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The new Latin American journalistic crónica, emotions and hidden signs of reality

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Abstract

Latin America journalism, throughout history, has been snugly knitted to the rich literature tradition of the region. In the 19th century – the century of the de-colonisation struggle with the Spanish crown – Latin American writers began experimenting with hybrid forms of narrative. It was a quest for new ways of story telling; a hybrid form – the crónica – where story telling became a parallel journey taken by the novelist impatient to engage his or her writing with the new post colonial conditions. Since these early days, the crónica – or the chronicle – was embraced with aesthetic commitment and ideological conviction by some of the most celebrated novelists in the region. In the crónica – paraphrasing Cuban poet Alejo Carpentier – the journalist and the novelist turn out to be the same person.

The exponents of the new crop of Latin American journalistic crónica – the central theme of this paper – could well be described as a post-literary boom generation of writers who – like their predecessors of the 19th century – are impatient to engage their writing with the 21st century post dictatorship conditions.

The new cronistas don’t discard any stories, as long as they are part of the Latin American realism, in the sense of Zola’s realism instead of García Márquez’s magic realism. All of these stories have three literary nexuses; they read as fiction, they are true tales and they are overpoweringly socially progressive. This paper seeks to review, examine and perhaps propose pointers toward the conceptualization of the crónica, as a literary long form of journalism that has a distinctive Latin American diacritic, form and social undertaking.

The crónica, an inevitable permeability between journalism and literature

The porosity of Latin America journalism and literature has been well documented. With the exception of a few novelists – fiction writers – the great majority of Latin American writers have worked as journalists (Rodó, 2009). And it is from the crop of this imaginative porosity that the crónica – with its verifiable hibridy and dialectically demolishing of orthodox journalism – has bred and grown.

It is the place where – paraphrasing Cuban poet Alejo Carpentier in the crónica – the journalist and the novelist turn out to be the same person (Cancio Isla, 2010) As Vivaldi points out, journalist-writer, or writer journalist is undistinguishable as long as the ‘literary dignity’ of the story is preserved (1986, p.24). In the crónica – understood as a tension between fiction and non-fiction – the cronista’s writing technique is in permanent negotiation.

The residence of the crónica is en la tierra – residence on Earth, rephrasing Neruda’s poem – where the actuality,
the journalistic referentiality and the poetry of language mix (Rotker, 1992). For Mexico's Juan Rulfo, an historical figure of the Latin American crónica modernista and indeed literature, the fundamental characteristic of the journalistic crónica is to create images that will concede readers the ability to evoke reality (Rulfo, 2009).

Argentina's Leila Guerriero is nowadays one of the most recognised names in the Latin American crónica, a towering female figure in the realm of literary journalism or reportage – a synonym the author of this paper thinks can be be applied to the crónica. Guerriero, author of the 2005 Los suicidados del fin del mundo among numerous books of crónicas, defines the genre as a ‘gaze, a look at something that not everybody is able to perceive, the certitude that something is being narrated’ (2010, p.3) and indeed the certitude that the way of telling a story ‘is something that matters', as she points out (2010, p.2).

The literary complexity of the crónica is Mexico's Carlos Monsiváis' point of departure for his understanding of the genre as a reconstruction of events and people; a reconstruction where the urgency to inform seems less important than the form and style (Egan, 2001). Chillón, on the other hand, defines the genre as having a promiscuous liaison between literature and journalism (1999). Flirting with the concept of explanatory journalism, Martinez Albertos considers the crónica a journalistic interpretation of an event that is real and truthful (1983) and for Leñero and Marin it is the fundamental journalistic genre of Latin American journalism (1986).

For Martin Caparrós – a representative of the new generation of Latin American cronistas – ‘the allure of a good crónica consists of making the reader absorbed by an issue that didn’t attract him or her in in the first place’ (Caparrós, 2012). Additionally, Caparrós gives the crónica an ethical and social dimension – the task to give voice to the voiceless. Spanish scholar and journalist Antonio Cuartero Naranjo (2014) preserves the traditional role of the journalistic text—news construction and news dissemination – but he also adds the traditional tools handled by fiction novelists, such as structure, ambiance, tones, dialogues or scenes – to tell a story.

