anthologies, those authors who are already established are featured repeatedly.

The Fundación para un Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano (FNPI) has also played an important role in organizing workshops, prizes and professional encounters on the topic. The foundation has become the influential journalistic elite of the region. As a result of seminars and conferences organised by FNPI, for instance, a group called Nuevos Cronistas de Indias was created in 2008. Officially, the group has 26 members from Latin America and Spain, born between the 1950s and 1980s, including some of the authors considered in this paper: Guerriero, Caparrós, Villoro, Alarcón and Goldman.⁹

In terms of authorship, today’s chroniclers are an elite, much as they were in the *modernista* era. If they do not all portray the glamorous life-style that their forerunners did, they still claim a connection with this heritage, as a means of distinguishing themselves from everyday news reporters. In Villanueva’s words, *crónica* is still “un género aristocrático con ilusiones de un público pop” (603). Nevertheless, the main difference with past generations might be that contemporary chroniclers consider their research method to be as important as

⁷ Mass media publications interested in what is called “investigative journalism” have been opening up more spaces for the genre. Some examples are print magazines as *Etiqueta Negra* in Peru, *Gatopardo*, *Emeequis*, *Letras Libres*, and *Proceso* in Mexico, *Soho* and *Lamujerdemivida* in Colombia; and online media as *Cosecha Roja* and *Anfibia* in Argentina, *Sinembargo.mx*, *Animal Político* and *El Barrio Antiguo* in Mexico, *The Clinic* in Chile or *El Faro* in El Salvador.

⁸ The most relevant anthologies have been edited by Carlos Monsiváis (1980), Tomás Eloy Martínez (2006), Daniel Samper (2008), Darío Jaramillo (2012), Diego Fonseca and Aileen El-Kadi (2012), Jordi Carrión (2012), and Cristian Alarcón (2015). Some academic publications also include a selection of chronicles or reflections of their writers, besides a variety of critics reflecting on the topic, such as Corona and Jørgensen (2002) and Angulo (2014). Although all these texts have published chronicles in Spanish, some of them include Brazilian authors in translation. Brazil certainly shares this editorial boom — as an example, see Ferreira dos Santos (2005).

⁹ In an updated version of the Nuevos Cronistas’ website, authors Elena Poniatowska and Santiago Roncagliolo are also included. See nuevoscronistasdeindias.fnpi.org for the full list of authors in this group.

the narrative style they use. The investigative process (called *reportería* or *reporteo*), and therefore the documents, images and voice recordings they obtain during it, seem to be the base on which to establish their credibility.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the field of the *crónica* has been traditionally dominated by males. In one of the first anthologies on the topic, a history of the Mexican chronicle, edited by Carlos Monsiváis in 1980, there are only three women among the 37 selected writers: Elena Poniatowska, Carmen Lira and Magali Tercero. In the more recent anthologies (Jaramillo 2012; Carrión 2012; Angulo 2014) the situation has not changed: for every ten male chroniclers there are on average two women published.

Literary Journalism

If some defend the *crónica* as a uniquely Latin American genre, others have been trying to integrate it into a particular form of international journalism, that which has been broadly called *literary journalism*. As a field of study, literary journalism has been looking for a place in American academia, particularly from communication studies and comparative literature. An example of this is the foundation of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies (IALJS) in 2006, after the first International Conference on Literary Journalism in Nancy, France. For this association, literary journalism is synonymous with reportage, and it is thought of as “journalism that is literature”.¹⁰

As a writing style, it is related to long-form journalistic genres, such as reportage, profiles, and the feature story. The IALJS considers the following terms to be synonymous with their definition of American literary journalism: literary reportage, narrative journalism, creative non-fiction, the New Journalism, *Jornalismo Literário*, *periodismo literario*, *Bao Gao Wen Xue*, literary non-fiction, and narrative non-fiction (“about us” *ialjs.org*). Some critics study this form as a kind of nonfiction, that could also derive from postmodern metafiction (Frus 1994; Zavarzadeh 1976; Hellmann 1981). Others consider it a completely new genre (Wolfe 1973), a subgenre of the novel (Hartsock 2016) or even an academic discipline in its own right (Bak 2011).

To avoid the traditional aesthetic values implied when using concepts in which the adjective *literary* precedes *nonfiction* or *journalism*, Phyllis Frus (1994) opts for the term *journalistic narrative*. While referring simply to writings about “newsworthy subjects” (Frus 1994: ix), the term offers a wider space for the allocation of all kind of hybrid texts between literature and journalism, with emphasis on both content and form. From the Spanish speaking world, Roberto Herrscher (2012) uses the similar term *periodismo narrativo* to refer to true stories told with *las armas de la literatura*. This is also the term used by María Angulo as a synonym for *crónica*, to designate the texts included in the collective work *Crónica y mirada. Aproximaciones al periodismo narrativo* (2014).

All these concepts are generally used indiscriminately to refer to a type of journalism that can be valued as literature because of its narrative qualities. Literary journalists use dialogue, monologues, descriptions, allegories, metaphors, intertextuality, and other language constructions, in order to recreate the facts aesthetically.

¹⁰ Since 2009 the IALJS has sponsored the peer-reviewed journal *Literary Journalism Studies*. They mostly publish papers analysing American texts. Nevertheless, their 2015 annual conference in Puerto Alegre, Brazil, was the first one to be held in a Latin American country and to offer space for presentations in Spanish and Portuguese. As a participant, I observed that there is still a need to legitimate, academically, the connections between *crónica* and literary journalism.

In the US, literary journalism has been published widely in print and online journalism since the flourishing of the New Journalism movement in the 1960s, led by authors such as Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer and Truman Capote.¹¹ According to Johnson (1971), New Journalism was born as an alternative way of writing about reality, in opposition to the established mass media. Therefore, it implied a complete change in journalistic practice. One of the main characteristics of this form was the inclusion of sociological and political commentaries, which signposted a subjective perspective, for “it is the writing itself – its style and technique, its expression of the writer as a person, and its record of human events – that is central” (xi–xii). Although innovations in journalistic writing style seem to be an inherent condition for this movement, there is also an ethical condition for its existence. For Johnson, at the root of this new way of telling facts, there is a renewed commitment to honesty and thoroughness as important values of journalistic practice. Hence, a free press is a basic condition for New Journalism to exist.

