

Narrating from the Margins: Representations of Shantytowns in Brazilian and Colombian
Nonfiction

Toby Weisslitz

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Advisor: Dr. Juan Carlos González Espitia

Reader: Dr. Emilio del Valle Escalante

Reader: Dr. Joanne Hershfield

Reader: Dr. Monica Rector

Reader: Dr. Alicia Rivero

Abstract

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(Under the direction of Dr. Juan Carlos González Espitia)

During the past sixty years in Colombia and Brazil, mass rural displacement to urban shantytowns has increasingly occurred as a result of poverty, public policy, and violence. The continual, unregulated growth of these shantytowns has triggered an increase in social problems for residents: poverty, gangs, drugs, violence, and social exclusion are not uncommon. Many books and films depict such shantytown problems, and there exist many significant studies of these works. These studies, however, have tended to focus exclusively on works of fiction. While these approaches make valuable contributions to the discipline of Latin American Studies, they overlook an innovative cluster of recent Brazilian and Colombian nonfictional books and films which are challenging traditional notions of authorship, genre, production, marketing, and conscience-raising. As an original contribution to scholarship, this dissertation is an examination and analysis of these recent (2003-present), nonfictional shantytown-themed books and films from Colombia and Brazil. These written and cinematic works speak to a wide range of urban social problems while simultaneously testifying to the economic, social, and political factors experienced by displaced, poor, rural Brazilians and Colombians during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Given that most shantytown residents are culturally, economically, and politically excluded from the means of self-representation, this category positions the shantytown

resident and his/her narration as central figures in the struggle for recognition of the social problems in peripheral Latin American neighborhoods.

To Brian

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Introduction

Notwithstanding the pervasiveness of displacement throughout Latin America,¹ Colombia and Brazil are pronounced cases in the region due to the particular extent and effects of rural-to-urban migration. In both countries, displacement has been a decades-long phenomenon that has resulted in a boom of rapidly growing shantytowns. Millions of rural workers have migrated to cities such as Medellín, Bogotá, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. For most, however, living conditions in the metropolises are not much better than the ones they left behind. While some are able to enter the middle class, the majority of the new urban inhabitants have built shacks in the Colombian *comunas* or Brazilian *favelas* in the unoccupied areas on the margins of the city. The growth of the aforementioned cities—fueled by increasing immigration and the rising value of land—has forced new arrivals to live further and further away from the downtown area. As a result, the past several decades have seen a shift in favelas and comunas from simple ramshackle communities to complex sprawling structures in which drug dealers and corrupt policemen coexist with low-income working families, religious missionaries, former peasants, small-scale farm owners, merchants, non-profit organizations and schools, street children, and drug addicts. Such remarkable diversity within the shantytowns starkly reflects the complexity of displacement and its effects. In the face of a new home void of both opportunities and human resources, some displaced people turn to crime, others to the church, and still others to whatever job they are able to find. Regardless of the different choices that they are forced to

¹ With the term “displacement”, I refer to forced migration—the coerced movement of a person or persons away from their home or home region often through violent means.

make in their daily struggle to survive, shantytown residents must live together in a new urban landscape in which they individually, and sometimes collectively, fight for a better life.

Parallel to the wildfire spreading of these marginalized urban communities, Brazil and Colombia have experienced a recent surge of shantytown-themed nonfictional literature and film. In academic studies of Brazilian or Colombian cultural production, such as those by Rory O'Bryen and Stephanie Muir, these nonfictional works have been largely overlooked in favor of their more popular and commercially successful fictional counterparts, such as, for instance, the Brazilian film *Cidade de Deus* (dir. Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002).² At the same time, many such studies tend to limit their scope to the literature and/or film of only one of these countries.

As an innovative, comparative, and interdisciplinary project, this dissertation identifies and analyzes the distinguishing characteristic of a new category of Brazilian and Colombian shantytown-themed nonfictional literature and film—a category which from here on out I refer to as shantytown testimonial narrative.³ These recent works, produced roughly from 2003 to the present, speak to a wide range of urban social problems while simultaneously testifying to the economic, social, and political factors experienced by displaced poor rural Brazilians and Colombians during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. They often take the form of a written narrative or documentary film that treats the life story or life experience of a shantytown resident; this person's story is commonly marked by displacement and is representative of his or

² For specific examples of academic studies of Brazilian or Colombian cultural production, see O'Bryen and Muir.

³ I include the word “testimonial” within this category in order to distinguish it from other nonfiction that is more scientific and less personal, and to connote that the narratives are largely told in the words of the marginalized protagonists themselves. Since this dissertation is written in English, I refer to the coined category with its English name—shantytown testimonial narrative, but it is important to note the category's Spanish-language and Portuguese-language labels: respectively, *testimonio de la periferia urbana* and *depoimento da periferia urbana*.

her community, or a sector of it, and the social problems that afflict it. At the same time, these nonfictional books and films distinguish themselves from their fictional counterparts in several significant ways: 1) first-hand accounts of shantytown life are presented, often word-for-word, in the street talk of residents; 2) there is a heavy involvement of shantytown dwellers in co-production and co-authorship; 3) sociologists or journalists, specifically *cronistas*—writers of *crónicas*, frequently co-author these books and films, and their research into the shantytowns is included alongside the intimate stories of residents;⁴ 4) marketing is prioritized to shantytown dwellers, other marginalized communities, as well as to an international audience; and 5) works are united both by theme—shantytown social problems—and by objective—creating a consciousness about daily shantytown struggles.

In addition to furthering the characterization of this recent hybrid category, this dissertation shows the ways in which shantytown testimonial narrative maintains roots in—yet significantly departs from—both *testimonio* and New Latin American Cinema. The complexity of shantytown testimonial narrative (i.e. there can be more than one target audience) reflects the always difficult to define nature of these two parent genres—both of which contain various sub-groups and phases. Nonetheless, written and filmic shantytown testimonial narrative is united by its aforementioned subject matter and its goals. Moreover, many of these Brazilian and Colombian books and films show a model of overcoming adversity through both first-hand accounts and the co-authors' proposals for affecting social change. Along these same lines, this dissertation reveals how shantytown-themed works can be, and are being, used as an instrument for social change, and not only for entertainment.

⁴ *Crónica* is a genre of literary journalism in which the everyday history of societies are recorded and documented. It often contains not only information, but also the author's impressions.

With this dissertation, I am not trying to represent all of Latin America nor all shantytowns. I am informed by my own experience, and my perspective is slanted in favor of shantytown residents. More specifically, I arrived at the scope of this dissertation's topic after spending a year and a half living and volunteering in Rocinha—one of, if not the, largest favela in Brazil. My experience living and volunteering in Rocinha opened my eyes up to the difficulty, and perhaps, impossibility, of ever getting out of the favela in the sense of socioeconomic mobility. I will never, for instance, forget my friend Igor—an extremely hard-working and naturally intelligent 23 year-old English student of mine. Igor worked as a busboy at a nearby upscale hotel that was located outside of the favela in one of Rio's wealthiest neighborhoods. Despite having a relatively good job, his income was quite low considering that he was supporting himself, his parents, and his four older brothers (all of whom were unemployed). In one of my many conversations with Igor, he told me that although he had a girlfriend with whom he was in love, he never wanted to have children because he would not want to bring them up in the poverty, violence and complete lack of opportunities in which he was raised. Igor also explained to me that any extra money that he managed to save from his job (which was never very much), he spent on expensive "Dungeons and Dragons" playing cards. Not only did Igor enjoy playing the game, but he sincerely felt that his only chance of ever getting out of the favela and into another neighborhood and class, was through becoming one of the world's best "Dungeons and Dragons" players and travelling the globe to championships. When he told me this, I became angry, and verbally attacked him for his absurdity and cynicism, but Igor insisted that he was a realist, not a pessimist. As I saw his story, minus the "Dungeons and Dragons" element, mirrored in countless other favelados that I met, I began to see the sad veracity of his line of thinking, and I understood how so many hard-working favela residents—without a quality

education, with countless family members to support, and with the daily struggles that define life in the shantytown—were stuck in a system in which socioeconomic mobility, or more specifically ascension, was virtually impossible.

This perspective—as well as the bias that I bring to this study—was further shaped by the friendships that I developed with several members of Comando Vermelho, the gang in Rocinha at the time that I was living there. For example, a friend of mine in Comando Vermelho, who initiated when he was just 14 years-old, explained to me that even if he wanted to leave the gang, it would be impossible for him to find work because no employer had ever signed his work card, and so it would be more or less obvious as to how he had spent the past several years. While I indeed met a wide range of levels and types of gangsters, most were kind, hard-working men who were simply trying to provide for their families. They explained to me that a gangster could earn in a day what a regular (non-gangster) favelado could make in a month. At the same time, they had days off, health insurance, power and respect, and their families were provided for should anything ever happen to them; such care and reparations, for instance, included an all-expenses paid funeral. My friendships with gangsters and the resulting solidarity I felt with them was further compounded by the community-wide respect for the extremely benevolent and beloved dono of Rocinha at the time—Lulu. Only 23 years old, his leadership in the favela was reflected in the way that the gang ran Rocinha at the time: their presence was hidden, not flashy, and they were extremely protective of the community. Lulu was also renowned for giving back to the community in the form of building schools and churches as well as starting the first youth soccer program in Rocinha.

Finally, the empathy and compassion that I felt for the residents of Rocinha in the short time I lived there was further amplified by the numerous instances of police brutality which I

witnessed—further evidence that the shantytown dwellers were helpless victims up against countless daily hardships. In one instance while I was living there, three adolescent boys were returning to Rocinha late at night, when police approached them and demanded to know the names and hiding places of top gangsters. The teenagers—all students with regular (non-gang) jobs—explained that they had no gang affiliation, but the police insisted, and eventually took them to a remote part of the favela where they were shot and killed. The next day, in rage and protest, the residents of Rocinha dragged their bodies into the main road. A couple months later in April of 2004, a week-long bloody and terrifying turf war erupted between two gangs. It became necessary to hide in whatever space was deemed the safest in your home as crossfire began every evening when the sun went down—that is until 1200 military police invaded, an act that culminated in their killing of Lulu. In the end, however, such moments of violence were few and far between, and any gang turf war violence always proved to be much less scary than the times when the police entered the favela either shooting randomly or throwing tear or gas bombs. My landlady in Rocinha accordingly always told me that “a bullet has no address”, meaning that stray bullets were a constant threat in Rocinha. But whereas a gangster is punished severely, at times by death, if he accidentally kills or injures an innocent favelado with a stray bullet, the police—although famously overworked and underpaid—are frequently exempt from punishment. Ultimately, while I indeed bring bias to this dissertation based off of my experiences in Rocinha, I have also approached this study with a sincere desire to draw attention to the social problems that are so often ignored or misunderstood, and I believe, perhaps naively, that shantytown testimonial narrative is a powerful vehicle to attract attention to these problems.

While in Rocinha, I was moved by many aspects of the favela, but most notably by the sense of community and by the extensive difficulties that many of its hard-working residents

faced on a daily basis. I was also struck by the overwhelmingly negative stereotypes and ignorance about the favelas that were constantly expressed to me in my conversations with middle and upper-class Brazilians. I saw these wide-spread biases mirrored in many of the popular representations of the favela, such as the immensely successful film *Cidade de Deus*. Frustrated by such negative images which my experience in Rocinha contradicted, I sought out more authentic representations of the favela, ideally in the words of those who lived there. As I came across many books and films that treated the shantytowns, and which notably had a heavy sociological influence, I began to look for a point of comparison, and eventually found many similarities with Colombia: the phenomenon of shantytowns there is comparable and with similar causes, and many recent nonfictional representations of the comunas tend to similarly be co-authored by a professional—here a journalist instead of a sociologist—who includes his or her investigation-based insight into the social situation outlined by the shantytown *testimonialista*.⁵ In the end, I observed that the works which I could locate within the category of shantytown testimonial narrative—a term that I started to frame then—tended to be accurate and ethical representations of these marginal communities that impressively aimed to counter the very stereotypes that struck me as narrow.

After conducting research in Brazil and Colombia, I concluded that the best method for the dissertation was to use a hybrid approach of analyzing literature and film together, and that paying special attention to the unique interdisciplinary fusion of sociology and journalism within the chosen books and documentaries would prove fruitful. In my analysis, I also emphasize the multifaceted qualities of contemporary shantytown conditions in the selected books and films. I thread my examination and characterization of these works with the theories and studies from

⁵ Testimonialista is the term used for the marginal protagonist of a testimonial work.

scholars of Film Studies, Latin American Studies, and Women's Studies among other disciplines; these scholars include Bill Nichols, John Beverley, Laura Mulvey, Jane Gaines, and Glauber Rocha. I also draw from the interviews that I conducted independently in Brazil and Colombia with the filmmakers and authors of the principal works that I analyze. Finally, my project is additionally complimented and enhanced by the unique perspective that I bring to it from having lived and volunteered in Rocinha for a year from 2003 to 2004, and then again during the summer of 2005.

Of the scholarly works that I draw from, of utmost importance is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Many of the ideas brought up in this essay, for example, pertain to the often-complicated and unequal relationship between the shantytown testimonialista and the interlocutor—usually a professional of a more privileged socioeconomic class—who collects and disseminates the shantytown resident's life story or experience.⁶ In Spivak's essay, for instance, she explains that the subaltern is a person "without lines of social mobility" (28) and with limited or no access to cultural imperialism. Spivak says that the subaltern is denied access to both mimetic and political forms of representation, but she highlights the problems that are associated with interlocutors' efforts to open up possibilities for such representation. For example, such an attempt could likely create a problematic dependence of the subaltern on interlocutors for access to collective speech. I refer to these issues raised by Spivak, among others, in my literary and filmic analyses in order to shed light on how shared authorship and production within shantytown testimonial narrative functions, as well as to

⁶ Interlocutor is a term used to refer to the person who elicits or collects the testimony or interview that is the basis of the testimonial work. This person also organizes and edits the testimonial work and is responsible for its production, publication, and dissemination. Oftentimes the interlocutor comes from a more privileged socioeconomic background than the testimonialista, and he or she tends to be credited as either editor or co-author of the testimonial work.

compare how shantytown residents' limited access to self-representation compares to that of their counterparts in testimonio and New Latin American Cinema.

The dissertation is composed of five chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter, "Displacement, Politics, and the Development of Shantytowns in Brazil in Colombia," is a comprehensive, largely sociological chapter which describes Brazilian and Colombian shantytowns in terms of their displacement-related growth and their present socioeconomic character. This chapter details the sociopolitical and economic setting of the comunas and favelas while also offering a background into how such communities were formed in Colombia and Brazil. It also provides a thorough rendering of the living conditions within these communities, as well as the sociopolitical problems and limited options which are faced by shantytown residents. These issues will be the points of reference among the selected books and films. It is essential to begin with this type of outline of the comunas and favelas because the social problems afflicting these communities are the very heart and the very urgency of the works which I examine. Such a framework allows for a better understanding of both the causes of the problems presented in shantytown testimonial narrative as well as of the stylistic and/or teleological features of these works.

The similarities (as well as the differences, of course) between displacement and the phenomenon of shantytowns in Colombia and Brazil are also underscored in this section. For instance, I show how guerilla groups such as FARC and the ELN as well as the paramilitaries have largely contributed to displacement in Colombia. There, forced migration is a consequence of Colombia's armed conflict and it is specifically often a response to threats and violence. In comparison, in Brazil, land ownership issues and the severe poverty of the northeast have been the largest contributors to displacement. Almost half of the agricultural land in Brazil is owned

by just one per cent of the population, and while land reform would benefit millions—both agricultural workers and shantytown residents, political opposition to government plans has prevented any meaningful progress. Ultimately, although relatively different in their causes, the indicated factors in both countries have led to the comparable rapid proliferation and intensification of the phenomenon of the shantytowns.

Building upon the sociopolitical framework of Chapter One, the second chapter, “Tracing the Roots of Shantytown testimonial narrative,” provides an outline of both the literary and cinematic traditions in which shantytown testimonial narrative is steeped. At the same time, I show how this recent hybrid category approaches the very issues detailed in the previous chapter. Specifically I demonstrate how these shantytown-themed books and films maintain roots in two Latin American genres popularized in the 1970s: testimonio and New Latin American Cinema. Both genres were reactions to, and documents of, the harsh regimes of the 1960s and 1970s and the related political and cultural resistance movements. They sought to portray marginalized subjects and transform reality through the critical documentation of poverty, societal injustices, and marginality; an active audience, it should be noted, was integral to this social change.⁷

The first part of this chapter deals with testimonio, a genre canonized by Casa de las Américas in 1971.⁸ This genre developed out of a documentation of, and desire to raise awareness about, urgent social problems in Latin America. Manuel Galich defined testimonio in

⁷ With regards to an active audience, New Latin American Cinema filmmaker Tomas Gutiérrez Alea distinguished between two types of spectators: 1) the contemplative spectator who does not move beyond the passive, contemplative level, and 2) the active spectator who takes a moment of live contemplation to critically understand reality and then to transform it into action.

⁸ Casa de las Américas is an organization that was founded by the Cuban Government in 1959. It aims to develop and extend the social and cultural relations with the countries of Latin America, the Caribbean and the rest of the world.

1970 as a text that documents, from a direct source, a particular aspect of Latin American reality, and René Jara and Hernán Vidal, in *Testimonio y literatura* (1986), expand upon that early definition through their observation that testimonial discourse is always intertextual because it supposes another, official version of that which is being narrated. Further developing those characterizations, John Beverley, in “The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio”—an essay included in *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (2004)—, defines testimonio as: “a novel or novella length narrative in a book or pamphlet form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts” (30-31). Beverley maintains that the narrator of testimonio is usually someone either illiterate or at least not a professional writer, and that this person often needs an interlocutor of a more privileged background in order to elicit his or her story (32). In accordance with the marginality of the testimonialista, testimonio is concerned with a problematic social situation, and the situation of the narrator is representative of a larger social class.

The supplementation by Jara, Vidal, and Beverley to Galich’s original definition shows that the genre of testimonio has undergone considerable evolution since its initial canonization four decades ago. In this chapter my discussion of changes within the genre touches on texts not only from Brazil and Colombia, but also from other countries in Latin America in order to give a more comprehensive picture of its evolution. The early stage of testimonio’s development was often characterized by: the presentation of an ongoing revolution; the organization of inexperienced, marginalized groups such as students or peasants against oppressive industries, governments or armies; and the use of an interlocutor who often instilled the testimonio with an ethnographic quality. Accordingly, Elzbieta Sklodowska shows in *Testimonio hispanoamericano* (1992) how these early testimonios were often infused with ethnographic discourse by

interlocutors such as Miguel Barnet and Elizabeth Burgos in *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1980) and *Me llamo Rigoberta y así me nació la conciencia* (1983) respectively (Skłodowska 58). Such early texts also tend to reflect the always-complex authorship issues inherent in the production of testimonios—a process that tends to be complicated by class and power issues that inevitably spring up between these two very different people who are often inorganically thrown together.

The next stage of testimonio can be classified as an experimental one, a challenge to the limits of such a dynamic genre, which includes texts such as Elizabeth Jelin and Pablo Vila's *Podría ser yo* (1990). This testimonio, which deals with residents in poor, marginalized Buenos Aires neighborhoods after the end of Videla's dictatorship, has an innovative authorship in that the subjects of the book chose all of the texts and photos and the interlocutors make a direct solicitation to the reader to connect with at least one of these images or commentaries. This stage of testimonio introduces us to a characteristic that will become an inherent component of shantytown testimonial narrative: direct pleas and prescriptions for social change by both the interlocutors and the testimonialistas.

Finally, shantytown testimonial narrative can be seen as the most recent phase of Latin American testimonial production. Like early testimonios, shantytown testimonial narrative is concerned with a marginal subject who is representative of his or her community and the social problems afflicting that community. The protagonists are shantytown residents who are denied access to a quality education, government assistance, and resources such as clean water and electricity. Additionally, in the face of limited options, they may be forced to enter into lives of crime in order to make ends meet and to attain a meaningful social identity in terms of a decent salary, respect, and power within their community. While shantytown testimonial narrative does not deal with the ongoing insurgencies or dictatorships that birthed testimonio, it does present a

new present-day urgency—that of the metropolis’ peripheral communities and displaced residents.

Like early testimonios from the preliminary stage, much shantytown testimonial narrative is produced in conjunction with interlocutors, although these gestors often are now cronistas or sociologists instead of ethnographers (like Barnet) or political activists (like Burgos). We also still see the organization of inexperienced marginalized groups in order to fight for a cause. Today, for instance, shantytown residents are often united in the struggle for better standards of living, education, and government aid. Also, especially in written shantytown testimonial narrative, the texts, like in the first stage of testimonio, tend to be directed to an audience that can produce social change—the middle and upper classes.

The next part of Chapter Two deals with shantytown testimonial narrative’s other parent genre, New Latin American Cinema. This movement—which largely included documentary or documentary-inflected films and also related manifestos by filmmakers—was a response to the despotism of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as to the legacy of centuries of colonialism and imperialism. New Latin American Cinema defined itself against the European desire for primitivism, misunderstood suffering, exhibitionism, and Hollywood commercialism and aesthetic. New Latin American Cinema was concerned with political action and choice, and filmmakers were often involved in politics, and frequently paid critical attention to history.

While shantytown testimonial narrative maintains many key traits of New Latin American Cinema which will be further elucidated in this chapter, one chief difference is that today, instead of being removed from access to mass communication, marginalized groups now lack the means to mass self-representation. While shantytown residents may have increased contact with cell phones and the internet, many are still without the tools such as video and web

cameras necessary for mass self-representation as permitted by websites like “You Tube” and documentary film. Shantytown testimonial narrative nonetheless retains themes of broad national importance—a characteristic, for instance, of one sub-group of New Latin American Cinema that I examine—because unlike any other genre, it speaks to both urban and rural problems as a result of the displacement intimately connected to the growth of comunas and favelas.

Expanding on the sociological, literary, and cinematic framework outlined in the first two chapters, Chapter Three, “(Author)itative Perspectives: Sociologists, Cronistas, and Shantytown testimonial narrative,” details the predominant structure and characteristics of the category I am defining. As in Chapters Four and Five, I analyze films and written texts from both Brazil and Colombia in order to show the organic nature of the discourse rather than the geographical or written versus filmic separation. In particular, I focus on shared authorship between shantytown residents and sociologists or journalists. Such co-authorship offers a mixture of personal narrative with investigative research that ideally engages both local, marginalized audiences as well as an international public. Here, unlike the early phase of testimonio, the discourse of the testimonialista is not being manipulated to meet readers’ expectations in the sense of adding an ethnographic style. Instead, shantytown testimonial narrative is often “elitized” in the sense of being accompanied by an academic or professional view—that of the sociologist or cronista. Oftentimes, their interpretations are followed by direct pleas and/or prescriptions by the testimonialistas and/or themselves such as those seen in the experimental phase of testimonio. In the case of sociologists and cronistas, these prescriptions are based on years of research and investigation and accordingly have heightened credibility among the indicated ideal audience.

Chapter Three also highlights a significant distinction between shantytown testimonial narrative from Colombia, which tends to have cronistas as interlocutors, versus that from Brazil,

in which sociologists more commonly function in that role. Such infusion of *crónica* with Colombian shantytown testimonial narrative is specifically seen in the journalistic investigation in *Comuna 13* (2005) by Ricardo Aricapa, and *La isla de Morgan* (2003) and *¿Cuánto cuesta matar a un hombre?* (2006), both by José Alejandro Castaño. In *La isla de Morgan*, for example, Castaño has a strong narratorial presence which is included alongside the quotes and testimonies of comuna residents. As in most *crónicas*, Castaño employs simple, direct but often descriptive language that at times is very personal. Despite such intimate narration, the intrinsically journalistic nature of the *crónica* offers shantytown testimonial narrative a more professional, and thus more highly regarded, type of witnessing—that which is unaffected by trauma. Along these same lines, in this chapter I show how the interlocutor in shantytown testimonial narrative balances out the remembering and witnessing problems of shantytown residents who are often survivors of trauma or violence; here, I specifically draw from the related issues raised by Ana Douglass and Thomas Vogler in *Witness and Memory: the Discourse of Trauma* (2003).

Within Brazilian shantytown testimonial narrative, we more commonly see the incorporation of sociology instead of *crónica*. Like the *crónica*, sociology adds a more creditable, professional element to the residents' testimonies, although sociology tends to mediate these testimonies through the dominant empirical discourse of science. Despite this distinction of *crónica* in Colombia versus sociology in Brazil, hybrid shantytown-themed works in both countries have the same method and goal: inclusion of the authoritative professional voice alongside personal stories of shantytown residents in order to substantiate and interpret the narratives, and then make recommendations of social change for those who can produce it—as I mentioned before, the intended upper and middle-class audience.

The Brazilian shantytown testimonial narrative that I analyze in this chapter includes *Crianças do tráfico* (2003) by Luke Dowdney and *Cabeça de porco* (2005) by Luiz Soares, MV Bill, and Celso Athayde. Within this discussion, I also include Brazilian films which are threaded with a sociological perspective such as *Ônibus 174* (dir. José Padilha, 2004). Here, the traditional voice-over narration in documentary style is replaced by interviews with sociologists and social workers who interpret the testimonies of shantytown residents and then offer recommendations for ameliorating the presented social problems.

Following Chapter Three's examination of genre-infusion and co-authorship, Chapter Four, "Representing Social Problems in Shantytown testimonial narrative," focuses on how marginality, poverty, and violence were depicted within testimonio and New Latin American Cinema, and how the threads of these types of representations are, or are not, retained within shantytown testimonial narrative. At the same time, I investigate the marketing and reception of the often dissimilar presentations of these themes within my selected books and films. By comparing such divergent portrayals, my analysis in this chapter furthers the characterization and understanding of the literary and filmic category that I am defining while simultaneously showing how precepts about the presentation of social problems from testimonio and New Latin American Cinema have evolved within it.

One example of the comparative strategy that I use in this chapter is between two types of presentations of violence in shantytown testimonial narrative: ethical depictions embedded in a context that explains the causes and effects of the violence, versus gratuitous presentations of violence that, in film, tend to be modeled after a Hollywood aesthetic. In light of the violent causes and effects of displacement that are so intimately tied to the growth of shantytowns, and due to the gangs that tend to define these peripheral communities, violence is a central

characteristic of favelas and comunas and thus a fruitful thematic lens in which to examine and compare shantytown testimonial narrative. Within this discussion, I first refer back to the related precepts of how to depict violence and misery in New Latin American Cinema which were principally set forth by Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha in his essay “Aesthetics of Hunger”, and I show how his ideas have significantly evolved with shantytown testimonial narrative. Through the comparison of very different representations of violence and social problems in shantytown testimonial narrative, I show how such depictions either oppose or reinforce existing stereotypes about these marginalized communities.

The films and books which I examine include the previously mentioned *La isla de Morgan* and *¿Cuánto cuesta matar a un hombre?* by Castaño—personal stories which openly aim to destroy stereotypes about the dark, violent side of Medellín—, Carolina Maria de Jesus’ *Quarto de despejo: diário de uma favelada* (1960)—an early testimonio from Brazil—, Catalina Villar’s documentary *Diario en Medellín* (1998), and MV Bill’s book and film project *Falcão* (2003). I also refer to more problematic representations of violence in shantytown testimonial narrative as evidenced by the Colombian documentary *La Sierra* (dir. Scott Dalton and Margarita Martínez, 2005) and the Brazilian film *Cidade de Deus*, which I analyze alongside its multi-faceted television spin-off, *Cidade dos homens*. While *Cidade de Deus* is not a documentary and not part of shantytown testimonial narrative, it cannot be overlooked within this project for several reasons: the global attention that it has brought to favelas, the use of natural actors—specifically adolescents from favelas—, and its wide-reaching presentation of violence and social problems tied to the favelas.

The fifth and final chapter, “Female Testimonialistas of the Shantytown,” examines female narrators of shantytown testimonial narrative. This chapter is a point of comparison with

the texts analyzed in the previous chapters which almost exclusively contain male protagonists. Here I address what these female-centered works reveal about gender relations and roles within the shantytowns, as well as what these works show about female/female collaborations and the role of female testimonialistas in co-authorship. The testimonies of these female shantytown residents prove innovative in several valuable ways: they present a facet of favela and comuna life that is often overlooked in favor of that of the glamorized violence and drugs with which their male counterparts are associated; they not only go against an official, state-sponsored narrative, but also against that of male-dominated shantytown testimonial narrative; and they deepen in such triangulation of power the discussion of the complications that arise in attempts by socioeconomically privileged interlocutors to represent marginal subjects.

In this chapter I pay special attention to *La Sierra*, *Diario en Medellín*, *Favela Rising*, and *Lucia: Testimonio of a Brazilian Drug-Dealer's Woman* (2005) by Robert Gay. I thread my analysis with the interviews that I conducted with Scott Dalton, Margarita Martínez, and Catalina Villar—the directors of *La Sierra* and *Diario en Medellín* respectively. I also draw on critical writing dealing with female testimonialistas in Latin America. Some of these texts include Joanna R. Bartow's *Subject to Change: the Lessons of Latin American Women's Testimonio for Truth, Fiction, and Theory* (2005) and Catherine Davies and Anny Brooksbank Jones' *Latin American Women's Writing: Feminist Readings in Theory and Crisis* (1996). These books and films show how questions of social exclusion particularly affect women even as they have become a larger part of the urban labor force in Latin America and as the share of female-headed households has risen.

Finally, in the conclusion I show how this innovative category of shantytown testimonial narrative has created a space for shantytown dwellers' self-representation within local and

international arenas. At the same time, this study ultimately shows how, despite a new era and a new context, shantytown testimonial narrative maintains ties to its parent genres but still succeeds in conveying a present-day urgency via the use of new tools, such as the fusion of other genres and a comprehensive presentation of social problems, in order to create solidarity. The connection between the audience and a normally distant cause is aided by the professional insight and prescriptions of sociologists and cronistas. Ultimately, this new category calls to be read and viewed because its themes are of such broad national importance. This type of multifaceted nonfiction can ideally create a bridge of understanding between groups that rarely—if ever—have contact with one another. In the end, given that most shantytown residents are culturally, economically, and politically excluded from the means of self-representation, I argue that this category positions the shantytown resident and his or her narration as central figures in the struggle for recognition of the social problems afflicting peripheral Brazilian and Colombian neighborhoods.

Chapter One: Displacement, Politics, and the Development of Shantytowns in Brazil and Colombia

Due to several common and unique sociopolitical characteristics, I have chosen Brazil and Colombia as lenses through which to examine and define a recent class of books and films which I call shantytown testimonial narrative—a hybrid category that treats the marginalized urban periphery, in this case the comunas of Colombia and the favelas of Brazil. I have chosen these countries because of their extensive displacement and ever-increasing shantytown proliferation, a phenomenon which is exacerbated by the fact Brazil and Colombia offer the unique draw of more than one city center. These characteristics, and the relationship between them, make Brazil and Colombia model countries in which to examine shantytown testimonial narrative. Over the past several decades, the two countries have experienced intense rural to urban displacement due to land reform issues and political violence respectively, and this internal migration has been the main contributor to the rapidly growing shantytowns in and around Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Bogotá, and Medellín. Although relatively different in their causes, extensive and long-term displacement in both countries has led to the comparable rapid intensification of the phenomenon of the shantytowns, and the related boom in shantytown testimonial narrative. It is very important to note, however, that shantytown testimonial narrative can exist in other countries; although I am focusing on examples from Brazil and Colombia, I do not discount that the phenomenon of displacement and shantytowns indeed occurs—although to

a lesser extent—in other countries, and that shantytown testimonial narrative is thus present in other contexts. Ultimately, however, while displacement occurs in many countries throughout Latin America, the extent and manner in which it occurs, as well as the outcomes, are very singular to these two countries.

In order to understand why shantytown testimonial narrative merits being defined as a contemporary wave of testimonial production, tied both to testimonio and New Latin American Cinema, it is essential to understand the history and consequences of displacement in Colombia and Brazil, and how this particular chronicle of events relates to the problematic growth of shantytowns. In addition to this history, one reason why shantytown testimonial narrative deserves attention as the most recent testimonial phase is because the social problems of shantytown residents continue to be overlooked by both the state and general public, even when they occur in proximity of the centers of political and economic power. Furthermore, displacement and the phenomenon of shantytowns in both countries are ongoing problems which have neither clear chronological markers nor concrete statistics and, as a result, the urgency of the situation seems less important than it actually is.

Within this chapter, I explain the recent historical and political background of both countries as it pertains to the development of shantytowns. This overview will underscore the similarities between Brazil and Colombia which are the basis for the study, elucidate the causes and effects of displacement as well as the related politics, show how displacement is tied to the growth of the shantytowns, and illustrate the complex conditions of shantytowns which makes them a logical theme for this most recent phase of hybrid testimonial nonfiction in Latin America.

Early Displacement in Brazil

Before the intense, long-term displacement of recent years began, migration at the beginning of the twentieth century took place as a result of regional disequilibriums in Brazil. Regional inequality in this country was well-illustrated by the success of São Paulo as compared with that of rural areas. Immediately following World War II, for example, São Paulo was producing about half of Brazil's gross domestic product and more than half of its federal revenues; this situation led the rest of Brazil often to be jealous and critical of that city. Along these same lines, politicians from the northeast—one of the poorest sections of Brazil—argued that their region had become a virtual colony of São Paulo (Skidmore 140). This situation is reflective of the fact that the social hierarchy at the time retained much of the flavor of Brazil's colonial era; those at the top, for instance, were treated with great deference by those from below. Since then it has been very difficult for those on the lowest socioeconomic tier to improve their class standing (Skidmore 143).

