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## **Collaborative Research Through Stories: A Case of Narrative Socio-Analysis in New York City**

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## ABSTRACT

Based on a collaborative research experience with Mexican women emigrated to New York initiated in 2016, this article offers an analytical approach to the praxis of Socioanalysis and Collaborative Ethnography. One of the most creative axes of this research project is the creation of a radio soap based on the outcomes of the research activity. By working with fictional storytelling women are exploring discourses, representations and imaginaries related to the “migrant” identity and communicating their exploration in a more innovative and powerful language than the rigid academic code. Through a creative overflowing of some of the dominant patterns in social research, the project is exploring a practical questioning of both the systemic modes of conception of the migrant phenomenon and the social research itself. A key ingredient in this methodological proposal is the development of an *affectionate* group activity whose purpose is both the production of knowledges and the collective construction of affection and care.

## KEY WORDS

Socioanalysis, collaborative ethnography, community storytelling, emigrated women, United States of America.

### INVESTIGACIÓN COLABORATIVA A TRAVÉS DE LAS HISTORIAS: UN CASO DE SOCIOANÁLISIS NARRATIVO EN LA CIUDAD DE NUEVA YORK

## RESUMEN

Desde septiembre de 2016 un grupo de mujeres mexicanas emigradas en la ciudad de Nueva York y varios investigadores sociales habitamos una experiencia de investigación cuyo carácter reflexivo está indagando la llamada «condición migrante» en la metrópoli neoyorquina (reflexividad de primer orden), preguntándose, al mismo tiempo, acerca del proceso de investigación mismo (reflexividad de segundo orden). El sentido del presente artículo es compartir algunas de las claves metodológicas y analíticas de una experiencia investigadora socioanalítica y de etnografía colaborativa en la que la narrativa comunitaria y los lenguajes de la radionovela juegan un papel vital en el análisis reflexivo de los imaginarios, los discursos, las formas de subjetivación y los modos de vida, al mismo tiempo que activan procesos de alfabetización mediática, agitan la creatividad y conforman un sentido en común caracterizado por una producción *amorosa* de saberes y conocimientos que coloca en el centro de su construcción grupal los cuidados y el tejido de un vínculo afectivo.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

Etnografía colaborativa, socioanálisis, narrativa comunitaria, mujeres emigradas, Estados Unidos.

## Introduction

Since the winter of 2016, we have been participating in a collaborative research experience with a group of Mexican women who immigrated to New York City, most of whom who are in an undocumented situation. The project is working as a process of composition of an *us-others* from the encounter of diverse subjects: (a) women who have immigrated to the United States and are not familiar with the usual languages and coding guidelines of research and academic logic; (b) women and men formally linked to the academy and familiar with the rationality of the social sciences; and (c) professionals in the audiovisual field. A basic ingredient of the methodological commitment we are going through is the exercise of self-diagnosis and self-analysis based on the community narrative and research games of a narrative nature.

In the course of this project, which starts from a previous experience of working together within a local community organization, the use of narratives is being revealed as a very useful tool for the reflective analysis of imaginaries, discourses, forms of subjectivation and ways of life, at the same time it is offering us the possibility of activating media literacy processes that help us (1) develop a critical approach to media discourse and (2) erode the role of passive spectators to experiment with the active production of content and narratives based on the collective analysis of what has been experienced.

Given the importance that media narratives, particularly the characteristics of the soap opera format, have in the existential universes of many of the Mexican women who immigrated to the United States, this area of our research action is not trivial at all. It is here, precisely, where we are discovering the political potentialities offered by the hybridization between collaborative research and narratives. A research policy that, from respect to the legitimacy of the other an individual, is putting into play different ways of understanding beyond the academic, weaving an experience of common construction of knowledges in the experience not only of other ways of knowing, but also in different forms and languages for the expression and communication of research.

The objective of this text is to share some conceptual and methodological elements that are proving important both in the development of the project and in the way we are thinking and experimenting with it. To do this, we go into the exposition of some of the keys to the perspective in which we inscribe our research experience: *narrative socio-analysis* (Curcio, Prette and Valentino, 2017), taking epistemological stimuli and methodological proposals from both *collaborative ethnography* (Lassiter,

2005; Rappaport, 2007 and 2008), as well as *autoethnography* (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011). In the course of our exhibition, we propose several concepts that are playing a relevant role when configuring and explaining the meaning of the project in which we are immersed.

An important ingredient in our presentation is the direct word of some of the Mexican migrant women in New York who inhabit the research initiative. The project started with the participation of seven women, most of them in a situation of undocumented immigrants. At present, three of them are constantly active in the day-to-day work of the research group, while another two follow the evolution of the project through sporadic communication with the team. Given the situated nature of any research experience, we deem it pertinent to offer the reader a minimum reference to the people who make up the core of the research group. We will do it by literally collecting the descriptions made in the first person by the people who participate in the day-to-day running of the project. In this way, we link ourselves to the logic of reflexivity that guides the initiative, as well as offering useful material for the unmediated analysis of the differences in discourse, self-perception, and self-description among the various subjects who share the experience. The descriptions that we transcribe below were part of a project presentation document prepared in June 2018 for a collaboration meeting with Brooklyn Information and Culture Arts Media (BRIC), one of New York City's most dynamic agents of cultural intervention.