In the European context, this kind of text was called *literature reportage*. Both movements, however, have their origins in the literary realism as well as in the journalism of the nineteenth century. The difference in the terms might be based on the intentions of the texts. On the one hand, American New Journalism has explored innovations in form, but remains rooted in detailed, objective research. European writers, on the other hand, have found, through reportage, a way to express themselves in a more interpretative style, and to write about censored topics, following an ideological, journalistic tradition (Bak 2011). It is possible that the contemporary Latin American *crónica* is a blend of both American and European traditions.¹²

***Testimonio*-based narratives**

“*Testimonio*” is a word charged with many meanings in the history of Latin American literature. As a particular, Latin American form of writing, it has been called *novela-testimonio*, *testimonial novel*, or simply *testimonio*. The genre is related to different modes of narrative, such as autobiography, biography, confessions, memoirs, letters and diaries. However, I refer to *testimonio* as it has been described by John Beverley: “The situation of narration in *testimonio* has to involve an urgency to communicate a problem of repression, poverty, subalternity, imprisonment, struggle for survival, and so on, implicated in the act of narration itself” (1996 [1989]: 26). Due to the fact that the narrator is often illiterate, or is not a professional writer, the process of writing a *testimonio* involves recording, transcription and editing by an intellectual, generally a well-known novelist or experienced journalist.¹³

¹¹ Tom Wolfe is recognized as the one who coined the term New Journalism in 1973, when he published the movement’s first anthology, along with Michael L. Johnson. However, by that time Johnson had already published a theoretical book analysing the works of Wolfe, Mailer and Herr, under a very similar title: *The New Journalism. The Underground Press, the Artists of Nonfiction, and Changes in the Established Media* (1971). For Hellmann (1981), New Journalism was symbolically born in 1965, when Tom Wolfe’s *Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* and Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* were published. By then, however, Capote had already coined his own term: nonfiction novel.

¹² For more on contemporary literary journalism around the world, see Norman Sims (1990; 2007), Bak and Reynolds (2011), and Keeble and Tulloch (2012).

¹³ For Beverley, all kinds of narratives where the *testimonio* is invented or reworked “with explicitly literary goals” (38) are not *testimonio* but pseudo-*testimonio*. These kinds of works are more linked with postmodern literature, an aesthetic that testimonial theorists reject. This observation could be highly problematic and leads to confusion about the literary value that he paradoxically claims for *testimonio*. Under these non-*testimonio* texts he even includes Barnet’s testimonial novel and Capote’s nonfiction novel.

In 1966, Miguel Barnet published *Biografía de un cimarrón*, defining it as the first *novela-testimonio*. The genre was consolidated with the incorporation of the testimonial category into the prestigious Premio Casa de las Américas in 1970. By this time, the Cuban Revolution (1953–1959) had triumphed, and campaign diaries were popular, such as those by Ernesto “Che” Guevara. It was a time in which freedom of speech was being negotiated, against the international backdrop of the Cold War (Franco 2002). In the intellectual field, theories about the West and the representation of Otherness were emerging, particularly those developed by the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz and the sociologist Edward Said.¹⁴

The *novela-testimonio* shares its documentary mode with other literary trends developed throughout the same period, such as New Journalism, the Latin American Boom and the postmodern novel.¹⁵ Regardless of the realistic mode that it can share with the “new historical novel”, which was also in fashion at the time, the evolution of the testimonial novel should be viewed as a different phenomenon. In a polemical piece, Seymour Menton (1993) describes it as a trend that had declined by the 1980s and that “never attained the high productivity, the great variety and the outstanding artistic quality of the New Historical Novel” (190–191).

Although emerging from the tradition of social realism, *testimonio* is not defined as a novel, and therefore its fictional nature is overlooked. But, like the *archive novel* (González Echevarría 1990), *testimonio* also claims to have a pact of truth with its reader.¹⁶ It is not surprising, then, that legal terminology was incorporated into this form: “The position of the reader of testimonio is akin to that of a jury member in a courtroom. Unlike the novel, testimonio promises by definition to be primarily concerned with sincerity rather than literariness” (Beverley 26). In contrast to Lukács’s (1978) notion of the novel as a grand narrative seeking universal truth through the representation of a whole society, the theorists of *testimonio* make a claim for the importance of specific, localised stories. This is why Beverley defines *testimonio* as “a nonfictional, popular-democratic form of epic narrative” (Beverley 27). The traditional role of the writer as he who speaks on behalf of the “voiceless” has, therefore, vanished. The erasure of the function of the author, who is just a compiler, is one of the main characteristics of a testimonial style. George Yúdice states that “the *testimonialista* gives his or her personal testimony ‘directly’, addressing a specific interlocutor” (1991 42). These debates concerning sincerity and literariness, nonetheless, came to a head with the controversy following Elizabeth Burgos’s *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983).¹⁷

¹⁴ In fact, one of the most important academic interpretations of *testimonio* came from the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group. Founded in the USA by John Beverley, Ileana Rodríguez and other scholars, it was inspired by the British-based Subaltern Studies Group, founded by historians of South Asia and among whose associates was Edward Said.

¹⁵ Raymond L. Williams (1997) considers that postmodernism in Latin America is related to the historical and political situation of the region, as it is shown in the novels of writers such as Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Manuel Puig, Ricardo Piglia, Salvador Elizondo, Carmen Boullosa, José Emilio Pacheco, Diamela Eltit, Sylvia Molloy, among others.

¹⁶ González Echevarría (1990) uses *archive novel* as a metaphor, coming from the language of the law to define a type of Latin American novel that creates a modern myth based on an old form, generally represented by an unfinished manuscript and an archivist/compiler. As an archive that accumulates and classifies information, these novels tend to go back to the origins of Latin American history, representing the relationship between legitimacy and power.