While this hierarchical class structure was apparent between regions, it also endured well within the countryside. There, the land oligarchy enjoyed a disproportionate share of wealth, political influence and social privileges, while the large majority of the rural population experienced harsh conditions of life and work (Smith 179). Rural Brazilians at the bottom had no chance of mobility as compared to the city where the chances for socioeconomic ascension through incipient public education were significantly greater (Skidmore 143).

For poor rural Brazilians, the possibility of working in the cities was a brand-new opportunity. Traditionally, employers in the old republic had concentrated on looking for new workers among immigrants from other countries. Racial and regional prejudices had long led them to underestimate the value of the labor force already in their country. But as large-scale immigration from abroad decreased after WWI, employers looked more seriously for workers

from other parts of Brazil. This flow was a spontaneous process of individual Brazilians and their families responding to economic signals across the country (Skidmore 140). While there are no official statistics on this internal migration, it is evident that the rural mass chose to move to the city because they perceived their economic opportunities to be better there and knew that they could move back to the countryside if city conditions became an unsurpassable obstacle (Skidmore 142).

The effects of this early rural-to-urban migration were severe and long-lasting, depriving the poorer states of many enterprising and talented citizens and feeding a pool of surplus labor that helped to keep wages down and thus reducing potential union militancy in the industrial cities (Skidmore 140-1). This post-war migration also led to the emergence of vast cities that would characterize urban life for the rest of the century. Urban areas absorbed an intake of migrants amounting to almost one quarter of the rural population (Smith 179). In fact, the urban population more than doubled between 1960 and 2000 (Smith 226). During this time, differences between regions and classes increased greatly due to the difficulties of adjusting to city life as well to the economic boom in the late 1970s in which the benefits were very unevenly distributed.

In Rio and São Paulo, rapid urban growth led many to settle in the informal sector due to a lack of formal sector jobs to support the growing population. The underemployment in the urban economy reflected the labor force stratification implicit in the countryside from which these new urban inhabitants came. In addition to employment difficulties, immigrants faced social alienation as they were viewed with wariness by the middle and upper classes. The newcomers were seen as potential, if not actual, criminals and thus a threat to public order, and as dangerous despite the fact that thousands of domestic servants from these communities served

peacefully in the homes of higher classes (Skidmore 142). In order to improve their life, these marginal inhabitants strove to either upgrade their shacks or move to better housing.

Nevertheless, many stayed in the very shantytowns which they helped to establish.

Land Reform Issues Tied to Brazilian Displacement

While migration was largely a reaction to the poverty of the countryside and the potential opportunities offered by the city, more recent resettlement—and specifically forced migration—has largely occurred as a result not only of these problems, but also because of persistent land reform issues. The roots of the inequalities in Brazil’s land tenure system go back five centuries to Portuguese rule. Along with such disparity, violence has been a traditional feature of the “land question” in the frontier regions. From 1964-1986, for example, an estimated 1,500 people died as a result of conflicts over land (Smith 230). While large landowners and corporations have had few problems creating huge estates, migrant families have found it difficult to acquire land. Fueling this situation is the support that big landowners have from federal and state governments in using violence to protect their estates from invasion by squatters and to expel indigenous people from land whose ownership could be legally contested (Smith 230).

In addition to legal issues, technology—and specifically mechanization—has driven thousands of poor people over the last fifty years from the countryside to populate the favelas that surround São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. As I will soon detail, the growth of these favelas is intrinsically connected to this displacement of rural residents. Unable to make a living as farmers and with extreme difficulty in acquiring land, those in the countryside increasingly look to the city as their one hope for making a living and providing the next generation with a better future.

Of those who have sought refuge in favelas, thousands—together with landless peasants—have joined the MST (The Landless Rural Workers Movement or *Movimento dos*

Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra) in order to change a system where around 1.6% of Brazil's landowners control nearly half (48.6%) of all the agricultural land.¹ The MST was formed in the 1980s by peasants, with the support of the Catholic Church and the Workers Party, in order to invade, occupy and cultivate some of the millions of acres of land that was laying fallow and not being put to productive use. The movement is now the largest social movement in Latin America with an estimated 1.5 million landless members organized in 23 out of Brazil's 26 states. As its mission, the MST states that it carries out land reform in a country mired by unjust land distribution.

While the MST is impatient for change, it is unclear whether Brazil's left-leaning President Lula da Silva is prepared to risk the wrath of the nation's powerful farming lobby, and its valuable export dollars, to alleviate their plight. Although Lula is widely identified with the MST's struggle, he must weigh the interests of the heads of agribusinesses, which now account for over a quarter of Brazil's economy. The MST remains optimistic, however, because although there has long been talk of agrarian reform, never have there been the conditions present today: a popular democratic government as well as an organized peasantry. In the end, for our purposes it is essential to understand these past and present land issues in Brazil because the favelas continue to multiply as a result of the forced migration tied to them.

Colombian Displacement

In Colombia, land reform issues—along with guerrilla and paramilitary violence—have also contributed to displacement and the resulting phenomenon of shantytowns. Like Brazil, Colombian agrarian problems are exacerbated by a legacy of regional inequalities and social

¹ For further information, see <http://www.mstbrazil.org/>. "About the MST." Due to the rapid development of the phenomenon of the land reform movement, most of the related information can be found in websites sponsored by non-profit organizations.

conflicts. Perpetuating this disequilibrium is “la asignación de los recursos públicos, por cuanto tienden a favorecer a determinados regiones y sectores económicos en detrimento de otros” ‘the assignment of public resources, since they tend to favor determined regions and economic sectors in detriment of others’ (Jaramillo 190).² This process of inequity is damaging to already vulnerable, needy communities. In the countryside it has resulted in “una población más débil, compuesta por mujeres con hijos menores, ancianos y niños, con un incremento en sus tasas específicas de participación” ‘a weaker population, composed of women with young children, elderly people and youths, with an increment in their specific rates of participation’ (Jaramillo 193).

Also like Brazil, there is a lack of equal land distribution and of an effective land reform policy (Jaramillo 194). Rural Colombians face severe restrictions with regards to agricultural growth, such as the elevated costs of rented property and the persistence of the *latifundio ganadero* in the north. The *latifundio ganadero*— expansive ranching estates that are an example of large-scale agrarian exploitation—are characterized by inefficient use of available resources, low production, minimal capitalization, a low level of technology, and hired workers in precarious conditions who have a meager standard of living. In order to solve the problems caused by the *latifundios*, agrarian reform is necessary. But the situation has been complicated by the creation of paramilitary groups that defend the position of owners of big extensions of land (the *latifundistas*). Ranchers, businessmen, foreign companies, and drug-traffickers have financed the paramilitary groups whose function is to defend the land and the established order by any means necessary as well as to repress local demands (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center 229). “...hay en la actualidad 4,4 millones acres de las mejores tierras en manos de los

² All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.

narcotraficantes y 60% de los desplazados tuvo que abandonar sus tierras a los grupos paramilitares. Desplazada la población y concentradas sus tierras, los paramilitares adquieren un enorme poder local” ‘there are currently 4.4 million acres of the best lands in the hands of drug traffickers and 60% of displaced people have had to abandon their land to the paramilitaries. With the population displaced and with the lands concentrated, the paramilitaries have acquired an enormous power’ (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center 230).

Not only do the paramilitaries seize land, but they also force out or kill anyone associated with the guerrilla. José, a 23 year-old Chimila Indian who was displaced from Magdalena, explains: “Si había un hermano o un padre que le colaboraba a la guerrilla, entonces todos los de la familia eran guerrilleros, todos, mujeres y niños los calificaban de lo mismo. Por ahí surgieron los desplazamientos, que hoy en día han sido numerosos por acá” ‘If you had a brother or a father who collaborated with the guerrilla, then everyone in the family was a guerrilla, everyone, women and children qualified as the same. From that arose the displacements that today have been so numerous around here’ (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center 85). In addition to the power of the latifundio ganadero and the paramilitaries, land distribution is further complicated by the fact that few poor farmers have property titles although it is very easy for middle and upper-class Colombians to obtain such deeds (LeGrand 125). While Colombian law permits free allocation of land, the related costs are prohibitive.

Today, land may be even more unequally distributed than ever in Colombia. Many rural agricultural communities are marked by the indicated violence of guerrilla groups, leftist military groups and paramilitaries who have sustained complicated relationships with, and forceful ownership of, the land (Jaramillo 201). With the violence exercised by these groups, some small landowners have fled to the cities. At the same time, drug dealers have bought land to grow coca

and to launder their drug profits (Kline 10). As a result, there exist severe restrictions for poor rural residents who must either abide by the laws of the violent groups controlling their community, or move to the comunas and try their luck there.

La violencia

In order to better understand the recent history of displacement in Colombia and the violence that has intimately been connected to it, it is essential to provide an overview of the period known as “La violencia.” Between 1948 and 1958, over two million people were displaced by violent political confrontations between Liberals and Conservatives. Intense and long-term displacement began a bit earlier in 1946 when the Conservatives came back into power, and when at a local level the leadership of the police forces and town councils changed hands, encouraging Conservative peasants to seize land from Liberal peasants and setting off a new wave of bi-partisan violence in the countryside.

Along with the ongoing conflicts between Conservatives and Liberals, one of the events which triggered La violencia was the assassination of liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. Clearly backed by the underprivileged sectors of society, Gaitán was the main leader of the Liberal Party, and was running in the presidential election as the candidate most likely to win. His murder was the catalyst for “El Bogotazo” (from “Bogotá” and the *-azo* suffix of violent augmentation), the massive riots that followed his assassination in Bogotá on April 9, 1948. Shortly after he was killed, *Últimas noticias*, a radio station managed by followers of Gaitán, made a broadcast that the Conservatives and the Ospina Pérez government had killed Gaitán. Using this unproven accusation, they ordered the people to the streets with clubs, stones, and shotguns in order to break into hardware stores to take dynamite, gunpowder, tools, and machetes. The radio station also provided instructions on how to make Molotov cocktails. People

from everywhere in the city rushed downtown. Many were homeless people who had come to Bogotá to flee the violent political conflicts of rural Colombia. The ten hour riot left a death toll of 200,000 people and 1,000,000 injured.

During the years following “La violencia”, several members of the Colombian Liberal Party and of the Colombian Communist Party organized self-defense groups and guerrilla units, which fought both against those of the Colombian Conservative Party and amongst each other throughout the countryside. The main violent groups were composed of peasants. The conflict was especially cruel and violent since a scarcity of guns caused most killings to be carried out with machetes and other crude implements. Torture and rape were common as well.³

The effects of La violencia were severe and long-lasting, and directly tied to displacement within Colombia. As mentioned, even before el Bogotazo, many people had come to Bogotá to flee the violent political conflicts of the countryside. Forced migration increased during La violencia as over two million people were displaced by violent political confrontations between the two parties. La violencia thus inaugurated an era of extreme displacement in Colombia which would continue in subsequent decades due to land issues as well as the activities of paramilitary and guerrilla groups.

While the Liberals and the Conservative Party reached an agreement to share power from 1958 to 1974 in the National Front, which in paper ended La violencia, displacement and political conflicts continued. Since La violencia, struggles for political power, land disputes, and drug trafficking have all found expression in armed conflict and the result has been widespread

³ Groups developed unique and horrific forms of corpse desecration as their signatures. For instance, the “Corte de franela” (literally “T-shirt cut”) was characterized by severed arms and decapitation, the “Corte de corbata” (“Necktie cut”) by a split-open throat and tongue placed over the chest, and the “Corte de florero” (“Flower Vase cut”) by severed arms and legs inserted in the torso like a floral arrangement. Such exacerbated barbarism was also aimed to create a state of terror among enemies, in order to dissuade others from involving in the fight.

displacement. In particular, guerilla groups such as FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (National Liberation Army), as well as the paramilitaries, have largely contributed to displacement through threats, violence, and forced control over land.

FARC, for example, was established in the 1960s as the military wing of the Colombian Communist Party. It later became involved with the cocaine trade during the 1980s in order to finance itself. FARC has employed vehicle bombings, gas cylinder bombs, assassinations, landmines, kidnapping, extortion, hijacking, guerrilla and conventional military action against Colombian political, military, economic as well as civilian targets, to attack those it considers a threat to its movement. It has not been uncommon for civilians to die or suffer forced displacement, directly or indirectly, due to many of these actions.

All parties in the rural conflict—including guerrilla groups, paramilitaries, and state forces—are responsible to varying degree for forced displacement as well as human rights violations and abuses.⁴ Successor groups to paramilitaries, which never fully demobilized, have appeared increasingly active, threatening and killing civilians, including trade unionists and human rights defenders. As a result, internal displacement of civilians has been steadily rising in recent years and the highest rate of displacement in 23 years was recorded in the first semester of 2008. The protracted internal armed conflict had by June of that year displaced 2,649,139 people, according to the government.⁵

As a result of such displacement, over the past two decades the comunas of Bogotá and Medellín have experienced rapid growth through waves of rural-to-urban migration. In addition

⁴ For more information on the role of guerrilla groups, paramilitaries, and state forces in displacement, see Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. “Colombia: Rate of New Displacement Highest in Two Decades.” *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre*. 17 Oct. 2008. Web. 14 Sept. 2010.

⁵ For more information on Colombian displacement, see Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. “Colombia: Rate of New Displacement Highest in Two Decades.” *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre*. 17 Oct. 2008. Web. 14 Sept. 2010.

to the aforementioned factors, as in Brazil, many have also been drawn to the cities by the hope of a better life—better housing, jobs, and schools for their children. Urban jobs, however, have not kept pace with population growth. Many unemployed Colombians enter the so-called informal sector, in which they live a day-to-day existence as extremely small-scale merchants, restaurateurs, or service sector operatives (Kline 23). This situation is very much like that of rural Brazilians who move to the metropolis only to find such informal sector jobs and shantytown dwellings.

Development of Shantytowns as a Result of Displacement

Though fairly dissimilar in origin, widespread, long-term displacement in both countries has led to the comparable rapid intensification of the shantytowns. Adding to this unique proliferation is another feature singular to Colombia and Brazil—the draw of more than one city center. Brazil and Colombia’s urbanization processes differed from countries like Argentina, Chile, Mexico and Venezuela, for example, because while Rio and Bogotá are capitols, they had to share dominance with São Paulo and Medellín respectively (Skidmore 142).

These four cities have experienced the effects of displacement in terms of the shantytowns which have sprung up on the metropolises’ periphery. These shantytowns are spontaneous settlements on the city margins that initially showed up during the first years of the accelerated urbanization process, and which manifested as groups of shacks or provisional housing, resident communities in precarious housing conditions, and as urban settlements in which the terrain’s occupation and its development were conducted without any plan and without the corresponding permits and licenses that are officially required. Due to displacement, these shantytowns have multiplied from simple makeshift communities to labyrinth-like, enormous structures in which gang members, unscrupulous developers, religious missionaries, shop

owners, and community activists all live side-by-side. Such remarkable diversity within the shantytowns starkly reflects the complexity of displacement and its effects.

Development of Favelas

For Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, urban development since the 1930s has been characterized by sprawl, decay, and the emergence of squalid shantytowns consisting of slums that were usually located on unstable land at the perimeter or outskirts of cities (a process known as ‘development of periphery’ or *periferização*) (Smith 180). As rural-to-urban migration continued due to the indicated causes, the increase in shantytowns significantly heightened in the 1950s onwards as the suburbs became overcrowded and only swamps, mangrove areas, steep hills and riverbanks were left for occupation. Lack of affordable housing and of a suitable mass transportation system promoted the further spread of favelas all over Rio (United Nations Human Settlements Programme Staff 225). By this point, the enormous growth of shantytowns was visibly highlighted since the shantytowns tended to be built on the hillsides right beside the wealthiest neighborhoods. The result has been a paradoxical phenomenon of reverse mirroring of socioeconomic conditions.

Despite their ramshackle nature, the favelas provided a refuge and a home for a large numbers of migrant families from the countryside whose daily life was dominated by the constant presence of hunger, degradation, and violence—problems which were often tied to the difficulties surrounding land acquisition. But while employment opportunities were available in cities as the manufacturing industry grew and new factories were established, workers suffered low pay, poor conditions and insecurity of employment. Even though some trade unions existed, they were subject to the control of the Ministry of Labor, which allowed only one union per trade in order to prevent the growth of a powerful trade movement (Smith 180). In addition to labor

problems, the increase in urban population extended pressure on welfare services such as health care and education (Smith 181). Ultimately, living conditions in cities were often little better than in the country because urbanization was unplanned and simply evolved with limited state regulation or concern for public health or social welfare (Smith 179).

By the 1970s, 13 percent of the city population lived in slums. The 1980s saw little change, and despite the development of a new municipal housing policy during the 1990s, the magnitude and complexity of the issues faced were, and still are, overwhelming. Today, slum issues continue to increase, as does the socio-spatial segregation of Rio and São Paulo's poor, and there is no visible end to growth. The dire situation of shantytowns, such as the lack of decent schools, social programs, human resources, clinics, sewers and sanitation services, and in some cases clean water and electricity, is poorly understood because statistics about the slums are always murky at best. This lack of reliable information is due in part to the fact that slums are so huge and maze-like, and because the gangs' control does not permit non-favelados to enter the favelas in order to gather such information.

What is certain is that these shantytowns are largely ignored by the state. As a result, the gangs very often fill in where the state is absent. For example, they commonly build schools, churches, and give money to sponsor programs such as soccer teams and daycare centers. These gangs additionally provide meaningful social identities to favela youths in the same way as criminal factions do in Colombian comunas. Ultimately, in the face of inferior schools, common domestic problems, and a lack of well-paying jobs, gangs prove to be tempting in that by comparison they offer an impressive salary, respect and power within the community, and thus they provide the previously unattainable chance to be "someone."

Development of Comunas

During the past few decades, Colombia has also sustained ever-increasing demographic growth through waves of rural-to-urban migration in the wake of general impoverishment and violence. The urban perimeters have expanded rapidly through illegal subdivisions, occupation and the development of marginal areas by immigrants. Like São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the slums of Bogotá and Medellín are largely the result of rapid, displacement-related population increase without the housing and services that such growth demands. These comunas—like the favelas—are located in peripheral and marginal areas and are largely characterized by a lack of physical and social infrastructure.

With an upward trend in the share of the population living below the poverty line, a steady increase in urbanization, and an increase of the population of Bogotá and Medellín, it is expected that the proliferation of new slums will continue well into the future. For reasons similar to those of the favelas, there is no clear information about social and urban homogeneity in the comunas. There are, however, indications that the pronounced urban isolation in which the slum dwellers live, coupled with the high levels of violence compared to other areas of the city, generates patterns of depressed urban areas. Like the wealthy urban residents living alongside the favelas, Colombian non-slum dwellers generally view the impoverished inhabitants of these comunas as undesirables, expressed in the specific terms applied to describe them—*desechable* (disposable), *gamin* (street boy), *vagabundo* (tramp), *populacho* (low-class)—that are highly associated with delinquency, unproductiveness and uselessness (United Nations Human Settlements Programme Staff 205). With an urgent need to address a growing housing deficit and to stop the process of informal urbanization in the peri-urban areas, Bogotá and Medellín have daunting tasks before them.

While all comuna residents face socioeconomic challenges to some degree, the youth who reside in Altos de Cazucá in southern Bogotá and Altos de Florida in Soacha, a suburb of Bogotá, have been identified as among the most vulnerable populations in Colombia. A significant portion of families who live in these areas have been displaced by Colombia's internal armed conflict, and the youth there generally lack economic security and educational opportunities for an improved life. It is widely recognized that they disproportionately run the peril of recruitment by guerillas, paramilitaries, and local gangs (Isacson n. pag). This situation is strikingly similar to that of the adolescents in favelas who, as mentioned, are at heightened risk for initiation into a life of crime.

In Altos de Cazucá in Southern Bogotá and Altos de Florida in Soacha, displaced families face conditions of extreme violence and poverty that often prove to be just as traumatic as the massacres and death threats from which they have fled. Few have access to social services, and most face severe discrimination in employment, housing, education, and health care. This acute socioeconomic crisis is reflected in the finding that displaced families have fewer basic needs fulfilled than the poorest income quintile of non-displaced families in Colombia's cities. The socioeconomic situation in comunas 4 and 6 (Los Altos de Cazucá and Los Altos de Florida respectively), for example, is one of poverty and misery. The youth have no real solutions for employment and income generation, and as a result fall victim to illegal activity and recruitment by illegal armed actors, in some cases forcefully. This situation is directly reflected, as we will see in Chapter Three, in many shantytown testimonial works. Ultimately, while the youth are a highly vulnerable group, there are almost no social projects that focus on them as the target population (Isacson n. pag).

We have seen in this section that residents of the favelas and comunas face an enormity of problems which continue to multiply: the temptation for adolescents to join gangs, the lack of social programs and human resources, and the poor quality of schools, infrastructure, sanitation services, and health care. Added to these shantytown problems is the even lesser-known situation cited in a recent United Nations study; this report, outlined in David McNeill's article "Megacities facing mega disasters, UN warns", warned that the rampant growth of urban slums around the world and weather extremes linked to climate change have sharply increased the risks from "megadisasters" such as devastating floods and cyclones (McNeill). These challenges illustrate that shantytown residents are in an ever-increasing state of vulnerability. The urgency of their situation, however, is commonly perceived as much less severe than it is, however, in the face of both absent or scarce statistics and temporal markers. Displacement and the growth of shantytowns, for example, have increasingly occurred over a period of decades without any clear start or climax.

This situation can be contrasted with that of the first testimonial phase in Latin America. In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, testimonios and New Latin American Cinema sought to expose the brutal dictatorships and oppression of that era. The films and texts from these two genres were able to cite the beginning of a harsh regime and estimate the number of *desaparecidos*. While shantytown testimonial narrative lacks these figures, it bears witness to a different ongoing problem which affects both the rural and urban areas of a given country. The themes of broad national importance as well as the magnitude of the daily problems of shantytown residents are proof that shantytown testimonial narrative merits characterization as a contemporary phase of testimonial production. This point will be further elucidated in the next chapter by the connections that I make between this recent hybrid category and its parent genres.

Shantytowns and the Recent, Related Effects of Neoliberalism

Another factor contributing to the dire conditions of slums as well as to the growth of shantytowns and the urban lower class in general, is the Latin American trend toward neoliberalism in recent years. Neoliberalism is defined as an extreme version of liberalism with low protectionism and efforts to reduce all types of interference with markets.⁶ It puts emphasis on flexibility in labor markets, more use of targeted as opposed to universal type social programs, and unregulated capital movements (Huber 28).

The trend toward neoliberalism in Latin America developed from a political and ideological offensive that presented the neoliberal model as the “only possible alternative” (Dello Buono and Bell Lara 2). This occurred alongside dictatorships and authoritarian governments who were busily repressing and orchestrating the disarticulation of the popular movement. At the global level, the triumph of neoliberalism coincided with the dismantling of the model of socialism that had existed in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Both processes had a devastating effect on the Left. In the end, there was conclusive evidence of the non-viability of a socialist alternative, and no alternative to capitalism; meanwhile waves of structural adjustment programs swept across Latin America, consolidating the reign of neoliberalism (Dello Buono and Bell Lara 2-3).

The emergence of the neoliberal order has weakened the popular classes through policies that systematically make work more precarious, increase unemployment and underemployment and invariably impoverish large sectors of the population including a significant portion of the middle classes (Dello Buono and Bell Lara 3). The spectrum of the exploited has thus grown

⁶ Liberalism is a philosophy of European origin that considers individual liberty and equality to be of utmost importance. It emphasizes individual rights, equality of opportunity, freedom of thought and speech, limitations on the power of governments, the rule of law, an individual’s right to private property, and a transparent system of government.

quantitatively while the industrial working class has been reduced, and extraordinary growth of the informal sector has occurred. Simultaneously, downward social mobility has resulted from the impoverishment of broad sectors of the middle class, the decline of the public sector and state employment, an increasingly precarious structure of employment, and a substantial loss of purchasing power on the part of wage workers. Those largely excluded and most damaged by neoliberal policies are the unemployed, retired, youth, indigenous peoples, and sectors of the middle class who have been forced into the ranks of the so-called “new Poor” (Dello Buono and Bell Lara 3-4). The number of female head of households has also grown and broad sectors of young people and students are living in frustrating situations with an uncertain future, such as the displaced adolescents in the comunas and favelas.

At the same time, with the implementation of radically neoliberal policies in the agricultural sector, there is little hope for the large majority of landless peasants much less the indigenous communities. The only possibility for survival rests upon a collective resistance against neoliberal policies as can readily be observed in Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay and Bolivia (Dierckxsens 311). In the Brazilian and Colombian countryside, however, the advances of agribusiness have aggravated the aforementioned problem of land distribution and rural poverty, further intensifying the migration of peasants to urban areas.

Neoliberalism in Brazil

In Brazil, many considered Lula’s historic election to have been a popular judgment against the neoliberal economic project that has caused the increased impoverishment of millions of Brazilians. When Lula, a long time grassroots leader, ran for president in 1994, he promised that if elected, he would settle 800,000 families in four years. By the time he ran for the fourth time in 2002, agrarian reform was still a major campaign rallying point. At that point, the

number of landless families had reached five million and over 150,000 families were camped on roadsides, abandoned estates, and on the patios of beleaguered Federal Land Reform Agencies (INCRA) in almost every state. By March 2005, programs for agrarian reform were paralyzed and rural social movements in Brazil, especially the MST, were questioning the gap between policy and practice. Escalating violence around land issues during the first two years of Lula's mandate and the highly visible assassination of Dorothy Stang and other rural leaders in land reform conflict areas in February of 2005 brought increasing public focus to the pace and direction of agrarian reform in Brazil (Pressly n. pag.).

Many argue that the election of Lula could have afforded the Brazilian left the possibility of making a decisive break with neoliberalism (Sader 173). But upon election, even knowing that the expansion of market relations would strangle it and take the wind out of the state's sails, by the insidious action of the market, Lula opted for continuity. He did so despite having the domestic and international support necessary for making a break with the neoliberal economic model and initiating a model focused on social priorities, just as he had promised to do in his electoral campaign (Sader 194).

The neoliberal agenda in Brazil, pursued in the last two decades and backed and promoted by such global institutions as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization, continues to push forward the mass privatization of state-owned industries, the explosion of low-wage factory zones, the wide-scale pillaging of Brazil's natural resources and the tripling of its international debt. Despite holding the tenth largest economy in the world, Brazilians have seen the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, with Brazil containing the widest disparity of wealth in the western hemisphere (Pressly n. pag.).

Neoliberalism in Colombia

Colombia has been under heavy neoliberal influence since 1990. More recently, acting with Washington and bolstered by massive U.S. military support, President Uribe installed a “war neoliberalism” utilizing all means including military (under his so-called “Patriotic Plan”), militarization of border regions, legal activities such as implementing an anti-terrorist statute, and police actions including mass arrests. This was the violent package necessary to impose neoliberalism in a country with a long history of popular resistance (Dello Buono 285). Uribe’s actions demonstrate how the persistent failure of a peace process to take hold in Colombia has coincided with a systematic, violent state and paramilitary repression.

Neoliberalism’s expanse can also be seen in the many new U.S. training programs for the police forces of Latin America including Plan Colombia which are presented as plans for “economic integration and sustainable development” but which more closely constitute a form of re-colonization of Latin America (Cockroft 263).⁷ The war against “narco-guerrillas” has provided a smokescreen for justifying a massive expansion of the armed forces establishment, likewise facilitating the use of paramilitary organizations in a dirty war against any expression of popular forces in the country (Dello Buono 290).

Currently, there is an armed political confrontation between guerillas on the one hand and paramilitaries and the state army on the other (Hart 231). Alejandro Reyes Posada, in his article “Paramilitares en Colombia: contexto, aliados y consecuencias” observes that there have been:

⁷ Plan Colombia is a piece of U.S. legislation aimed at curbing drug smuggling by supporting different Drug War activities in Colombia. It was conceived between 1998 and 1999 by the administration of President Andrés Pastrana with the goals of social and economic revitalization, ending the armed conflict and creating an anti-drug strategy. The most controversial element of the anti-narcotic strategy is aerial fumigation to eradicate coca. This activity has come under fire because it damages legal crops and has adverse health effects upon those exposed to the herbicides. Critics of the initiative also claim that elements within the Colombian security forces, which received aid and training from it, were involved in supporting or tolerating abuses by the purportedly dismantled right-wing paramilitary forces against left-wing guerrilla organizations and their sympathizers.

dos tácticas en la década reciente de combatir la subversión: las acciones de control y combate de las fuerzas armadas y las acciones de escuadrones paramilitares privados... la acción paramilitar ha probado ser un medio eficaz para expulsar a los grupos guerrilleros en algunas regiones pero el costo oculto de esta transformación es la creación de dominios territoriales armados, donde no puede actuar el estado sino como cómplices de sistemas de justicia privados.

two tactics in the recent decade of combating the subversion: the actions of control and combat of armed forces and the actions of private paramilitary squadrons... the paramilitary action has proved to be an effective means of expelling guerrilla groups in some regions but the hidden cost of this transformation is the creation of armed territorial dominions where the state cannot act without accomplices from the private system of justice. (Reyes Posada 353)

Drug trafficking has played a major role in maintaining the finances of the armed groups and has directly exacerbated the violence, which in turn has resulted in widespread displacement (Hart 231). In the past 15 years, some 1.9 million people have been displaced because of the violence (Vincent 206). The government, however, routinely denies the sociopolitical factors that underlie the armed confrontation and it instead reframes the armed opposition as a terrorist threat (Hart 232).

Ultimately, the inheritance of neoliberalism is not only one of greater poverty and inequality among these societies, but also of states with lesser resources, dismantled by the elimination of some of its agencies and the privatization of public enterprises, riddled with corruption, all with a massive external debt and the pressures of the international financial institutions weighing down upon them. The state reshaped by neoliberalism has limited the means for confronting the enormous problems that have been inherited. It faces powerful, wealthy elites that perpetually accuse it of the very same deficiencies that they themselves have created, pointing to its inefficiencies and never hesitating to resort to capital flight, boycotting

investments, and practical speculation while paying debts, all as a means of preserving their interests (Dello Buono and Lara 10-11).

Conclusion

Along with the varied effects of neoliberalism, Brazil and Colombia are united by intense, long-term displacement, rapid and ever-increasing proliferation of shantytowns, and ominous conditions faced by shantytown residents. They are also connected by their reputations for violence. In Colombia, violence remains the principal sociopolitical problem of the country and it holds the world's record for the number of kidnappings with an average of one every three to four days (Bell Lara and Lopez 31). At the same time, it is said that in Brazil, a homicide occurs every three minutes (Bell Lara and Lopez 31). Tied to this violence are the socioeconomic disequilibriums which continue today in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Bogotá and Medellín. In addition to this inequality, prejudices and misunderstandings toward the shantytowns remain as strong as ever.

Ultimately, the urgency of the favelas and comunas warrants attention in the very words of those suffering most as manifested in the testimonies of shantytown residents. In addition to these literary and filmic nonfictional works, the combination of a growing political basis for real involvement of the affected communities and improved knowledge of the social problems of communities in the peri-urban areas will, perhaps, provide the all-important lessons for improving the living conditions in the slums, and may reflect the substantial change in political will and in the management of poverty.

Chapter Two: Tracing the Roots of Shantytown Testimonial Narrative

As detailed in Chapter One, both Brazil and Colombia have suffered long-term and widespread political corruption, land reform issues, mass displacement of rural populations to shantytowns, as well as urban and rural violence alike. At the same time, with this set of social problems as a catalyst, both countries have experienced a recent boom in testimonial nonfictional literature and film that treats the marginalized urban periphery. In this chapter I trace the roots of these literary and filmic works to two preceding genres. The goal is to show the development of testimonial production in Latin America and how this new category has grown organically out of evolving social problems and transformations of literary and filmic nonfiction in the region. In mapping out this evolution, the characteristics of those parent genres—testimonio and New Latin American Cinema—are presented and illustrated with examples from Latin America in general and from Colombia and Brazil in particular. The literary and filmic connections that I draw show the lineage of shantytown testimonial narrative, further its characterization, and set the stage for my analysis in Chapters Three, Four and Five. In view of the basis that I present in this chapter, I reserve an in-depth analysis of specific works within this recent hybrid category for the subsequent chapters of the dissertation.

Since roughly 2003, a surge has erupted of nonfictional literature and films that treat the comunas of Colombia and the favelas of Brazil. Shantytown testimonial narrative most commonly takes the form of a written narrative or documentary film that deals with the life story or life experience of a shantytown resident told in his or her own words; this person's story is

often marked by displacement and is representative of his/her community and the social problems that afflict it. Shantytown dwellers tend to co-author and co-produce these books and films along with sociologists or journalists, specifically *cronistas*—writers of *crónicas*—, whose research into the shantytowns is included alongside the intimate stories of residents. Shantytown testimonial narrative also distinguishes itself through marketing that is prioritized to shantytown dwellers, other marginalized communities, as well as to an international audience. Finally, works within this new hybrid category are united both by theme—shantytown social problems—and by objective—creating a consciousness about daily favela and comuna struggles.