Reynolds defines the crónica as a ‘brief text that is bound up with journalistic forms of authorship – the “reporter,” the “foreign correspondent”’ (Conway, 2012) as well as with different types of printing, such as newspapers, literary magazines and books. Reynolds speaks about the crónica as an expression of ‘aesthetic journalism’ (2012), and for Bernal and Chillón, it is a genre where the cronista flies from the ‘stereotyped language’ of journalism (1985, p.93).

Mexico's Juan Villoro is also a member of the new wave of the Latin American crónica. And he has come up with perhaps one of the most titillating definitions of this genre. He called it the ‘ornitorrinco’ of prose (2006). The crónica is, he argues, like the Australian semi-aquatic egg-laying mammal whose anatomy was so unusual that it was thought that somebody had sewn a duck's beak onto the body of a beaver-like animal. The Latin American crónica looks like a genre sown onto its hybridity with the subjectivity of the novel, the truthfulness of reportage and the mise-en-scène of a theatre play.

The new generation of cronistas – and this will be examined a bit later in this paper – are the direct progeny of late 20th century Latin American literary crónica. However, between the new and the old there is a generation gap. It is a gap marked by the late 1960s and late 1990s wave of US sponsored military dictatorships. In two – and in some cases three – decades of historical darkness, the journalistic crónica capitulated to the urgency of the days, to the daily denouncing of deaths, human rights abuses and exile by the pro-democracy media. Apart from a few expressions of crónica, these are years marked by the alternative media’s struggle for democracy. In response the new generation of cronistas – post late 1990s – were forced to lift their gaze higher up the barren and bloody period of military dictatorships to find ‘somebody to learn from'. The literary mentorship was found then in the likes of Colombiano Gabriel García Márquez, Mexicans Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Monsiváis or Argentineans Tomás Eloy Martínez or Rodolfo Walsh.

Fundamental to all of their stories – and others who not mentioned due to space requirements – was the narrative style and the political lucidity of their work. Their canonical texts, such as Eloy Martinez’s The Passion According to Trelew (2009) or García Márquez's The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor (1989) – reflects the evolution of the crónica modernista to a pivotal position in the pantheon of the modern Latin American narrative. But it was the crónica of Mexico's Monsiváis that reflected better than anybody else the cataclysmic changes of Latin America crónica in the second half of the 20th century.

Monsiváis was the historical and lubricating literary hinge that kept the old and the new tightly connected. His sensibility – embraced by the new generation of cronistas – is ideologically and aesthetically reflected in his profile, for example, of boxer Julio César Chávez and the impact of the bolero, a Cuban music genre intimately connected to Argentina’s tango through their nostalgic lyric and melancholic style (1995). The work of Monsiváis exposes the fugacity of journalistic events and people.

A crónica is a true tale, Gabriel García Márquez once said. García Márquez’s celebration of the discourse between journalism and literature was well reflected when he commented that after 30 years, he had discovered that novelists tend to forget that the best literary formula is always the truth. And this was indeed the literary
Perhaps it was Rodolfo Walsh in his 1957 masterpiece testimonial narratives, as was the case of Mexico’s Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Monsiváis (2011). And the politicisation of the crónica was a journalism bursting in ‘political urgency’, social demand and condemnation. It was a militant and partisan crónica could be traced back, for example, to Argentina’s Domingo Sarmiento memorable 1845 largely not what could be described as impunity and a deep democratic deficit – can be seen in the work of the new generation of cronistas, they are To clarify, however, while the contemporary crisis of Latin America – corruption, poverty, rampantant criminality, impunity and a deep democratic deficit – can be seen in the work of the new generation of cronistas, they are largely not what could be described as militant writers. They are not in the sense of the militant crónica that could be traced back, for example, to Argentina’s Domingo Sarmiento memorable 1845 Facundo (1998). The crónica of Sarmiento – like those produced in the 1950s and 1960s by the likes of Argentina’s Rodolfo Walsh – was a journalism bursting in ‘political urgency’, social demand and condemnation. It was a militant and partisan crónica.

The politicisation of the crónica, however, as Mahieux reminds us, is better reflected by the emergence of testimonial narratives, as was the case of Mexico’s Elena Poniatowska and Carlos Monsiváis (2011). And perhaps it was Rodolfo Walsh in his 1957 masterpiece Operation Massacre, that the process of politicisation of
the crónica was firmly established. Walsh’s opus resorts to literary tools to uncover an event that the official version attempted to hide. And this is indeed an act of political resistance.