¹⁷ The book was based on interviews with Rigoberta Menchú, conducted and edited by the Venezuelan anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos. After being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, Menchú declared that Burgos did not tell all of her story. In 1999, anthropologist David Stoll published *Rigoberta Menchú and the*

Against Yúdice and Beverley's concept of the author as an objective mediator, some critics studied the aesthetic and ethical implications of the role of the writer, mainly during the processes of transcription and edition (Vera León 1992; Sklodowska 1993). For them, the testimonial pact is complex because there will always be a tension between the worldview of the writer and that of the informant: "Es evidente que entre los códigos veredictivos de los testigos y de los editores hay un hiato que se debe a sus diferentes posturas cognitivas frente al mundo" (Sklodowska: 86).

Although *testimonio* has been written about and studied from different points of view, an inherent aspect agreed on by all relevant actors involved is that *testimonio* is not only a discourse but an act that implies solidarity. "*Testimonio* is a means rather than an end in itself" (Beverley 1996: 279), and a way to understand experience and to preserve memory (Randall 1992).

In contrast with its definition in the 1960s-1980s as a new genre, current scholarship considers *testimonio* to be a subgenre of Latin American literature. Although some commentators remain attracted to traditional testimonial works and their influence on social justice and human rights, others have moved towards a less politically charged speech, proposing that *testimonio* should be analysed as any other hybrid discourse. They prefer to use concepts such as the *testimonio mood* or *storytelling* to refer to life narratives based on real experiences:

It is time for *testimonio de jure* of scholarship to move forward because *testimonio de facto* on the ground has undergone a profound metamorphosis and many migrations: from discipline to discipline and border to border; from text to textiles, radio, and graphic art; from transcribed and written to spoken, public, and performative; from fixed contexts to interactional ones; and from nonfiction to fiction and film. Included in these movements is the key figure of the *testigo*, or eyewitness. In the informant role, the eyewitness described in these pages may be invented, false, hidden, or disengaged while living in insile (internal exile), or even nonhuman. (Detwiller and Breckenridge 2)

On one hand, *testimonio* has been liberated from the written form, allowing for the exploration of a variety of media in which *testimonio* could have a new place. On the other hand, *testimonio* is no longer attached to a particular person or locality, but rather it can be found at the intersections of self, community and geopolitical borders.

The traditional concept of *testimonio* remains, in whatever way, useful as a form of expression for individuals in marginal communities, such as indigenous villages, urban peripheries or prisons. If it is true that there is still a high percentage of illiteracy and poverty in Latin America, technology and new media allow more possibilities for the self-expression of the other who, without any need of a mediator, can now become the author of his own story. For instance, projects such as *Tejiendo nuestras raíces* (2010), an audio book of testimonials in Spanish and Mayan, are recovering myths and worldviews of native cultures as well as details of their everyday life. These new practices challenge the traditional definition of *testimonio* as mediated speech and lead us to question, again, the politics of representation.

Story of All Poor Guatemalans, in which he claimed that some facts had not happened exactly as Menchú narrated them. To validate Stoll's book, a *New York Times* journalist later corroborated the falseness of parts of Menchú's account.

From another perspective, Beatriz Sarlo (2006) analyses documentary texts and films in order to criticise the excess of testimony in contemporary representations of the past. Although it is true that testimonial accounts have been essential to the reconstruction and validation of cases of human rights violations, it is important to critically examine the ethical implications of the first-person narratives, when testimonies are the only source, or the most trustworthy one. “Si hace tres o cuatro décadas el yo despertaba sospechas, hoy se le reconocen privilegios” (25). She analyses, for instance, the artistic representation of disappearances during the Argentinean dictatorship, as described by the children of the victims, and which have been seen as part of a post-memory trend. For Sarlo, however, in the twenty-first century there is no *posmemoria*, just another form of memory in which an event has to be precariously reconstructed through disorganised pieces of information, because it is the only way to tell the stories of those who were silenced and murdered:

La primera persona es indispensable para restituir aquello que fue borrado por la violencia del terrorismo de estado; y al mismo tiempo, no pueden pasarse por alto los interrogantes que se abren cuando ofrece su testimonio de lo que nunca se sabría de otro modo y también de muchas cosas donde ella, la primera persona, no puede reclamar la misma autoridad. (162)

But testimonies respond to the needs or trends of the public sphere, and in the established “teatro de la memoria” the other who speaks is no longer the poor; the illiterate; the exploited, but rather the female; the marginal; the subaltern; and the young. Nonetheless, it is only by means of fiction, Sarlo concludes, that one can say what has not been said already, what the victim was not able to document: “La literatura, por supuesto, no disuelve todos los problemas planteados, ni puede explicarlos, pero en ella un narrador siempre piensa desde afuera de la experiencia, como si los humanos pudieran apoderarse de la pesadilla y no sólo padecerla.” (166)¹⁸

In-between fields

Santiago Roncagliolo’s *La cuarta espada. La historia de Abimael Guzmán y Sendero Luminoso* (2007) begins with a self-reflective narrator responding to a rhetorical question. A shameless and ironic Santiago Roncagliolo-as-narrator thus gives his reasons for getting involved in the journalistic investigation that makes up the book:

¿Por qué un reportaje sobre Guzmán? Porque vende. O porque yo creo que vende. O porque es lo único que puedo vender. Siempre he sido un mercenario de las palabras. Escribir es lo único que sé hacer y trato de amortizarlo. Ahora vivo en España y trato de hacerme un lugar como periodista. Necesito algo novedoso, y el tema de actualidad en el último año, tras el 11-M, es el terrorismo. (23)

In an attitude that resembles that of a *modernista* chronicler, this narrator shows his awareness of the commercial value that words hold for newspapers. The journalistic field whence Roncagliolo is speaking, however, is no longer the romantic, bohemian scenario that previously served as a platform for the Spanish-American *modernistas* authors, lending them social popularity and literary prestige (Reynolds 2012). It is true that *crónica* is still, as a genre, mostly published in newspapers by intellectuals who “enjoy a recognized position in the field of restricted production” and manage “to overcome the isolation of the written word” (Bielsa 2006: xii). The contemporary press, however, is not as well-disposed towards fiction authors as

¹⁸ Sarlo refers to fiction and literature as synonyms, which is not uncommon but is the kind of practice that makes it extremely difficult to conduct an analysis of nonfictional narratives as literature.