In order to better understand the features and derivation of shantytown testimonial narrative, it is necessary to first provide a framework for the characteristics of its parent genres. Testimonio, canonized by the Cuban organization Casa de las Américas in 1971, grew out of a documentation of urgent social problems in Latin America together with the desire to draw widespread attention to these issues in order to unite readers in the search for, and presentation of, Latin America as articulated by its marginal, oppressed inhabitants. There was hence a double birth of testimonio: in a reality that demanded the recording of Latin American social problems and revolutionary movements from a marginal perspective, and in an official literary sense by means of its canonization. One of the first to define the genre, Manuel Galich described testimonio in 1970 as a text that documents, from a direct source, a concrete aspect of the Latin American social condition, and he defined the genre by means of the sum of its negations. For instance, testimonio is different from a *reportaje* in that it is not destined for a magazine or newspaper and is instead an autonomous work with a literary quality that is meant to last in time. It is also dissimilar to *investigación* because a testimonio usually has to do with living people while an *investigación* is about the dead. Finally, it differs from autobiography in that

autobiography connotes social privilege whereas testimonio deals with marginal subjects generally in a position of vulnerability (Galich 125). Adding to this definition, René Jara and Hernán Vidal, in *Testimonio y literatura* (1986), observe that testimonial discourse is always intertextual because it presupposes another version of that which is being narrated. More specifically, as testimonio offers the perspective of the oppressed, it goes against a concurrent official version of events such as that of the government, military, or ruling classes.

In “The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio”—an essay included in *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* (2004)—, John Beverley expands on the prior characterizations of the genre. He notes that while testimonio is intrinsically dynamic, it can be characterized as “a novel or novella length narrative in a book or pamphlet form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts” (30-31). Beverley maintains that the narrator of testimonio is usually someone either illiterate or at least not a professional writer, and this person often needs an interlocutor of a more privileged background in order to elicit and publish his/her story (32). In accordance with the marginality of the testimonialista, testimonio is concerned with a problematic social situation, and the situation of the narrator is representative of a larger social class which is being oppressed. More specifically, “private history always confronts the reader with larger issues of social justice” (*Against Literature* 75). While testimonio is a powerful textual affirmation and identity-formation of the speaking subject itself, an “I” that demands to be recognized, it is also an instance of the feminist slogan “the personal is political” because this “I” represents a collective marginalized “we” facing a critical social problem.

The power of testimonio comes not only from the collectivity and the politics tied to it, but it is also a result of the vulnerable, intimate place from which the genre originates.

Testimonio starts with a terror, a trauma, a need to talk, and it is ultimately seeking a reaction. As such, testimonio comes from the heart of pain and suffering which cannot be ignored. Through testimonio, the audience, who is a reading public, can identify with a normally distant cause. This identification is, after all, one of the objectives of the genre—to create awareness about a social problem among those people who can produce change; as such, the ideal readers are usually located among the middle and upper classes.

Based on these characterizations, some preliminary parallels can already be made between shantytown testimonial narrative and testimonio. Both genres seek to present social problems from the perspective of marginalized protagonists who represent a larger community. Also, authorship, production, and dissemination of works within both categories are dependent upon an interlocutor of a more privileged socioeconomic background. At the same time, one initial departure is that a different set of social circumstances has brought each genre into being. The urgency at the core of shantytown testimonial narrative is not born from the dictatorships and oppression that birthed testimonio and, as we will see, New Latin American Cinema, but rather from present-day displacement, economic issues, public policy, and civil conflict. The exigency at the core of shantytown testimonial narrative is in fact exacerbated because the dire, long-term social problems of favela and comuna dwellers continue to be overlooked by both the state and general public. The daily challenges that these residents face include denied access to a quality education, government assistance, and resources such as clean water and sometimes electricity. Additionally, in the face of limited options, they are increasingly forced to enter into lives of crime in order to make ends meet and to attain a meaningful social identity—in terms of a decent salary and respect and power within their community. At the same time, as indicated in Chapter One, displacement and the phenomenon of shantytowns in both Brazil and Colombia are

ongoing problems which have neither clear chronological markers nor concrete statistics and as a result, the urgency of the situation seems less important than it actually is.

In order to better illustrate the evolution of testimonio towards shantytown testimonial narrative, it is useful to examine testimonio's sub-groups which tend to be categorical rather than temporal. Starting in the 1960s, the early, traditional stage of testimonio was chiefly characterized by the presentation of an ongoing revolution, the organization of inexperienced, marginalized groups such as students or peasants against oppressive industries, governments or armies, and particularly the use of an interlocutor who often infused the testimonio with an ethnographic or anthropological quality. This category of testimonio refers predominantly to those texts published prior to the 1990s. This is not to say that testimonios from the 1990s and onwards into the post-dictatorship era do not contain these characteristics. Some do in fact. But most of the texts characteristic of the traditional phase, especially those with anthropological or ethnographical influence, are among the earlier testimonios produced and the ones which helped to define the genre.

Elzbieta Sklodowska accordingly maintains in *Testimonio hispanoamericano* (1992) that these early testimonios were often subject to the manipulation of conventions of traditional ethnographic discourse by compilers such as Miguel Barnet and Elizabeth Burgos in *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966) and *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983) respectively (Skłodowska 58). In a chapter titled, "Barnet and Burgos as Ghostwriters: Fictionalization of the Oral in *testimonio*" Amy Naus Millay similarly claims that early testimonios frequently masqueraded as scientific discourse to appeal to Western audiences (Millay 125). For example, Millay says that *Biografía de un cimarrón*—the testimonio of Esteban Montejo, a 105-year-old Cuban man of African descent who had lived as a slave in

captivity, a fugitive slave in the wild, and a soldier in the Cuban War for Independence—was initially presented as ethnography in order to secure authenticity as a primary account. Fittingly, she says, it has all “the trappings of scientific discourse—an unassuming cover, a photograph of the subject, an explanatory prologue written by the ethnographer and composed in the voice of an authoritative ‘we,’ and a glossary of terms” (125). These elements accentuate the verifiable nature of Montejo’s story and suggest an underlying methodology.

The anthropological influence in Rigoberta Menchú’s testimonio is equally apparent. Born into the Guatemalan K’iche’, one of twenty-three mestizo groups, Menchú tells how the K’iche’, and specifically her family, fought to keep the government from stealing their land. She also relates the suffering of her relatives and community: her family was forced to watch her youngest brother tortured and burned alive; her mother was tortured to death, and her father was murdered. In the face of continuous hardships, Menchú assumes the role of community leader. Her book testifies to her community and family’s organization against the government and it also calls attention to the atrocities committed in villages like her own. In terms of an anthropological influence, interlocutor Elizabeth Burgos, herself an anthropologist, intertwines the testimonio with the traditions, practices and beliefs of Menchú’s indigenous community. Burgos also includes excerpts of *The Popol wuj* that seems to add a level of sacredness or additional spirituality to the testimonio; the addition of this element was her authorial choice, not Menchú’s.

Like traditional testimonios, shantytown testimonial narrative presents the organization of inexperienced marginalized groups in order to fight for a cause. Today, for instance, shantytown residents are often united in the struggle for better standards of living, government aid, and trying to stop the cycle of violence that specifically entraps adolescent males. Also like these

early testimonios, works within this recent hybrid category are directed to an audience unfamiliar with the marginal group presented and one that can produce social change—the middle and upper class. An additional parallel is that shantytown testimonial narrative is produced in conjunction with interlocutors, although these gestors are now cronistas or sociologists instead of ethnographers (like Barnet), political activists or anthropologists (like Burgos). Today, however, the discourse of the testimonialista is not being gauged to meet readers' expectations, in the sense of adding an ethnographic style and/or putting forward a supposedly representative portrait of indigenous life.¹ Instead, shantytown testimonial narrative is often resemanticized in the sense of being accompanied by an academic, authoritative view—that of the sociologist or cronista. Accordingly, this professional interprets the shantytown resident's story for the targeted upper and middle-class audience. Oftentimes, their interpretations are followed by direct pleas or prescriptions by the testimonialistas or themselves. In the case of sociologists and cronistas, these prescriptions are based on years of research and investigation and are accordingly likely embraced by the indicated ideal audience.

There also exist many points of comparison between shantytown testimonial narrative and the next phase of testimonio—non-traditional or experimental testimonios that are a challenge to the limits of this dynamic genre. In *Voices from the Fuente Viva*, Millay observes that the defect of many early or “traditional” testimonios is that they avoid or cover up tensions between the reader, informant and compiler. An exception, she says, are testimonios, many of which I call experimental, that do recognize and address the problems inherent in the production

¹ Elzbieta Sklodowska notes in *Testimonio hispanoamericano* (1992) that early testimonios were often subject to the manipulation of conventions of traditional ethnographic discourse by interlocutors (Sklodowska 58). In *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of all Poor Guatemalans* (1999), David Stoll says that *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983) puts forward a representative vision of indigenous life through Menchú Tum and it thus conforms to expectations of the audience (Stoll 200).

and consumption of testimonio; this is an honest approach that makes for a more effective, convincing text. In some experimental testimonios, for example, the interlocutor or testimonialista directly addresses the reader, or explicitly discusses the manner in which the testimonio was produced. Experimental testimonios are further characterized by use of photographs, media excerpts, and polyphony.

Elena Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971), for example, includes photographs, newspaper clippings, interviews and quotes by protesters, victims' families, government soldiers, police, and doctors. Their voices, at times contradicting each other, piece together the 1968 Mexican student massacre carried out by police and military and which occurred days before the Olympics. The massacre was preceded by months of political unrest in the Mexican capital which echoed student demonstrations aimed to exploit the attention focused on Mexico City for the 1968 Summer Olympics. Students and other protesters were beaten and arrested indiscriminately at what was supposed to be a peaceful rally. Demonstrators and passersby alike, including children, were hit by bullets, and the killing continued through the night.

La noche de Tlatelolco is very unique because of its highly multi-faceted and polyphonic nature. In addition to the varying perspectives presented, the photographs themselves, some of which include bloody corpses and other graphic images, are a shocking testimony to the events which transpired that night. *La noche de Tlatelolco* is also noteworthy because it clearly and directly goes against the official discourse at the time. While to a certain extent this feature is characteristic of all testimonios, in Poniatowska's text we are explicitly presented with quotes from both the students and the military officers that show opposing sides of the conflict.

Such polyphony is reflected in several shantytown testimonial works, such as Jose Alejandro Castaño's *¿Cuánto cuesta matar a un hombre?* and Jose Padilha's documentary

Ónibus 174. Castaño's hybrid crónica/testimonio, for example, openly aims to deconstruct stereotypes about the comunas and those who live there through portraits of comuna residents who defy common public perceptions about the shantytowns. Each chapter is a mixture of Castaño's narrative plus stories and quotes by the comuna resident protagonists. The central characters, who are rendered in separate sections, include: a born-again Christian hamburger vendor who used to be a professional killer nicknamed Rambo; a poet policemen who has not had a day off in ten years; a sixteen year-old female coroner; and a drug boss who listens to opera, does not have a bodyguard, and who enjoys reading international magazines. Castaño is firm in his declaration that there are no caricatures or exaggerations in this text. Instead he uses the polyphony of these protagonists to rebuke the stereotypes that that so many middle and upper-class citizens have of comuna residents.

The threads of experimental testimonios are also seen in *Ónibus 174*—a documentary about a former street boy who hijacks a Rio de Janeiro bus. Padilha, for instance, combines media footage such as photographs and television coverage which are reminiscent of the then-innovative newspaper excerpts in *La noche de Tlatelolco*. In particular, Padilha makes use of archival footage as well as interviews which are intermixed with what was aired on television on the day of the hijacking. In order to create a more multi-faceted and multi-perspective film, accounts from all actors involved in the hijacking—often expressing divergent views as in Poniatowska's text—are featured in the documentary. Among the interviews included are those with police officers, a Rio Swat team negotiator, a newspaper reporter, hostages, and friends and family of the hijacker. Hence, polyphony and media excerpts, characteristics developed within experimental testimonios, continue to be seen within both literary and filmic works corresponding to this new hybrid category.

Further connections exist between shantytown testimonial narrative and experimental testimonios as evidenced by other examples from this parental sub-group. In *El infarto del alma* (1994), for example, Diamela Eltit and Paz Errazuriz guide us through a mental institution in Putaendo, Chile in 1992. The residents of the institution, who appear tenderly photographed in pairs, are mostly without civil identification and are catalogued as N.N (“ningún nombre”). In her introduction, Eltit calls attention to the lack of value that the majority, or at least the state, has associated with these patients. In fact, upon entering the asylum, Eltit expresses her surprise at the large number of patients there, roughly 500; “El siquiatra nos recibe y habla de unos quinientos pacientes (dijo, en realidad, quinientos?)” ‘The psychiatrist received us and spoke about some five hundred patients (did he really say five hundred?)’ (Eltit and Errazuriz 10). This shock is a frank reaction to finding out that there exist so many people that are forgotten, denied, or shunned by society; she describes them as “Chilenos, olvidados de la mano de Dios, entregados a la caridad rígida del Estado” ‘Chileans, forgotten by God’s hand, submitted to the rigid charity of the State’ (12). In this sense the book deals with people who lack citizenship—people who are not worth anything to anyone, except to one another. As such, the institution functions as an intermediary space to hide a reserve of bodies who are deemed unworthy or non-productive members of society.

Along these same lines, the subjects of shantytown testimonial narrative are also commonly considered disposable members of society and are often stereotyped as being drug users, gangsters, or street kids with no value—the very biases against which Castaño writes. Like the institution in Putaendo, the comunas and favelas—though impossible to ignore as a part of the urban landscape—largely conceal their residents and keep them out of view since these shantytowns are often autonomous and it is extremely rare for a non-shantytown dweller to ever

enter the peripheral neighborhoods and have contact with residents in that space. The perceived disposability of shantytown dwellers is evidenced by the notorious death squads who target urban poor, but most notably street kids. An example of this is seen in *Ónibus 174* through the interviews with street kids who attest to being regularly beaten up by both uniformed and plain clothes police. One former street kid, who was good friends with the hijacker, explains that not all of the street kids slept out in the open because police, among other people, would come by and drop a heavy stone on someone's head and "their brains would spill out" (*Ónibus 174*).

The threads of shantytown testimonial narrative are well-evidenced in another experimental testimonio that, like *El infarto del alma* and *La noche de Tlatelolco*, mixes a visual or plastic discourse with a more textual or literary one. Elizabeth Jelin and Pablo Vila's *Podría ser yo* (1987) deals with residents in Buenos Aires shantytowns after the end of Videla's dictatorship. Jelin and Vila interviewed many of these residents and used the photographs that Alicia D'Amico took of the subjects as a point of departure for a dialogue among the shantytown dwellers. *Podría ser yo* is thus a unique testimonio in that the testimonialistas have considerable authorship, since the text is entirely composed of their comments about the photographs with the exception of Jelin and Vila's introduction and conclusion; it is also significant that the subjects chose all of the texts and photos included. While *Podría ser yo* deals with shantytowns, it should be noted that it cannot be placed within shantytown testimonial narrative because the text was birthed in a very different set of sociopolitical circumstances than those of the hybrid category we are outlining here. This contextual difference is reflected in the immediate post-dictatorship themes of *Podría ser yo* which differ from those common to shantytown testimonial narrative, such as the contemporary favela and comuna-related issues of gangs, drug trafficking, and displacement.

At the same time, the threads of *Podría ser yo* are well-illustrated in shantytown testimonial narrative by means of the direct solicitations that the authors make to the readers with regards to fostering solidarity and encouraging social action or change. *Podría ser yo* tries to connect the reader with the social problems presented by means of a direct plea by Jelin and Vila for an open dialogue via the images and text; they ask the reader in their introduction to connect with at least one image or text in the book. Similarly, in several shantytown testimonial works, there is a solicitation—usually on behalf of the sociologist interlocutor—for social change by way of several recommendations for how to improve the social problems depicted in the narrative of the shantytown dweller. In *Crianças do tráfico*, for example, the interlocutor—sociologist Luke Dowdney—, dedicates his entire concluding chapter to such recommendations. Along these same lines, prominent sociologist Luiz Eduardo Soares offers a similar set of suggestions for affecting shantytown-related social change through both his interviews in *Ônibus 174* and in the shantytown testimonial book that he co-authors, *Cabeça de porco*.

This heavy influence of sociology seen in shantytown testimonial narrative was similarly valorized—although present to a considerably lesser extent—in New Latin American Cinema. Though the use of sociology was praised in New Latin American Cinema, as I will explain in Chapter Three, it was often not incorporated in films. Several shantytown testimonial films, however, have a very visible sociological influence. This fusion of sociological work with film is a means to reach mass audiences, including marginalized communities like the ones depicted, while at the same time explaining the presented social problems to the upper-class public who has the resources to affect change. With shantytown testimonial films, there is, however, a division between sociology-inflected documentaries versus those that are more in line with the ideals of New Latin American Cinema in the sense of having the subjects, and no elite

professional outsiders, involved in authorship and production of the film and prioritizing the screening of these films to similarly marginalized communities, rather than at international film festivals.

Before further comparing shantytown testimonial narrative to New Latin American Cinema, it is helpful to better understand that earlier cinematic movement as a whole. Around the same time that testimonios first came into being, a similar filmic movement arose with comparable goals and methods. New Latin American Cinema was a reaction to the harsh regimes of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as to the legacy of centuries of colonialism and imperialism. It was a movement that produced documentary or documentary-inflected films from the perspective of the marginalized, and it went against state, official discourse. New Latin American Cinema was concerned with political action and choice, and its films were thought to have a catalytic role in the aim to overcome imperialism. Filmmakers were often involved in politics, and frequently paid a critical attention to history.²

New Latin American Cinema defined itself against many characteristics of dominant, mainstream cinema at the time. For instance, it rejected the European desire for primitivism, misunderstood suffering, exhibitionism, and Hollywood commercialism and esthetics.³ In working against primitivism, Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha, for example, often spoke of his films as being a departure from what he considered to be the colonizer's view, to whom poverty was an exotic and distant reality, as well as the colonized who regarded their third world

² In the 1970s, there was a shift in New Latin American Cinema towards historical films which revealed aspects or presented explanations of the racial, post-colonial condition of Latin America at that time. Some examples of such historical films include *Como era gostoso o meu francês* (dir. Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1971) and *La última cena* (dir. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, 1976).

³ Primitivism is a process in which European imperialism and degrading views of the "East" by the "West" define colonized peoples and their cultures.

status as shameful. Rocha also explained the New Latin American Cinema rejection of Hollywood commercialism and esthetic. He said, in “Aesthetics of Hunger”, that while Latin America’s originality is their hunger, their greatest misery is that this hunger is felt but not intellectually understood. For him, this hunger could not be cured by moderate governmental reforms and it could not be hidden, but rather only aggravated, under the cloak of technicolor. He thus called for a revolutionary sense of consciousness to be achieved via an anti-Hollywood aesthetic that would “awaken” the spectator. New Latin American Cinema filmmakers such as himself also rejected *pornomiseria* cinema which, during the 1970s, was very popular. Pornomiseria was composed of films with a high, exhibitionist content of poverty and human misery; often these films made money, usually abroad, but were criticized within Latin America because filmmakers generally had a poor knowledge of their subjects and their social problems.

At least three national movements were created within the umbrella of New Latin American Cinema: Cinema Imperfecto in Cuba, Cinema Novo in Brazil, and Tercer Cinema in Argentina. Cinema Imperfecto, for example, stated that films are only genuine when the masses create them, that they must show the process which generates the social problems presented, and must reject exhibitionism and a technically perfect esthetic. In terms of the masses being involved in creation of the film, filmmakers were committed to having the subjects of the film as participants in authorship through roles such as natural actors and editors. Many New Latin American Cinema filmmakers would travel to and from small villages with just a bed sheet to project their film onto for the community to view.

One New Latin American Cinema film which well-illustrates these characteristics is Jorge Silva and Marta Rodríguez’s *Chircales* (Colombia, 1972). *Chircales* is a documentary about a family of brick makers with whom the filmmakers lived for a couple of years. This type

of close relationship and friendship between interlocutors and marginal subjects—which will be examined more closely in Chapter Five—is similarly well-illustrated in shantytown testimonial films such as *Favela Rising* and *Diario en Medellín*. Silva and Rodríguez’s interviews with, and footage of, the brick-making family’s grueling daily hardships reveal the community’s condition of inequality, exploitation, and class imbalance. In accordance with the targeted marginalized audiences of New Latin American Cinema, Silva and Rodríguez had two screenings of their documentary for members of the brick making community. At the first screening, the subjects were largely preoccupied with recognizing themselves on screen. At the second, however, they had a more critical attitude: they saw certain mechanisms of exploitation and domination, and they saw themselves listening to soap operas and understood what those soap operas represented. The filmmakers did not lead a forum afterwards because they believed that the subjects should lead the discussion, in order to raise their level of participation and awareness. After the film was made, the brick makers took great strides and even formed their own union. The film was also shown to construction workers who recognized the same exploitative operations at work for them.

The direction of *Chircales*—and of many New Latin American Cinema films in general—to the marginalized subjects and similar communities is in contrast with testimonios which were often directed to the upper and middle classes who had the power to produce change. Such an audience distinction—with books directed towards more privileged classes and films towards the masses—continues within shantytown testimonial narrative. We have already seen, for example, that the infusion of sociology and *crónica* within such nonfictional literature is directed towards a reading public who is capable of affecting change. But in many shantytown testimonial films, like in New Latin American Cinema, there is an emphasis on having the

marginal protagonists intimately involved in creation, co-authorship and co-production of the film, and additionally as audience members.

For instance, Catalina Villar, the director of *Diario en Medellín*, established a video production workshop for comuna adolescents during the making of her documentary. In a similar fashion, Matt Mochary and Jeff Zimbalist—the directors of *Favela Rising*, lent video cameras to favela youths and used some of those youths' footage, as well as their editing input, for their documentary. *Favela Rising* also retains ties to Cinema Imperfecto and Tercer Cinema—sub-groups in which filmmakers hoped that through their films the public would become more conscious of the roots and nature of their social problems as well as more participatory in affecting social change. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, *Favela Rising* strongly maintains roots in this belief as can be seen by the directors' decision to screen their film to marginalized communities around the globe through their at-risk educational tour. By means of this marketing approach, they hoped to show that adversity is shared, but as their film evidences, such hardships can be overcome in constructive, positive ways.

In addition to the three national movements within New Latin American Cinema, various sub-genres were formed whose traces can also be seen in shantytown testimonial narrative. One example is cine testimonio which was defined by Cuban documentary filmmaker Víctor Casaus as containing the following:

rapid and flexible filming of unfolding reality without subjecting it to pre-planned narrative *mise-en-scène*, 2) choosing themes of broad national importance, 3) employing an audacious and intuitive style of montage, 4) using directly filmed interviews both for the narrative functions they are able to fulfill and because they provide the means of popular speech to the screen. (Chanan 211)

Beyond these four characteristics, cine testimonio was further defined by Mexican documentary filmmaker Eduardo Maldonado who explained that the genre “is concerned to put cinema at the

service of social groups which lack access to the means of mass communication, in order to make their point of view public” (Chanan 210). In the process, he says, the film collaborates in the *concientización* of the group concerned. According to Brazilian pedagogist Paulo Freire, *concientización* is a process through which individuals can come to shape their own destiny, and it is also a means to break “the culture of silence” to which underdevelopment condemns the marginalized classes. By putting cinema at the service of social groups which lack access to the means of communication, their point of view is consequently made public and *concientización* can take place (Chanan 169).

Shantytown testimonial films maintain many key aspects of Casaus and Maldonado’s definitions of *cine testimonio* while simultaneously departing from their characterizations in striking ways. In particular, films within this new hybrid category embody Casaus’ recommendation for themes of broad national importance because, unlike any other genre, shantytown testimonial narrative speaks to both urban and rural problems as a result of the displacement intimately connected to the growth of *comunas* and *favelas*. In contrast to the previous definitions, however, shantytown testimonial narrative differs with regards to the present-day character of mass communication. Specifically, Maldonado stated that the *cine testimonio* works to “put cinema at the service of social groups which lack access to the means of mass communication, in order to make their point of view public” (Chaurand and de Luna 46). Today, with a greater access to cell phones, walkie talkies, and the internet, the relationship between marginalized subjects and the mass communication of several decades past has drastically changed. Instead of being removed from access to mass communication, marginalized groups are now still independently without the tools, like video and web cameras and even

computer access, that are necessary for mass self-representation such as that permitted by websites like “You Tube”, documentary film, and literature.

The modernization and changing times that this difference in mass communication signals is also reflected in the dissimilar social problems and themes of New Latin American Cinema and testimonio versus shantytown testimonial narrative. Although all three genres portray oppression from the perspective of the marginalized, the former two categories tend to treat dictatorships, indigenous communities, oppressed workers and student protests, while the recent hybrid category is more singularly aimed at presenting the effects of displacement as seen through the social problems of the favelas and comunas—drug-trafficking, gangs, and lack of human resources such as health clinics, schools and sanitation services.

Within the 1980s and 1990s—the period roughly after testimonio and New Latin American Cinema and before shantytown testimonial narrative—a series of neorealist shantytown-related films in both Colombia and Brazil intimated a transition from those two parent genres towards the new hybrid genus. New Latin American Cinema had, in fact, originally been influenced by Italian neo-realism as several New Latin American Cinema filmmakers studied at Rome’s Centro Sperimentale. Italian neo-realism was rooted in an emphasis on social realism and it generally contained realistic treatment, popular setting, social content, historical actuality, and political commitment. Within Latin America, neo-realism offered an alternative to the dominant modes of Hollywood and commercial production in the region. Later, as the Cuban Revolution spread and gained force, it soon pushed Cuba, and then all of Latin America, beyond neo-realism towards New Latin American Cinema.

In the 1980s and 1990s, neo-realist films, like Hector Babenco’s *Pixote* (1981) in Brazil and Víctor Gaviria’s *Rodrigo D.* (1990) and *La vendedora de rosas* (1998) in Colombia, began

to present a stylistic and thematic shift away from New Latin American Cinema and towards shantytown testimonial films. The fact that we can most clearly see this transition in the films of Brazil and Colombia indicates another similarity between these two countries in terms of comparable social problems and a similar way of documenting marginality. Within the neo-realist films of Babenco and Gaviria, stylistically we see the use of natural actors as testimonialistas who function as witnesses to, and victims of, the very social problems presented; the principal natural actor in *Pixote*, for instance, was born and raised in a favela, while the natural actors of *La vendedora de rosas* were all street girls. Thematically, Babenco and Gaviria's films lead us towards the themes of street life, shantytowns, and urban violence which are seen in both literature and films of the genus that is assessed and coined in this study.

The neo-realist films of the 1980s and 1990s also indicate a transition towards shantytown testimonial films in the sense of a different style of marketing, as well as in the sense of filmmakers who are far less politically involved or committed than those of New Latin American Cinema. This difference is tied to the effects of neo-liberalism which has opened up the markets so that foreign investors are more common, instead of New Latin American Cinema's prioritization of low cost of production. At the same time, after the revolutionary politics of the 1960s and 1970s and the debatedly disappointing outcome, many contemporary filmmakers are disillusioned with politics, revolution, and films that incorporate these themes. That is not to say, however, that the filmmakers of shantytown testimonial narrative believe any less in the power of cinema to create consciousness and potentially affect change. Zimbalist, as will be seen, firmly believes that film can be used as a tool to promote social action and not just for entertainment. At the same time, the limits of this hope for change are seen in Chapter Five, specifically through my interview with Catalina Villar.

In the end, the similarities and differences that I have signaled in this chapter between shantytown testimonial narrative and its parent genres ultimately provide a backbone for the in-depth analysis of works within this new hybrid category which is the basis for the following chapters. While we have seen that testimonio and New Latin American Cinema each have numerous sub-categories, the traces of each sub-group are nonetheless present in shantytown testimonial narrative and thus proof of this category's roots. The complexity of shantytown testimonial narrative—for example the diversity of targeted audiences—simultaneously reflects the always difficult to define nature of its parent genres: testimonio, which is noted for being a dynamic genre that is difficult to pin down, and New Latin American Cinema, which was such a broad category—encapsulating third cinema, cinema novo, imperfect cinema, fiction, and non-fiction—that many people questioned whether or not it could actually be called a single movement due to its extreme diversity. Nonetheless, both written and filmic shantytown testimonial works are united by their subject matter—shantytown residents who testify to displacement as well as urban and rural social problems—, and their goals, such as conscience-raising of urgent social problems of the present-day metropolis in order to produce change among the audience—be it the upper and middle class or other marginalized communities.

Chapter Three: (Author)itative Perspectives: Sociologists and Cronistas Within Shantytown

Testimonial Narrative

Due to the complex relationship between interlocutors and testimonial subjects, authorship has been an oft-debated topic with regards to both testimonio and New Latin American Cinema. Specifically, compilers of testimonial works often come from a more privileged socioeconomic background than the marginal protagonists whose life experiences and struggles they aim to present and disseminate, and as a result, power relations and shared authorship often prove to be problematic matters. These issues can be further complicated, or in contrast resolved, by the infusion of other genres by the interlocutors. Within shantytown testimonial narrative, for instance, there is a tendency to fuse these works with (urban) sociology among Brazilian examples, and with *crónica* among Colombian texts. Despite the distinction of genre influence within the two countries, these amalgam nonfictional works are united by shared attributes such as their goals—humanization of the testimonialista and *concientización* of shantytown social problems—, the roots of their type of inscription—New Latin American Cinema and testimonio—, their subject matter—the residents and social problems of shantytowns—, and most importantly, their interdisciplinary method. This approach involves the inclusion of an authoritative, trauma-free professional voice alongside the narratives of shantytown dwellers in order to substantiate and interpret these stories, and then formulate an array of recommendations for social change directed towards those who can produce it—namely, the often intended upper and middle-class audience.

It has been rather common for compilers of testimonios to introduce the influence of other genres. This is a tactic which impacts, on the one hand, the authorship, because the mark of the interlocutor is often much more visible in these cases, and on the other, the audience of the testimonio—to whom the specific genre influence is usually targeted. As mentioned in Chapter Two, even the earliest “traditional” testimonios exhibited the influence of other genres, most notably anthropology and ethnography, as seen in the testimonios of Rigoberta Menchú Tum and Esteban Montejo.

In *Biografía de un cimarrón*, for example, Miguel Barnet—the compiler of this testimonio—marketed the publication as one of anthropology. This testimonio not only exhibits the influence of ethnography that were alluded to in Chapter Two, but it also reveals the complicated relation of mediation and authorship between interlocutors and testimonialistas. Although Barnet’s voice and presence seem to largely disappear in the main text that is Montejo’s testimonio, in the prologue he does in, in fact, explain that he wanted Montejo’s “story to sound spontaneous and as if it came from the heart, and so I inserted words and expressions characteristic of Esteban wherever they seemed appropriate” (5). Additionally, in his essay “La fuente viva” Barnet says that he would never write a book by reproducing exactly what is on the recorded audiotape of a testimonialista; he instead took the tone of the language and the anecdotes from Montejo’s recorded story, while the style and the nuances of the text were his own contribution. As interlocutor of this testimonio, Barnet clearly had an agenda which can be seen not only in his stylistic contributions, but in his thematic focus as well. He concentrated Montejo’s life story on certain topics which were of particular interest to him, among them: the social problems of life under slavery, promiscuity in the baracoons, and Montejo’s celibate life in the forest. While Montejo was sometimes hesitant to speak, Barnet’s

gifts of candy, tobacco, and liquor won him over. Barnet was also a catalyst to Montejo's memory in that he constructed a historical context that shaped the testimonialista's discourse.

The delicate relationship between interlocutor and testimonialista is thus well-illustrated in *Biografía de un cimarrón*. As readers, we are presented with Montejo's life story altered thematically, stylistically, and linguistically by Barnet, and elicited in accordance with given gifts. In the end, Montejo's story filtered through Barnet raises the question of how such tampering affects authorship of a testimonial work. For example, as readers we wonder whether the text is more a reflection of Barnet or Montejo. Also, if the goal of testimonio is solidarity with a normally distant cause, then whose cause or politics are we being steered towards? Such "shared" authorship, as we will see later in this chapter, is treated quite differently within shantytown testimonial narrative where the interlocutor's voice is presented synergetically alongside that of the testimonialista's unaltered words.

It is crucial to note, however, that this is still a form of mediation, although it is less transparent at times. Mediation is, in fact, always present in shantytown testimonial narrative. There is even mediation in works in which the interlocutor appears to disappear because the very act of interviewing someone is a type of mediation. Unmediated works, like one hundred percent transparency, is never possible. Filmmakers and authors do, however, attempt in varying degrees and ways to give the effect of removing themselves. Interlocutors, for example, try to approximate unbiased perspective through techniques such as having their perspectives alongside the story of the marginal protagonist in his/her own words; this creates the effect of an "unaltered" testimonio. The degree of mediation also varies with regards to the amount of subjectivity given to the testimonialistas. Having subjectivity is tied to having power, and the more the testimonialista is allowed to be subjective, the more power that he or she has. The

degrees of mediation and transparency are ultimately related to marketing because the authors know that the audience will have prejudices and the text is accordingly cleansed or sanitized.