I am from a small town called San Lucas Atzala, Cholula, Puebla. I came to the United States in 1996. I have three children born here. One of them is in college. I have been a community activist since 2001, when I started at my oldest son's school. I have collaborated in different organizations as a volunteer, an event organizer and, also, as the director of the community group "Bensonhurst." I am a teacher of folk dances and a member of the ZENKA organization, dedicated to the indigenous communities of Latin America. In addition, I run a grocery store in the neighborhood where I live and I am a member of the Parish Council of my church and president of the Guadalupano Committee, which is dedicated to the Guadalupana parties. I miss my country a lot, especially my mother's meals (Blandie Medina).

I came to the United States in 1981. I was born in Mexico City. I have enjoyed working and helping young people in my community and my parish for more than twenty years. I have three children for whom I have fought and worked. Today I begin to receive fruits from my oldest daughter, who is graduating in Latin American Studies this year at Scripps College (California). My youngest daughter is also in college and my son is finishing high school this year. I worked in an organization called "La Unión" giving service and helping my

community in education and rights at school. Today I continue to contribute and help my community (Isabel).

I am from Mexico. I grew up in a small town in Tepoztlán (Morelos), where I learned to love the land and cultivate it. I immigrated to the United States at seventeen with the dream of returning with enough capital to farm my grandfather's land. Driven by him and my mother, I studied tax accounting in Mexico, and here in the USA, I achieved the great dream of studying Import and Export, a field in which I worked for fourteen years. I have always liked to get involved and participate with the community. With the "La Unión" organization, I learned and reflected on our rights as immigrants. I have the great fortune of currently working on my own, making tamales and Mexican snacks. I am proud to share my culture through the food that I sell. That has helped me integrate and connect with the people in my neighborhood, as if it were a town. I love New York City, the great diversity of people and cultures. When they ask me what town I am from, it comes out of my heart to say, "*my town is New York*" (Aída Márquez Romero).

I was born in this country and raised all my life in Brooklyn. I am a photographer and organizer, something I inherited from my parents' social justice ethic. I met my partners from "La Séptima Mujer" years ago, doing an *internship* with the "La Unión" organization, and even more so when in 2013 I participated with some of them in the Zapatista Little School in the State of Chiapas, Mexico. I studied Environmental Studies at Amherst College (Massachusetts). I currently work as a tenant organizer in the Latin neighborhood known as "Los Sures," in Williamsburg (Brooklyn, NY) (Lucas Rénique-Poole. Community organizer).

Margarita Zires: "Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Frankfurt (Germany). She is a professor in the Master's in Communication and Politics and the Ph.D. in Social Sciences at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), Mexico City. Member of the National System of Researchers of Mexico. Director of the research group 'Questioned Nation and Political Action' since 2009. She is a specialist in the study of rumors, myths, and social imaginaries in different socio-cultural contexts in Mexico. Professor Zires develops a multidisciplinary perspective in fields of study such as communication, symbolic anthropology, political philosophy, sociology, semiotics, and discourse analysis."

Felipe Vara de Rey: "Filmmaker and director of photography with award-winning works at festivals around the world. Born in Madrid, Felipe has been developing his career in New York City since 2011, when he began studying for a Master's in Film at New York University (NYU). Felipe has been a Fulbright scholar, has obtained a scholarship from the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, and was nominated for the 'Volker

Banhemann’ award for photography awarded each year by the global company ARRI.”

Ángel Luis Lara: “Doctor in Sociology and screenwriter. Professor of Cultural Studies at the State University of New York, College at Old Westbury. He has taught Social Research Methods courses at The New School. For years, he has been teaching scriptwriting at the International School of Film and Television of San Antonio de los Baños (EICTV), in Cuba. He has directed community audiovisual writing programs at the Jacob Burns Film Center-Arts Media Lab in New York and has directed seminars on the issue at the University of Costa Rica and the University of Granada (Spain).”

## 1. Socio-analysis, collaborative ethnography, situations, autoethnography

Sociologists Georges Lapassade and René Loureau defined *socio-analysis* as a form of institutional analysis in an intervention situation that entails the deployment of methodologies of *instituting involvement* in what is analyzed, that is, whose objective is the transformation of the group or the social space analyzed, emphasizing the idea that the institution is what reproduces the dominant social relations within an organization or a community (Lapassade, 2000; Lapassade and Loureau, 1974). In general, we could say that it is a research-transforming praxis through reflective analysis in situations of conflicts and problems that affect social groups. We speak of an intervention of a character situated in two senses: (1) because the analysis, far from claiming any objectivity, is located in an *instituting position* that is oriented toward the questioning and transformation of the instituted (Lapassade, 2000: 107); and (2) because the development of the socio-analytic experience is built from the identification or production of concrete situations or “analyzing events” capable of making covert dynamics emerge. These analyzers consist of given or created situations that allow the structure of the institution to be revealed, to provoke it, to force it to speak (Loureau, 1970: 282).