it used to be, or at least not universally. What Roncagliolo's metafictional narrator demonstrates in this quoted passage, is that an ambitious author, who aims to make a living from journalism – and not an occasional *cronista* – must obey the rules of the market and look for a story that sells. This cynical narrator, thus, represents what I perceive as a generational change in Latin American authors interested in “giving voice to the other”. If the documentarist goes out of his comfort zone and risks his security in order to encounter the other, it is less because of a social or ideological commitment to the topic – that testimonial authors past would have claimed to be driven by – and more because the topic is newsworthy.¹⁹

Another difference is that today's documentary authors have found that the traditional format of the book, rather than any mass media, is the best platform for telling true stories. Two years before publishing *La cuarta espada*, in October 2005, Roncagliolo published a journalistic article on Abimael Guzmán in the Spanish newspaper *El País*. Divided into two chapters, the story is told in the third-person, without any allusion to the author's personal experience or opinions on the topic. Parts of the information, and of the text itself, were repurposed for the book version. The main stylistic difference was the first-person narrator. By inserting the self into the narrative, the new story became a dialogue between the protagonist and the journalist, even if the former never gave him an interview. Roncagliolo chooses the book to tell the complete, true story of Sendero Luminoso, rather than one of the more influential Spanish newspapers.

Metafiction as a self-reflective narrative technique has been used and debated in the postmodern era, largely by the social scientist, and particularly in fields such as anthropology, ethnography and history. However, traditional journalism has paid less attention to theoretical discussions on the role of narrative in the construction of its discourse, and thus in its construction of reality through language. In a field that assumes a transparent style of writing, what Barthes (1967) called “degree zero”, experiments with storytelling structures and general narrative techniques can be found less in everyday, breaking-news, and more in what in journalistic jargon is called “soft news”. This experimentalism is found particularly in interpretative genres such as the opinion piece, column, *reportage*, and *crónica*.

According to Pierre Bourdieu's theory on the field of cultural production (1993), cultural producers move between two poles in the field: the autonomous and the heteronomous. The first one is the space for those artists who are more concerned with autonomy, while the second one is the space of popular culture and bourgeois art, and its producers are more driven by economic interests than those on the autonomous pole. In the case of the literary sub-field, the struggle can be defined as a battle for the monopoly of literary legitimacy, or “the power to say with authority who are authorized to call themselves writers” (41). This is not wholly different for the journalistic field, for in a later work, *On television and journalism* (1998), Bourdieu locates the journalistic field between the market and the intellectual pole. Journalists might have more or less freedom to say what they wish, depending of their specific role or position in the field. This position is determined by the level of control of both the particular media interests and the journalists' sense of self-censorship.

If one considers that culture is a field in which its producers are in a constant struggle for power (Bourdieu 1993), the corpus I am analysing here as documentary narratives are inevitably situated in a liminal space. Its authors can be placed in diverse positions of the field

¹⁹ The idea of a “comfort zone” is of course highly subjective. In the case of Roncagliolo's narrator, journalism represents a sort of dignified salvation from his impoverished life as an illegal Peruvian immigrant in Spain.

of cultural production. Their positions, I suggest, depend more on their cultural affiliations and prestige, in both the literary and journalistic fields, than on the peculiarities of their writing.

In the case of the Latin American cultural field, in which belonging to the literary sub-field has traditionally been much more prestigious than having a place as a journalist,²⁰ it is not surprising that the “literary” element of documentary narratives makes their position ambiguous in terms of authority. Writers like Leila Guerriero, Martín Caparrós, and Juan Villoro, for instance, recognized in our interviews that they usually do not have disagreements with editors, and that they normally publish their texts as they wish. They also have the freedom to choose or propose their own topics, and enough time to develop them, at least in comparison with writing up the daily news. This is not the case, however, for common reporters working to the pressures and interests of editors and media owners.²¹

Despite Roncagliolo’s cynical self-representation as a *reportero en apuros*, the Latin American *cronistas* can be considered an elite in the journalistic field, and thus they act closer to the autonomous pole of the cultural field of production. As I stated before, since the creation of the FNPI, there has been an increase in workshops, conferences and even festivals in which recognized chroniclers from all over the region get together to share their experiences and teach “the craft” to young journalists.²² Nevertheless, if in the journalistic field these Latin American authors are considered an elite, in the literary field they are still marginal. For instance, they have less likelihood of success when competing with fiction writers for prizes, peer recognition, social prestige, and even less in terms of publishing opportunities.

Documentary writers, therefore, have to play two games in order to legitimate themselves within both fields. On the one hand, for the journalistic field they emphasize the ethics of their work, conducting long and detailed investigations. Finding the balance between fidelity to the “voice” of the informant and “good” storytelling has been particularly challenging for journalists who also wish to experiment with form, for there is a risk of falling into stereotypes in the characterisation of the other. Based on her anthropological research on nonfiction narratives about violence in Colombia and Mexico, Gabriela Polit (2013: 174–176) thinks that journalism becomes a trap, because even if not all documentary authors are pursuing originality in their writing, they struggle with representation and try to avoid portraying the cliché of the victim, for instance.

For the literary field, on the other hand, they consciously craft their authorial presence through the construction of a first-person narrator. For it is true that authors use the first-person narrator to create verisimilitude – they depict themselves as witnesses to the story they are telling – and they also use the “I”, to claim authority in a cultural field that still does not give them full acknowledgement.

Towards a theory of documentary narratives

²⁰ According to Bielsa, the *crónica* as genre was not autonomous from the Latin American literary field until the 1960s.

²¹ Based on interviews with selected *cronistas* from Mexico City and Guayaquil, Bielsa also concluded that they are usually not full-time journalists but writers with an in-between position who have the freedom to work beyond the conventional press limitations of space and time: “Cronistas enjoy a degree of relative freedom in a medium in which their work is recognized as creative or literary journalism, and is not subject to the same kind of demand and limitations as predominantly informative reporting. It is thus possible to argue that most *cronistas* experience a privileged position when compared to the journalists who cover news”. (85)

²² Other important venues for this kind of training are Mexico and Argentina. In Buenos Aires, for example, the Fundación Tomás Eloy Martínez regularly offers workshops led by recognised authors.