If we come back to *Biografía de un cimarrón*, shantytown testimonial narrative—especially those infused with sociology—similarly tends to lay out a methodology, but unlike traditional testimonios, they explicitly include the voice of the interlocutor directly in the foreground of the main text and not just in, for instance, the prologue or confusingly hidden throughout the testimonialista's words in the form of stylistic or linguistic alterations. As such, since the interlocutor has his or her own individual defined presence throughout the testimonial work, he or she interferes to a lesser extent with the words and story of the testimonialista and instead the voice of the testimonialista and that of the compiler can coexist in a complimentary form that is less altered though still mediated. This characterization of shantytown testimonial narrative, however, juxtaposes with the traditional idea about testimonio that “the text's authority has conventionally come to depend on three ideas: what we define as truthful, the collective representativity of the narrator, and the transcriber's disappearance by his or her transparent intervention” (Bartow 24). I argue that in shantytown testimonial narrative this final trait applies to a significantly reduced degree. In fact, it is the opposite strategy: the direct appearance, voice, and opinions of the interlocutor—now a professional sociologist or cronista—that give these testimonial works their authority and which yield increased engagement with and understanding of the social situation, as well as greater solidarity.

This notion of the explicitly present interlocutor, it should be noted, is also in contrast with theorists of subaltern studies who, in accordance with authorship issues like those raised by *Biografía de un cimarrón*, have argued that the very interviewer who elicits testimonio is a likely enemy because of the potential for distorting the narrator's words or intent. The subaltern

perspective considers that this narrator or testimonialista is often a subaltern subject—someone denied both mimetic and political forms of representation. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, for example, in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, says that any outside attempt to provide subalterns with collective speech—and thus to improve the subalterns’ condition—will invariably result in the problematic assumption of cultural solidarity among a heterogeneous people, and a reliance upon western intellectuals to speak for the subaltern condition instead of the subalterns speaking for themselves. For Spivak, the assumption and construction of a consciousness or subject will, in the long run, enmesh with the work of imperialist subject-constitution and as a result, the subaltern subject will be as mute as ever. By the same token, another ongoing problem with representations of the subaltern in testimonio is that imperialism continues to establish the universality of the mode of production of narrative. Hence, while to ignore the subaltern today is to continue the imperialist project, trying to represent the subaltern or speak for the subaltern, will also continue that project.

Ultimately, in learning to speak to—rather than for—the historically muted subaltern subject, the postcolonial intellectual may systematically unlearn privilege and connect with the subaltern in a more authentic way. In a sense, though, this is in fact what sociologists and cronistas are attempting to do in shantytown testimonial narrative; instead of dominating authorship—by, for example, choosing themes and stylizing the testimonialista’s speech—they are speaking alongside the subaltern subject instead of for them. By doing so, these authoritative professionals substantiate the testimonialista’s story and provide further insight into the presented social problems for the target audience. This strategy is effective because, as we will see through the examined texts, the audience is likely of a background similar to that of the compiler.

Even apart from the interlocutor, however, the testimonialista as author, and as authority, can quickly be called into question. George Yúdice, in his essay “Testimonio and Postmodernism”, notes that literary critics are “quick to discard the testimonialista’s claim to authenticity, based on the age-old literary premise that narrative voice is always a persona which does not coincide with the individual narrating” (18). At the same time, while the testimonialista, who by very definition is representative of larger social class, is meant to be an author who speaks for his or her community, voice and pain are always ultimately individual, even when they are trying to speak for a community. Although this first-person perspective, what we could call the “real thing,” is crucial to the account’s authority, all testimonios, as much as they try to speak for the collective, are only partial stories (Bartow 12). Another problem with the testimonialista’s claim to a collective voice is that through the process of recounting his or her story, leaving the community or interacting with outsiders, the narrator can no longer be truly representative of the collective identity provided for the reader (Bartow 25). In the end, in the process of constructing a narrative and articulating oneself around its circulation, the testimonialista is ironically becoming a not-subaltern, in the sense that he or she is functioning as a subject of history.

Upon such examination, authorship within testimonio indeed lends itself to deconstruction. But while it is easy to deconstruct the illusion of the “real” subaltern voice in testimonio, John Beverley, in “The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio”, says it is necessary to depend on it in order to understand testimonio’s power and to have the sensation of experiencing the real; this “truth effect”, after all, is tied to solidarity of the audience with a normally distant cause and social situation (31). In shantytown testimonial narrative, the truth effect is largely created and substantiated by the sociologists and cronistas who verify and supplement the

testimonialista's story. Ultimately, the solidarity between audience and testimonialista, together with its causal truth effect, is often contingent upon authorial decisions of the interlocutor, and this is precisely why it becomes so important to examine editorial choices such as genre-infusion. Joanna R. Bartow has accordingly pointed to mediation's possibilities to empower the marginalized (13). In the case of shantytown testimonial narrative, the sociologist or cronista does just this by interpreting—and altering to a lessened extent—the raw language of the testimonialista according to a scientific or journalistic gaze.

Another reason why more direct mediation in testimonial works is important is due to the problems of memory associated with those persons who have witnessed trauma. This is especially true of shantytown dwellers who have often been raised in violent, precarious spaces and have likely witnessed violence repeatedly over the course of living in the comuna or favela. Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler, in *Witness and Memory: the Discourse of Trauma* (2003), point to the widespread view that witnesses, like testimonialistas, are by definition affected by their experience. The effects of trauma are illustrated in the broken, incoherent nature of their acts of witness, which function as an authenticating sign for their testimony (11). They go on to note that over time it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between what one has actually experienced and what one has read, heard, or imagined about what happened in the past. Accordingly, in relation to testimonio, the major problem is that memory is susceptible to modification by later experience. This fact is even more the case with very traumatic events where the memory trace was compromised from the beginning in a way that capacity for observation was paralyzed by suffering and incomprehension. Within shantytown testimonial narrative, readers rely on the sociologists or cronistas for their professional, more objective accounts and interpretation of the social problems presented by the testimonialista. In the end,

sociology and *crónica*—with their scientific and journalistic influences respectively—serve to balance out any doubts that may arise from testimonies as a result of the aforementioned problems which originate due to the witnessing of trauma.

Although not a wholly objective journalism, *crónica*'s power in shantytown testimonial narrative lies in the interpretive, explanatory nature of the *cronista*'s writing. According to Esperança Bielsa in *The Latin American Urban Crónica* (2006), this genre was in part influenced by North American New Journalism, and first emerged in its contemporary form at the end of the 1960s as a privileged means through which the plurality and diversity of urban life could be narrated (xii-xiii).¹ It has since come to be known as a genre of literary journalism in which the everyday history of societies are recorded and documented (xii). Building upon this characterization, Bielsa notes that *crónica* is a genre that contains not only information, but also the author's impressions. Additionally, she says, a *crónica* is normally "written on demand for the mass media and is subject to the technical limitations of space, language and time" (32). The authors of *crónicas* are often intellectuals who enjoy a recognized position in the field of restricted production, and they tend to confer a stylized look upon reality. Traditionally, *crónica* has been the vehicle through which they have been able to overcome the isolation of the written word, to reduce its characteristic distance from the majority of the population in Latin American societies, and to engage with large audiences (xii).

In comparison to testimonio, one noteworthy overlap is that both genres tend to be meeting points for high and low cultures. Bielsa notes that the *crónica*, as a literary account of city life, is an intermediate form of the contact zone between both cultures. This is also true of

¹ New Journalism is a style of 1960s and 1970s news writing and journalism which used techniques borrowed from literary fiction such as conversation speech, point of view, and recording everyday details.

testimonios, a genre in which interlocutors often come from a more privileged background than the marginal testimonialistas, and they tend to disseminate testimonios of the oppressed to a public capable of producing change—the reading public that tends to be dominated by the middle and upper class. Apart from this commonality between the two genres, it is important to note here some of the ways in which crónica differs from testimonio. For example, crónicas usually lack a testimonialista, a subaltern subject, an authentic speech, and the prioritization of exposing social problems, because a crónica can encapsulate a wide variety of themes. Other important distinctions are that crónica “fictionalizes in varying degrees the real events it portrays, producing an ambiguity between reality and fiction” and that “crónica possesses a style” (Bielsa 39). While this fictionalization is present to a certain extent in testimonios, since memory inherently contains aspects of fictionalization and interpretation, it is by no means an intrinsic part of testimonios. Shantytown testimonial narrative is unique because the potential fictional narrative aspects of the cronistas’ texts are balanced by the unadorned testimonies of the subjects. At the same time, the problematic memory associated with first-hand accounts of testimonialistas is ideally balanced by the more objective and more professional, if stylized, journalistic writing of the cronista. There is hence a mixture of self-represented witnessing and intentionally interpretive narration, and readers thus receive a multifaceted, multi-perspective text.

One exemplary crónica-infused work within shantytown testimonial narrative is José Alejandro Castaño’s *La isla de Morgan* (2003). In this publication, Castaño has a strong narratorial presence which is included alongside the quotes and testimonies of comuna residents. As in most crónicas, Castaño employs simple, direct but often descriptive language that at times is very personal. Despite such intimate narration, the intrinsically journalistic nature of the

crónica offers this shantytown testimonial work a more highly regarded type of witnessing—that which is unaffected by trauma. In terms of how he wrote this book intermingling crónica with testimonio, Castaño mixes narration and investigation with quotes by comuna residents. While we have seen that the genre of testimonio is notoriously dynamic and historically influenced by other genres, it is worth mentioning, given the heavy presence that the genre of crónica has in the text, that *La isla de Morgan* was actually awarded the Casa de las Américas prize for testimonial literature. In fact, though, this publication was based off of several crónicas that Castaño, a cronista, had previously published. Castaño, though, has been very vocal about the value of fusing crónica with testimonio. Within such texts, he says that cronistas should not only tell the story, but also decipher why the story occurred. This aspect is very different from testimonio in the sense that it underscores the authoritative, professional presence of the interlocutor. In addition, Castaño praises the crónica because it is not:

un texto que se pasa por el salón de belleza. Una crónica, más allá de la manera como está escrita, debe suponer un hallazgo. Algo distinto, un encuentro con algo. Debe encontrar una cosa que no se sabía antes. O se sabía, pero se sabía mal. Entonces, el cronista sobre todo es un explorador más que un decorador.

a text that passes through a beauty salon. A crónica, beyond the manner in which it is written, should put forth a discovery. Something different, an encounter with something. It should uncover something that was not previously known. Or that was known, but misunderstood. As such, the cronista above all is an explorer more than a decorator.²

La isla de Morgan is the result of Castaño's effort to investigate La isla de Morgan, one of the worst comunas in Medellín—in terms of, for instance, the extent of drug addiction, poverty, lack of sanitation and social organizations. In order to enter this comuna, Castaño, born and raised in a different Medellín comuna, disguised himself as a homosexual, a cover

² Escribano, Pedro. "La crónica no es un texto que se pasa por un salón de belleza." *Diario La República On Line*. 24 July 2007. Web. 15 Sept. 2010. <<http://www.larepublica.com.pe/content/view/168482/28/>>

recommended by his contact there—a skilled petroleum engineer nicknamed “Mickey Mouse” who had never actually worked due to his drug addiction. Castaño had, in fact, passed by La isla de Morgan many times and had even entered once in order to buy cigarettes; after that purchase, however, he was ordered to go outside the comuna to smoke because, he was told, “ese lugar está prohibido para gente desconocida” ‘this place is prohibited for unknown people [outsiders]’ (12). The initial encounter in La isla de Morgan highlights the codes that are strictly enforced within shantytowns and the suspicion and antagonism with which any outsider is met.

Upon entering the comuna with insider Mickey Mouse, Castaño vividly describes the streets, stores, and history of this shantytown; he explains: “Hoy en la zona funcionan 740 negocios y en un día normal transitan por sus calles cincuenta mil personas, entre obreros, vendedores ambulantes, comerciantes, taxistas, clientes y mendigos” ‘Today in this area 740 businesses operate and on a normal day 50,000 people—including workers, peddlers, businessmen, taxi drivers, clients, and beggars—pass through the streets’ (13). In particular, however, we receive a detailed account of a building, which along with other nearby abandoned structures used in a similar fashion, is known as “Las Cuevas”:

Un viejo caserón... quedó vacío, y los vendedores de marihuana y basuco, que ya habían logrado consolidar un territorio propio en la geografía del barrio, lo reclamaron como suyo. Los mendigos descubrieron allí un paraíso seguro y seco que burlaba...el frío, un hotel cuya única tarifa era consumir droga.

A big old house...remained empty, and the marijuana and crack cocaine peddlers, that had already succeeded in consolidating their own territory in the geography of the neighborhood, claimed it as their own. The beggars discovered a safe and dry paradise there that evaded...the cold, a hotel whose only tariff was to use drugs. (14)

At Las Cuevas, Castaño notes, “Los drogadictos iban y venían y los extremos encendidos de los cigarros que fumaban eran punticos rojos flotando en la oscuridad. Parecían luciérnagas. Había cientos de ellas. Me sentí como en una proyección en un planetario” ‘The drug addicts

came and went and the lit ends of the cigarettes that they smoked were small red dots floating in the darkness. They looked like fireflies. There were hundreds of them. It felt like a show in a planetarium' (18). Castaño's description of this drug-filled space is, as one would be hard-pressed to deny, rather beautiful. In *Subject to Change: The Lessons of Latin American Women's Testimonio for Truth, Fiction, and Theory* (2005), Bartow discusses the potential problems associated with stylizing such a dire social situation; she points to the "aesthetic concerns associated with fiction, with literature, [that] have seemed inappropriate to mix with the urgency of authorizing the reality and truth of marginalized accounts denied by official history" (20). In spite of the delicate balance between aesthetics and acute social problems, it is Castaño's beautiful, vivid description of the poverty and drug-use he sees that make his depictions of La isla de Morgan so shocking, impactful, and absorbing to the point that, as we will see, the public demands a mayoral response. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, such aestheticization of urgent social problems is reminiscent of the debate in Latin America over depictions of violence and misery in film. Within that debate, Castaño would likely find himself aligned with New Latin American Cinema filmmaker Jorge Sanjinés who argued that a revolutionary art of the marginalized and their social problems must seek beauty not as an end but as a means because without this interrelation, we are left with a mere pamphlet (Sanjinés 62). Indeed, without Castaño's stylized description, the readers have a dry, non-engaging portrait of the everyday cityscape that is commonly ignored.

Castaño's aestheticization indeed lures us in and engages us with this distant underworld, only for us to be met by more shocking and hidden features of the shantytown. In particular, perhaps the most upsetting aspect of *La isla de Morgan* is the account of abandoned children and street kids: "Muchos—entonces me pareció increíble—no recordaban sus nombres, apenas los

apodos; tampoco el lugar de donde venían ni la edad. El sufrimiento era un vestido diario que, semejante a la mugre y al hambre, enseñaban con naturalidad y mansedumbre” ‘Many—it seemed incredible to me—did not remember their names, just their nicknames; neither the place where they came from nor their age. Suffering was a daily outfit that, similar to filth and hunger, they showed with naturalness and meekness’ (20). Castaño witnesses children from nine to twelve years of age who sell their clothing, or their bodies, for drugs. At one point, he sees a young pregnant woman hitting her stomach and yelling hysterically. As Castaño tries unsuccessfully to stop her, he notes that he had been in La isla de Morgan for only five hours, and already felt as though he was pushing his limit of resistance for what he saw. He needed to get out, but he also felt like the rest of the city had to know what was going on there: “Deseaba gritar, despertar a la maldita ciudad que a esa hora dormía y escupirle todos los horrores que había visto” ‘I wanted to shout, to wake up the damn city that at that hour slept, and spit onto them all of the horrors that I had seen’ (26).

As someone who himself grew up in a violent Medellín comuna, Castaño’s shock towards La isla de Morgan makes all the more of an impact on the reader:

Crecí en un barrio pobre...y vi caer a la mayoría de mis amigos en la guerra del narcotráfico a finales de los años ochenta y comienzo de las noventa... El primer cadáver que vi fue el de un vecino al que unos jóvenes decapitaron con una escopeta de doble cañón. Tenía entonces doce años y no había comenzado a mudar las muelas.

I grew up in a poor neighbourhood... and I saw the majority of my friends fall in the drug war at the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s... The first corpse that I saw was that of a neighbour who some youths had decapitated with a double canon shotgun. I was twelve years old then and had not even started losing my baby teeth. (39)

Castaño’s astonishment at La isla de Morgan, and Las Cuevas specifically, is indeed striking in light of the extensive violence that he witnessed while growing up in a Medellín comuna. The resulting gravity of his reaction is reflected in the public response to his crónicas about the shantytown; these crónicas appeared prior to the publication of this book in the Medellín

newspaper for which he worked. Less than 24 hours after their publication in that newspaper, the mayor was bombarded by calls from Medellín residents who pressured him to do something about the situation of the comuna. The mayor responded by sending a letter to the newspaper which congratulated the bravery of journalists like Castaño, and mandated that Las Cuevas “debían desalojarse y ser derruidas” ‘should be vacated and be destroyed’ (30). As a result, at 4:30 am a few days later, “Ciento cincuenta agentes de la Policía Metropolitana, acompañados por peritos de la Fiscalía y funcionarios del Instituto de Bienestar Familiar y de las secretarías de Bienestar Social y de Gobierno, irrumpieron en La isla de Morgan” ‘One hundred and fifty agents from the Metropolitan Police, accompanied by experts from the district’s attorney and workers from the Institute of Family Well-Being and the secretaries of Social Well-Being and of the Government, invaded La isla de Morgan’ (31). The reactions triggered by Castaño’s crónica consequently illustrate the power and authority that cronistas bestow upon a testimonial work. Indeed, if the story of Las Cuevas and the residents of La isla de Morgan had been published on its own as a testimonio, it is difficult to imagine that—without Castaño’s vivid description and interpretative narration—it would have generated a similar response. At the same time, the public reaction—suggesting that destroying the place would resolve the problem—typifies the middle and upper class attitude of “out of sight out of mind”. While Castaño’s work was a catalyst for a societal reaction, it did not produce the expected effect of finding ways to solve structural problems in society. As such, this shortcoming highlights the type of outcome that can realistically be yielded through shantytown testimonial works. While such texts are able to raise awareness about a social problem among an audience that is physically and intellectually removed from these urban spaces, such an upper class public—while likely able to instigate the necessary structural changes that the shantytowns could benefit from—is perhaps more likely to

bury the problem under the ruins of its own physical obliteration; with this “quick and dirty” solution, the seeds of the social problems remain as pervasive as ever.

As revealing as *La isla de Morgan* is about the outcomes of shantytown testimonial narrative, so it is, too, about authorship of these hybrid works. Castaño walks a fine line, for instance, between being an insider and outsider of the comuna, and both his book and newspaper crónicas ultimately reveal the problematic authorship issues intrinsic to all types of testimonial works. One comuna resident, for example, tells him: “Periodista, usted hizo un buen trabajo. Pusimos a la gente a hablar. Antes nadie sabía de las jodidas Cuevas, ahora todo el mundo habla del tema. Ganamos. Váyase a dormir” ‘Journalist, you did a good job. You made the people talk. Before nobody knew of the screwed up Cuevas, now the whole world is talking about it. We won. Now go to sleep’ (68). But in the end, Castaño, for better or worse, is responsible for the casting out of scores of people from Las Cuevas, and these people are left with nowhere to go. One comuna resident accordingly says: “Mire, por increíble que parezca, Las Cuevas era el único hogar de estas personas...Ud. se las quitó” ‘Look, as incredible as it seems, Las Cuevas was the only home for these people...You took that from them’ (46). The havoc wrecked by Castaño through his publication thus illustrates a fulfillment of Spivak’s indicated prophecy that by granting subalterns—here, the residents of the comuna—collective speech, they will be as mute as ever. Through the imperialist destruction of Las Cuevas, the problems and people of *La isla de Morgan* will likely be forgotten, and the imperialist project will be as strong as ever.

In accordance with the upshot of Castaño’s publication, while in the first half of *La isla de Morgan* he focuses the text on exposing the unknown world of Las Cuevas and the shantytown at large, in the second half we follow him as a central character who must deal with his culpability. Mickey Mouse, for instance, sends him the following text message: “Periodista:

buena puntería. Impacto en blanco. No hay sobrevivientes” ‘Journalist: good aim. Perfect shot. There are no survivors’ (32). Castaño repeatedly expresses his guilt for single-handedly causing the eviction of so many comuna residents, but what seems to annoy him just as much are the accusations that he resembles the *pornomiseria* journalists whom he hates, a topic that will be further touched upon in Chapter Four. One resident tells him: “La miseria y todas las pestes de la ruina humana los atraen a ustedes [los periodistas] igual que el vómito de un borracho atrae a las moscas” ‘Misery and all the pests of human ruin attract you [journalists] just like a drunk’s vomit attracts flies’ (48). This characterization of misery-hunting journalists is, ironically, precisely what Castaño aimed to work against, and it is why he chose crónica as his preferred genre. Castaño has openly criticized mainstream journalists, specifically in Colombia, for converting human drama into a garbage dump; they all, he says, extract the worse from each story. Instead, Castaño suggests trying to find the real human stories behind the pain and suffering because each story, after all, has something to teach us, a key which will help us to become better citizens and a better society. Despite his intended goals through this hybrid text, Castaño did not succeed in producing the type of change that testimonial work is made for, a type of change that is better evidenced by the outcome of the documentary *Chircales* as shown in Chapter Two, and by several shantytown testimonial works that will be examined in Chapters Four and Five.

Castaño’s aestheticization of urgent social problems, coupled with his shock at the comuna conditions despite being from a shantytown, do produce a text that succeeds in stirring the public and fostering *concientización*. Nevertheless, facts show in this case that it was a fleeting consciousness because the mayor had already forgotten his promises to clean up La isla de Morgan a mere nine weeks later. The rapid public reaction and almost equally speedy loss of interest in Las Cuevas leads one to ask what effect crónicas or testimonios can truly have on the

public, and whether, perhaps, testimonial film like *Chircales* is a more powerful artistic medium for affecting social change because it can reach a wider audience, and not just the upper-class dominated reading public. By reaching a wider audience that includes the subjects of the testimonial work and other marginalized groups like them, the subaltern protagonists have greater control to affect change concerning the social problems presented. But with regards to affecting social change, Castaño defends himself by telling a comuna resident in *La isla de Morgan*: “Yo no escribo para cambiar el mundo, trato de ser consecuente. Si el Municipio prometió una cosas, pues que las cumpla, no es más!” ‘I don’t write in order to change the world, I try to be consistent. If the Municipality promises things, then they should fulfill them, that’s it!’ (69). The man, however, reminds him: “¡A punta de crónicas y de libros no se cambia el mundo! No se exija tanto!” ‘The world isn’t changed through crónicas and books! Don’t demand so much!’ (69). Maybe he cannot change the world, but at the very least Castaño’s hybrid text succeeds in engaging readers with an unknown shantytown space while simultaneously humanizing its populace who are all too often considered disposable “members” of society.

Despite this merit, *La isla de Morgan* has shortcomings. The interlocutor, in this case a journalist, uncovers truths and in this sense he aims to produce a reaction among the reading public. In journalism, this is enough to solve the problem—it suffices to signal the problem and then leave it for the authorities or active readers, like the active spectators of New Latin American Cinema, that is, if they want, can, or wish to do so. The problem is that this method is journalism plain and simple, and *La isla de Morgan*, as winner of the Casa de las Américas testimonio prize, must do more. Beyond uncovering and pointing to a dire problem, the testimonial work, and specifically shantytown testimonial narrative, aims at creating tools for affected communities to confront their oppression; these tools are more clearly seen, as we will

see later in this chapter, in sociologists' explicit recommendations for social change and, as will be seen in Chapter Four, in film, such as screenings to marginalized communities. But in journalism and in *La isla de Morgan* specifically, the interlocutor immediately becomes responsible for the fate of the portrayed people because he or she has chosen to signal the problem without doing anything more. Beyond uncovering the truth, testimonial works generally are meant to empower their subjects, but as *La isla de Morgan* shows, this is true to a lesser extent in crónica hybrids. While descriptive language is an effective tool to engage the reader, crónica hybrids like Castaño's ultimately fail to empower shantytown resident protagonists.

In the same fashion as *La isla de Morgan*, Ricardo Aricapa's *Comuna 13: crónica de una guerra urbana* (2005) offers intimate accounts of life in a Medellín comuna via a fusion of crónica and testimonio. The book is largely centered around testimonies from a diverse group of Comuna 13 residents, which are intertwined with Aricapa's comprehensive investigation about the shantytown. The final product is a multifaceted and engaging text that pieces together the history and present situation of Comuna 13 from a journalistic perspective and which incorporates the popular lexicon of the shantytown residents.

In the first part of this book, personal accounts, interwoven with historical, narrative commentary by Aricapa, are used to detail the displacement-related start of Comuna 13 several decades ago. The first story we are presented with is that of Esperanza—a displaced woman, lured by “la oportunidad de hacerse a un lote y levantar un rancho” ‘the opportunity to acquire a plot of land and construct a shack’ (3), who comes to the shantytown when it is first being created. Described as “una mujer con necesidad urgente de salir del lugar en que vivía” ‘a woman with an urgent necessity to leave the place in which she lived’ (4), Esperanza shows that the comunas were started by honest, needy and vulnerable people like herself, and her testimonio

sheds light on how different the comuna conditions were early on as compared to today. In the beginning, she says:

... todo fue como en el primer día de la creación: sin agua, sin energía eléctrica, sin alcantarillado, sin vías de comunicación. Y hasta sin ley... No pocas disputas con mucha frecuencia se resolvían a machete limpio, arma bastante popular dado el acervo campesino de la mayoría de los invasores.

... everything was like the first day of creation: no water, no electric energy, no sewer systems, no paths of communication. And even no law... Many disputes were commonly resolved with a machete, a popular weapon given the peasant heritage of the majority of the newcomers. (9)

As she sought to escape the poverty and violence of the countryside—detailed by both her first-hand account and Aricapa’s research, “un año llevaba Esperanza viviendo en el sector que por varios lustros había sido el depósito de basuras de Medellín” ‘Esperanza spent one year living in the area that for many years had been the garbage dumps of Medellín’, a place where it was not uncommon to find “cucarachas de tamaños heroicos [y] vapores nauseabundos” ‘cockroaches of heroic sizes [and] nauseating smells’ (5). Despite moving to a more stable home in Comuna 13, Esperanza’s economic situation did not improve after some time living there, so she and some of her neighbors decided to form a women’s committee in the shantytown. Esperanza, in fact, became committee president, although she still does not know why she took up leadership: “Ni en el pueblo donde nací, ni en Moravia había sido yo líder de nada” ‘Not in the village where I was born or even in Moravia had I been a leader of anything’ (11). Despite her lack of experience, little by little comuna conditions improved because of the committee “y las cosas empezaban a marchar por alguna parte. Y eso despertó en mi una energía que no sabía que tenía” ‘and things began to work in some places. And that awoke in me an energy that I didn’t know I had’ (11). Esperanza and the other women organized activities such as raffles and dances in order to get more community resources and funds. More recently, she was even invited

to a Medellín city council ceremony to receive an award given annually to five outstanding community leaders.

In many ways, Esperanza's opening story situates this book—labeled in some sections as a testimonio and in others as a crónica—within a testimonial tradition. The strong ties to testimonio are felt early on because most of this first text is Esperanza's own words, although Aricapa's narrative appears intermittently to provide supporting, substantiating investigative research. At the same time, Esperanza comes across as a modern-day Domitila Barrios or Rigoberta Menchú in the sense that she is a normal, unassuming woman with little education who winds up getting involved in the politics of her community in order to improve the dire socioeconomic conditions in which she and her neighbors reside.

Another testimonio we are presented with in *Comuna 13* is that of Marco Aurelio, a shantytown resident who explains the history and present-day situation of the violence within his community. His story highlights the growth of comunas in direct relation to forced displacement tied to land reform and civil conflict—the very situation outlined in Chapter One. In particular, Marco Aurelio details the beginning presence of the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) in the comuna, and the difficulties that it had with its new urban, versus rural, members:

los jóvenes que reclutaron y trataron de entrenar en los barrios, a diferencia de los cuadros campesinos...se cargaban con todos los vicios y desapegos de la gran ciudad, más exactamente de la parte de la ciudad más pobre y marginada; jóvenes sin ninguna formación política, en no pocos casos consumidores de drogas, con serios problemas de resentimiento y adaptación social, y además sin el sentido de la disciplina y obediencia...

the youths that they recruited and tried to train in the neighborhoods, in contrast to the peasant groups...were loaded with all the vices and detachments of the big city, but specifically of the most poor and marginalized part of the city; youths without any political formation, in many cases drug users, with serious resentment and social adaptation problems, and furthermore without a sense of discipline and obedience. (28)

Ultimately, the first-hand accounts of Marco Aurelio and Esperanza—the fictional names given for real people Aricapa interviewed—, coupled with Aricapa’s journalistic investigation, offer an impressively in-depth discussion of displacement, the transfer of rural to urban social problems, and the related violence. The situation presented reflects that explained in Chapter One, in which displaced youth in the urban periphery lack economic security and educational opportunities for an improved life and thus they are disproportionately vulnerable to recruitment by guerillas, paramilitaries, and local gangs. Since few displaced families in the comunas of Medellín and Bogotá have access to social services, and most face severe discrimination in employment, housing, education, and health care, the youths there have no real solutions for employment and income generation, and often become involved in illegal activity and recruitment by illegal armed actors, in some cases forcefully. In *Comuna 13*, this situation is starkly reflected in the clear, explanatory, and multi-perspective account—provided by journalist Aricapa as well as verbatim by the shantytown residents—of the relation between the violence of the countryside and the development of both the comunas and their social problems.

Comuna 13 is sub-titled “crónica de una guerra urbana” but the aspects of crónica that it retains are very different to those in *La isla de Morgan*. Compared to Castaño’s graphic, aestheticized and personal depictions of the social problems of Las Cuevas, Aricapa aligns himself more with investigative reporting. At the same time, alongside the testimonios of comuna residents, he confirms and expands upon the stories told while providing hard, unbiased research into the shantytown conditions. This journalistic image of Aricapa is confirmed by detailed methodology and a list of resources. The publication, for instance, includes timelines and chronologies of events within Comuna 13, as well as a bibliography with newspaper articles, official city statistics on crime, and police reports. Beyond the presence of the voice of

community residents, and the mixture of journalism with testimonio, *Comuna 13* is furthermore aligned with shantytown testimonial narrative due to the extensive discussion about rural to urban displacement and how such migration affected the growth of comunas as well as the boom of violence within the urban periphery.

In light of the common fusion of testimonio and journalism within shantytown testimonial narrative, I asked award-winning Colombian cronista Alberto Salcedo Ramos why Colombian testimonies are so commonly infused with crónica. He explained that “la crónica es una forma de construir memoria. En Colombia como tenemos una realidad tan compleja, tan llena de problemas, me parece que el periodismo de denuncia es tal vez lo que la sociedad requiere con mayor urgencia” ‘crónica is a way of constructing memory. In Colombia, since we have such a complex reality that is so full of problems, it seems to me that a denunciatory journalism is perhaps what society so urgently needs’ (Salcedo Ramos). But while Salcedo Ramos ultimately categorizes this fusion of testimonio and crónica as journalism, for me it is shantytown testimonial narrative because it denounces comuna social problems not just in the words of an authoritative professional author, but also in the very popular lexicon of the residents living in the comuna. This co-authorship—intimate stories accompanied by more objective research, or rather the personal and the collective as substantiated by unbiased facts—ideally awakens the reading public that is otherwise sits isolated from the informants’ experience (Bartow 25).

The mixture of testimonios with an authoritarian voice, such as that of the cronista, is also a reoccurring presence within Brazilian shantytown testimonial narrative. One recent work which touches on this fusion of insider and outsider perspectives about the shantytowns is Bryan McCann’s “The Political Evolution of Rio de Janeiro’s Favelas: Recent Works.” McCann

specifically discusses favela-themed texts with a focus on who is producing them. He notes that social scientists have served as some of the foremost intermediaries between “favela” and “cidade,” between the masses of squatter settlements and the institutions of political power and cultural capital in the formal, official metropolis. He observes that until recently, such traffic remained heavily unidirectional, as university researchers entered favelas and reported back to the wider world in sociological reports. The slow but significant expansion of the population of university students hailing from the favelas and the far more rapid growth of nongovernmental organizations cultivating local agents trained in social scientific methods have begun to change this pattern. Partly as a result, recent studies and reports have reached new levels of density, combining “native” and “foreign” viewpoints to offer a richer understanding of the changing problems of these neighborhoods (McCann 150). I, however, would argue that more influential than the trickle of favelado university students and NGOs has been the recent boom of testimonial works co-produced by favelados, predominantly former and current gangsters as well as hip hop artists, and non-favelados, mostly sociologists, such as *Cabeça de porco* (Luiz Eduardo Soares, MV Bill, and Celso Athayde, 2005), *Crianças do tráfico* (Luke Dowdney, 2003), and *Favela Rising* (dir. Jeff Zimbalist and Matt Mochary, 2005).

Instead of *crônica*, Brazilian shantytown testimonial narrative more commonly employs the influence of urban sociology—the study of social life and human interaction in metropolitan areas. Urban sociology seeks to study the structures, processes, changes and problems of an urban area and by doing so provides input for policy making. Statistics, observation, and interviews are commonly used. Like *cronistas*, urban sociologists add a more creditable element to the shantytown resident’s unadorned testimonies, although sociology often mediates these testimonies through the dominant empirical discourse of science.

Cabeça de porco (2005) is one such mixture of testimonios and sociological investigation about youths involved in gangs and drug-trafficking in the favelas. It was organized by rapper MV Bill, hip-hop businessman Celso Athayde, and Luiz Eduardo Soares, one of Latin America's leading specialists on urban conflicts and a sociologist who was national secretary of Public Security. MV Bill and Athayde were both raised in Rio favelas and were initially skeptical of collaborating with a non-favelado like Soares. After reviewing his extensive research and ideas about favelas, however, the two men were able to see that Soares' outsider status did not impede his profound insight into the condition of the shantytowns. Their resulting publication mixes reflections on urban violence, years of ethnographic research carried out by Soares, and testimonios elicited by MV Bill and Athayde in drug selling points in several Brazilian cities.