Rodolfo Walsh’s 1957 Operation Massacre is an undisputable landmark in the Latin American militant journalistic crónica of the 1950s and 1960. A crime story that reads like a crime fiction novel ‘synthesized the most hard-hitting journalism with literature of the highest caliber. His example of adeptness and dignity in literary reportage lives on beyond his death at the hands of a military dictatorship (Galeano: 2013).

On the night of June 9, 1956 the police rounded up a group of friends who had gathered to listen a boxing match. The police thought there were members of a radical political movement – they were not. After being taken away, the police proceed to execute them. Six of them managed to escape perhaps due to their quick reactions and the poor aim of the police. Walsh’s narrative is profoundly political and his empathy bleeds into solidarity (Phelan, 2013).

The explosion of the militant crónica was indeed a manifestation of the political effervescence and turmoil of the 1960s, highly moulded by the Cold War and the Cuban Revolution. It was also a period of dramatic decline in illiteracy among the urban and rural poor, an act of social change indebted to the critical pedagogy movement of Paulo Freire (2000). It is also important to mention the role played by Casa de las Américas, an organization founded by the Cuban Government in April 1959. As Calvi points out:

“All of this – in one way or another – is behind the explosion of the literary and intellectual boom of the 1960s.

A central figure of this literary boom was indeed Gabriel García Márquez. As a writer at ease with literature and journalism, García Márquez’ Story of a shipwrecked sailor became a significant instant in the crónica of the period. And it was also the beginning of the long affairs of García Márquez with this genre. Story of a shipwrecked sailor was originally published as 14 consecutive daily instalments in the Colombian newspaper El Espectador in 1955. It was later published as a book in 1970.

In 1974, four years after the publication of Story of a shipwrecked sailor the Latin American journalistic crónica reached a climax with Tomás Eloy Martínez’s 1989 The Passion according to Trelew. This journalistic opus – a mix of factual and fictional elements – is an account of a massacre of left wing militants at a jail in the south of Argentina. Reflecting on his work in a speech at the 1997 Sociedad Interamericana de la Prensa (Interamerican Society of the Press), Eloy Martínez pointed his finger to the printed press’ survival – a major theme in contemporary journalism (2010).

The formula for its survival, he said then, is to tell stories by reporters who are also storytellers. Eloy Martínez died of cancer in 2014 at the age of 75. In a thoughtful obituary, The Guardian described him as ‘one of the most innovative journalists and novelists of his generation’ (2010). Tomás Eloy Martínez was unwavering when he said the crónica was the fundamental Argentinean literary genre. It is a genre that was foundational to the writing of, among others, Julio Cortázar with his La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos; Jorge Luis Borge’s Historia universal de la infamia y otras inquisiciones or Lucio V. Mansilla’s Una excursión a los indios ranqueles.

**Latin American modern-day crónica & cronistas**

It would be unwise to suggest that with the death of Tomás Eloy Martínez, the ideologically charged militant and partisan crónica also died. Traces of the militant crónica can still be seen. It is, however, a crónica less attached to the old ideological paradigms and more engaged with the demand aspirations, concerns – and even the literary ludic cravings – of sociedad civil (civic society). This is a society that emerged as product of the post-military democratic desencanto, the disillusionment.

There is a sense that in recent years, the new generation of cronistas has formed part of a rearguard action in response to the disappointing democratic systems – and the economic model – that emerged at the end of the 1990s. They are young, contemporary cronistas who write – as Tirzo (2013) suggests – in a time of deep crisis for journalism and profound changes to journalists’ work.

Despite the traumas caused by the military dictatorships that ruled most of the region from the 1970s until the end of the 1990s that are not yet healed due to the prevailing reign of impunity, the new crónica appeals to an audience more concerned with micro demands and validations.

The current crop belongs to the generation born in the midst of the military dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s. Some were called the children of Pinochet, in the case of Chile. They have been influenced by the
The modern-day Latin American crónica is fundamentally connected to the neoliberal crisis and transformations experienced in the post-1990s democracies. It is a neoliberal system inherited from, and left in place by, the post-military democratic regimes – a time where social activities have been reduced to market practices (García Canclini, 2000). It is in this new post-dictatorship scenario – and already in the mid of the 21st century – that two major anthologies dedicated to the best of the contemporary Latin America crónica were published in 2012. These publications showed a renewed interest in the genre, both from practitioners and readers alike.