So far, I have stated that the notion of “field” is a useful metaphor for the interpretation of all kinds of documentary narratives as a cultural phenomenon. Nonetheless, I find that narratives that fall between fields need to be studied with a consideration of the physical, concrete conditions of the real encounters between the author and his or her informants. These real encounters, which become part of the narrative, problematize a reading contract based on credibility: if the author declares “I was there”, the reader is invited to believe it. The author, then, acts less like an isolated, (post)-modernist novelist, and more like Benjamin’s storyteller: “The storyteller takes what he tells from experience — his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale.” (87)

Clearly, when reading these narratives after the experiments of the postmodern era, one cannot avoid a certain scepticism. Narrative strategies such as the configuration of a self-conscious, metafictional narrator, or diverse modes of intertextuality, for example, can be read as typical postmodern devices rather than a way of emphasising the act of witnessing. Nevertheless, I agree with Amar Sánchez (1992) and Frus (1994), that nonfiction raises political and historical issues that should be analysed along with discursive strategies. It is precisely because literary journalism was born as a subversive form in an age of uncertainty, that its content should read through this form, so as to question what we mean by literature, and by journalism.²³ For Frus, nonfiction is part of a complex public discourse, and therefore its literary strategies are more than stylistic attributes. This point of view coincides with the declared intentions of the authors I have interviewed, as they stated that they included, for instance, a first-person narrator, mostly because of ethical concerns.

Latin American literary journalists have created a self-referenced character for themselves, who is usually a trustworthy, cultivated, intellectual, middle-class, progressive, open-minded man (or sometimes a woman), who is interested in marginal people and social problems. Within their own texts, they are intrepid reporters and sensitive detectives; they are, in short, the heroes of their stories. This “I” in literary journalistic narratives is closer to an autobiographical voice and therefore there is a tension between what Robert Burroughs calls the “eyewitness” and the “I-witness” (in Berger and Luckman 1967). Beyond the information the journalist gathers in the field, what becomes the unquestionable evidence in the text, is the self who witnessed something; the storyteller who comes back home to relate what he saw or heard.

It is in documentary narratives that the limits and consequences of using the motif of “real life” are most evident. This is particularly clear in the Latin American cultural field, in which even before the Boom movement, writers used tools from the social sciences to approach a reality from within their countries that they could not relate directly. Writers have used anthropological research methods, specifically ethnographic techniques, such as the field interview, participant observation and life story (González 1993; Corona 2002). Framing facts through this kind of narrative, particularly in politically difficult times, has been a way through which writers make sense of reality, and preserve stories that otherwise would have disappeared, for, as Bruner note, when analysing how people give meaning to their

²³ The nonfiction genre was born as a product of a time of crisis and value disorder (Zavarzadeh 1976). Hartsock (2016) traces the origins of the *literary reportage* — which would later inspire the American New Journalism — as a proletarian, literary genre used in the late 1920s by the workers’ movements in Germany and the Soviet Union. Another interesting account of the history of nonfiction in relation to the Latin American context is given by Amar Sánchez (1992).

experiences: “if we were not able to do such framing, we would be lost in a murk of chaotic experience and probably would not have survived as species in any case” (1990: 56).

Of all possible forms of framing reality, my approach to Latin American nonfiction explores that of testimony. Testimony, however, is not isolated speech, but the result of a dialogue. While imparting their *testimonio*, the other is responding to a self who is there, face-to-face, waiting to hear his or her story. In fact, the form and the content of this testimony are influenced by the others involved in the communication process: the listener-writer and the reader.

As documentary narratives depart from a journalistic, or semi-journalistic investigation, I have chosen to focus on a particular form of dialogue: the interview. In order to do so, I depart from Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981; 1981) reflections on speech genres²⁴ and style as a social phenomenon, individualised by each author’s particular use of language. Although I conduct a literary analysis, I do not intend to read documentary narratives as novels. I rather read each of these texts as what Bakhtin has defined as an “utterance”, that is, an individual, concrete use of language, here generated within a specific genre. These acts of speech, called here “documentary narratives”, are, therefore, the result of various dialogues: first, between the informant and the writer, and second, between the writer and the reader; and, on another level, between the journalistic and the literary genres. All these diverse voices and genres clamour alongside one another in the text, for each speech represents a particular worldview.²⁵

By focusing on their dialogized style, I have found that the ethical intentions of the documentary authors do shape their narratives and their pact with the reader. Their words cannot avoid being conditioned by the other’s words, even when they are appropriating them by means of writing. That these narratives are the product of real encounters between at least two people, the author and the informant, cannot be ignored. They are, then, the most literal example of Bakhtin’s idea of *dialogization* in speech:

Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated — overpopulated — with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one’s own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process. (1981: 294).

What I propose, therefore, is that documentary narratives should be read as performative speech acts, in which multiple and highly diverse worldviews clash. A reading like this can, I think, show that questions of self-representation are inevitably linked to the participants’ real identities. For Erving Goffman (1974), self-identity is always changing according to circumstance, but it can be observed in the way that individuals perform tasks, or in their behaviour in concrete situations. Therefore, an approach that focuses on the dialogical

²⁴ Bakhtin defines speech genres as “relatively stable thematic, compositional, and stylistic types of utterances” (1987: 64), developed in a particular social sphere.

²⁵ Critics who defend literary journalism as a literary subgenre, like Hartsock (2016), use Bakhtin’s theory of the novel as support for their arguments. For it is true that defining the novel as a hybrid form that mixes diverse speeches from real life (*heteroglossia*) can allow for a consideration of nonfiction forms as such, I do not think that Bakhtin included texts that claim to document real-life speech in his own definition of the novel. First, because for him the division between “artistic” and “extra artistic prose” is quite clear, and he includes journalism, as well as philosophy and other “moral” speeches in the “living rhetorical genres”. Second, because to consider a reading of these texts as novels would imply, according to Bakhtin’s theory, a transformation of any element coming from the realm of the real-life into objects or characters, and this is precisely the opposite of what authors intend to do with documentary narratives.

nature of these texts as a representation of the real can reveal, to a certain degree, the identities of the self and others, beyond the fiction.