According to the authors, the main objective of *Cabeça de porco* is to put a face on the young people involved in the drug trade and to humanize them without, at the same time, taking away from their responsibility for crimes committed. They additionally say in the introduction that “a intenção deste livro não é denunciar, mas apontar saídas” ‘the intention of this book is not to denounce, but rather to point to ways out’ (5). Hence, there is an explanation of a set of social problems, a humanization of the principal actors involved, and a set of suggestions as far as how this problematic social situation can be resolved. These suggestions, however, are not directed towards the favelado youths themselves. Indeed, it is hard to imagine any one of the featured testimonialistas picking up this 200-plus page book and looking for answers and insight into their own lives. The ideal audience is instead a presumably more privileged reading public that is unfamiliar with the presented social problems and in a position to somehow ameliorate them from the outside; after all, if the presentation of “saídas” is not for the favelado youths themselves, then we can assume that it is for this reading public to somehow affect.

The idea of presenting solutions to a more privileged socioeconomic class, instead of to the very favelados, is problematic as it insinuates a reliance on outsiders for affecting social change in marginalized communities. Nonetheless, *Cabeça de porco* distinguishes itself from Spivak's warning of a dependence upon western intellectuals to "speak for" the subaltern condition rather than allowing them to speak for themselves. The three authors make this distinction by including word-for-word testimonios of favelados alongside their own essays. These raw, unadorned testimonios are candid and seemingly addressed to the aforementioned audience; as such, they become a powerful tactic of solidarity building. As Beverley notes, in testimonios, when we are addressed directly—such as in Domitila Barrios's *Si me permiten hablar* and Rigoberta Menchú's *Me llamo Rigoberta*—even by someone we would normally disregard, we are placed under an obligation to respond; we may act or not on that obligation, we may resent or welcome it, but we cannot ignore it; something is therefore asked of us by testimonio. Ultimately, testimonio comes from heart of pain and suffering which cannot be ignored. Ideally a solidarity, which is solidified by the insights and explanations of Soares—a highly esteemed and widely-known public figure—, is yielded from the collage of voices and perspectives included within *Cabeça de porco*.

What remains ironic, however, is the very title of the book—*Cabeça de porco*, which as the authors explain, is street talk for "situação sem saída, confusão" 'a situation without a way out, confusion.' Indeed, there seems to be a contradiction between a title signaling "no way out" and a book that precisely aims to show that there are, in fact, remedies for these social problems, even though they are solutions that are potentially only affected by the upper classes. Nonetheless, at the very least the authors succeed in their intention to permit an approximation to the reality of crime and the favela "sem academicismos, mas através de uma narrativa solta,

atraente—escrita por quem conhece os lados varios desse universe” ‘without academic jargon, but rather through an unbound, engaging narrative—written by those who know the various sides of that universe.’ (10)

The testimonies included in *Cabeça de porco* alongside Soares’ interpretive narration and recommendations provide an intimate insight into that shantytown universe. These testimonies, which are included verbatim in their own sections, apart from the texts written by the three authors, contain one of a father whose son is involved in traffic and many by favelado youth involved in gangs. There are also several testimonios by Athayde and MV Bill about their experiences growing up in gang-run favelas. One interesting tactic is that for a couple of the stories related, Athayde tells his version of events, and these are then followed by MV Bill’s account of the same story. At other points in the book, MV Bill tells the first part of a story and Athayde then relates the second half. This technique, while providing a unique method of narration, is a testament to the subjectivity of memory—and its susceptibility to alteration by later experience— and the allied importance of balancing out that partisanship out with the voices of others.

Among the testimonios of gang-involved favela adolescents, one notable account is that of a 15 year-old, entitled “Não filma eu chorando” ‘Don’t Film Me Crying.’ The youth has been involved in the drug trade and in a brutal assassination, and he prays to God at this point just to make it to the age of 18. He explains how he did not need to stay involved in crime were it not for the following situation:

Eu queria o amor de uma tia, de uma mãe, isso que nunca tive, o amor de uma família, que quando eu precisasse de conversar, ela estivesse la, viesse conversar comigo. Mas eu nunca tive. Se eu tivesse uma família para conversar, eu não estaria nessa vida não, não estaria não. Desculpa ai, eu não queria chorar não, não filma eu chorando, não, filma não.

I wanted the love of an aunt, of a mother, that which I never had, the love of a family, that when I needed to talk, they would be there, would come to talk with me. But I never had that. If I had a family to talk with, I wouldn't be involved in this life, I wouldn't. I'm sorry, I didn't want to cry, don't film me crying, don't film. (139)

This youth's testimony points to the enormous role that, as touched upon in Chapter One, gangs play within the favela. These criminal factions not only fill in with regards to where the state is absent—in terms of building schools and churches, but also providing a surrogate family for many favela youths who are either orphans or who come from broken homes. This situation is elucidated by Soares, who provides fascinating insight into the background and motives of the adolescent testimonialistas. He says that the important thing for them is the desire to be the object of pride for someone who loves them, as illustrated by the 15 year old and his desire for “o amor de uma tia, de uma mãe.” Soares further explains that when we are threatened on a street corner by an underprivileged armed youth, it is really a cry for help, recognition and valorization that this adolescent is launching at us, rather than a malicious threat; this youth who was invisible is imposing himself upon us in order to be recognized as a member of society in the same way that Beverley claims.

Today, although crime threatens all society, it oppresses the poor with the most brutality. Soares elucidates this oppression by explaining the commonalities among the nine Brazilian cities from which the gang-involved youth testimonios were taken:

The similarities between the cities are the following: poor kids, frequently black, are recruited by the drug trade, and are ever younger. They don't understand the process and are its victims. First they are victims and then they are victimizers; and finally are victims again when they die young.³

³ Monteiro, Marcelo. “Brazilian Book “Cabeça de Porco” Discusses Urban Violence and Youth Involved in the Drug Trade in Nine Brazilian Cities.” *Children and Youth in Organized Armed Violence*. 6 June 2005. Web. 15 Sept. 2010. <<http://www.coav.org.br/publicque/cgi/cgilua.exe/sys/start.htm?infoid=1421&tpl=printerview&sid=41>>

Soares goes on to make numerous prescriptions regarding how to improve the situation of such youths. He says that repression should be the last resort. Before that, there is a lot to be done in the form of prevention, reinsertion, education, and self-esteem. He says that the goal is to integrate youth, not exterminate them, and society thus has to offer youth at a minimum what the drug trade offers: material resources as well as recognition and a sense of belonging and of value. In the end, there is a hunger more profound than physical hunger: the hunger for affection and recognition, which raises self-esteem. Ultimately, the more directed, humanizing, and policy-oriented roadmap that Soares provides for social change, in contrast with the “signal and leave” approach of a journalist such as Castaño, offers the advantage of allowing less space for the “out of sight, out of mind” social change course as interpreted, and then affected, by Castaño’s audience.

Similar prescriptions are laid out in *Crianças do trafico* (2003) by Luke Dowdney—another favela-themed fusion of testimonios and sociological study. Dowdney—a British ex-boxer who has worked with Rio’s largest non-profit group, Viva Rio, for several years—conducted an investigation of between five and six thousand youths involved in drug traffic in Rio de Janeiro. Among his objectives with this study and resulting book was the aim to:

definir corretamente as disputas territórios armas das facções da droga no Rio; definir corretamente as crianças que trabalham armadas para facções da droga no Rio; conscientizar sobre tal situação, um nível nacional e internacional; propor algum tipo de solução local; propor algumas medidas necessárias para que a comunidade internacional reconheça a existência do problema e o enfoque; abrir um debate internacional sobre situações similares em outros países do mundo.

correctly define the territorial armed disputes among drug factions in Rio; correctly define the armed children that work for the drug factions in Rio; raise consciousness about that situation, at a national and international level; propose some type of local solution; propose some necessary measures in order for the international community to recognize the existence of the problem and to focus on it; open an international debate about similar situations in other countries of the world. (16)

More so than the crónica-infused shantytown testimonial works of Colombia, and even more so than *Cabeça de porco*, Dowdney's publication has a direct agenda, and clear prescriptions, that are intended to affect social change as well as both a local and global discussion about the vulnerable situation of favela youth. Dowdney's straightforward objectives are further underscored by the verbs that he uses: "definir", "conscientizar", "propor", "abrir um debate." Based on the list of goals, we can deduce that, like *Cabeça de porco*, *Crianças do trafico* is not aimed for the favelados whose testimonios are presented, but rather for a domestic and international reading public of a more privileged socioeconomic background whom Dowdney would like to make aware of this social situation in order to affect change from the outside within.

Dowdney's book, which has been published in several languages, is divided into several parts including methodology and sources of facts, the drug business in Rio (a historical perspective), an explanation of different criminal factions (with regards to the drug trade in Rio de Janeiro), the involvement of youth and adolescents in drug factions and in armed combat, local solutions, a glossary, a bibliography, maps, diagrams, graphs, and photographs. Each section contains both Dowdney's narration—based off of all the sources mentioned in his methodology—and testimonios by a variety of people, including gang members, ex-gang members, police, family members of gangsters, children, and various favelados. Dowdney also includes newspaper clippings from various sources, diagrams explaining the hierarchy of people involved in the drug trade, and statistics on (police) violence in Rio; in fact there is a whole section on police and on their relation with the favela, favelados, and bandidos.

The testimonios elicited ultimately aid in outlining the gang roles, the past and present relationship between the gangs and the rest of the shantytown community, the gang-imposed

codes for residents of favelas—such as no stealing, no physical fights, no rapes, no sexual activity with children, no abuse of women, no talking to police, or no carrying of arms without the gang knowing—and the various motives that cause adolescents to enter into a life of crime. The gangs, as these testimonios show, serve not only as protectors from other, outside gangs, but also as mediators in the face of a violent and corrupt police force. They are therefore seen as showing a more practical interest in the well-being of favela residents than the police. The gangs also give a considerable amount of money from trafficking to the community, which solidifies their domination, and as they ultimately offer what the government does not, they consequently become a necessary evil. Dowdney points out that the gangs do not force initiation, but if youths do not have choices in society, then the “decision” to join is easy. Nonetheless, all of the youths involved in gangs say that while they would like an honest job, they feel as though it is not a possibility. Dowdney accordingly says that if we do not deal with these problems—social exclusion, the perspectives for youths, and marginalization of the favelas—we will never solve the problem of traffic.

Within *Crianças do tráfico*, influence of sociology is by no means subtle. Dowdney had previously studied both anthropology and sociology, and he quotes renowned sociologist Howard Becker in his introduction. Furthermore, the details in which he describes the (scientific) methodology of this book especially stand out. Dowdney explains the specific hours that interviews were conducted as well as the specific places, in order to highlight the variety, and he distinguishes how the testimonios were elicited: for example, semi-structured individual interviews versus group interviews versus questionnaires. In addition, there are numerous footnotes alluding to how the information was gathered. In the end, one would be hard-pressed to

deny that this publication was well-researched via an extremely diverse but calculated range of sources and methods.

Like Soares, Dowdney offers suggestions as far as how to improve the situation for favelado youth. He says, for instance:

Os jovens estão sem alternativas... É preciso oferecer alternativas reais. Não adianta fazer um curso de cabeleireiro e depois não arrumar emprego... Também precisamos arrumar uma maneira de trabalhar com... os jovens presos. Sem um lugar para receber o jovem na volta, eles vão se envolver com o crime de novo.

The youth have no alternatives... It is necessary to offer real alternatives. It's not worth doing a barber course if afterwards employment cannot be arranged... We also have to arrange a way of working with... imprisoned youth. Without a place to receive the youth after, they will involve themselves with crime once again.⁴

Ultimately, Dowdney's heavy infusion of urban sociology alongside the elicited testimonios provides deep insight into the world of youths involved in drug-trafficking. The endorsements on the front cover of *Crianças do trafico*—by Viva Rio, Save the Children, and ISER (Institute of Social and Economic Research)—further substantiate Dowdney's investigation. Hence, marketed as a product that is endorsed by these distinguished international organizations, Dowdney's publication—and the testimonios in it—have greater credibility and ideally manifest an increased truth effect.

Like *Crianças do trafico*, and *Cabeça de porco*, Brazilian shantytown testimonial films are commonly presented with a sociological perspective. Here, the traditional, authoritative voice-over narration in documentary is now replaced by interviews with sociologists who interpret the testimonios of shantytown residents and then offer recommendations for ameliorating the presented social problems.

⁴ Editora 7 Letras. n.d. Web. 1 Sept. 2010. <http://www.7letras.com.br/detalhe_livro/?id=141>

If we look at testimonio's filmic counterpart—New Latin American Cinema—the influence of other genres was neither very common nor was it necessarily looked down upon.

Marta Rodríguez, an anthropologist and New Latin American Cinema filmmaker, for instance, said:

When you combine social science with mass medium like film, you are challenging the uses to which both are put by the privileged classes. In contrast to the kind of hermetic treatise that only five initiates can read, this is a way to use anthropology or sociology so that the working class can put it to use analyzing their particular situation. (Burton 31)

While Rodríguez is a trained anthropologist, the influence of this social science in her films, such as *Chircales* and *Amor, mujeres, y flores*, is significantly more subtle when compared to the direct extent that sociology is present in shantytown testimonial narrative. Another distinction is that while New Latin American Cinema films were targeted for marginal audiences, shantytown testimonial films are commonly screened for both a local and international public. Accordingly, instead of genre amalgamation, New Latin American Cinema filmmakers tended to focus on the participation of the masses in various aspects of film production, such “the people” as co-authors, natural actors, co-producers, co-editors, and as the ideal audience.⁵ To the extent that filmic shantytown testimonial narrative, like many New Latin

⁵ This prioritization, it should be noted, was in direct opposition to the historical notion of *auteurism* in film. In film studies, *auteurism* refers to authorship of the film—a credit traditionally bestowed upon the director. As is noted in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen's anthology *Film Theory and Criticism* (2009), the stamp of the director was much less visible in the early 20th century. At this time, the Hollywood studio resembled a factory (with costume design, technicians, and actors) where goods—motion pictures—were manufactured for a mass audience; this type of production was commercial in contrast to art films or the underground cinema of Europe. Despite the commerciality of these films, François Truffaut argues that the presence of an *auteur* (for him, always the director) can be seen even in such Hollywood films. However, the director's style of basic motifs can only be discerned by viewing his work as a whole (the true mark of the *auteur* will appear in all of his works). In contrast to Truffaut, some say that scriptwriters, cinematographers, stars, and producers deserve to be called *auteurs* as well. Most agree, though, that the director is responsible for the overall look and aesthetic of the film and that the final product is a reflection of the director's personal creative vision (as if he or she were the primary *auteur*). Under European Union law, for example, the film director is always considered the author or one of the authors of a film.

American Cinema films, use directly filmed interviews and at times voice-over narrations by the marginal protagonists, there remains, to a degree, shared authorship.

With its directly filmed interviews with favelados and street kids and its heavy infusion of sociology, Jose Padilha's *Ônibus 174* (2004) is both an exemplary and a non-traditional shantytown testimonial film. Indeed, Padilha's methodology and goals are very much in line with the other shantytown testimonial works examined in this chapter, but the subject matter of *Ônibus 174* is broader and more multi-faceted. While the main action of this film does not take place in the favela, all of the marginal subjects presented were born in favelas, and the great majority of social problems depicted are directly tied to those in the favelas. At the same time, Padilha tries, through this film, to go against an official, one-sided, and poorly understood version of events. The fact that we are hearing an unofficial story by marginal protagonists as well as interpretation and insight by sociologists ultimately situates this documentary well within the category of shantytown testimonial narrative.

In *Ônibus 174*, Padilha mixes interviews with street kids, research by sociologists, and live television footage to present an intense and multifaceted film. Padilha details the life of Sandro, a former street boy who, by hijacking a local bus in Rio de Janeiro in 2000, attacks the society that robbed him of what little he possessed: his mother, who was slain in front of him when he was six years old; members of his gamin family, who were murdered by police while they were sleeping; and, finally, his youth, which was annihilated in the juvenile detention center to which he was sent. *Ônibus 174* clearly presents such state-sponsored subjugation as the justified stimulus for Sandro's nationally televised act of terror. Padilha demonstrates this cause and effect relationship by presenting two parallel stories in the documentary: the first presents that which is to be explained—the hijacking, and the second shows the cause; in the end, both

stories meet. In terms of causes for the hijacking, Padilha shows that, denied a significant social role by a society that aims to obliterate its human waste, poor youths like Sandro must, in fact, resort to criminal behaviour as a means to both daily survival and an identity that demands respect.

In an interview included on the DVD edition of this film, Padilha outlines his reasons for making *Ônibus 174*. He says that after reading the Rio newspapers days after the hijacking, he found almost no information on Sandro, and instead the focus of most of the articles was on the related police work; hence, the official story included almost no biographical data and no attempt to explain Sandro's actions. This goes to show how the "official story" often turns its focus completely away from the marginalized, and there is thus a need for testimonial works that offer the perspective of the subaltern. Padilha felt that Sandro's behaviour was so strange that it deserved an explanation. At the same time, he wondered how Sandro could be involved in the bus hijacking and the murder of several street kids—part of his gamin family—at Candelaria years earlier, two of Rio's most violent incidents to date. Padilha reasoned that "if you treat someone with violence, you probably turn that person into a violent individual" (*Ônibus 174*). Through his film, Padilha not only aimed against the official, incomplete account of the hijacking, but also, as in the other shantytown testimonial texts of this chapter, to show Sandro's human side. This aspect is clear through the portrayal of Sandro as a victim of society, through his relationship with his adoptive mother, and finally through Sandro's own behaviour broadcast on live television. In one early scene from the hijacking, for instance, he says to a hostage: "You're a student, right? Then you better get going because you'll be late", and Sandro lets him leave the bus (*Ônibus 174*).

In terms of genre influence, there are several interviews with renowned sociologist Luis Eduardo Soares, co-author of *Cabeça de porco*. With great conviction and passion, Soares attempts to explain Sandro's actions in the following way:

This Sandro is an example of the invisible kids who eventually emerge to take the scene and confront us with their violence which is nothing but a desperate and impotent cry. They do it because we fail to deal with social exclusion, racism, and other kinds of stigmatization. People eventually learn to coexist with the Sandros... All this has been converted to part of our daily experience. These boys battle against invisibility. We are nothing if someone doesn't look at us, doesn't acknowledge our worth, doesn't tell us we have some importance... We only see what we project, not who they really are... At the point Sandro got in front of the TV cameras, he imposed his visibility. He was the main character in a new narrative. He redefined the social narrative. The story that placed him in a subordinate position was suddenly converted into a tale where he had the leading role... A boy with a gun can make us feel something, a negative feeling, but a feeling. He can recover his visibility and affirm his social and human existence. It is a process of self-construction, self-invention mediated by violence. (*Ônibus 174*)

Soares points to Sandro as a collective voice representing countless other street kids like him; here, an individual voice becomes a communal one. Padilha echoes this notion by saying that "if one understands the causes of violence in Sandro's case, one will be able to generalize for Brazil society as whole", because many are treated with violence like him (*Ônibus 174*). This universality is another reason why Padilha wanted to make the film, and it is why he used so many aerial shots of the city throughout it, so that he could visually make this generalization. During these aerial shots of sunny, colourful Rio, very somber music is playing which serves to remind us of the tragic subculture of street children and violence that looms behind this city with such a festive reputation.

In addition to the "personal is political" element of the documentary that is represented by Sandro's universality, various testimonies are presented from an impressively diverse range of people involved in the hijacking. This multi-perspective nature, with notably conflicting viewpoints, harkens back to the testimonio *La noche de Tlatelolco* by Elena Poniatowska.

Padilha, for instance, combines media footage—photographs and television coverage reminiscent of the then-innovative newspaper excerpts in *Tlatelolco*—plus, like Poniatowska’s text, accounts from all actors involved in the incident; now, however, the new protagonist is the sociologist, but there remains a journalistic tie to the crónica-infused texts seen earlier in this chapter. Padilha’s interest in showing different viewpoints related to a single phenomenon, for instance, is very characteristic of the journalistic work. In fact, one of the supposed doctrinal backbones of journalistic work is to contrast different perspective in relation to a fact. Padilha’s provides polyphony in film through various interviews with police officers, a Rio Swat team negotiator, a newspaper reporter, hostages, and friends and family of Sandro. He also makes use of archival footage from the event as well as interviews which are intermixed with what was aired on television on the day of the hijacking.

The interviews with hostages are a specific reminder—given the character of the hijacking—of problematic witnessing and memory in the face of a trauma, issues which are raised by Vogler and Douglass in *Witness and Memory*. But instead of traumatized memory, Padilha explains that the greatest challenge was the fact that all of the hostages had been interviewed many times before and they had consequently developed automatic answers to questions about the incident. In order to get more raw accounts from them, Padilha showed the hostages images from the hijacking; the hostages would control the projector and stop it whenever they felt like it, and Padilha would then interview them right after. The result was that they remembered new aspects of the event with greater detail.

Other interviews among the myriad of testimonies elicited include that of a Swat instructor who paints a sympathetic portrait of Rio police—those officers who in fact would be responsible for suffocating Sandro to death on the way to the police station. He explains that

“today in Rio those who become police officers are those who could not get a regular job... Rio’s police force is poorly armed, poorly trained, and lacks self-esteem... The police officer thinks his duty is to arrest and kill criminals” (*Ônibus 174*). This notion of violent, and poorly trained police is indeed reflected in the interviews with street kids who attest to being regularly beaten up by both uniformed and plain clothes police.

Perhaps the most powerful—and most haunting—testimonio comes from the now-dead protagonist himself. Padilha uses much of the live television footage in which Sandro speaks to cops and to the public. At one point, Sandro takes off the towel from his face and holds a female hostage with a gun out of the window; he says:

Check this out everybody, the same way you are mean, I’m not fucking around either... Stare at my face! Take a good look! ...Fifteen years ago they tore my mother’s head off. I just got out of jail and have nothing to lose... Hear what I say? ...This ain’t no action movie. This is serious shit, bro! No use in terrorizing me. Didn’t you terrorize me when you could? Haven’t you slaughtered those people in Vigario? Didn’t you kill my friends at Candelaria? I was there. Weren’t you? Ask Aunt Yvonne. (*Ônibus 174*)

Yvonne Bezerra is a social worker who had known Sandro during his childhood and adolescence. In his speech to police, Sandro points to her as an authority who can back up his claims. In fact, she, along with Soares, is precisely the type of professional authoritative voice that, as Sandro himself recognizes, corroborates the words of marginal testimonialistas like himself; Sandro indeed recognizes that Yvonne’s words are more valuable than his own.

In her own interviews, Yvonne describes Sandro as an introvert with severe learning problems. She has tears in her eyes when talking about him, and their relationship over the years, and she portrays him in the tenderest of lights as a victim who did not get the educational and familial attention he so desperately needed. In broader terms, she talks about what became of the rest of Sandro’s gamin family that survived Candelaria. Seven of 62 street kids were killed at Candelaria. Yvonne recently concluded a study on their fates and found that 39 were murdered,

several disappeared, and some have managed to survive precariously. In her interview she additionally recalls that a radio station did a survey about the incident and most people said that the massacre was a good thing—that these youths should be killed and the city should be cleaned up. *Ônibus 174* is an attempt to humanize these street kids. While in the interview Padilha recognizes that violence has many causes such as, he says, foreign debts, education, police pay and training, he believes that films like his own can help bring awareness and put pressure on authorities to bring about change.

On the Colombian side of shantytown testimonial films, sociology and *crónica* are present to a much lesser extent, although the influence of journalism, written testimonio, and New Latin American Cinema do exist to a great degree. However, films such as *Diario en Medellín* and *La Sierra*, also raise critical issues regarding production methods and the presentation of violence. Since those topics are more heavily raised as compared to genre hybridity, they will be the center of Chapter Four's analysis, which centers around those former themes.

In the end, testimonies are often seen as commodities that must provide practical use, and non-hybrid testimonial works are often unable to provide a large supply of what society values as truthful, namely, accurate data. Through the fusing of journalistic, such as *crónica*, or sociological influences, shantytown testimonial narrative is able to put forth this esteemed data and professional insight along with, at times, stylistic elements to further engage the public. While witnesses' accounts and testimonies as evidence tend to be condemned in case they do not match evidence collected by other means, shantytown testimonial narrative solves this problem through its hybridity and authoritative perspectives. As such, shantytown testimonial works continue to be valuable means for working through traumatic memories and for social and

cultural resistance, and ultimately they can function not only as evidence of the past but also a different way to live now—a outline for the future which is aided by interlocutor recommendations and reader solidarity with a normally distant shantytown universe.

Chapter Four: Representing Social Problems in Shantytown Testimonial Narrative

New Latin American Cinema and testimonio initiated a period of Latin American cultural production in which the critical documentation of social problems took center stage. In this chapter, I examine the threads of both early representations of marginality within shantytown nonfiction with a specific focus on their marketing and reception. Since an intrinsic goal of testimonial production is the building of solidarity between testimonialistas and the public through *concientización*, it is important to understand the ways in which social problems are presented and how such empathy and understanding is, or is not, fostered. By comparing portrayals of marginality in shantytown nonfiction, my analysis in this chapter furthers the characterization and understanding of this new literary and filmic category while simultaneously showing how precepts about the presentation of social problems from testimonio and New Latin American Cinema have evolved.

Within the numerous manifestos written by filmmakers of New Latin American Cinema, Glauber Rocha's "Aesthetics of Hunger" ("A Estética da Fome", 1968) deals with the presentation of poverty, misery, and specifically violence in the most direct and prescriptive manner. In this essay, Rocha raises the ethical issue of how to show suffering without falling into folklore, paternalism, Hollywood aesthetics, or a conformist humanism—precepts against which New Latin American Cinema defined itself.¹ Rocha contends that the normal behavior of

¹ Paternalism here refers to the notion that a certain political or cultural system is wiser than, and acting in the best interest of, its protected figures. This system is often actually pursuing another agenda which results in oppression.

starving people is violence, and that the violence of starving people is not exotic or primitive since, for instance, it is tied to complex social problems; hence it is not in line with the European desire for primitivism which was rejected by New Latin American Cinema. Instead, for Rocha, an esthetic of violence, before being primitive, is revolutionary because it is the initial moment when the colonizer becomes aware of the colonized. Only when confronted with violence does the colonizer understand, through horror, the strength of the culture that he exploits.

At the same time, Rocha says that Latin Americans neither communicate their real misery to the civilized European, nor do Europeans truly comprehend the misery of Latin America. While Latin America's originality is their hunger, their greatest misery is that this hunger is felt but not intellectually understood. Such hunger, says Rocha, will not be cured by moderate governmental reforms and he asserts that the cloak of Technicolor cannot hide, but only aggravate, its tumors. Ultimately, the violence of social circumstance can only be reversed by intellectual understanding and a revolutionary sense of consciousness, and this will be achieved by an anti-Hollywood aesthetic that will "awaken" the spectator.

Rocha's prescriptions for an ethical presentation of violence—one that, for example, is intellectual and explanatory without employing either Hollywood aesthetic or primitivism—was mirrored in other manifestos written by New Latin American filmmakers. Cuban filmmaker Julio García Espinosa, for instance, wrote "For an Imperfect Cinema" ("Por un cine imperfecto", 1969), in which he advocated for filmmaking that would oppose perfect cinema (a reactionary cinema that is technically and artistically masterful). In this countering, like Rocha, he thus called for an anti-Hollywood aesthetic while simultaneously encouraging committed films that would show the cause of social problems.

According to Rocha, it was cinema novo, including Rocha's own films, that ultimately could make the public aware of their own misery.² In line with the shock that he promotes in "Aesthetics of Hunger", Rocha's *Deus e o diabo na terra de sol* (1964), for example, departs from critical realism and classical narration in order to present an aesthetic apocalypse that ideally stirs the spectator out of both immobility and ignorance. The film takes place in the 1940s during a drought in the sertão where Manoel (a ranch hand) is frustrated with the poverty and merciless condition of the hinterland. When Manoel's boss tries to cheat him, Manoel kills him and runs off with his wife Rosa. They soon join up with Sebastião—an Afro-Brazilian self-proclaimed saint who has a disturbing hold over his followers. Within *Deus e o diabo na terra de sol*, Rocha blends mysticism, religion, and popular culture and insists that rather than follow the external and obscure dogmas of culture and religion, man must determine his path by his own voice. This insistence is suggested through the strong relation that is presented between hunger, violence, and religion which legitimizes the response of the oppressed.

Despite—or because of—the innovative social message of this film, *Deus e o diabo na terra de sol* had a poor reception in Brazil; in general, it was thought to be too intellectually difficult for the popular, mainstream Brazilian audience. It was, however, more successful at the international film festivals where it was shown in venues such as Cannes. It is likely that the then-unique anti-Hollywood aesthetic of Rocha's film, and the intellectual, rather than purely visual, presentation of violence and poverty contributed to its poor reception. Historically in Latin America, the filmgoing public has been conditioned by the standards of European and American cinema, and audiences have thus been reluctant to accept alternative forms, even if

² Cinema novo was the Brazilian strand of New Latin American Cinema; its films dealt with themes related to acute national problems, from conflicts in rural areas to human problems in the large cities.

produced locally. Hence, we here see an early example of audience reception and success being contingent upon easily digestible films, preferably with a Hollywood-infused aesthetic.

Commercial success for Latin American films at this time was also associated with a strand of films that were in complete opposition to New Latin American Cinema. Parallel to the ethical, explanatory, anti-Hollywood depictions of violence by filmmakers like Rocha and García Espinosa, so-called pornomiseria films surged during the 1970s. Films within this category were known for incorporating a high content of exhibitionist poverty and human misery. Instead of awakening the audience to social injustices, filmmakers took pleasure—at least monetarily—in others' misery or poverty as they sought to make money, often abroad, and gain international recognition. Compounding the ethical problems at the core of pornomiseria films, filmmakers often had a poor understanding of the marginal protagonists and their social situation; they did not treat their subject with profoundness and instead took a facile approach to the issues. Pornomiseria cinema was especially popular in Colombia and Brazil, although in Colombia it was heavily criticized by the Group of Cali, represented by Carlos Mayolo and Luis Ospina, which produced the mockumentary *Agarrando pueblo* (1977) with an air of satire for pornomiseria as well with a direct and acute criticism of the type of films that European audiences wanted about Latin America. In contrast to the precepts put forth by Rocha, pornomiseria films often used the very Technicolor that he denounced—in order to superficially, cosmetically present—and, by neither explaining nor contextualizing the violence and poverty shown, in terms of causes and effects, the possibility for intellectual understanding and revolutionary consciousness, at least according to Rocha, was thus diminished.

Ciro Durán's *Gamín* (Colombia, 1978) is for me a prime example of pornomiseria, although Durán has never responded to his film being labeled as such. The documentary centers

on several unrelated groups of street kids, and it offers scarce background information in order to give reasons for their situation—poverty, hunger, drug use and social exclusion—as well as for the larger, collective social problems at hand. The focus of the film is the survival strategies of these street children: some steal food and jewelry, others become prostitutes, and still others sniff gasoline and glue in order to alleviate their hunger and misery. All are ill-nourished, surviving off of the change, garbage, and stolen goods of others.

In opposition to New Latin American Cinema, and very much in line with pornomiseria, *Gamín* is full of exhibitionism. The documentary, for example, contains lengthy, in-your-face scenes of street children sniffing glue; with the abundance of these close-ups of misery, it feels as if these youths are being told to look into the camera and look sad. The eerie circus music and extreme low and wide angle (or fish eye lens) shots additionally contribute to the otherness of the subjects filmed, since we feel like we are watching the marginal protagonists through the warped perspective of a fun house. Coupled with that exhibitionism, the shots of busy highways are accelerated in order to accentuate the denseness and constant motion of Bogotá, and Durán overlaps urban sounds and songs to accentuate the isolation of the city night. These techniques ultimately present the gamins as members of an alternate reality, one that is foreign to the middle and upper classes. Along with the underscoring of otherness, *Gamín* is further situated in opposition to New Latin American Cinema due to both its lack of an explicit political agenda as well as to the filmmaker's apparent monetary objective. Durán based his feature length documentary off of a much shorter one with the same subject matter which had major success abroad; as a result, he extended his twenty minute short into a two hour film designed for financial success in Germany. Hence, its exhibitionism, absence of contextualization and politics, coupled with its fiscal objective, ultimately situate *Gamín* within pornomiseria.

Despite this categorization, Durán's film deserves credit as a testament to how people treat street children in Bogotá. In one scene in which a terrified Pinocho, one of the gamin protagonists, is on a roller coaster, he reaches out to hug the arm of the man sitting next to him and is harshly pushed away.³ Society's refusal to acknowledge these disadvantaged children is further highlighted by one of the film's opening scenes—a juxtaposition of images of a man hugging a baby, with those of a barely visible Pinocho sleeping under newspapers on the sidewalk. An officer—like the man on the roller coaster—tries to physically push Pinocho out of his sight and consciousness. The outsider status—outside of nationalism, citizenship, and society—of Pinocho and his street friends is thus constantly reinforced; these juveniles are continually denied a meaningful social identity (as beloved family members, students, formal workers, etc.). While they persistently sneak into venues (i.e. a wrestling match and an amusement park), the *gallada* [gang] is constantly either kicked out or ignored when in these mainstream spaces. *Gamín* thus confronts the audience with a marginal collective that many are unwilling to recognize. It must be noted, however, that Durán does this in a way that accentuates otherness while resulting in European box office success.