In his Antología de crónica latinoamericana actual (‘Anthology of current Latin American crónica’), published by Alfaguara, Colombian journalist Dario Jaramillo Agudelo points out that the ‘the journalistic crónica is today the most popular reading and its prose is the best expression of the Latin American narrative.’ The anthology of Jaramillo Agudelo was soon followed by Mejor que ficción (Anagrama, 2012) – Better than fiction – a journalistic opus of crónicas compiled by Spanish journalist and writer Jordi Carrión.

Writing in Argentina’s newspaper La Nación, Leonardo Tarifeño (2012) points out that these anthologies are connected by the subjectivity of the journalistic approach and by bringing to the centre the news landscape the margins of society. The publication of these two anthologies has been described by some literary sectors as the emergence of a new Latin American writing boom, a post-magical realism fiction movement deeply attached to the reality of a region that seems to be in a permanent process of encounters and disruptions.

One could argue that these two major publications – a showcase of the best crónica in Latin America – reflect something already insinuated – the crónica is a well-established journalist genre in Latin America that has re-emerged with new vitality from the ashes left by the cronistas of the mid 20th century. In their respective anthologies Jaramillo Agudelo and Jordi Carrión brought together the best Latin American exponents of the crónica. From their singular and individual experiences – some are more concerned with style and tone and others with a strong sense of a social and political mission – the new cronistas construct a personal reflection over reality and transform the invisible social actor into a visible one.

Style – rather than common themes – is the key feature of the stories assembled by Jaramillo Agudelo and Jordi Carrión. These are journalists whose main fear is be tedious writers. This is indeed a reflection of their professional upbringing. They come from dailies, a fast news environment that compels them to manage a precise, direct and attention-grabbing narrative. They are writers certain that the reality of contemporary Latin America can be told by the crónica and only by the crónica.

The key challenge of the genre is to marry entertainment with the symbolic power that readers have traditionally found in fictional stories and tales. It is, one could argue, an aesthetic and narrative task in transforming the factuality of a story into symbolic non-material prose. The contemporary cronistas – the new exponents of the hybrid literary journalism – have managed to ‘do’ literature without resorting to fiction. Without the urgency of the news cycle, they are immersed – using the first person – into the realities they observe and live.

Viviane Mahieux (2011) points out that the crónica has become the place of public intellectuals who – from the perspective of their different milieux – seek to do what the precursors of the genre previously attempted – to represent reality. Mahieux accentuates the work of Chile’s Pedro Lemebel. Lembel, who died in 2015, was a solitary voice of Chile’s crónica gay. He acted – as Monsiváis did in the second half of the 20th century – as a literary hinge between the horrors of the dictatorship and the desencanto of the democracy. In doing so, as Salcedo Ramos (2013) argues, he is one of the fundamental literary scaffolds of the new generation.

Also fundamental to the new crónica is the work done by the Fundación por el Nuevo Periodismo, (New Journalism Foundation). If Casa de las Américas (House of the Americas) was vital in the development of the mid-20th century crónica, in the last two decades the Fundación has become the foundamental institutional alma mater of the new crop of cronistas. Established by García Márquez in 1994, the Fundación was the creative reply of the Colombian writer to, as described by García Márquez, the banalization of journalism.

Based in the Colombia city of Cartagena, the Fundación was conceived as a mentoring place for the new exponents of the Latin American crónica. As Jaime Abello, the current director of the Fundación, points out, García Márquez sought ways to give back to journalists the desire to tell good stories and, along the way, keep hold of the elusive and unrestrained contemporary reader. The Director of Mexico’s El Economista, Luis Miguel González, points out ‘the foundation had profoundly marked thousands of Latin American reporters’ (Crúz: 2014); and for Guillermo Osorio, cronista and Mexican editor, the initiative of García Márquez has produced a network of cronistas who can be considered the best in Spanish language journalism (Crúz, 2014).

In addition, the Foundation has redirected the gaze of the next generation of cronistas from European and US journalism to Latin America. Since it was set up, the Foundation has mentored some of the most notable names
of the recent Latin American crónica, such as Leila Guerriero, Alberto Salcedo Ramos, Josefina Licitra, Martín Caparros, Julio Villanueva Chang, Christian Alarcón and Héctor Feliciano, just to name a few. These are crónistas who have challenged the neoliberal paradigm applied to journalism in the 1980s and 1990s.