The traces of the relationship between the self and the other are, therefore, exposed in the representation of the narrative dialogues, for the story shared is never just of one self but the result of particular encounters between particular individuals. Although dialogue is a narrative strategy widely used in fiction, in documentary narratives comes from the real encounter and thus it has ethical implications in its readership. Therefore, in the following sections I analyse the interview as a primary genre²⁶ coming from orality, which is transformed into literature through the use of two journalistic techniques: transcripts and editing.

The interview

The device that makes it possible for contemporary documentarists to connect both the social and textual spheres in which they act is the interview.²⁷ The interview is in itself a hybrid speech genre. It incorporates an oral conversation, generated in a particular social sphere and later reorganised by only one of its participants. This speech is then incorporated into written speech, which is intended for another social sphere. The interview is also complex in its function, for it is a method of research, and also, when incorporated into the text, it becomes a stylistic, literary device.

Through the interview, “el género de la voz y la autenticidad”, as Sarlo calls it (in Arfuch 1995: 13), authors strengthen verisimilitude. Quoting – directly or indirectly – the other’s speech, becomes essential for the pact of credibility with the reader, because, ironically, it is only through the manipulation of the information gathered by the encounter with others that the author is able to tell the truth:

Podría decirse que los hechos existen en la medida en que son contados, alguien ha registrado algo sobre ellos y entonces se puede proceder a su reconstrucción. La verdad es la que surge de esos testimonios, de su montaje, y no está en una realidad de la que se puede dar cuenta fielmente, sino que es el resultado de la construcción. (Amar Sánchez 34)

The truth coming from the other’s speech, however, is transformed through narrative into a “fictional truth” (Riffaterre 1990). This is because testimonies act in the text as symbolic stories, as any other literary text would. Transformed from real into symbolic stories, they tell a truth about certain aspect of reality in a way that is memorable and meaningful. This explains why there is an obsession among documentarist authors with finding the individual story that stands

²⁶ Bakhtin (1987) classifies social speeches into primary and secondary genres. The first ones are the simple, everyday life speeches we use to transmit information or express ourselves, such as a conversation. The secondary genres include and transform the first ones into more complex forms of communication; they have lost their immediate relationship with reality and therefore they are an artistic phenomenon and not an everyday life act. Among the secondary genres, Bakhtin includes literature (novels and dramas), but also scientific research and “great journalistic genres”.

²⁷ I refer to the genre of interview in its broadest sense as a conversation intended to be recorded somehow and later used by one of the speakers as a source for his or her book. This is because some of the authors I studied do not conduct formal, well-structured interviews but opt for a more flexible ethnographic-like method of gathering testimonies. For an in-depth analysis of the interview as speech genre in contemporary societies, also applying Bakhtin’s theory, see Arfuch (1995). For the specific use of the interview in journalistic genres, see Halperín (1995).

as a sign for the theme they aim to address, as Cristian Alarcón expresses regarding his own working process: “yo creo que uno sabe que tiene entre manos una gran historia no porque la historia en sí sea buena sino porque hay un personaje que vale la pena y que va a ser memorable” (Chávez Díaz: 197).

Testimonial-like narratives tell the interviewee’s story, but also show a trace of the encounter, as remembered by the interviewer. Riffaterre’s fictional truth can, thus, relate to Adriana Cavarero’s concept of a “narratable self”, for both interviewer and interviewee are exposing their equal desire for narration:

The narratable self’s desire for narration manifests itself in autobiographical exercises in order to entrust one’s own story to another’s storytelling [...] what is at stake is not an assessment of qualities, or the frequency of a biographical response. Rather, the point is that I become for you a narratable identity, someone whose story you can tell, since my identity is by now in the care of this story that you know by heart. (2000:114)

Editing

Stylistically, the presence of the other in the narrative is represented by quotation marks or dialogue markers. According to Riffaterre, quotations are symbols of the text’s limits because they are used to signpost the intersection between the world and the word. They also show the limits between the authority of the writer’s and the other’s speech. To quote is to demonstrate awareness of Otherness, but also to state the degree of authority that each speech has. That is why editing becomes the most creative element in documentary narratives, because it displaces the experience of the encounter and its recorded evidence to the author’s will. The authors’ decisions towards the representation of the other are primarily stylistic, as Leila Guerriero explains:

Yo creo que cuando uno percibe que hay cosas que tienen que tener una tensión narrativa más fuerte no es muy buena idea darle la voz al protagonista de la cuestión, depende. No hay reglas con eso. Evalúo eso: a ver qué sentido tiene desde el punto de vista de la tensión dramática que lo cuente yo o lo cuente el entrevistado, ¿conviene que comparta la voz con él? ¿que ponga su testimonio y que lo vaya partiendo con una narración mía? creo que la mirada mía está puesta más en cómo lo va a percibir un lector, cómo va a llegar mejor esta historia, cómo se va a percibir mejor el peso de la información. (Chávez Díaz: 247)

It is through the process of editing, thus, that the other’s story becomes the self’s story too. During interviews, authors place great emphasis on the carefully crafted process of editing the words of others. I see this as less because they might need to defend themselves against a fact-checker – since this is not a common practice in Latin American media – and more because the transcription of the recorded voice of others is a way of showing respect for their stories. To take care of the story entrusted to them is part of the ethics of the profession, according to Alarcón:

Creo que hay un respeto por la forma de hablar, o sea por las formas del lenguaje, que no son tampoco reproducciones mecánicas y que es un lenguaje seguramente más depurado, más accesible, pero donde el trabajo es el del oído, el de poder respetar las melodías que en el fondo de los discursos son sustanciales, que son clave para la existencia del otro.

Nevertheless, Alarcón would recognise, along with others, that he does not transcribe the testimonies verbatim. Therefore, to let the other speak is an ethical problem that can be reflected through style. A simple decision about the way in which the testimonies are included in the text becomes essential for our interpretation of the work.

There is, then, an evident linguistic tension in the dialogues. They expose the unavoidable differences between the self and the other. After all, these encounters are not as smooth and idyllic as it might be imagined by traditional testimonial narratives:

As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (Bakhtin 1981 293-94)

Although it might be true that the author's intention is to respect the other's story, and that during the real encounter the dialogue might appear equal, there is something lost and something else added in the process of translation from oral to written speech. If, during fieldwork, the author acts mostly as a listener, during the process of writing he or she transforms the journalistic interview into a literary dialogue, and it is in this that the differences between the self and the other emerge.