The tension between ethically presenting social problems and simultaneously having commercial success is also illustrated in one of the first testimonios about shantytowns: Carolina

³ Many neighborhoods of Bogotá, in the 1980s and 1990s, were known for their gamin populations and dangerous reputation. La Candelaria, for instance, even during the day was filled with gamins—orphans without anywhere to go who were often using drugs. The gamins were very visible, and known for stealing and begging. Considered a menace to society, downtown merchants grew fed up with them and one would hear stories about so-called “social cleansing,” a euphemism for physical extermination. Hired guns would round the orphans up, who would never be heard of again. If the merchants thought their problems would be put to rest with social cleansing, however, they were mistaken. Indeed, average street crime was a constant fact of life in downtown. But after the administrations of city mayors Mokus and Peñalosa, these groups were “relocated” to areas of the city off of downtown. Entire neighborhoods that served as a residence to street people were demolished as part of a project of urban reorganization. This sort of urban displacement has favored the raise of new settlements on the urban periphery that are similar to those in Medellín, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo.

Maria de Jesus' *Quarto de despejo: diário de uma favelada* (1960). De Jesus was born in a rural Brazilian community and, upon the death of her mother, was forced to migrate to a São Paulo favela. There, she made her own house out of used plywood, cans, and cardboard. While searching for such materials, she often found journals and old notebooks which she kept and used to write in. In particular, De Jesus wrote about the day-to-day activities of herself and other favelados as well as the political and social factors that ordered their lives. She explains how poverty and desperation could cause people of high moral character to compromise their principles and dishonor themselves simply to get food for themselves and their families. Also, she describes how there is often no chance to save money, because any extra earnings has to immediately go to pay off outstanding debts. De Jesus' diary ultimately increased the knowledge of favelas around the world to the point that local politicians wanted to meet with her and discuss some of her points. At the time of its production, this text was the most successful book in Brazilian publishing history and although written in the simple, "crude" language of a favelada, it was translated into thirteen languages and became a bestseller in North America and Europe.

De Jesus wrote four additional books which, however, were published without success. Unprepared to have a "normal" middle-class life, her second testimonio shows how she desperately tries to escape the label favelada, and tragically fails. The book depicts her new routine in her middle-class neighborhood in a house bought from the royalties of her first testimonio: autographing copies of her diary at book signings around Brazil, meeting politicians and wealthy people, and giving interviews to local and foreign journalists. But the testimonio also shows De Jesus trying to educate her children in their new environment and trying to learn how to deal with simple things she never experienced before, such as opening a bank account or making an airline reservation. When the initial rush of book signings and traveling started to fade

away, De Jesus struggles to integrate herself and her family into a middle class that refuses to accept her.

The difference between De Jesus' latter four books and her first testimonio, and a reason why those latter publications were unsuccessful, is because they lacked the pornomiseria in *Quarto de despejo: diário de uma favelada*. This pornomiseria was likely unintentional, though; De Jesus indeed put forth a bluntly graphic, albeit explanatory, description of the poverty and misery of favela life, but the objective in that first testimonio was not to make money through exhibitionism, but rather to raise awareness about favela conditions and perhaps, along the way, improve the life of De Jesus. In comparison with *Quarto de despejo: diário de uma favelada*, De Jesus' latter testimonios lack the detailed tragic account of hunger and state neglect, and instead touch on other problems that are no less serious, but less graphic and compelling. For example, in the second testimonio De Jesus neither collects garbage nor struggles for food anymore, but she still writes about exclusion, although it is now in a middle-class context. This contrast between the first and latter testimonios shows that a presentation of marginality and social problems relies on the descriptive extremeness of misery in order to make it intriguing; without that, the public loses interest and the audience size shrinks sharply. Ironically, because her latter books were so unsuccessful, De Jesus was pushed further away—out of the public eye and back into the poverty she so vividly detailed in her first testimonio. She spent her last years in another shack in one of the poorest peripheral areas of São Paulo, and she eventually died in poverty.

With *Quarto de despejo: diário de uma favelada*, *Gamín*, and *Deus e o diabo na terra de sol*, we thus see a direct correlation between graphic, extreme presentations of social problems and positive, mainstream reception. Whether intended or not, exceedingly vivid presentations of marginality signal commercial success and an increased audience. Within shantytown

testimonial narrative, this co-dependence continues for some—but not all—literary and cinematic works. Like its parent genres, though, shantytown testimonial narrative struggles to ethically counter the stereotypes, misrepresentations and ignorance regarding the social problems it presents. In particular, shantytown testimonial narrative simultaneously pits itself against a lack of statistics and chronological markers with regards to the phenomenon of comunas and favelas. At the same time, in the face of continued government neglect and public ignorance, there is again, as with Rocha, a hunger and violence that is felt and seen from afar but seldom understood intellectually. Nonetheless, several shantytown testimonial works are using innovative techniques to evolve Rocha's recommendations for ethical representations of violence and misery; such techniques include overtly deconstructing stereotypes and showing inspirational—instead of deconstructive, depressing, or glamorized—depictions of (overcoming) violence and social problems.

Two thematically congruent—but stylistically and methodologically divergent—documentaries about adolescents in Medellín comunas highlight the different directions that presentations of social problems—in particular violence—have taken within shantytown nonfiction. Both *Diario en Medellín* (dir. Catalina Villar, 1998) and *La Sierra* (dir. Scott Dalton and Margarita Martínez, 2004) illustrate how violence and the daily struggles of comuna life disparately affect the heterogeneous population of Medellín shantytowns. But despite treating the same marginalized urban periphery, the tone, presentation of violence, and reception of these documentaries contrast sharply.

Villar's *Diario de Medellín* focuses on adolescent students in Santo Domingo, a Medellín comuna, who are victims of displacement and the related violence. Their school, although lacking in resources, is run by a teacher, Rubén Darío, who assigns them the task of writing in

their notebooks the stories of their lives. Villar sheds light on the value of Darío's assignment as she comments:

Contar las vidas es darles valor... la palabra es lo contrario de la violencia... [y] el diario íntimo era un excelente hilo conductor y un objeto emblemático de lucha contra la violencia... estas historias familiares sirven a la realizadora colombiana para pintar, sin sensacionalismo, una ciudad cargada de violencia.

By telling their lives, they are giving them value... words are the opposite of violence... [and] the intimate diary was an excellent common thread and an emblematic object of the struggle against violence... these family stories help the Colombian director to paint, without sensationalism, a city filled with violence. (Villar)

As they read their diarios aloud in class, the common themes that arise are: absent and/or alcoholic parents, murdered relatives, displacement, the difficulty of adjusting to the city, and the hope for a better life in Medellín. These diarios ultimately weave together the story of several generations in Santo Domingo, as well as the violence and social problems that have marked their lives. Villar's approach to presenting these hardships is based on her aforementioned notion that writing is the opposite of violence and that the students' diarios are an ethical vehicle—without sensationalism, graphic extremeness or pornomiseria—to present shantytown violence and social problems.

While we hear about comuna violence often in the film, through the diarios and in interviews, the only violence that we actually see in the film is tied to displacement. This violence is very minimal, and it is morally purposeful in the sense of explaining the creation and expansion of the comunas, and also because it is reflective of the larger conflict between the state and shantytown dwellers. Specifically, throughout Villar's film, we see newly displaced people constructing shacks on the unoccupied periphery of Santo Domingo. Towards the denouement, police with guns and shields forcefully evacuate them and tear down their homes. One man, who is being kicked out and who is crying, says: "The government treats us like dogs, that's what's so

painful” (*Diario en Medellín*). Contractors scope the hillside along with people who claim the land, and the shacks are destroyed and burned down. These squatters have fled from the countryside violence and have no place else to go. They protest and put up a fight with police, and at least one man is badly beaten by the authorities. Through this minimal violence shown, *Diario en Medellín* ultimately signals how the displaced often face conditions of extreme violence, poverty, and continued threats, and continued displacement, that often prove to be just as traumatic as the massacres and death threats from which they have fled.

The difficulties of life in a Medellín comuna are also the focus of *La Sierra*. Filmed in 2003 in a Colombian hillside shantytown, *La Sierra* is a personal examination of three individuals who are intimately connected to their community’s brutal turf war. The documentary contains abundant scenes of crossfire and bloodshed while also showing the everyday life that exists alongside persistent conflict. Ultimately, violent young paramilitaries are at once *La Sierra*’s compelling focal point and—as described by an elderly man in the beginning of the film—the community’s central crisis; he attests: “Son muchachos. Es que estamos en manos de muchachos armados. Eso es todo el problema” ‘They’re kids. It’s that we’re in the hands of armed kids. That’s the whole problem’ (*La Sierra*).

Unlike *Diario en Medellín*, there is little mention in *La Sierra* of the displacement that is intrinsically connected to the growth of comunas as well as to the shantytown turf war. The short text at the beginning of the film, however, does tell us that the decades-long bloody civil conflict in Colombia “has slowly moved from the jungles to cities such as Medellín, where urban gangs aligned themselves with leftist guerillas or right-wing paramilitary groups” (*La Sierra*). *La Sierra* ultimately centers on this urban warfare, and it illustrates how a life of violence in the comunas is often the most accessible way for a comuna youth to attain a meaningful social

identity in terms of a decent salary, respect and power. Ultimately, due to a lack of economic security and educational opportunities for an improved life, youths like those depicted in *La Sierra* are disproportionately at risk for recruitment by guerillas, paramilitaries, and local gangs. This situation, and the violence tied to it, however, are manifestations of rural Colombian problems taking a new form in the comunas as a result of the displacement touched upon in *Diario en Medellín*.

When these two documentaries are viewed together, the nurturing and empowering space of Darío's classroom—the focal point of *Diario en Medellín*—is in direct opposition to the central space of *La Sierra*—the streets of the comuna which are marked by killing and drugs. While violence, gangs, and death are themes in both films, we only *hear* about them in *Diario en Medellín* as compared to graphically *seeing* them in *La Sierra*. In Villar's documentary, we persistently learn about the community's violence through stories told by the protagonists either in school or in their homes; for instance, one adolescent explains how and why she joined a gang—a situation which also elucidates other leitmotifs in *Diario en Medellín* such as domestic abuse, absent parents and even threats by local militiamen. Additionally, in the documentary's final scene, we hear about more comuna violence as a central character explains that thirty people in Santo Domingo have been killed in the past two weeks. The result is that there is a phantasmal, hovering presence of violence that becomes even more pervasive because it is not overtly shown. In contrast, in *La Sierra* we graphically *see* the violence and drugs through numerous scenes of crossfire, shootings, and cocaine use by a few of the central characters. Other comuna social problems, however, are never expounded upon to the extent that they are in *Diario en Medellín*. The streets of La Sierra—although at times filled with dancing and music—

are more commonly presented as dog-eat-dog, and they thus stand out against the sense of solidarity fostered among students in Santo Domingo.

Due to the contrasting focal points of these thematically similar films, the protagonists of Villar's documentary seem more innocent, diligent, and determined to rise above their social situation, while in *La Sierra* youths who are roughly the same age come across as killers—they are actually shown shooting at people—and drug addicts with no hope and no way out. Still, Villar's documentary is not necessarily a warm, sentimental film; the void of commonality, such as Darío's guidance, is apparent in that the only space in which these youth can find it is in the school, not at home, church or in their neighborhood, as we are used to infer. When these two documentaries are viewed together, the classroom in *Diario en Medellín* illustrates an example of the encouragement and support that the protagonists in *La Sierra* desperately need. Dalton accordingly explains that observing the situation of *La Sierra*'s central characters and their lack of opportunities was one of his greatest challenges in making the film:

It was hard just seeing people making really bad decisions. I'm not a father but you can really kind of appreciate that position of seeing someone you really care about getting a really bad idea... But if these people had more opportunities and an education then they could actually do things with their lives... But as long as you have huge parts of the country that the government can't control, there's going to be a wall on the amount of progress made. (Dalton)

The educational resources shown to be lacking in *La Sierra*, coupled with the chosen focus of Dalton and Martínez, result in a documentary in which everything is grittier, starting with the very first scene, even before the title is shown, of an adolescent girl weeping over the fly and bullet ridden corpse of her baby's young father. With regards to these selected subjects, and specifically the chosen protagonists—students in Santo Domingo versus individuals intimately connected to the shantytown turf war—, the value of these particular comuna residents lies in what their own lives represent and how this serves the filmmakers' project. Dalton and Martínez,

for instance, wanted to focus their documentary on the varying effects of violence on the residents of La Sierra. Their selected protagonists reflect that central theme: Edison, a powerful, charismatic and adored paramilitary leader; Jesús, a drug-addicted paramilitary member who recently lost his left hand when a grenade that he was building exploded; and Cielo, a teenage mother whose boyfriend was killed in the shantytown turf war. Even the extremely religious father of Edison describes how he was in a gang when he was younger.

Although Dalton does not deny the film's intended focus on violence, he is nonetheless surprised by the reactions of community members as well as foreign audiences to this central theme. Residents of La Sierra, for instance, complained that he and Martínez did not "show the good parts of the community" and that they made "it seem like everyone's involved in the fighting" (Dalton). Dalton continues:

They said we don't show the religious side, and you know, not everyone's a paramilitary, there's more hard-working people trying to make a living, and that's something we thought about while we were filming but, you know, it's not *their* story. Hopefully people can assume that just because we're focusing on kids involved in gangs doesn't mean that everybody's involved in gangs. You think it would be a logical deduction... [But] in every film screening that we did, it could be in Miami or New York, we'd always get one person like: "Why you always got to show all the violence?" (Dalton).

For every comment like this one, Dalton says, there were contrasting reactions, specifically from paramilitaries: "In La Sierra we had a big screening in a church and everyone came and one of the paramilitaries came up to me afterwards and said 'it's really good but I thought you were gonna have more action in it.' And I'm just like 'it's not just about shooting people, there's more to it'" (Dalton). The conflicting criticisms of too much versus too little violence, however, reflect how Dalton and Martínez worked to show the humanity and personal life of those connected to La Sierra's turf war. As Edison says: "Nosotros somos gente también, no sólo máquinas de guerra" 'We're people, too, not just fighting machines' (*La Sierra*).

While *La Sierra* was shown in the comuna in which it was filmed, the other screenings were almost exclusively at international film festivals. In addition, Dalton and Martínez teamed up with Films Transit International for worldwide sales. This marketing technique, coupled with the memorable presentation of violence in the film, has resulted in extensive commercial success as well as widespread recognition for *La Sierra*. *The New York Times* has hailed the film as “a courageous documentary” while the *Village Voice* proclaims: “Devastating... *La Sierra* is essential viewing.”⁴ This latter comment by the *Village Voice* raises the question as to whether or not *La Sierra* is essential viewing precisely because it is devastating, and because it so graphically shows the violence of the community in its various scenes of crossfire and slain comuna residents.

With its graphic violence and scenes of drug use, *La Sierra* is indeed hard to forget. While it is very well known internationally, very few people in Colombia have even heard of Villar’s film. When I asked Villar about the marketing and screenings of her film, she responded:

La he ido mostrando en sitios muy variados con gente muy distinta y las reacciones son muy distintas... desde la casi rabia por el hecho de que sea eso lo que yo quiera mostrar “de mi país” en el exterior, es decir una preocupación por la “imagen del país” que pesa más que el fondo... pero también gente muy conmovida, que descubre lo que pasa cerca de sus casas, o gente más militante que se siente mal de que eso siga pasando.

I’ve shown it in various places with very different people and the reactions are very different... from almost rage for the fact that this is what I want to show “of my country” to outsiders, or rather a preoccupation with the “image of the country” that is more important than the content... but also people that were very moved, that discover what is happening around their houses, or more militant people that feel bad that this continues to happen. (Villar)

Villar says that during the production and screening of the film, she made a conscious decision not to worry about the nationality of the audience and their varied reactions. This was in

⁴ *La Sierra Film*. Home page. lasierrafilm.com. Web. 15 Sept. 2010. <<http://lasierrafilm.com/English.htm>>

part due to her feeling that there was already a universal element in the film that most audiences could relate to: “el puente que tenemos en común muchos de los posibles espectadores es el de ir o haber ido al colegio” ‘the bridge that many of the possible spectators have in common is going or having gone to high school’ (Villar). Indeed, the setting of the classroom functions not only as a nurturing place for Darío’s students but also as a universal space that most spectators can relate to despite the harsh and likely unfamiliar context in which it is situated. It is in fact the absence of such direct universality, coupled with the graphic violence that—although humanized and personalized—is the focal point of *La Sierra*, which contributes to a tone of otherness rather than solidarity between the central characters and the audience in Dalton and Martínez’s film.

The vastly different tones of *La Sierra* and *Diario en Medellín*—films that treat the same Medellín comuna space—are reflective of not only varying focal points, but of the fine line that exists in creating empathy and understanding versus exhibitionism and otherness. Laura Mulvey has written about such friction in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” She says that film satisfies a primal pleasure that we all get from looking at other people (scopophilia), and we get a sense of power from being able to do this. At the same time, we also identify with people in movies. There thus exists a tension between the sense of power we get from observing others as separate from ourselves and the pleasure we get in imagining that we are the people we are looking at (or, in the case of pornomiseria, perhaps feeling thankful that we are not the people we are looking at and that we are, in fact, far removed from them). Within New Latin American Cinema, this friction was taken up by filmmaker Jorge Sanjinés who suggested that empathy and a confrontation of social issues was only possible if the audience was lured in through aesthetics; a film, he said, must be beautiful rather than presenting social issues as a mere pamphlet.

In determining how to present the social problems of La Sierra, Dalton and Martínez—journalists who both had several years experience working for the Associated Press—were foremost concerned with putting forward a well-rounded piece in which the marginal protagonists of comuna violence could testify for themselves. The contrasting audience criticisms of *La Sierra* that I have indicated illustrate the fine line that Dalton and Martínez had to walk between showing the faces of the shantytown turf war without seeming like all they were presenting was gratuitous violence. Dalton explains, for example, that he and Martínez tried to let the protagonists speak for themselves: “the idea of the film was that it was going to be, ya know, their own words... just the lives that they wanted to portray and we just try to respect that” (Dalton). At the same time, he says, they tried to avoid exhibitionism in the sense of “[National] Geographic, Discovery Channel, or Animal Planet” as in “look at the young paramilitary guy walking in the street” (Dalton). Such exhibitionism is actually a feature that New Latin American Cinema worked against, along with misunderstood suffering, and Hollywood commercialism and aesthetic.

La Sierra thus maintains a New Latin American Cinema connection, and the presented violence is often justified by Edison and Jesús’ repeated arguments that they are fighting for a cause, saying, for instance, that if the ELN invaded, then a lot of people would be killed and forced to leave the comuna. Nonetheless, the graphic presentation of this violence, coupled with the production methods and authorship of *La Sierra*, contribute to a documentary that at times resembles the aesthetic of a Hollywood action film. Specifically, the fast-paced rhythm and editing and the adrenaline-based aesthetic, in which the scenes of crossfire resemble the per seconds reactions of Hollywood films, are in direct contrast to the precepts of New Latin American Cinema which called for an anti-Hollywood aesthetic that would awaken the spectator.

La Sierra even maintains its footing in a similar effectiveness as that of North American action movies due to its romantic subplots and tidy ending (Bentes 48). At the film's denouement, for instance, we see a voluntary disarmament of all the paramilitaries, insinuating that the comuna violence will somehow lessen. But Dalton says that the violence is worse now: "The paramilitaries control every aspect of the barrios in Medellín today. And they're in Cartagena and Bogotá, too. They're everywhere. There are more paramilitaries now than there were before the disarmament" (Dalton).

In contrast, *Diario en Medellín* ends in just the opposite way with news that a wave of people have died and with a group of friends singing a song for one of the deceased. While the audience has ideally connected with the central characters through the solidarity in—and space of—Darío's classroom, we see that the violence and rippling effects of displacement still continue. Hence, whereas *La Sierra* has a violent tone and focus with a resolved ending, *Diario en Medellín* presents a more multifaceted depiction of comuna social problems with a universal element and a disturbing final scene. The solidarity fostered during Villar's film, between the audience and subjects through the universal bridge of high school, ideally makes this denouement all the more upsetting. But like the endings common to New Latin American Cinema films, in which a call to action was very common, this shock after solidarity is another call to action, another testimonial tie.

Like *Diario en Medellín*, Jeff Zimbalist and Matt Mochary's *Favela Rising* (2005) is a presentation of a troubled shantytown that avoids graphic depictions of violence and social problems and instead focuses on an inspirational community that is succeeding despite all odds being stacked against it. The film is the testimony of Anderson Sa, a former drug-trafficker who becomes a social revolutionary within his Rio de Janeiro favela and later within other such

communities. *Favela Rising* ultimately testifies to a man and to a movement; through hip-hop music and Afro-Brazilian dance, Sa is able to overcome his personal demons while also rallying his community to counteract the violence of both local gangs and corrupt police.

Although violence is a central theme within this film, it is presented chiefly through stories told by Sa of violence and killing that he witnessed during his childhood and adolescence. Like the diarios in Villar's film, these personal stories serve as a means of offering background into the community's social problems in the very words of those who experience it without graphically showing violence, poverty or misery in the way that *Gamín*—and to a lesser extent *La Sierra*—does. This focus on Sa's stories reveal how he, in contrast with many around him who chose to enter a gang, began to seek alternatives for both himself and the youths in his community. Sa's resistance to participating in the omnipresent community violence is evocative of New Latin American Cinema's emphasis on personal choice. The significance of his difficult decision is elucidated through the statistic in the beginning of the documentary which highlights the extent of the ongoing, oft-ignored and/or misunderstood violence: "Between the years 1987 and 2000, 467 minors were murdered in Israel and Palestine combined. During that same time, 3937 were murdered in 1 city in Brazil" (*Favela Rising*). This statistic—indeed a shocking number when compared with a veritable war zone—is further explained by Sa, who tells how for many decades the government has ignored the shantytowns and has not thought about improving the lives of the people there. The favelas have forever been forgotten, paralyzed; it is as if, he says, the spinal cord of the favela has always been broken. Sa's comment early on in the film foreshadows the pivotal moment in *Favela Rising* when he later has a surfing accident, and the doctors tell him that he will likely never walk again. Nonetheless, he rises up, literally and figuratively, and this miraculous recovery becomes a metaphor for the whole community, as the

title suggests. This central, inspirational theme of the documentary is further explained by

Zimbalist:

So often in the first world we see images and films of the third world depicted as a place of crisis and conflict, nothing working... When Matt and I travelled we had the opposite experience. We came across leaders and heroes, and inspirations, and communities that were really coming together, building solidarity, taking charge of their own situation... When people are only given access to stories of things falling apart, then naturally they see the world as a place falling apart, and the more we tell stories of communities that are working, then the more I think people's worldview will change and start to encompass also an understanding of the globe as a place coming together and effectively transforming. (*Favela Rising*, "Behind the Documentary")

In viewing their film, ideally the audience is shocked, like Rocha advocated, but this effect is not the result of graphic, depressing, or abstract imagery, but instead because of the stirring positivity of Sa and the Afroreggae movement. In line with the inspirational tone of this film, Zimbalist goes on to express a firm belief in using media as a tool for change, not only as entertainment—the way it is usually used. This notion is very much in line with the use of film as outlined in New Latin American Cinema; for example, film should move people to social action instead of merely entertaining. Jane Gaines, in her essay "Political Mimesis", points out however, that films in the documentary canon have not often been box-office blockbusters. Given this knowledge, she asks why the myth of sweeping social change has remained attached to the documentary film. Furthermore, she says, when connecting social change to cinema, we are always hampered by empirical questions such as: What do we count as change? How do we know what effects the film has produced? How do we determine where consciousness leaves off and where action begins? Gaines' colleagues argue that it was only in connection with moments or movements that films could be expected to make a contribution to social change, and that in and of themselves, they had no power to affect political situations. Perhaps, though, *Favela Rising*, in conjunction with the Afroreggae movement, is doing just this.

Mochary and Zimbalist's commitment to using media as a tool for social change is seen, for instance, in their prioritization of showing their documentary to at-risk marginal communities where the social message, and not a graphic presentation of violence and poverty, would ideally be embraced. They focused their marketing and screening of *Favela Rising* in a wide array of venues both in and outside of Brazil, but also had an educational tour that was aimed at at-risk communities like the favela depicted in the film; this tour included screenings at locations such as Rikers Island (a screening for 200 teenage inmates currently awaiting trial); Harlem Children's Zone; Milwaukee Public Schools; Latino Youth, Inc.—an alternative high school for teenage youth of the Little Village Community in Chicago who are facing challenges in school as a result of outside factors; and Chicago's Cook County Detention Facility. *Favela Rising* was additionally screened within several Brazilian favelas, and it also had a screening in Jacmel, Haiti—a poverty-stricken community which does not have a single theatre. Although many Jacmel residents are illiterate, Zimbalist and Mochary had the film dubbed in Creole for the over 8,000 people who attended the screening there.

Among such at-risk communities, Zimbalist describes their reaction as an understanding that adversity is shared; the force of the film, however, lies in the model that it puts forward of overcoming such universal hardship. It shows empowerment through the use of culture and dance to create an educated, ultimately self-sufficient community. Zimbalist explains that the model of development that Afroreggae preaches—that of inside out growth, working with assets that are already in a community, bringing people together and teaching leadership skills—is applicable in similar communities around the world; that is why they decided to bring free screenings for underserved neighborhoods for whom the message of the film would serve best.

Favela Rising was also screened at international film festivals such as the Czech Republic MOFFOM Film Festival and the Rio de Janeiro International Film Festival. After the screening at the Tribeca Film Festival, many members of the audience came up to Junior (an Afroreggae member featured in the film) wanting to donate money. Junior, as explained by Zimbalist, told them:

No, I won't accept your money because... this is not a Brazil problem, this is a world problem, and this problem exists in your backyard. So if you really want to help, you need to find the closest favela nearest to you and find the group that's working in that favela and go help that group. (*Favela Rising*, "Behind the Documentary")

The audience desire to help, coupled with the aforementioned audience reaction during the at-risk educational tour, shows how *Favela Rising* has succeeded in affecting audiences from very different backgrounds. This is relatively surprising given that, unlike *Diario en Medellín*, there is not a clear universal bridge in *Favela Rising*. While adversity in a sense functions as the "puente en común" within Zimbalist and Mochary's film, many pornomiseria films show hardship as well. *Favela Rising*'s key to fostering empathy within dissimilar audiences, then, is the way that this adversity is presented: it is contextualized, shown alongside social alternatives, and the cinematography of the film is professional, beautiful and engaging but without glamorization of the favela (with, for example, a Hollywood aesthetic).

In a starkly different representation of Rio favelas, MV Bill—co-author of *Cabeça de porco*—has produced a documentary and book, both titled *Falcão*, which present the lives and dangers of an invisible sector of gangsters. Falcões are adolescent gang members who work the night shift selling drugs and guarding the favela against invasion. Their testimonies, elicited by MV Bill, offer these youths a public voice and identity for the first time. Many of these testimonies focus on the severely limited social options which lead to gang initiation, but they also put on display the falcões' drug and arms expertise. In one exemplary interview, a falcão in

an alleyway shows off the cocaine and marijuana that he sells; he explains: “Isso é o que os ‘viciado’ cheira, né? Isso aqui estraga a vida do homem” ‘This is what the ‘addicts’ sniff, right? This is what spoils the life of man’ and another falcão chimes in that “o crack acaba com a pessoa totalmente, né?” ‘crack finishes off a person completely, no?’ (*Falcão*). The derogatory attitude that these falcões exhibit towards their customers is ironic: after all, being in a gang “acaba com a pessoa totalmente” just as easily as drug use does. Still, these falcões seem to place their drug-dealing on a higher ethical tier than the practices of their customers, and this moral hierarchy elucidates the falcões’ lack of education, family, and guidance.

In comparison to *Cabeça de porco*—MV Bill’s other favela-themed publication co-authored by Celso Athayde and sociologist Luiz Eduardo Soares which was studied in Chapter Three—, the two-part *Falcão* project is much less multifaceted, in-depth, and the presentation has a notably amateur feel to it as evidenced by the camerawork in the film that is at times out of focus. MV Bill, perhaps anticipating such criticism, is quick to point out the following: “*Falcão* no es, ni pretende ser, un estudio sociológico o antropológico de las condiciones de vida de los niños del narcotráfico... Ya ha habido demasiados académicos, antropólogos y sociólogos hablando de las favelas en televisión sin haber pisado jamás una de ellas” ‘*Falcão* is not, nor does it pretend to be, a sociological or anthropological study of the conditions of life of the youths involved in drug trafficking... There have already been too many academics, anthropologists and sociologists speaking about the favelas on television without having once stepped foot inside them.’⁵ In contrast to those academic studies, MV Bill claims that his insider

⁵ “Falcão: Meninos do tráfico.” *Educacion en valores*. Web. 15 Sept. 2010. <<http://www.educacionenvalores.org/Falcao-Meninos-do-Trafico.html>>

status, having been born and raised in a Rio favela, allows him a certain intimacy and openness with the subjects:

Al contrario de lo que ocurre cuando los que hablan sobre ello son políticos, artistas, académicos o supuestos expertos, la voz de los falcões no se va por las ramas... Llama a las cosas por su nombre y denuncia incansablemente que se les ha privado de la que es su única aspiración social: la igualdad en la capacidad de consumo con el resto del país. En resumidas cuentas: tener dinero. Y así, niños de 10 años sin padre ni escuela ni casa muchas veces proclaman a los cuatro vientos que si el país no es capaz de garantizarles un futuro están dispuestos a arriesgar su vida y la de quien haga falta por conseguirlo. Muchos de ellos recuerdan que, al fin y al cabo, en la favela, el jefe de los narcotraficantes es el tipo que ayuda a pagar las cuentas.

In contrast to what occurs when those who speak about them are politicians, artists, academics or supposed experts, the voice of the falcões does not beat around the bush... It calls things by their name and inexhaustibly denounces that which has deprived them of their only social aspiration: equality in the capacity with the rest of the country. In a nutshell: having money. And as such, kids who are ten years old without a father or schooling or a house in many cases proclaim their virtues to the world that if the country isn't capable of guaranteeing them a future, then they are willing to risk their life and that of anyone else in order to achieve one. Many of them remember that, in the end, in the favela, the head of the drug traffickers is the type of guy that helps to pay the bills.⁶

Although MV Bill does a commendable job of granting a collective voice to these invisible youths, *Falcão* ultimately comes across as the very image of the third world against which Zimbalist speaks. The film, in particular, is chiefly structured by the presentation of exceedingly dismal gang-related stories, one right after another. While *Diario en Medellín* and *Favela Rising* also present shantytown violence through storytelling, *Falcão* has a sharply dissimilar tone because it goes a step further towards pornomiseria by neither contextualizing the violence nor presenting any social alternatives, and by graphically showing drug use, machine guns, and misery. The dark, depressing tone of the film is amplified, in comparison to *La Sierra* for example, because the interviews with falcões were all filmed at night. Some examples of

⁶ "Falcão: Meninos do trafico." *Educacion en valores*. Web. 15 Sept. 2010. <<http://www.educacionenvalores.org/Falcao-Meninos-do-Trafico.html>>

such segments include an over-extended, sentimental scene in which a mother shows photos of her dead falcão son in her shanty shack; a section called “meu pai” ‘my father’ in which falcões are interviewed about their absent, abusive or dead fathers; an extensive interview with an ex-gangster in a wheelchair who was paralyzed during a turf war; and interviews with friends and girlfriends of killed falcões. Another of this series of interviews is with a street kid who steals and uses drugs and who comes across as a carbon copy of those in *Gamín*. He tells MV Bill that he never cries and is never sad because he is always high. If he dies, he says, at least he will get to rest, and then another street kid, better or worse than him, will be born.

On the one hand, these dark and disheartening segments are in line with pornomiseria because they do not elucidate the larger social problems responsible for the protagonists’ misery. At the same time, there is no universality to draw in the audience in order to foster empathy or solidarity. On the other hand, however, MV Bill insists that his project is a candid representation of a large sector of favela youths. He explains that while only one of the seventeen falcões interviewed is alive, and he is in jail, the falcões that were chosen for the project were not the most troubled youths, but they instead typify a fate that is commonplace in the favela.

In addressing the objective of the documentary, MV Bill says the aim was not to solve the problems presented, but to help the audience think about them with a certain humanity so that people can listen and make some sort of reflection. He further explains:

Não queremos... apresentar soluções para a criminalidade infantil, induzir opiniões ou fazer uma análise profunda baseada em teorias para explicar o motivo dessa tragédia... pretendemos simplesmente narrar as dificuldades... Como ativistas, movidos pela busca da igualdade de oportunidades, queremos ainda contribuir de alguma maneira para que este país, tão machucado socialmente, deixe pra trás a alienação induzida pelo poder hegemônico. Queremos contribuir para uma nova discussão sobre a segurança pública e o bem-estar.