It seems Latin American crónistas of the 21st century have found ways to compete with the moving image of the 24/7 news channel. It is a generation that seeks to rupture the hegemony of traditional journalism – a journalism anaesthetised by the sameness. As Bernabé (2006) suggests, these are writers who, in their crónicas, threaten a society run by indifference, consummation and social uniformity.

The post-dictatorship desencanto and the social tranversal reivindications or demands at the dawn of the 21st century – from the right to water, to the legalisation of the marihuana; from students' demands for better education, to gay rights – becomes the fertilizer of a crop of young, outraged and intellectually fearless crónistas. They are mostly freed from the ideological and partisan straps of the past. Since a crónica can be about any imaginable subject, the non-conformist, and at times random, stories speak of a new crop finally able to move beyond the central themes of the previous period – human rights abuses, torture, disappearance, democracy, and freedom of the press among others. And it is in this sense perhaps that the current crónistas are less overtly militantly political than the previous generation, even through they are overtly engaged and critical.

The new crop seems to have found the leit motiv – in plural – to make visible the invisible actors and events of the modern ‘social reality of Latin America’ (Falbo, 2007). They are crónicas that – as Poblete suggests (2009) – are enticed by the crisis and the neoliberal transformations of the region's economy and society. It narrates the ‘dark side of things’ (Rivas, 1998, p.23). As Calvi observes in his excellent article on the ‘new journalism in Latin America’, ‘the main characters of Latin American nonfiction tended to fulfill a symbolic function, and their narratives were very much allegorical’ (2010, p.70). And rightly he gives to this genre a ‘socio-political role’. The common experiences of the daily-life life, the stories of common men and women – physically unconnected – takes shape as an imagined community, as suggested by Anderson (1983), playing a social political act.

Argentina’s Robert Herrscher (2012) regards the new Latin American crónica as the literature of the poor. Herrscher argues the crónica is where el pueblo (the people) – understood as social and political category – can access to the best existing literature in Argentina. These are stories located at the margins of society, they are subjective observations and at the same time they meet the key requirement of journalism: they are accurate. Carlos Monsiváís recognized the fibre that unified the aspirations of the new emerging crónistas. They ares less anxious to meet the demands of traditional commercial journalism and – instead – they are in pursuit of the best method of telling a story (1998).

Indeed this doesn’t mean they neglect the story. On the contrary, they are in a permanent search for stories able to appeal to a fragmented audience. The national stories became regional and the nation becomes one individual. Or as Salcedo Ramos suggests -the aim is to narrate the particular to interpret the universal (2013). It is the individual tale suggested by Lyotard (1979) as a reaction to the great narratives as a strategy to mend the social connections shattered in the epoch of the desencanto.

The individual story able to tell – as Borges once suggested – the story of the humanity seems to be the demand of these new crónistas – capturing a fragment of reality, as hinted by Bernabé (2006, p.11). Paraphrasing Hayden White (1987) – these are stories with a non-conclusive end where things are not resolved. One could be tempted to suggest this is a metaphor of the Latin American reality, unresolved, unending and incomprehensible.

This is the kind of narrative that seeks to describe, explain and problematize the communal experiences of the Latin American historicity. It reflects a counter-hegemonic and fragmented thematic that provides a sense of heterogeneity in the commonality of realities. It is narrative with a sense of marginality and with a fundamental mandate; to counterbalance an official, mainstream and hegemonic narrative. In light of this, the crónica post-neoliberal model – and catastrophes – became an act of intervention. In a performative sense, the crónica has an ethical appeal, an appeal seeking the encounter between the reader and the invisible event and individual (Bernabé, 2006)

And they are not all the time ‘noble individuals’. Frequently they belong to the deviant fringes of society. Some of the most powerful pieces of crónicas have been about those at the margins of the law – drug lords, gang leaders and other deviant characters that fascinate these modern crónistas and readers alike. They are also moved by the incomprehension of the post-dictatorship Latin America milieu, a milieu wonderfully articulated by Carlos Monsiváís’s aphorism ‘Either I don’t understand what is happening or what I understand has already happened’ (Loaeza, 2011). And while he was referring to the perplexities of the modern Mexican society, it is also pertinent to the south of Monsiváís’ country.