As there is an unresolved tension between the self and the other, shown in their own communication process, there is also an unavoidable betrayal of the other by the author. If, following Bakhtin and Cavarero, one's story is always attended to, and shaped by the listener, there will be a discrepancy between a testimony confessed to the writer and the version of it that the reader finally receives. The real encounter between the journalist and the informant cannot be separated from its narrative representation. This is, I think, because, in contrast to other truth-telling situations in which there is a real story to tell (e.g. confession, therapy, legal process), in the case of documentary narratives, what generates the encounter is the desire for narration.

Re-telling a truth

Francisco Goldman's *The Art of Political Murder. Who Killed Bishop Gerardi?* (2007) uncovers the case of Bishop Juan Gerardi, murdered in 1998 in Guatemala. Although the text is written in the first person, it is hard to find an explicit representation of the journalist at work. References to the process of investigation are used in this case not to tell his own experience as reporter approaching others, but to provide information that confirms his involvement with the topic. It is only in a paratext, in the 'Afterword', that Goldman represents himself in relation to the case. He closes with a scene in which he meets Judge Yassmín Barrios, who had received several threats during politically-charged cases:

She didn't seem to register my name, though maybe she did, because turning back to Mario, she asked him, "And when is that book on the case coming out in Spanish?" Mario told her that the person who'd written it was standing next to her. She was astonished, and thanked me, and I replied that I'd done nothing but narrate as faithfully as I could what she and many others had accomplished in the case. She

spoke about her inability to “understand people who live by denigrating the truth.” Then she gestured to her police bodyguards, and said that there was a *patrulla*, a police patrol car, waiting for her around the corner.

“As you can see,” Judge Yasmín Barrios said, “I gave up my own freedom so that other people can have justice – so that other people can be free to say what they believe.” (381)

The scene depicts two characters who have been involved in telling the truth about others, but from different positions. In comparison with the Judge who has to live surrounded by bodyguards, the writer is much safer. By including the judge in his narrative, as well as other people who risked their lives for the case, he becomes not only the listener for the truth in Gerardi’s case, but for the tales of all those who cannot tell the full story.

Born in Boston to a Catholic, Guatemalan mother and an American, Jewish father of Ukrainian ancestry, Francisco Goldman is personally and professionally linked to Latin America. Goldman is aware that, in contrast with colleagues publishing from Latin America, he can be a more committed listener: “Yo sentí que estos chavos necesitaban que alguien contara la verdad. Yo era el único que estaba en posición de hacerlo y me sentí muy obligado a hacerlo”. (Chávez Díaz: 237)

In unstable societies, such as Latin America, in which journalism has become a dangerous profession and the media is censored, transmitting the other’s truth is always a risk. Goldman is aware of the privileges of publishing his true stories abroad: “Nunca he tenido mucha simpatía por el punto de vista gringo, ni entonces ni ahora. Pero sí es otra manera, estás más afuera”. (238)

In contrast with authors publishing abroad, such as Goldman, Latin American writers need to include themselves in the narrative, for being a witness can supplement the lack of official information, or the lack of a trustworthy legal process. This might explain why these authors are more concerned with modes of telling the truth that entail fewer risks, than with delivering “objective” information.

Similar to the priest hearing confession, the journalist acts as a responsible listener. What metadocumentary narratives show, however, is that there is a contradiction between the aim of the journalist-narrator to express himself, and his will to say what people trust him to say. This is why I consider that, in documentary narratives, the narrator is configured as both a storyteller and a professional listener.

Michel Foucault (2012) analyses the act of telling the truth under the name of *parrhesia*, which involves a couple: a speaker and a listener.²⁸ The risk in telling the truth is always on the side of the *parrhesiast*, the speaker who needs courage to tell the truth about himself even if that may involve angering the listener, breaking a connection, or experiencing hostility. The receiver of this truth is an expert in listening, like a technician or a teacher. In theory, this *teckne* passes the knowledge to society without putting himself at risk.

²⁸ Foucault defines *parrhesia* as “the courage of truth in the person who speaks and who regardless of everything takes the risk of telling the whole truth that he thinks, but it is also the interlocutor’s courage in agreeing to accept the hurtful truth that he hears” (13). The concept is opposed to the art of rhetoric, in which the way of saying things does not affect or determine the relations between individuals, and it does not involve any link between the speaker and what he states. For Foucault, the rhetorician is “an effective liar” and a *parrhesiast* is “the courageous teller of a truth”.

The activity of listening to someone else's truth used to involve several people in Ancient Greece, and in Christian culture was represented by the confessor or spiritual director. In modern societies, Foucault notices, the role is practised by the doctor, psychiatrist, psychologist, or psychoanalyst. Nowadays, I argue, the journalist can also act as this professional listener who transmits the true story entrusted to him. While Foucault dedicates more space to the role of the speaker, the truth-teller, Judith Butler (2005) focuses on the receiver of the confession. For Butler, giving an account of oneself is an embodied phenomenon that involves more than one person, since one must always tell the truth to another.

In Latin America, the journalist-narrator is in a highly vulnerable position, for they vacillate between the idealised, professional listener to a *parrhesiast*, and being the *parrhesiast* himself. This is because telling the truth is a risk for them too but they feel a responsibility to tell it.²⁹ It is not out of mere fascination with literature, at least not in all cases, that Latin American authors opt for storytelling as a strategy to communicate certain information without the risks that other modes of truth-telling might imply. To publish in a book, rather than an article in a newspaper or magazine, can also be a way to avoid media censorship or massive attention while writing about particularly sensitive topics.

If truth is a social construct, as Foucault considers it to be, in Latin America this truth will have a different mode in which it can be told. One must attend, then, to the particularities of the context in which documentary narratives are produced. The four modalities of the truth-teller as categorised by Foucault—prophet, sage, technician, parrhesiast—are combined differently in each culture or society. In the particular case of Latin America, I believe that writers who aim to tell true stories have to combine the role of the sage, “the subject who tells the truth but has the right not to speak” (88), with that of the technician and the parrhesiast. The act of questioning, for example, is a way of combining the sage with the parrhesiast. Depicting themselves as interviewers, and thus letting the other speak through the responses, it might be a way of speaking without taking too much risk.