We don’t want... to present solutions for juvenile crime, to induce opinions or make a profound analysis based on theories in order to explain the motive of this tragedy... we

aim to simply narrate the difficulties... As activists, motivated by the search for equal opportunities, we still want to contribute in some way to this country that is so socially bruised, and to leave behind the alienation induced by hegemonic power. We want to contribute to a new discussion about public security and well-being. (*Falcão*)

But while MV Bill says that “a unica coisa que nos importa é que a luta tem que continuar” ‘the only thing that matters to us is that the struggle must continue’, *Falcão* is so hopeless and depressing that it is hard to reflect on the social problems in the way he seems to want us to (MV Bill 5). By not presenting possible solutions, inducing opinions, or analyzing the social situation that he presents, MV Bill risks generating an entirely different reaction than the one desired such as confusion, hopelessness, or disinterest regarding how to ameliorate the *falcões*’ condition. Although the *Falcão* projects allows us to hear the voices of the oppressed and listen to their concerns, without any alternatives or hope shown, it is difficult to imagine what the “luta” that MV Bill beseeches would even look like.

In contrast, in thinking back to the shantytown testimonial narrative containing specific recommendations for social change, for example the hybrid testimonies examined in Chapter Three, we see that the fusion of *crónica* or sociology drastically affects the presentations of shantytown social problems as evidenced by *Falcão* versus *Cabeça de porco*. This hybrid nonfiction tends to be more multi-faceted in its presentations of marginality. Colombian *cronista* José Alejandro Castaño, for example, has praised this fusion while sharply criticizing mainstream journalists in Colombia for converting human drama into *pornomiseria*. Such journalists go into the *comunas* for a couple days, come out thinking that they know everything, and publish pieces in which they tend to extract the worse from each story. Referring to these journalists, foreign ones in particular, he says: “Conozco mucho... Son cazadores que, una vez capturada la presa, negociarán su valor por teléfono con un editor que confunde Colombia con Bolivia” (Castaño 55). Instead of presenting *pornomiseria* like these journalists, Castaño says

that we should do more than scratch the surface; we should find the real human stories behind the pain and suffering because each story has something to teach us, a key which will help us to become better citizens and a better society. (Escribano)

With the fusion of *crónica* and *testimonio*, Castaño has coupled his own narration with the personal stories of comuna residents in order to present the social problems of marginal communities like the one he grew up in; through this technique, he explicitly aims to counter stereotypes about these peripheral neighborhoods. In his introduction to *¿Cuánto cuesta matar a un hombre?* (2006), he goes a step further by offering extensive background into, and contextualization of, the Medellín comunas. Castaño details the history of these comunas, their violence and drugs, and the sicario schools there. He explains how with the absence of government assistance, within the comunas “las familias continuaron sintiéndose atacadas por el Gobierno y los hijos de esos hogares crecíamos, sin remedio, con un profundo resentimiento y un debilitado concepto de nación” “the families continued to feel attacked by the government and the children of those homes grew up, without a solution, with a profound resentment and a weak concept of nation” (Castaño 22). This explanatory introduction highlights a central difference between *¿Cuánto cuesta matar a un hombre?* and *Falcão*, both of which were produced by authors born and raised in shantytowns. While both Castaño and MV Bill explicitly lay claim to their insider status, they take very different approaches to portraying their native communities. Castaño, for example, sets out to thoroughly contextualize the social problems there while simultaneously shocking readers with comuna resident portraits that are completely out of sync with mainstream depictions. MV Bill, in contrast, lets his subjects speak for themselves, hoping the words and misery of falcões will be enough in itself to contribute to an ongoing—albeit frequently ineffective—public conversation about the favelas.

In order to create this shock for his readers, Castaño includes several *crónica*/testimonies in *¿Cuánto cuesta matar a un hombre?* which openly aim to deconstruct stereotypes about the comunas and those who live there. Each chapter is a mixture of Castaño's narrative and quotes by the comuna resident protagonists. These central characters, who are rendered in separate sections, include a born-again Christian hamburger vendor who used to be a professional killer nicknamed Rambo; a poet policemen who has not had a day off in ten years; a sixteen year-old female coroner; and a drug boss who listens to opera, does not have a bodyguard, and who enjoys reading international magazines. Castaño is firm in his declaration that there are no caricatures or exaggerations in this text. Instead he uses these protagonists as a means to rebuke the stereotypes that that many have of comuna residents. At the same time, Castaño employs an attention-grabbing title in order to play into readers' expectations about the violence of the comunas to only then surprise them with portraits of comuna residents that juxtapose these assumptions.

Such disparity is true for the majority of the *crónicas* in this book, the notable exception being the very one for which the book is named. In that *crónica*, the protagonist Narices discusses his experience as a sicario, noting that by age 19 he had asphyxiated a man, and by 20, he had stabbed two more. As the title suggests, Castaño asks Narices what he charges as a professional killer, and Narices very thoroughly details the different rates based on level of difficulty, messiness, and danger. Castaño also asks Narices if he has any remorse about the killings, and Narices responds that yes, he is regretful, but only, he smiles, because he has at times had to use more bullets than were necessary. The playful yet professional manner in which Narices describes his job nearly masks its innate brutality. Still, Narices' chapter also has an incontrovertibly serious tone to it, most notably when he remembers a gang-related turf war in

his comuna in which many people he knew were killed: “En esa Guerra murieron siete niños. Nadie se acuerda de ellos porque a su edad aún no tenían apodo” ‘In that war seven kids died. No one remembers them because due to their age they did not even have nicknames’ (Castaño 51). These moments of tragedy amid the often light-hearted and humorous *¿Cuánto cuesta matar a un hombre?* serve to underscore the horror of the comuna violence and social problems. As Héctor Abad Faciolince says in the prologue, “asco por la muerte: es lo único que puede salvarnos” ‘disgust for death: it’s the only thing that can save us’ (Castaño 5). This “asco”, however, is all the more powerful because it is embedded in a multi-faceted text with shades of humor, love, determination, and irony. In this way, Castaño’s multi-hued and counter-stereotypical text contrasts with *Falcão*, and underscores the importance of having more than just an unadorned—albeit self-represented—depiction of depressing social problems.

Castaño’s polyphonic, explanatory text is also an apt point of comparison with several fictional works that have solidified shantytown stereotypes by either glamorizing the favelas and comunas, through Hollywood aesthetics, or embracing pornoviolenca.⁷ These works, although not part of shantytown nonfiction, are noteworthy within this chapter because, as a result of their commercial success, they have come to typify public perception about Brazilian and Colombian shantytowns. In particular, within cinematic fictional shantytown representations there a continuance, if not strengthening, of the marriage between reception/success and graphic presentation of violence. This fortified correlation is at least in part tied to the chronic conditioning of audiences to a Hollywood aesthetic, complete with a marketable soundtrack, fast-paced editing, etc. The increase in such habituation was recently elucidated in an article in

⁷ The term pornoviolenca was first popularized in the 1976 essay “Pornoviolence” by Tom Wolfe. The essay spoke out against the media’s glorification of violence in order to gratify their audience in the same way a pornographic film does using sex.

the journal *Psychological Science* by James E. Cutting who described how Hollywood filmmakers have steadily perfected the shaping “of basic movie structure to match the pulsatile, half-smooth, half-ragged way we attend to the world around us” (Angier n. pag). Along these same lines, in recent filmic fictional representations of comunas and favelas, crimes are often sexed up and turned into effortlessly watchable spectacles that are made to go together with candy, popcorn and a soda.

In Colombia, such recent problematic representations of shantytowns include *La Virgen de los sicarios* (a 2000 film by French director Barbet Schroeder). Schroeder’s cinematic interpretation of Fernando Vallejo’s acclaimed novel includes cinematography that is incredibly crisp and polished (a very Hollywood aesthetic), and the scenes that supposedly take place in the comunas were shot outside of them in very clean and fake and studio-like settings. Within Brazil, the film *Como Nascem os Anjos* (dir. Murillo Salles, 1996) does not beautify or glamorize the shantytown, but is instead a modern-day example of pornomiseria. It uses raw, unrefined cinematography to show the lives of favelados as marked by violence that occurs without any logic or discourse to explain it.

In her essay “The Aesthetics of Violence in Brazilian Film,” Ivana Bentes notes that many such recent cinematic representations of Brazilian favelas—though this is true of representations of Colombian comunas, too—have employed such modern-day pornomiseria or contrastly glamorized urban violence through the aesthetic of Hollywood films. The result is films with a new realism based on adrenaline that have the same basis of pleasure as that of North American action movies. Hence, she says, since New Latin American Cinema there has been a shift in fictional films from an aesthetics of hunger and violence, which sought to shock and then activate, not simply to amuse, to a cosmetics of hunger and violence, such as a

superficial representation for entertainment and money-making purposes. Currently, we have a parody of the original. This shift creates a product that neutralizes any potential to disturb and there is thus only a sensorial impact, and not the intellectual one that Rocha advocated. As Bentes observes, this depiction parallels recent Brazilian tourism in which poverty and misery are a museum of the mankind with tours in the favelas using the same jeeps that are used to trek through the rainforests. We thus have a culture which is capable of relating to violence and poverty with pride, fascination and terror, and there is consequently a marketplace for these recent exhibitionist films.

In Brazil, perhaps the best-known representation of favelas is Fernando Meirelles' *Cidade de Deus* (2002). In the film, the audience is guided through a favela in 1970s Rio de Janeiro by a young Afro-Brazilian favelado named Buscapé ("Rocket"). The drug trade is beginning to boom and it is alongside this narcotics expansion that the formation of a local gang occurs in the favela *Cidade de Deus*. Within *Cidade de Deus*, the cinematography overtly glamorizes the favelas: dirty spaces which are poverty and disease-ridden are transformed into streets that are free of garbage and a community where no one is sick or hungry; the colors are vibrant, everyone's teeth are bleached white, and their bodies are glowing under the sun that always shines. Many favelados would likely jump at the chance to live in *Cidade de Deus* as it is depicted in Meirelles' film. The artificiality within *Cidade de Deus* is an example of what Rocha referred to as the "formal exoticism that vulgarizes social problems" (Rocha 59). While Rocha had said that the hunger and misery of the people will not be cured by moderate governmental reforms and the cloak of technicolor cannot hide, but only aggravate, its tumors, *Cidade de Deus* tries to do just this with cutting edge cinematography (complete with beauty shots of pooling blood), an entrancing soundtrack, as well as its fast, Hollywood action film pace; ultimately, the

film's aesthetics neutralize the shock. What we as spectators are left with is mere pornoviolenca, the spectacle of violence, and pornopobreza, the spectacle of the poor.

The film's glamorization of the shantytown is reflective of the media images of favela drug bosses. Due to the gang-mediated level of favela reporting, most newspaper stories that cover the shantytowns report on the leading traffickers as if they were part of a telenovela-like saga. The result is the popular attitude and image of the favela in mainstream culture that is an example of the cosmetics of poverty because it is unauthentic, glamorized, and stereotype-ridden. Just like cariocas get a superficial, glamorized view of the gangs from this coverage, so too does the Brazilian bourgeoisie get its dose of exoticism from films like *Cidade de Deus*.

A much more multi-faceted depiction of the favelas can be seen in "Cidade dos homens"—a television show that is a spin-off of *Cidade de Deus*. The adolescent protagonists of "Cidade dos homens" represent the majority of people living in the favelas who are uninvolved in drug-dealing but who are forced to learn to live with its omnipresence and influence. While *Cidade de Deus* is a drama, with touches of comedy, about drug dealers in Rio with the community as the backdrop, "Cidade dos homens" is a comedy, with touches of drama, about the community of Rio where drug dealers appear only as a backdrop. The actors are almost all from "Nós do Morro"—a non-profit group from the Rio favela Vidigal that trains favelados in acting and video production. In one exemplary episode, the Napoleonic Wars learned about in school are paralleled with the drug and turf wars, and the narrative breaks to allow for real testimonies from the natural actors. For decades, telenovelas have included a studio poor—actors who are from a more privileged socioeconomic background—who are presented with stereotypes that sanitize social difference and conflicts. The main actors of "Cidade dos homens" break the monopoly of white rich actors on Brazilian Television. Furthermore, "City of Men" is shown on

the largest network in the country (TV Globo) with spectacular audience ratings. There is an avoidance of clichés that associate favelas with crime and violence, and the favela, in contrast to *Cidade de Deus*, is self-represented and gritty without any glamorization.

The fictional shantytown representations like *Cidade de Deus*, that contain glamorization, pornoviencia or pornomiseria, also often include stereotypes of shantytowns which are reflective of those that I encountered among middle and upper-class Brazilians while living in Rio. These stereotypes were completely contrary to my own experiences living and volunteering in Rio's largest favela, and this chasm was the main reason that I chose this dissertation topic in an effort to seek out more self-represented and ethical shantytown depictions that were more in line with the favela as I experienced it. Although the shantytown nonfictions in this chapter (specifically *Diario en Medellín*, *Favela Rising*, and *¿Cuánto cuesta matar a un hombre?*) contributes to a deeper understanding of shantytown conditions and the sociopolitical factors that play a role in the social problems in these marginal communities, fictional, stereotype-ridden depictions still prevail at the box office and continue to shape public opinion.

Hence, as a result of the continued—if not significantly stronger—marriage between superficial, unexplained social problems and reception, Rocha's observation—that Latin America's originality is their hunger, and their greatest misery that this hunger is felt but not intellectually understood—is perhaps more true today than ever. Of course, in linking these current works back to the precepts of New Latin American Cinema, we must remember that different tools and different aesthetics are required in order to portray a new set of social problems. At the same time, there has been a disenchantment with the revolutionary politics of the 1960s. Keeping this in mind then, an apt evolution of Rocha's manifesto today would likely include a multi-faceted presentation of social problems, explanatory discourse, social

alternatives, and an engaging aesthetic as well as realism; it would likely also contain a call to action or inspiration, instead of mere entertainment with a tidy ending that closes the narrative and thus minimizes space for contemplation.

We see such evolved techniques within several of the shantytown nonfictional works of this chapter. Despite their different degrees of explanation and contextualization as well as different marketing techniques and reception, these literary and filmic works—*La Sierra*, *Diario en Medellín*, *Favela Rising*, *Falcão*, and *¿Cuánto cuesta matar a un hombre?*—are all united by theme and the objective as raising consciousness about shantytown social problems. While these works add to the characterization of shantytown nonfiction via examination through this fruitful thematic lens, they simultaneously highlight the dynamicness of the genre—a trait intrinsic to shantytown nonfiction’s parent genres, written testimonio and New Latin American Cinema.

Chapter Five: Female Testimonialistas of the Shantytown

As a point of comparison with the male-centered shantytown testimonial narrative examined in Chapters Three and Four, this chapter focuses on works within this literary and filmic category that contain female protagonists. In analyzing and comparing these latter books and films, I pay special attention to the involvement of marginal female protagonists in testimonial production and authorship, the relationship between testimonialistas and interlocutors, and what this nonfiction reveals about gender relations and roles within the marginal urban neighborhoods of Brazil and Colombia. The testimonies of these female shantytown residents prove innovative in several valuable ways: they present a facet of favela and comuna life that is often overlooked in favor of that of the glamorized violence and drugs with which their male counterparts are associated; they not only go against an official, state-sponsored narrative, but also against that of male-dominated shantytown testimonial narrative; and they deepen the discussion of the complications that arise in attempts by socioeconomically privileged interlocutors to represent marginal subjects.

Traditionally, testimonies have tended to center around men since the “*testigo*, he who has *testiculi*, has, after all, not been a woman, since women have been considered untruthful” (Bartow 36-7). Even though the first Casa de las Américas Prize for testimonio was awarded to a woman, María Esther Gilio, in 1970, testimonial production, and specifically the *armas y letras* at its core, has conventionally been a masculine form of participating in history. This gender dominance is true of New Latin American Cinema, too—and film in general—in which

filmmakers were almost exclusively men, with notable exceptions, however, that include Sara Gómez and Marta Rodríguez.

Despite the gender unbalance within nonfictional production in Latin America, there is a special importance, as Doris Summer points out, within the less-common female-based testimonies. Summer says that women's testimonials offer the possibility of lessening the tension between the First World self and the Third World other. While she does not deny the differences between these two subjects, she does suggest that the female testimonialista can be a model for respectful, nontotalizing politics.

The possibility for such cross-socioeconomic solidarity is potentially further amplified in testimonies in which the interlocutor is also a woman. Women doing oral histories with other women have seen their work as being in harmony with feminist research, and specifically in line with the phrase "research by, about, and for women" (Berger Gluck and Patai 1-2). In such testimonies, the female transcriber and the female reader are lent a heightened authority and agency since these works portray women as protagonists of history (Bartow 19). Ideally, a reciprocal and co-dependent relationship is thus born in that both the transcriber and the testimonial subject use each other's voice, legitimating one another: the marginal subject realizes identity formation and self-worth by narrating her life story, while the interlocutor stands to gain professionally by publishing that story. At the same time, the sociologist, cronista, or director has access to publishers or distributors and the narrating individual offers a reason for which the transcriber's work should be published (Bartow 33).

While female-female collaborations indeed allow unique advantages for the transcriber, testimonialista, and the female reader alike, and while such works challenge male domination of *letras y armas*, several problems are associated with these productions, as with testimonial

production in general. As we have seen in past chapters, tensions in testimonial production are intrinsic to the relationship between interlocutors and testimonialistas. Co-authorship and representation among people from very different socioeconomic backgrounds inevitably yield conflicts. Like written testimonio and New Latin American Cinema, shantytown testimonial narrative raises questions about the marginal subject's terms of self-representation and who can change those terms. At the same time, as Claudia Salazar notes in "A Third World Woman's Text: Between the Politics of Criticism and Cultural Politics", there exists the uncomfortable, "invasive demand that the Other expose itself (vulnerability) along with the desire to know (power/knowledge) that guides the ethnographic project, and these two aspects inevitably create a hierarchical field of forces..." (100). Along these same lines, The Popular Memory Group has observed that it is often the interlocutor who is solely benefitting—and in several significant ways—from the testimonial production: the interlocutor judges what is true, reliable and authentic; his/her name often appears on the publication and s/he receives a portion of the royalties; and s/he gains professionally as a result of the publication. At the same time, the testimonialistas are commonly—at least in the long-run—unchanged by the whole project except in what they have given up—the telling (The Popular Memory Group 220).

Such issues have always been present in testimonio and New Latin American Cinema, although it is important to revisit the new set of socio-political and economic issues that are shaping the context in which female shantytown testimonialistas are situated. At the same time, it is necessary to point out the specific socioeconomic factors at play for female shantytown residents—a group largely omitted from the works examined up to this point. As seen in Chapter One, the emergence of the neoliberal order has led to an extraordinary growth of the informal sector, downward social mobility resulting from the impoverishment of broad sectors of the

middle class, the decline of the public sector and state employment, an increasingly precarious structure of employment, and a substantial loss of purchasing power on the part of wage workers. For women in particular, there has occurred a significant increase in the number of female heads of household. Ultimately, the inheritance of neoliberalism is not only one of greater poverty and inequality, but also of states with lesser resources, dismantled by the elimination of some of its agencies and the privatization of public enterprises, riddled with corruption, all with a massive external debt and the pressures of the international financial institutions weighing down upon them.

Donna M. Goldstein has examined these factors—and specifically how they pertain to Brazilian women in the favelas—in her publication *Laughter Out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown* (2003). Goldstein notes how the absent state especially affects women who must deal with family, household, and health issues. She says that in the favelas, state and global processes seem removed and nebulous, and their presence is only really felt through routine occurrences such as “humiliating encounters with police, standing in line at the emergency room with a deathly sick child, visiting a friend’s relative in prison... Residents feel largely divorced from these “outside” forces except as a generalized target of them” (1). Furthermore, women in the favelas are at the bottom of a number of complex and interacting hierarchies:

They experience simultaneous and multiple forms of domination, including criminalization by the police forces and the society at large, intimidation by the local gangs whose web of activities seduce their youth and entangle many who want to remain neutral... and frustration in their relationships with men who can transgress sexual boundaries as part of an acceptable cultural script. These women, throughout their everyday lives, are almost wholly devoted to surviving. (Goldstein 15)

Before turning my attention to issues at play within female-female testimonial collaborations, I would like to first look at a work of shantytown testimonial narrative, with a

male interlocutor, that testifies to the very issues Goldstein points out for women in the favelas. Robert Gay's *Lucia: Testimonies of a Brazilian Drug Dealer's Woman* (2005), another Brazilian fusion of sociology and testimony such as those studied in Chapter Three, is an example of shantytown testimonial narrative that illustrates the complicated authorship and relationship between interlocutors from very distinct socioeconomic backgrounds. Gay published this book based off of interviews that he conducted between 1999 and 2002 with Lucia—a woman born and raised in a Rio favela, who like the males we have seen in other shantytown testimonies, is lured into the sphere of drug-trafficking and crime due to the many temptations it offers and the simultaneous dearth of socioeconomic opportunities. During her childhood, Lucia's mother tried unsuccessfully to lift her family out of poverty by cleaning the homes of the wealthy. Lucia, who was uninterested in school, was determined to lead a life different than her mother's. Rather than being a housekeeper, becoming a drug dealer's woman seemed like a way to provide her with anything she could want.

In her testimonio, Lucia talks about several gang members whom she dated and about one in particular who became the father of her daughter, Amanda. Ultimately, she shows how a successful *dono* (a high-ranking gangster) like him could provide in a day what it takes her months to earn on her own. This is illustrated through the series of short-term, low wage jobs that she holds over the years which all prove unsatisfactory in pay, treatment, and exploitation when compared with being a *dono's* woman. Still, although a life built around narcotics had many temptations, Lucia explains at length the extent to which *donos* require total submission and are frequently violent. As her testimonio comes to a close, Lucia, like her own mother, is determined that her daughter will have a better life and more opportunities than she had, but Amanda has already failed the fifth grade and seems destined to follow in Lucia's footsteps.

In the introduction to Gay's publication, Lucia's testimonio is situated within the context of the testimonios of other Latin American women such as Carolina Maria de Jesus and Rigoberta Menchú Tum. Adding to this testimonial tie is the title page which includes a photo of the back of Lucia taken in a sunny alley in the favela; this is the only image in the book of her and it at once implies a level of anonymity and universality in the sense of a collective voice for other female faveladas like her. It is also reminiscent of Esteban Montejo's testimonio *Biografía de un cimarrón* which, as Anne Nauss Millay observed, includes a photograph of the subject and an explanatory prologue written by the interlocutor—aspects which underscore the truthfulness of the testimonio as well as the underlying methodology. Gay's introduction points out that on the one hand, Lucia is an unusual choice for a testimonio because unlike the other Latin American female testimonialistas to whom she is compared, Lucia is neither an activist nor a spokesperson for a protest movement or non-profit organization. But, on the other hand, her testimonio offers a seldom-heard woman's perspective on a male-centered and male-dominated world. Indeed, most of the shantytown nonfiction examined up to this point centers around male protagonists, although women are very much a part of this world—in roles that range from girlfriends like Lucia, to activists, to, although less frequently, gangsters themselves.

Gay's introduction also foregrounds the sociological framework in which Lucia's testimonio is situated. This introduction, for example, includes an explanation of Latin American urban violence and reasons behind the increase in violent crime in Brazil which is reflected in this book. The mentioned causes of such violence include the impact of globalization, inequality, the authoritarian legacies of the previous regime, growth of the drug trade, changing attitudes toward work and leisure, and the emergence—among the young—of a fetishism for high-priced articles of “style” that confer status and power.

Following this contextualizing introduction, *Lucia*—notably marketed as a sociology book written by a sociology professor—is divided into sections which include a testimonio by her, and then a sociological narrative written by Gay. These latter discussions, which are related to topics that Lucia brings up, introduce the reader to the universe of the favelas, the emergence of drug gangs, issues of police violence and corruption, the prison system, education, the world of work, and, finally, religion. Gay explains that these sections were written and researched after his initial interviews with Lucia and that they represent an attempt to position her testimonio in its broader context without disrupting the flow and integrity of their conversations (11). Hence, as we have seen with the shantytown testimonies of Chapter Three, Gay’s insight and investigation is synergetically placed alongside Lucia’s words in order to supplement and contextualize her story.

While *Lucia* is largely narrated in the words of the protagonist herself, Gay acknowledges his inevitable voice and role. He says he has attempted to stay as faithful as possible to Lucia’s words because it was always his intention to tell her story from her perspective. Inevitably, though, aspects are lost in translation and transcription; he also moved sentences around for thematic consistency and edited out prompts and reiterative figures of speech that are an essential aspect of interviewing (11). Gay also left his own voice in because interviews are, by nature, conversational and involve a special form of collaboration and partnership between interviewer and interviewee. He says: “In other words, whether I like it or not, I was and still am very much a part of the production process” (11). Despite this kind of intervention, it is important to distinguish between moving around sentences and editing out prompts versus, like in *Biografía de un cimarrón*, Barnet’s tactic of adding words and expressions that he thought Montejo might use. The difference lies in making a text more “readable” in the former instance as compared to,

in the latter one, creating the artifice of a subaltern voice—an illusion always present to a certain extent in testimonios but more so in Montejo's in which Barnet supplemented the testimonialista's story with his own words and stylistic nuances.

Perhaps most striking about this shantytown testimony is the candor with which Gay addresses his relationship with Lucia, and how this friendship affected authorship of the book. While on the one hand his long-lasting friendship with Lucia functioned as a guarantee of her truthfulness, on the other hand it threatened Gay's own objectivity. He says: "I really liked Lucia and considered her my friend. And I believed in my heart she was a good person. I had to be careful of these emotions, however, and had to constantly remind myself not to let my relationship with Lucia interfere with what I was doing" (9). What he was doing was eliciting a sociology-infused testimonio, a project, he says, that was only possible because Lucia had professed a desire to go "straight" and thus turn her back on her past lifestyle. This stated goal of hers is a reminder of the difficulties that testimonialistas have in representing a collective. As Bartow points out, "through the process of recounting his/her story, leaving the community and/or interacting with outsiders, the narrator can no longer be truly representative of the collective identity provided for the reader"(Bartow 25). Hence, if Lucia turns her back on her past and fortifies this friendship with Gay, is she truly able to represent the universe which she describes?

Gay, in fact, addresses questions like this one in the introduction as well as others that he believes many readers will ask. For instance, could Lucia feel confident confiding to a male author? But Gay considers that his long relationship with Lucia, her aforementioned motivation to go straight, and aspects of his methodology are assurance of the basic veracity of her story as well as her capacity to accurately represent the very world that she is struggling to distance

herself from (xii). Unfortunately, Lucia's stated goal of leaving gang life was easier said than done. By the end of their interviews Lucia was working part time, but Gay was sure that she and her family had gone back to drugs, and he consequently becomes angry and upset. Back in his air-conditioned hotel room, however, he remembers: "Who am I to judge? How could I possibly know what it was they were going through?" (xi). Gay's admitted haste to criticize serves as a reminder to readers, too, to withhold their own prejudices. Although we can approximate Lucia's world through her graphic, candid story, we can never know what it is to live it. Gay's reminder and sociological contextualization ideally strengthen the truth effect and related solidarity so that we can perhaps understand—without bias—the complex shantytown universe and the specific struggles of the women who inhabit it.

In addition to the challenges that Gay was met with during the production of *Lucia*, shantytown testimonial narrative containing female interlocutors tends to be further complicated by the innocent assumptions that gender unites women more powerfully than race and class divides them (Berger Gluck and Patai 2). Anny Brooksbank Jones points out that "If, after all, women figure as men's marginalized and excluded other, then these women figure as the others of the predominantly white middle-class Anglo-European feminists who were purporting to speak on behalf of women in general" (Brooksbank Jones 204). The question then emerges as to how privileged women can speak through other women's experiences? (Bartow 35).

These issues are well-illustrated in *La Sierra* and *Diario en Medellín*—films which, as I have shown in Chapter Four, are thematically congruent but stylistically divergent. I have already discussed the different foci and presentations of violence in these documentaries, but since both films were directed by women—though *La Sierra* was a co-production—and since they both contain female protagonists, there remain fruitful, yet-unexamined areas of comparison

within these two films. Both documentaries, for example, intimately reveal the hardships of being an adolescent female in the comunas while contrasting sharply with one another through the very different styles of collaborations between female directors and female shantytown testimonialistas, both in terms of testimonial production and the relationships between both sets of co-authors. Despite their different approaches, both films are extremely constructive lenses in which to examine the lives and social problems specific to adolescent females in Medellín comunas.

Within *La Sierra*, the role of women in the Medellín comuna is immediately shaped by the very first scene, even before the title is shown, of a teenage female sobbing uncontrollably over the freshly killed body of her baby's young father. Two female protagonists—Cielo and Millerlad in *La Sierra* and *Diario en Medellín* respectively—shed light on the situation represented by that opening scene of Dalton and Martínez's film. Both characters are teenage mothers whose boyfriends have been killed in gang-related violence and their individual stories ultimately offer a collective voice of countless other adolescent mothers in the comunas. In my interview with Villar, she even describes choosing Millerlad for the documentary because “ella era una evidencia” ‘she was evidence’ (Villar). She says that upon meeting Millerlad for the first time, she asked the then 14 year-old girl if she was scared of becoming a mother at such a young age. Millerlad responded with confidence that her child was the seed of somebody who would likely die tomorrow. In view of that, Villar explains the commonness of these girls' situation within the comunas:

El problema principal es la violencia que rodea al colegio, que lo gangrena, que le quita la noción de futuro a todos los muchachos y muchachas que lo hacen, y que de ésta forma les quita también la razón misma de estudiar... [y] ellas responden con vida a la muerte que las rodea.

The main problem is the violence that surrounds the high school like gangrene, and that removes the notion of a future from the adolescents there, and in that sense it also removes the very incentive to study... [and] the female youths respond with life to the death that surrounds them. (Villar)

In keeping with the distinct tone of the documentary that each protagonist pertains to, Millerlad is an optimistic character as she attempts to overcome her struggles, while Cielo is in some respects hopeless: as she repeats the same mistakes, it seems as though she (and then her child) will continue to be drawn into a life of crime. In *Diario en Medellín*, Millerlad dotes on her child, quizzes her about her father in order to keep his memory alive, and reads loving poems at his grave. She explains that she was in a gang but has since left, reconciled with her mother, and is now dedicated to her studies and child. In the end, Millerlad typifies the fight to distance herself from gang life. In contrast, Cielo functions as a vehicle reflecting another facet of shantytown violence different than that offered by the other two protagonists of *La Sierra* who are both male paramilitaries: her two and a half year-old son boasts that he will avenge his father's death, and she herself continues to be attracted to paramilitaries as illustrated by her new relationship with one such male who is in prison. Cielo is also, however, one of the only characters who directly speaks of displacement in *La Sierra*; she recounts how a few years ago her family—who included paramilitary members—received a note from a rival faction saying that they had to leave their home in three days or all of them would be killed. At the time, Cielo was in sixth grade and she never went back to school.

While Millerlad strongly contributes to the stirring tone of *Diario en Medellín* (a tone which is initially set by the encouragement fostered within Darío's classroom), Cielo serves several often dissimilar functions in *La Sierra*. In the first place, she offers a female perspective to offset that of the two other (male) protagonists. Both Edison and Jesús assume control of describing the shantytown turf war, what it means to be a young male in the comuna, and what

the principal traits of the females in the community are. Edison explains that in his neighborhood, where there is gasoline, guns or commanders, that is where the women are; he adds that the comuna females “son muy desesperadas por el sexo” ‘are very desperate for sex,’ especially if the male is a commander or someone with a motorcycle or gun. Women like the adrenaline, he says, the tough stuff.

Cielo, along with Edison’s girlfriends, is in charge of countering these comments while simultaneously constructing a fuller, more multi-faceted image of adolescent females in the comuna. In response to Edison’s aforementioned views about women in La Sierra, his main girlfriend, who is 16 years old, argues that on the contrary, she fell in love with Edison before she even knew that he was connected to the turf war. They have been together for four years, and as a commander’s girlfriend, she has the respect of the whole community. Despite being but one of Edison’s four pregnant girlfriends, she is happy. Anyway, she explains, in the comuna women will go after a guy whether he is taken or not, and a girl just needs to get used to it and accept it. In fact, her best friend Jazmín, who is her same age, recently got pregnant by Edison, too.

Jazmín hides Edison’s guns and explains how her father was in a gang war that interested him much more than his own family. While she criticizes her father, Jazmín appears blind to the fact that Edison is exactly like him. In the same way that *Lucia*’s Amanda—whose mother desperately wants a better life for her daughter as Lucia’s own mother wanted for her with neither generation succeeding, she seems destined to remain shackled to either a gangster or a low-paying job in the favela—, Jazmín, too, heads down the same dead end path that her mother took. These characters show the difficulty of breaking out of the molds or stereotypes to which many shantytown women are confined. In the interview that follows Jazmín’s, yet another of Edison’s pregnant girlfriends, 14 year-old girlfriend Yurani, says that she is unsure what she

feels for Edison, but she hopes that it is not love because she does not see the guys involved in drugs and guns in the comuna as having any sort of future. Like Jazmín, Yurani seems easily critical of the men in her community, while unable or unwilling to cast that critical glance at her own situation and at that of so many other pregnant girls around her. Ultimately, the female protagonists of *La Sierra* reinforce Villar's comment that so many girls in the comunas tend to respond with life to the omnipresent death around them. Additionally, Edison's girlfriends portray lives defined by men, or by one man in this instance, in which they accept that they are just one of their partner's many girlfriends. By the film's end, however, like Cielo, they wind up as widows with kids who will likely avenge their father's death and continue the cycle that is illustrated by Jazmín and her father as well as Cielo and her son.