I would posit that one reason why the crónicas of those on the margins of the law have a strong resonance in the popular classes is that these characters represent a mirror image of the institutionalised criminality of the governing elites, the systematic robbing of public assets by those in power. These stories also implicitly or
explicitly address the complicity of the elites with crime, and the often disfunctionality and complicity of the judicial system.

The crónica is political writing and cronistas assume this with a sense of mysticism. The core and the margins are turned upside down – or perhaps it is better to say that the margin (al) is brought to the centre. It is a mutiny against traditional journalism that tells the stories of the few to the many. In this act of political rebellion, the crónica seeks to tell the story of the many – the majority – and to rescue them from oblivion. And perhaps one should pause to also point out that the modern crónica has reinstalled once again the notion of the testimonio.

And despite this attempt to tell the story de los abajo – those from below – there is also a call for examining the action of the few – at the top of the social scale as perpetrators of the misery of the many. In this thematic shift, the cronistas enter into the world of the powerful politicians or financial speculators, as it is the case of Hernán Iglésias in his potent piece of journalism, Golden Boys (2011). It is a story of Argentinean financiers who became wealthy speculating in Wall Street while the country was financially falling apart.

This thematic shift – as Iglésias did – has it risks though. One could argue the crónica is a genre able to upset the establishment. While those down below don’t have the resources to challenge a story that might aggravate them, those higher in the social scale can. As Mexicans’ Alma Guillermo Prieto warns us, it is less risky to write about the poor than the rich (Núñez: 2009). Writing the stories of the rich and powerful can be very costly; the writers’ wallet or their life.

And perhaps there is nothing new here. After all it was back in 1980 that García Márquez wrote in the prologue to his The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor that this story ʻwould cost my lifeʼ. In this story he had challenged the official version of the government. Indeed, Rodolfo Walsh paid with his life. The publication of his Operation Massacre – mentioned earlier – also is a case of a narrative that challenged the official story. On March 25, 1977, a military task force finally caught up with Walsh and gunned him down in La Plata.

Pablo Calvi doesn’t refer to physical security of the cronistas writing stories able to upset the elite but rather to the ‘passivity and indifference with which the story was received by the mainstream media’ (2010, p.73). And despite this passivity and indifference – and indeed despite these cronistas belonging to the cultural industry of the region – they don’t avoid the frontal clash with those who financially control the mass media. As Calvi (2010) said, this is a crop that despite all that indifference, they plough along with their stories.

The themes of privatisation of violence and the otherness have taken a central stage among the new crop of cronistas. In books, literary journalism magazines, in online sites and in some weekend newspapers magazines, violence is confronted head on and connected to la inseguridad ciudadana (citizens’ insecurity), another major theme of the contemporary Latin America crónica. One of the most notable exponents of the crónica of violence is Mexico’s Fabrizio Jaramillo Mejía Madrid.

Mejía Madrid Jaramillo Madrid is a peripatetic writer when it comes to publications. His work is widely published in Mexico’s newspapers and magazines and also in some of the most important publications in the region. His work is deeply marked by the realities of Mexico, a country that seems unable to shake off the shackles of violence. Deeply moving, gory and poetic and at the same time a reflection of this violence can be read in his piece 2007 Salida de emergencia (Emergency exit).

Teatro del Crimen, Theatre of the Crime.

As modern representatives of the heroic reporter, Latin American cronistas take a close up look – simultaneously deep and panoramic – of the drug war in Mexico, the forced diaspora of minors from Central America to the US, the campesinos confronting water privatization, and structural issues that keep the region on its knees, corruption, impunity and inequality.

The otherness – the other central theme in some of the recent crónicas – points toward the bizarre. The whacky – from the large number of Uruguayan children who are named Hitler, to a magician who lost his arms – abounds. Reality, and the cornucopia of events that converge into its own construction, is the place where the cronistas converge. And indeed humor is also very much part of the themes these new cronistas attempt to craft in their writings. It is very often an uncanny and off-the-wall humour, such as the stories about Albinos living in the Patagonia. They are stories that incite the sensualitethe aestheticism of the cronistas and readers alike.