Certainly, the point of view of the author affects the representation of reality, but this is not only a matter of narrative strategy but also the result of the embodied, real and complex experience of encountering the other. In order to ask to the other “who are you?”, as Cavarero and Butler propose, one must first give account of oneself, recognizing one's differences from the other. This might not be a conscious, creative process or a deliberate narrative strategy for writers who conceive of their task as a service to others' story. It is, however, an irrefutably dialogic process. And this is why documentary narratives offer both an aesthetic and ethical response to the problem of truthfulness and communication in uncertain times, as well as a challenge to continue the endless dialogue between the world and the word.

Conclusions

In times where the other has access to more tools to speak for himself, mediated testimonials are still necessary, even if it is only to prove that someone else is still there, listening.

²⁹ The assassination of Rodolfo Walsh is perhaps the most iconic example of this situation, but there are more contemporary cases of journalists who have disappeared while reporting on drugs in Mexico, for instance. A comparative example is that of Roncagliolo's *Memorias de una dama* (2009). After the author was threatened by the protagonist's family, the novel was banned from the Dominican Republic and it has not been republished.

Nevertheless, the representation of the performance of both the self and the other, through narrative techniques such as dialogue, indirect free speech or monologue, influences the interpretation of facts. Echoing Hayden White's ideas regarding historiography, I believe that information and narrative technique cannot be mixed without putting the transparency of a true story in doubt.

Under particular contexts of censorship and violence, the journalist's job cannot be seen only as that of a professional who listens to others and transmits a truth in their name (as the task of a journalist is usually defined). It is not surprising then, that the authors studied here are more concerned with the ethics of representation than the technical methods for transmitting what they hear word-by-word. The narrator thus becomes a blend of storyteller and professional investigator, attempting to diminish the risk inherent in the transmission of the truths of others. The product of this mix of techniques—that I refer to as documentary narrative—can be studied either as another form of journalism, or an alternative way of telling the truth in response to particularly dangerous circumstances. In both cases, they are I think forms of knowledge, even if their unorthodox methods have not been legitimized, yet, as those of other factual discourses.

It is difficult to situate these texts in a concrete position within the chronology of a region's literary history. Yet I believe they can be read as works by dislocated modern writers in a postmodern world, already anachronistic in their postmodernism. This is why I evoke Severo Sarduy's concept of *lo barroco* to refer to their style. As a form concerned with superabundance and waste, the baroque opposes information. Documentary narratives are baroque, eccentric products of literary journalism. While they transgress the utilitarian function of information in the press, they also subvert both literary and journalistic fields, transforming into an alternative vehicle through which to tell the truth (or certain truths).

Nevertheless, it seems that uncovering the truth is no longer the sole aim of documentary authors; they also seek to know the other. They are situated on a threshold. As modern writers, they assume their role in the construction of Latin American reality, contributing to the completion of a total narrative. They use irony and analogy as modern writers do, in order to confront Otherness: if irony marks the differences with the other, exposing *lo bizarro*, then analogy finds similarities through *lo bello* (Paz 1974). Thus, these narratives prove that approaching the other—these strange people, as Kapuściński (2007) notoriously defined them—is still possible. The encounter, however, is never equal and sometimes even impossible.

As my analysis of narrative dialogues shows, there is an unresolved tension between the speech of the self and that of the other. The other becomes a narrative strategy used by the journalist to document fragments of collective memory. Recording and translating their voice onto paper is an act of care for their identities, but it is also a creative activity, for editing the other's testimony displaces the experience of the real encounter into the realm of the author's aesthetic aims. This is why, I conclude that Latin American documentary narratives no longer focus on the representation of the other, but on the self and his or her transformation after approaching the other. Confronted with terrible facts, this narrator is still able to break the paralysis of shock in order to describe what he witnesses, for he is a mediator between the world and his reader. Each true story becomes an individual creation, based on a real moment; an encounter with Otherness.

Literary analysis assumes that, when reading a narrative, one must separate the real self in action from that of the narrator. This assumption is difficult to apply to hybrid texts such as the ones analysed here, because in praxis, the documentarists do not actually separate their

real self from the one on the page. They defend the use of the first-person in order to show to the readers their supposedly fair, trust-based relationship with their informants. Nevertheless, I believe that these authors play diverse roles, depending on the field in which they are performing and how they perceive their two interlocutors: the informant and the reader. During fieldwork, authors act as professional listeners. They try to adapt to the informants' expectations and look for similarities with them in order to develop empathy. Afterwards, in their writing they try to connect with the reader, by stressing the differences between them and their informants. Whether the author depicts himself or herself as an outsider, or someone who manages to infiltrate others' worlds, what the reader gets to know is indeed a literary construction of the self, reliable or not.

While the other is at risk of devolving into stereotype -characters in an edited version of their lives- the author's self becomes the most literary element. The fictional devices employed by nonfiction texts, I think, are found not in their "literary" use of language, but in the construction of a self-reflective narrator. As opposed to other narrative genres, however, the nature of this type of narrator has to be traced throughout the nonfictional works of each author, for it evolves through time as the real self does. However, this stylistic decision, of including the self on the narratives of others, does not diminish the collective, dialogical nature of these texts, for they are, I think, striking examples of multiple selves exposing their desires for narration.

Analysed as a speech act, documentary narratives are a means to explore the difficulties of the encounter with Otherness. In representing diverse individuals in dialogue, transmitting a "living impulse" as Bakhtin would say, these texts show that each voice carries its own perspective on the world. These perspectives or worldviews do not interconnect smoothly with each other, as in a traditional fictional style. They clash, they collapse into each other, producing a new collective, heterogeneous, and complex speech form.

Although they are not emblems of popular culture per se, these narratives are situated, I claim, not only at the intersection between diverse social and economic contexts, but also between the diverse worldviews that are constantly crashing in the everyday encounters of the inhabitants of Latin America. Because of these reasons, I believe this concrete documentary form is truly Latin American, although similar forms exist in other regions where inequality, instability and uncertainty affect society.

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