While Edison's girlfriends and Cielo contribute to the often hopeless tone of *La Sierra*, they additionally serve a visual purpose. In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Laura Mulvey observes that women are always on display in film and are seen as objects of sexual desire. Exhibitionism is linked to women in film, as the visual presence of the female tends to stop the story line in order to dwell on the image. In *La Sierra*, this exhibitionism is heightened by the tight, revealing clothing that many of the young females wear—an attire that is not seen in *Diario en Medellín*. Mulvey's comment is also reflected in the scenes of Cielo painting nails, of an aunt tickling her feet as she giggles, and of several female adolescents fawning over Edison as he walks through the neighborhood—scenes which sharply contrast with those of Edison and Jesus dodging crossfire, doing drugs, or patrolling the comuna.

Mulvey's remarks about gender in classical Hollywood cinema apply to *La Sierra* as well. She notes that men tend to be filmed in three-dimensional space, allowing them movement to either side or backward and forward within the filmed space. By contrast, women—the

looked-at objects—are filmed in two dimensional space, often relatively still, suggesting stasis, while the audience is drawn into looking at them through men’s eyes. Women often appear in a framed space, perhaps standing in a door frame or before a window frame, underlining their position as two-dimensional static objects, like pictures in a picture frame (Parker 153-54). Along these same lines, Edison’s girlfriends are mostly interviewed in their dark shanty shacks, usually sitting on their beds, with the filmmakers at times shooting from the doorway, creating the very framing effect that Mulvey highlights. In contrast, Edison and Jesús are frequently interviewed outside, often on a hilltop with the whole comuna as a backdrop, as if they were kings of the shantytown. This distinction not only reflects the difference in daily life between the males and females in La Sierra (i.e. Edison’s girlfriends are stuck pregnant at home, while he seems to be living the good life out and about in the neighborhood), but it also illustrates how this gender split is reflected in the narrative of the film as well—men carry the story and make things happen, while women remain as icons. While firearms could be the great equalizer for the female protagonists, none of the females in *La Sierra* is armed. Cielo, as well as the girlfriends of Edison and Jesús, are instead all passive characters, at times coming across as mere vehicles for the sons of their soon-to-be-dead boyfriends. And as Cielo, similar to Lucia, shows, even after her boyfriend’s death, that path is difficult to break away from.

The path and life outlook of Cielo and Edison’s girlfriends is in direct opposition to that of Millerlad, a young woman who is actively and independently turning her life around for the better. Parallel to the different trajectories and outlooks embodied by Millerlad and Cielo is the dissimilar relationship that they had with the directors and the distinct level of involvement that they (along with the other protagonists) had in authorship and production of each film. This involvement is critical in documentary because, as visual anthropologists Nancy Lutkehaus and

Jenny Cool observe, the act of representing is in itself a form of domination (116). While in *La Sierra* the central characters did not participate at all in film production, Villar tried to balance the power relations intrinsic to documentary production through her commitment to involving the protagonists in the making of *Diario en Medellín*. She says:

Siempre he pensado que no podemos “pagar” los actores de documental, porque justamente creamos una relación económica en que les podríamos exigir lo que queramos, pues les estamos pagando... ¡la gran libertad que tienen es de irse cuando quieran! Pero al mismo tiempo, sus situaciones económicas eran tales que era muy difícil no ayudarles. Yo decidí crear un taller de video en el colegio, un intercambio: por un lado ellos entendían mejor lo que yo “podía hacer con ellos cuando los filmaba” y por otro lado yo les permitía acercarse a un *métier*, un oficio que de pronto les abría otras puertas.

I always have thought that we cannot “pay” the documentary actors, because that precisely creates an economic relationship in which we could demand what we want, because we’d be paying them...the great freedom that they have is that they can go when they want to! But at the same time, their economic situations were such that it was very difficult not to help them. I decided to create a video workshop in the high school, an exchange: on the one hand they better understood what I “could do with them when I filmed them” and on the other hand I allowed them to approach a *métier*, a trade that soon would open other doors for them. (Villar)

Villar also paid some of Darío’s students to be her assistants on the film and to help out the production crew. The involvement of the student protagonists in the documentary production is another testimonial heirloom, this time hearkening back to New Latin American Cinema. With regards to auterism, there was a fundamental emphasis in New Latin American Cinema on the participation of the people as co-auteurs in the production of the film because cinema was believed to be genuine only when the masses created it.¹ In *Diario en Medellín*, not only do we see the subjects learning about film production, but they also create a testimonial script for the

¹ Often in New Latin American Cinema films, the mode of production was characterized by the subjects of the film—“the people”—being inherently involved (i.e. sometimes the subjects were co-directors and co-editors, and these subjects often acted in the film in roles—a-la-neo-realism—based on themselves).

film through their diarios—a tactic which further implicates them in authorship of the documentary.

Even Villar's attitude at the start of making *Diario en Medellín* is reminiscent of New Latin American Cinema filmmakers, who were often involved in politics, focused on choice as a central theme, and who believed that their films contributed to the *concientización* of the protagonists, filmmakers and audience alike.² Most notably, we see the theme of choice in the central protagonists who struggle to rise above the seemingly insurmountable problems of the comuna; as Darío tells them: "One can escape a background and overcome it. Complaining all one's life about one's on-goings, home, and neighborhood gets one nowhere. You have to move on and expect nothing from the system" (*Diario en Medellín*). Accordingly, outside of Darío's classroom, a student named Camilo organizes a raffle in order to raise money for a trip to Rome. Millerlad also chooses a challenging, uncommon path by struggling throughout the film to distance herself from gang life in order to study and be a good mother—something that she herself lacked while growing up. This focus on choice reflects how at the onset of making the documentary, Villar believed in the ideals embodied by New Latin American Cinema, but through making the film, the *concientización* that took place for her was unforeseen:

Yo creo que cuando lo hice, mi objetivo si tenía algo de militante.... querer cambiar algo, querer participar a cambiar la visión de las cosas... pero en el fondo haciéndolo me di cuenta de que lo más importante que me estaba sucediendo era que yo misma estaba por primera vez entendiendo muchas cosas en carne propia... y que la película me transformó el optimismo en un pesimismo pasajero... Yo creí a todas las historias desde el principio: pensé que el colegio era un sitio de cambio social y de posibilidades de salir de un hueco... al final lo viví como Pigmalion de Bernard Shaw (la protagonista, florista, después de mucho aprender, de salir de su condición, vuelve a ella por algo casi de

² As Michael Chanan notes in *Cuban Cinema* (2004), Brazilian pedagogist Paulo Freire believed that *concientización* was a process through which individuals could come to shape their own destiny, and it was also a means to break "the culture of silence" to which underdevelopment condemned the subaltern classes. By putting cinema at the service of social groups which lack access to the means of communication, their point of view is consequently made public and *concientización* can take place (Chanan 169).

predestinación social: las sociedades que no permiten el movimiento social nos dan ésta impresión)... Creí que Camilo podría hacer su viaje si vendía el loto... no pudo, no consiguió plata. Pensé que Doralba podría instalarse en un nuevo barrio, y la desplazaron de nuevo... En fin, me di cuenta de manera muy concreta que ese círculo de violencia, de guerra, pero sobretodo de injusticia social en Colombia es muy difícil de romper... [y] diez años más tarde la cosa no ha cambiado mucho.

I believe that when I made it, my objective had a militant aspect to it... wanting to change something, wanting to participate in changing the vision of things... but deep down, making it I realized that the most important thing that was happening to me was that I myself for the first time was personally understanding many things... and the film transformed my optimism into a fleeting pessimism... I believed all the stories from the beginning: I thought that the high school was a site of social change and of possibilities to escape from a hole... in the end I saw that it was more like Bernard Shaw's *Pigmalion* (the florist protagonist who after much learning, and leaving her condition behind, returns to it as though it were some sort of social predetermination: societies that don't allow social mobility give us that impression)... I believed that Camilo would go on his trip if he succeeded with the raffle, but he couldn't, he didn't raise enough money. I thought that Doralba could relocate to a new neighbourhood, but they displaced her again. In the end, I realized in a very concrete way that the circle of violence, of war, but above all of social injustice in Colombia, is very difficult to break... [and] ten years later things haven't changed much. (Villar)

The production of *La Sierra* was a learning process for Martínez as well, specifically with regards to the very power relations that Villar tried to balance. While her co-director Scott Dalton was very close with the protagonists (often spending his free time during and after the film in *La Sierra*), Martínez's relationship with them was more uneven. In my interview with her, she told me that the protagonists never asked for anything back in return during the film's production, but that this in fact changed when the film was released:

Cielo has always felt that she didn't have anything in return... Even though Scott and I have separately given her money, she has always felt, and you know, this is something about a documentary that I would never do again, it's that Cielo felt that she should have received more maybe. She has received a lot, but little by little. If there had been a payment at the end then maybe she would have felt better... I don't know. She calls me every like three months, and it's a very strange relationship. It's something I wouldn't want to do again like that, like little by little, or maybe like a payment, I don't know. I just think, you know, you don't want to pay them because if you pay them, then their story changes. But if you don't pay them then...it's just a tricky question. (Martínez)

Cielo is not the only protagonist in *La Sierra* to express dissatisfaction upon completion of the documentary. While Edison was killed during the filming, the third central character, Jesús Martínez, has said:

We liked the film because it showed the reality we were living, but it would be good if someone came to show how we are now. When the gringo came to film us, this zone was the most conflict-ridden of all. What I want to explain is: now we have peace, but they still don't repair the roads or the steps. Look how we are living. Look at this poverty. (Bristow n. pag.)

Jesús explains that his comuna is still dependent on outsiders for representation—to record their stories and draw attention to their problems. Along these same lines, Gayatri Spivak, in “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, argues that any attempt from the outside to ameliorate the subalterns' condition by granting them collective speech invariably will encounter the following problem: a dependence upon western intellectuals to “speak for” the subaltern condition rather than allowing them to speak for themselves. This dependence, however, is in direct opposition to some of Villar's protagonists who thanks to her workshop, are now able to represent themselves. In addition to the workshop that Villar created during the production of *Diario en Medellín*, she explains:

Unos años más tarde creé en Bogotá un taller de cine documental Varan—la escuela de documental con que trabajo en París—e hice venir tres de los muchachos que había conocido en las comunas. Dos de ellos hicieron películas maravillosas que viajaron por festivales y que los hicieron viajar, y hoy en día ambos trabajan por la televisión local de Medellín.

Some years later in Bogotá I created the Varan documentary film workshop—the school that I work with in Paris—and I arranged for three of the adolescents that I had met in the comunas to come. Two of them made wonderful films that travelled through festivals and that enabled them to travel more, and today both of them work for the local Medellín television. (Villar)

Power relations and co-authorship were equalized not only by the workshop, but also by Villar's sustained friendships with the central characters and by the assigned testimonios in

Diario en Medellín. Villar says that she has stayed in close contact with all of the central characters from the film, and especially with Millerlad: “Con Millerlad nos hablamos aún de vez en cuando, y nos contamos muchas cosas, la última vez que fui a Medellín hace unos tres años hicimos una linda reunión de reactualización” “With Millerlad I speak every once in a while, and we tell each other many things, the last time that I went to Medellín three years ago, we had a really nice time updating each other again” (Villar). In addition to such relationships, the diarios themselves became another means to unite the interlocutor and testimonialistas in co-authorship of the documentary. In explaining the assignment to the class, Darío says:

This is the start of your big experience and you must commit fully to it. You’re writing the most important book in the world, more important than *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, more important than *Ulysses*... And what are you going to do? You’re going to tell the story of your life, to reconstruct your past so you can cope better with your present and your future. Where are your parents from? From what village? Why did they leave the countryside to come to Medellín and specifically to come to Santo Domingo? (*Diario en Medellín*).

In a sense, these students are writing their own testimonios because they are recording individual stories which are reflective of a collective, underrepresented social condition of Latin America—the ever-growing shantytown population affected by displacement and national violence. Through testimonios like the assigned diarios, the audience ideally identifies with a normally distant set of social problems. The testimonios/diarios in Villar’s film do not only facilitate a greater understanding between the audience and the protagonists, but also among the students themselves. In one exemplary scene, as a student reads her diario aloud to the class, Darío interrupts her to question a classmate about her story and to make sure he, and all the other students, are listening. Darío explains:

Our aim is to develop in this class a capacity for listening to others, being interested in them. This is a problem in Colombia—we don’t listen to each other. That’s one of the reasons why this country is so violent. Groups that fight each other think they exchange

ideas. They don't—they try to impose their ideas on others. Let's reinforce this concept—respect others, listen to them. (*Diario en Medellín*)

Within shantytown testimonial narrative, Matt Mochary and Jeff Zimbalist's *Favela Rising* is an apt point of comparison with Villar's commitment to co-authorship and the involvement of her central characters in production. Despite an absence of female protagonists, within this chapter *Favela Rising* presents a noteworthy model of, like *Diario en Medellín*, directors' efforts to ethically deal with and balance out the hierarchical tensions intrinsic to testimonial production. Not only did Villar, Mochary and Zimbalist all believe in sharing authorship with their marginal protagonists, but they also all have a strong belief in the ideology and possibility of change represented by the communities that they portray. As Zimbalist says: "We made it clear from the beginning that we were committed to and very much in line with the Afroreggae ideology that they were preaching in the community... We weren't just going to pop in and pop out [of the favela] like journalists often do, we were there for the long haul" (*Favela Rising*). This attitude of commitment to a long-term presence in the community is reminiscent of Colombian cronista José Alejandro Castaño, who criticizes foreign journalists who tend to visit the comuna for one day, come out thinking they know everything about the neighbourhood, and then proceed to extract the worst parts of it for their articles.

Zimbalist goes on to explain that the way he and Mochary showed this long-term commitment to the community was by giving cameras to favela youths and teaching them how to shoot. The directors were trying to promote the idea of self-representation because when one is telling his or her story with his or her own voice, they feel a sense of ownership and authorship over the product. In my interview with Zimbalist, he explained:

When we were editing the film we would show the kids a scene and ask them, is this what it looks like to walk in the street, and they might say, no, this is too pale, my world

is much more full of color, so we'd go back and add some color. The first screenings were also held with Afroreggae members to get their feedback. (Zimbalist)

While lending the cameras and teaching the favela youths how to film started off as symbolic gesture to show that the directors were committed to the Afroreggae cause, it ended up producing some of best access that Mochary and Zimbalist had to scenes of day-to-day life of in the favela. In my interview with Zimbalist, he further explains that despite teaching the favela youths to shoot and although employing some of their footage, the central characters wanted him and Mochary to be principally in charge of filming and producing the documentary.

Matt and I were liaisons. We offered to teach members of Afroreggae how to use cameras and produce/make a film, but they directly told us that they'd rather that we make it because we already have the experience. They did, however, stress that they wanted the film to be shown to other communities facing the same adversity, the message was the most relevant to them. (Zimbalist)

As explained in previous chapters, Zimbalist and Mochary did indeed screen *Favela Rising* to many marginal communities around the world. But they also showed it at several international film festivals. Although the central character, Anderson Sa, attended some of these festivals, Zimbalist explains that Sa does not like want to travel too much because he needs to be in his community in order to be an available, accessible role model. But at the same time, there is also the argument for going to these international film festivals which is that through their own marketing they can become more self-sufficient, not need to rely on grants eventually, and they can be an economic model for change (Zimbalist). Mochary and Zimbalist developed close friendships with Sa and the other central characters of the documentary, and all of the investors in the film ended up donating 100% of the proceeds to the Afroreggae. Ultimately, *Favela Rising* shows a praiseworthy model of ethical reciprocity between interlocutors and testimonialistas.

If we come back to the representation of adolescent females in Colombian and Brazilian shantytowns, one film—V́ctor Gaviria's *La vendedora de rosas* (Colombia, 1998)— should not

be overlooked. Despite its alignment with neorealism, such as the use of natural actors and on-location filming, and its status outside of shantytown testimonial narrative, *La vendedora de rosas* cannot be disregarded within this chapter because, in the same way that *Cidade de Deus* has shaped global perceptions of the favelas, Gaviria's film is responsible for a dominant public image of lower-class female youths in Colombia. Furthermore, the protagonists of this film—street girls themselves—represent perhaps the bottom tier of shantytown marginality in the sense that they are not even the subject of any nonfiction, testimonial works, and they are commonly considered disposable members of society. Lastly, the tragic life of the principal protagonist, coupled with authority and authenticity Gaviria bestows upon her and the other natural actors, further validates the inclusion of this film within the discussion of female shantytown testimonialistas in this chapter.

In an interview with Carlos Jáuregui, Gaviria accordingly explains: “Los actores naturales son testigos... El personaje se produce entre la narrativa de la propia vida y el proceso de la narración filmica” “The natural actors are witnesses... The character is produced between their own real life and the process of filmic narration’ (224-25). The external reality of the film represented by the natural actors is further heightened by their use of street slang. In the aforementioned interview with Jáuregui, Gaviria adds that such slang “expresa y alevosamente alude a la historia y a las historias de muchos, a determinados espacios de la ciudad, a experiencias sociales profundas... lo que violenta al espectador no es la monstruosidad abstracta del lenguaje sino lo que ésta significa como diferencia” ‘expresses and as a challenge alludes to the history and the histories of many, to determined spaces of the city, to profound social experiences... that which violates the spectator is not the abstract monstrosity of the language but rather the difference that it signifies’ (229-30). The street language of the actors thus

confronts the spectator with the uncomfortable reality of the often-ignored social problems embedded within the film's characters.

In present-day Colombia, the mounting presence of street children (like those who act within Gaviria's film) is aggravated by abusive state rehabilitation centers and precarious lower-class, shantytown households. Flight from either sadistic reformatories or violent homes is the point of initial departure for many homeless juveniles. For the protagonists of *La vendedora de rosas*, the alternative to street life is to remain in the crowded, inhospitable shack that is their home. There, domestic life is defined by hunger, neglect, and both physical and sexual abuse. Accordingly, the girls in the film's gamin family unit have all run away due to familial mistreatment. The gamin sisterhood is thus composed of independent young girls who provide for one another, be it affection, a transfer of street survival tactics, or the sharing of glue to sniff as a means of alleviating or momentarily escaping the bleak misery of street life. These girls are desperate for parental love and a meaningful social identity; as females, they are not even afforded the opportunity to be a *falcão* like those in MV Bill's shantytown testimony examined in Chapter Four, and as street girls, they lack the "opportunity" to be cared for as a gangster's pregnant girlfriend. As desperate and depressed as MV Bill's *falcões* are, we see that their female counterparts have even fewer options.

Gaviria's film centers around Mónica and her friends—street girls who share in rose selling and petty theft in order to survive on the street, and who also communally abuse drugs, specifically getting high on glue. The girls' make-shift sisterhood itself has an adhesive quality due to the girls' efforts to stick close to one another; they are all that one another has in the world. But ironically, their addiction yields the opposite of glue's intended purpose to bond, for

the gamin sisterhood—and in particular the improvised sister and mother/daughter relationships—consequently come undone.

In their study on Colombian street children, Bedoya Marín and Jaramillo Martínez find the same “adicción a la droga como una forma de escape a las vicisitudes cotidianas” ‘drug addiction as a form of escape from the daily hardships’ (83). Monica indeed achieves an escape from the hardships of street life by getting high on glue. Her various attempts to reconnect with her dead grandmother are ultimately achieved only by means of the hallucinations that result from her addiction. After hours of sniffing glue, Monica envisions her dead grandmother in a statue of the Virgin Mary and proceeds to tell her: “Usted vino por mí, cierto? No, yo no la voy a botar... ¿Por qué se fue y no me llevó?” ‘You came for me, right? No, I’m not going to throw it away... Why did you go and not take me?’ (*La vendedora de rosas*). In her assurance that she’s “not throwing it [the glue] away” (“no la voy a botar”), there is a distressing duplicity. Left alone in the world, Mónica fights to give value to her life (and thus to not throw her existence away) via a relentless search for love; her friendships with other street girls and with her boyfriend—a gamin himself—, though, are never enough to satisfy her longings. Although the girls have formed a cohesive gamin kinship in which sister and mother/daughter relationships prevail, their shared glue addiction produces unreliability and consequent holes in their network of safety. As Mónica becomes increasingly addicted to glue as both an escape from her lonely existence and a means to connecting with her grandmother, it is the glue that she ultimately cannot throw away. In the end, her inability to dispose of it proves fatal.

In thinking back to the shantytown testimonial narrative in this chapter, *La vendedora de rosas* contains several noteworthy points of comparison in terms of its presentation of lower-class, shantytown female youths. *La Sierra*, for example shows an invisible sector of the

comuna—the pregnant female teenagers, confined to their shanty shacks, who are often disregarded in favor of their male counterparts. But Gaviria’s film perhaps shows an even less visible, or at least more commonly ignored, sector—that of the female street youths denied a significant, formal female social identity as a daughter, sister, and mother. In a sense, these girls prove to be a lot worse off than those of Edison’s girlfriends since they have neither a shack to live in nor a well-connected boyfriend to provide for them.

The street girls’ tragic depiction is mirrored in the real life of actress Leidy Tabares, who plays Mónica. Like the other street children who make up the cast of the film, before Gaviria found her, Tabares was scraping together money to feed her habit by selling roses table to table in bars. Tabares and the other natural actors were mostly required to merely replicate the sordid routines of their nights and days. When the film was released with widespread acclaim, Tabares spent a month in Cannes, but then went back to her old life. Soon she was selling roses on the streets again, and she fell in love with an assassin who was shot dead in front of her and their one-year-old child. Tabares then got involved with another bad crowd, ended up being implicated in the murder of a taxi driver, and was sentenced to 26 years in jail. Along these same lines, of *La vendedora de rosas*’ cast of 17, nine have died violent deaths, and one who was shot through the head is paralysed for life.

Ultimately, Gaviria’s film provides a raw, often difficult to watch account of life on the streets for these young girls. It is also a cautionary tale of that is reminiscent of Villar’s eventual realization that it is not so easy to bring people out of their problematic social situations. Additionally, we see in this neorealist film that indeed, the interlocutors (directors, journalists or sociologists) are often the sole beneficiaries of the testimonial productions, although *Diario en*

Medellín as well as *Favela Rising* are noteworthy challenges to that point raised by the Popular Memory Group in the beginning of this chapter.

Although many of the females protagonists studied in this chapter seem destined to follow the unforeseen path most commonly taken within the shantytown, I would like to end this chapter with a portrait of a woman in Rocinha (Rio's largest favela) who, while she may never get a testimonial production of her own, warrants admiration and is reflective of a lesser-visible and lesser-known collectivity of women who are fighting on their own to improve conditions within the shantytowns. After about six months of living and volunteering in Rocinha, I was introduced to Marcia Ferreira da Costa, a woman who had started a school in Roupas Sujas, the poorest section of Rocinha. In comparison to the established bars, stores, and housing in some other parts of Rocinha, Roupas Sujas is an extremely dirty and makeshift community: improvised shanty shacks of wood and cardboard line the extremely steep (and often urine and garbage-littered) stairway to get to Marcia's school. Little kids run around either naked or with just underwear, and the stench of the garbage in the heat is always overpowering. Marcia started her school in 1978 when she began tutoring children in her home. By 1993, forty students and eight infants were showing up for daycare and schooling on a daily basis. Along the way, she encountered difficulties: in the structure next to her, the local gang would bring people to be tortured for their crimes. Their screams were so loud that it interrupted the students' schooling. Marcia eventually went over and told these armed men that they needed to move elsewhere. It is this fearlessness and commitment to the youths in her community that makes Marcia such an awe-inspiring woman. Many women in the community have since begun helping Marcia, and with their assistance, as well as with local and foreign grants, they have started a non-profit organization that has purchased several new houses for needy families in the community,

purchased a second building for an afterschool program, opened a community medical clinic and a computer center, and most recently inaugurated a program to teach unemployed women saleable crafts.

While we have seen various types of shantytown women in this chapter, such as those dependent on gangster boyfriends and others who try to distance themselves from their community's gang problem, Marcia, similar to Anderson Sa, serves as a stirring reminder that against great odds and continual hardships, many people in the favelas and comunas are succeeding with innovative, autonomous organizations that are helping the community and changing lives. Such female leadership, and the female perspective in general, is often overshadowed by the males who "govern" these peripheral neighborhoods, a condition that is mirrored in male-centered representations of comunas and females. In light of this gender domination, even despite their different paths, women like Marcia and Lucia offer a largely underrepresented female perspective on the shantytowns and they point to the need for a focus on, and increase in, female shantytown testimonialistas.

Conclusion

The threads of New Latin American Cinema and testimonio within shantytown testimonial narrative illustrate that these two parent genres—along with the politics, oppression, and revolutionary movements that catapulted them into existence—no longer exist in their original form. Nevertheless, the significance and utility of testimonial production remains as valuable as ever. In accordance with this evolution, John Beverley, in 1996, famously declared that the state of emergency that drove our fascination and critical engagement with testimonio had undoubtedly passed, but that there remains praise to be had for the genre as both an art form and as a strategy of subaltern memory. Hence, in stating that the moment of testimonio was over, he nonetheless argued that its importance most certainly persisted (*Testimonio* 77). Joanna R. Bartow, in *Subject to Change: The Lessons of Latin American Women's Testimonio for Truth, Fiction, and Theory* (2005), accordingly notes that in more recent years, testimonios have tended to be perceived as non-idealized, subjective but still important tools for human rights—a purpose necessary to the crisis moments of revolutions, genocides, dictatorships, and I would argue, to marginalization and oppression in general (Bartow 11).

As an example, shantytown testimonial narrative shows that testimonial production is still a critical and effective response strategy to repression and social problems. The merit of works within this category is well-evidenced in specific examples such as *Diario en Medellín* and *Favela Rising*. Several of the protagonists in Villar's film, as a result of the video production workshop that she established while making the documentary, now have successful careers at

television studios—a bi-product of the unique authorship and production of a film that draws attention to displacement and comuna social problems. And in *Favela Rising*, the protagonists have benefitted from numerous donations to Afroreggae, and the at-risk audiences have ideally learned how to improve, or at least survive, their own volatile situation as a result of the message of shared adversity in the film and that model the *Favela Rising* shows of overcoming such hardship.

With documentaries like *Favela Rising* and *Diario en Medellín*, as well as more problematic and less hopeful books and films, I have shown the value and relevance of this new hybrid category in the context of a societies which tend to overlook the problems of the urban periphery. We have seen that shantytown testimonial narrative most commonly takes the form of a written narrative or documentary film that treats the life story or life experience of a shantytown resident; this person's story is representative of (a sector of) his or her community and the social problems that afflict it. Many innovative devices are gainfully employed within these testimonial books and films: authentic speech of the marginal testimonialista alongside investigation and recommendations by interlocutors; the heavy influence of crónica and sociology; frequent prioritization of marketing to a varied audience including shantytown dwellers, other marginalized communities, as well as to an international audience; and, as with testimonio and New Latin American Cinema, common involvement of shantytown residents in co-production and co-authorship.

With regard to the influence of other genres, the use of sociology and crónica within these testimonial works is crucial for their credibility and utility because testimonies are often seen as commodities that must provide practical use, and non-hybrid testimonial works are often unable to provide a large supply of what society values as truthful—namely, accurate data.

Through the fusing of journalistic (i.e. *crónica*) or sociological influences, shantytown testimonial narrative is ultimately able to put forth this esteemed data and professional insight along with, at times, stylistic elements to further engage the public. While witnesses' accounts as evidence, as well as testimonies, tend to be condemned in case they do not match hard, scientific, or more objective evidence collected by other means, shantytown testimonies solve this problem through their hybridity and authoritative perspectives. As such, shantytown testimonial works are a valuable means for both working through traumatic memories and for social and cultural resistance, and ultimately they function not only as an evidence of the past but also as a different way to live now—a outline for the future which is aided by interlocutors' recommendations and reader solidarity with a normally distant shantytown universe.

The methodology of analyzing together the Colombian and Brazilian books and films within this new category has permitted many advantages in the analysis. The study, for example, has been able to pay special attention to the unique interdisciplinary fusion—of sociology and journalism—within the chosen books and documentaries and to compare the effects of such genre influences. The study has also emphasized the equally multifaceted qualities of contemporary reality in the selected books and films, and the methodology has illustrated the organic nature of the discourse rather than the geographical or written versus filmic separation. At the same time, the theories drawn from in the analysis, particularly Subaltern Studies, have guided the examination and comparison of the complex authorship, production, and presentation of social problems within shantytown testimonial narrative. Through the selected methodology and theories, it has been shown that notwithstanding the illustrated diversity of theme, representations of social problems, and types of testimonialistas, shantytown testimonial narrative remains united by theme—shantytown social problems such as displacement, its related

violence, and the lack of human resources, quality education, and health care—, objective—creating a consciousness about daily shantytown struggles—, and end product—construction of alternative national identities and simultaneous creation of a space for shantytown dwellers' self-representation within local and international arenas.

Although there are many advantages gained from this approach, there are still some limits and problems with the selected methodology as well as with the study in general. To begin with, there are many generations affected by displacement in the shantytowns, and many different communities within these marginalized neighborhoods; such disparity makes it difficult to talk about them as a single periphery. Many elements, communities and cultural traditions within the favelas and comunas are not touched upon in the selected nonfiction, such as the evangelical community, and in Brazil, the culture of the displaced *nordestinos*, or northeasterners. Another limitation is that the approach privileges the inherent mediation of shantytown testimonial narrative. While the fusion of other genres is innovative and an effective device to reach an audience than can produce change, it is still problematic, as Spivak points out, because it implies a continued reliance of shantytown residents on others—and specifically elite professionals—for self-representation.

Another potential shortcoming of this study has to do with the hybrid approach of analysing film and literature together; while it places value in highlighting the thematic and authorial similarities among books and films within this category, at the same time it must be recognized that perhaps the casualty of this method is that the study does not get as in depth with either one as it could have if it were examining each on its own; with film, for instance, I could have employed more related theory. Nonetheless, the hybrid approach has permitted me to pay special attention to the unique interdisciplinary fusion of sociology and journalism within the

chosen books and documentaries. Through this method, I have been able to emphasize the multifaceted qualities of contemporary shantytown conditions and focus on the similarities between the urban peripheries of both Colombia and Brazil.

As with any anthropological or sociological study, another of the limitations of this inquiry has to do with my own biases that I bring to the study. As noted in the introduction, this project began as a result of my own frustration at depictions of favelas that were incongruent with my experience in Rocinha; I felt that popular representations and mainstream opinions about the favelas were ignorant and full of negative stereotypes. Living in and volunteering in Rocinha, I should point out, was one of the most important and powerful experiences of my life, and the said stereotypes upset me to the point that I changed my entire planned course of study in graduate school so that I could seek out more ethical representations of communities like Rocinha. In contrast to the prejudices of favela “outsiders”, I felt that I knew a more authentic, positive side of the favela. But of course, I am neither from a favela nor have I lived there for years on end. Still, at the same time, my experience seeing people struggle, and seeing the overwhelming kind-heartedness and generosity of those who lived there, fostered within me a deep, unrelenting admiration and empathy for shantytown residents.

Some of the very limitations of this study have opened up research questions and ideas for future projects. This study, for instance, does not examine the confrontation of shantytown testimonial writing with almost exclusively privileged readers, and in a future project, for instance, more attention could be paid to the divergent socioeconomic audience of the films versus the limited readers of the books within this category. Another possibility for a future project includes an examination and comparison of shantytown testimonial narrative in other Latin American countries.

Despite the limitations of this work and the biases brought to it, I remain convinced that the urgency of the favelas and comunas warrants attention in the very words of those suffering most as manifested in the testimonies of shantytown residents. Given that most shantytown dwellers are culturally, economically, and politically excluded from the means of self-representation, this category positions the shantytown resident and his/her narration as central figures in the struggle for recognition of the social problems plaguing these peripheral Brazilian and Colombian neighborhoods. But for every inspirational story like those of *Diario en Medellín* and *Favela Rising*, other works within this category do demonstrate the difficulty of actually affecting social change as a result of an artistic form. Confrontations of shantytown testimonial fiction with “the real world” do not always lead to success or social action. Brazilian president Lula da Silva, for instance, has hosted MV Bill twice at the presidential palace and has required all his ministers to see the documentary *Falcão*. While the president’s invitation and required reading are impressive, and while Lula has promised to help improve the situation of falcões and their families, one mother in the book that accompanies *Falcão* keenly observes: “matar o meu marido em nome da lei e facil, dificil agora criar uma lei para sustentar o meu filho” ‘killing my husband in the name of the law is easy, what is difficult now is to create a law to sustain my son’ (45).

Despite the difficulty of transforming audience solidarity into social action, shantytown testimonial narrative remains an important tool, especially in the context of what Stjepan Mestrovic calls the “postemotional” society. Maggie O’Neill summarizes Mestrovic’s view stating that “societies that are postemotional are marked by mechanical, mass-produced emotions and compassion fatigue; but they also contain possibilities of and for authenticity” (O’Neill 13). In such a society in which violence is treated mechanically and in which spaces to think and feel

critically are continually losing ground, the humanizing potential of art forms such as testimonial production is imperative. Shantytown testimonial narrative is indeed a revolutionary tool for creating consciousness because many of these Brazilian and Colombian books and films show a model of overcoming adversity through both first-hand accounts and the co-authors' proposals for affecting social change; as such, shantytown testimonial narrative can be a vehicle—albeit an indirect one—for social action, and not only for entertainment (the way literature, and especially film, is commonly used). Still, in addition to these literary and filmic testimonies, the combination of a growing political basis for real involvement and improvement of these marginalized communities as well as increased knowledge of displacement and the related social problems will ideally provide a model for improving living conditions in the shantytowns, and thus lessening the urgency that is at the heart of shantytown testimonial narrative.

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