The historic visibility of people and events – the reality – is achieved by the use of personal styles and indeed by the use of the first person – a personal approach that helps to narrow the gap between the writer and the reader. Narrowing the space between readers and writers is a key aspect of the new crónica. This is an undertaking that brings into the front – and reinvindicates – the subjectivity of the writer. And there is a sense of moral obligation that suggests the cronistas are moved by an ethical dimension. As the heirs of Tomás Eloy Martínez, they have taken seriously the suggestions of the Argentinean writer to whom the journalist was a ‘voice that thinks, acknowledges emotions and the hidden tensions of reality’ (Goyes, 2006).
El Malpensante was born in 1996 in Colombia and Peru’s Etiqueta Negra was established in 2002 by cronista Julio Villanueva Chang. Etiqueta Negra plays an important place in the magazines of crónica(s). Published in Peru, Chile and Panama, the magazine defines itself as a publication for the ‘absent-minded’. Some are published digitally and in hard copy, while others are just in digital format. While both magazines were highly influenced by The New Yorker, Esquire and Atlantic Monthly, they have a strong Latin American flavour. The network of publications also includes Soho (Colombia), Lamujerdemivida and Orsá (Argentina), Frontera D (Spain), Pie izquierdo (Bolivia), Marcapasos (Venezuela), Letras Libres (México), The Clinic (Chile).

Books of crónicas are the great news story of both the Latin American and Spanish publishing industries. As they are long texts – as Cuartero Naranjo (2014) suggests – they are perfectly adapted to the book format. And it is in Argentina, a country with a strong tradition in well-researched and stylistically attractive crónica, that books of journalism by journalists are financially underpinning the ‘political economy’ of the local publishing industry. In the cash registers of Latin American bookstores the crónica – in book form – has long displaced fiction.

And these are books that, in the same tradition of newspaper or magazine articles, are framed around the fundamental social and political realities. In Argentina, for example, during the government of Carlos Saul Menem, the production of crónicas examining corruption, the decisive characteristic of this government, grew at a fast pace.

There are also those who, at high financial risk, have been publishing her work in book form. Such is the case of Rocio Montes. A Chilean journalist, Montes is the co-author with Nancy Castillo of the best selling book Hijas de General: la Historia que cruza a Bachelet y Matthei (Editorial Catalonia 2013). Montes and Castillo, who...
believes the crónica helps to understand the world, explore the fate of two women, Michelle Bachelet, the Chilean president of two terms and daughter of Air Force General Alberto Bachelet – assassinated by the military dictatorship of Pinochet (1973-1989) – and Evelyn Matthei, a member of the Pinochet military junta. In The New Yorker, John Lee Anderson described the crónica as heartrending and as exemplary for the history of Chile (2013).

The boom in number, and financial success, of books dedicated to the crónica has encouraged publishing houses to develop collections dedicated to the genre. This is the case of Santillana that has created the collection Aguilar; Random House with Debate and Anageamawith Crónicas. In 2006, Planeta publishing house established the award Crónica Planeta and Seix Barral in partnership with the Foundation for New Journalism.

**Conclusion**

There is a sense of reluctance in calling the crónica a new Latin America ‘boom’, but certainly it seems to be one of the newest trends in the region’s rich journalistic tradition. The crónica is today one of the most exciting writing journeys undertaken by what can be described as the post-dictatorship writers. One of the most powerful dimensions of the crónica is its pan-Latin Americanism: it flourishes throughout Latin America.

In an era of ‘media decadence’ (Keane, 2013), the crónica has not only challenged the hegemonic forms of journalism, but it also has given a new dimension to Latin American non-fiction writing. The modern crónica in Latin America operates mainly outside the boundaries of commercial journalism and in fact tends to disrupt the official story conveyed by the hegemonic news media. The crónica is a transgressor, and by tackling the social tensions in modern Latin America, it brings to the public sphere subaltern actors, events, places and ideas.

The Latin American contemporary crónica addresses very troubling and unresolved issues in society, such as violence, exclusion, corruption and impunity. It does this in ways that resonate with readers as they can deeply identify with these issues. In the context of the crisis of traditional journalism, the crónica is not only vital because it addresses issues unresolved in the post-dictatorship period, but also because it gives voice to the disappointment and disenchantment with so-called leftist governments in the post-dictatorship era and, in particular, their concessions and complicity with neoliberalism and authoritarianism.

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