In the *Report on the Construction of Situations*, the founding document of the Situationist International written by Guy Debord in 1957, some ideas are pointed out about the category of *situation* that present a noteworthy analogy with the methodological reasoning about the socio-analytic school’s own analyzer. For Debord (1957), a *situation* is a moment of life, spontaneous or constructed, that is capable of transforming what has been lived into an experience based on the production of a

greater impassioned quality in relation to living: the general objective must be the expansion of the “non-mediocre” part of life and the decrease of what the situationists called “the null moments,” referring to the monotony of the instituted. From the point of view of the institution of situations, it is an intervention on the complex factors of two major components in perpetual interaction: the material framework of life and the behaviors that it entails and that disrupt it. In this way, the institution of situations is presented for Debord as a political tool for the concrete transformation of people’s lives based on the collective organization of a kind of “game of events” that implies an action on behavior and “a revolution in customs.” This situationist game is distinguished from the classical concept of *game* by the radical denial of the playful nature of competition and separation from everyday life. It is, according to Debord, a game that involves a kind of ethical rebellion<sup>1</sup> in which the construction of the situation has a participatory and democratic character: the situation is made to be lived by its builders. In this way, the institution of situations operates in the antipodes of the logic of the spectacle and of the condition of “passive public” that the instituted order grants to people as audiences, voters, or consumers. Far from a public opinion, the situation establishes an environment in which people emerge as subjects *living* an experience of which they are a constitutive part.

In the same way that the creation of situations implies for Debord the production of new meanings and new possibilities (“powers for”)<sup>2</sup>, the situation functions in socio-analysis as a tool for the institution of resignifications and other meanings. Lapassade quotes Bergson to give a clarifying example in this sense from the situation of someone in an orchard:

A cherry tree is good for eating cherries and for cooling off, but if a dangerous animal appears, a threatening bull for example, the cherry tree ceases to be a

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1. Mario Tronti, in conversation with Adriano Vinale, explains in a clarifying way the quality of this *ethical rebellion*: “*In the same social subjectivity is the internalization of an enemy world. [...] And how the singular individual resigns himself today to the fact that he needs to be the way he is demanded to be — that is, a bourgeois: if you want to live, if you want to live well, and we all want to live well, you must be bourgeois [...] If you want to act ‘well’ in this world, we have to internalize this characteristic, you must be as you are asked to be. And this is what provokes an ethical rebellion, because it is a process that brings in what was previously only an external enemy. We are now facing an internal enemy that is much more difficult to fight*” (Vinale and Tronti, 2008: 24).

2. “*The powers of the everyday are not only ‘powers over,’ but also ‘powers for.’ Relationships are not only domination but construction. It is not about ‘taking’ the powers, and using them by others without changing their contents, but of building or rebuilding them*” (Villasante and Martín Gutiérrez, 2006: 18).

cherry tree and becomes a protective tree if it climbs its branches. Thus, the two definitions of the tree are different. This is precisely the explanation of the situation: the world is perceived differently depending on the need of the moment and what is nothing more than a means becomes a situation. The environment as an objective set (trees, grass, etc.), as a world, becomes a world for the one who is going to define it and give it meaning. At the beginning the tree is a tree. The cherry tree is a cherry tree and it has cherries, but it can be both a fruit tree and a shelter-tree. This is where we go from the notion of environment to the notion of situation (Lapassade, 1999).

The situation, therefore, has an eminently instituting character by revealing possibilities that were hidden and instituting a new meaning from one's own experience. It is precisely from the creation of situations or work with pre-existing situations that socio-analysis builds its instituting activity in groups, organizations, social networks, community fabrics or socio-political projects in which it intervenes. The methodological key is the conversion of the situation into an analyzer, be it natural or constructed, as a material device that makes the analysis and that causes the emergence of "the real from what is hidden," dislodging the instituted from an intervention that shakes the usual rules of the institution. It is a pattern of self-analysis or "internal analysis," made by people based on their work in the group, which assumes the common knowledge of its participants as the main source of knowledge and the collective narration of their experience as the main route of exploration (Curcio, Prette and Valentino, 2017). We are speaking, in short, of an epistemological and methodological turn that, activating intersubjective processes that cancel the asymmetry between a research subject and a researched object, introduces a mutation in the preposition usually involved in research activity and adds complexity in the form of an adverb so: from research *on* to research *together* and *with*.

In this turn in which we locate our research practice, we guide our activity from a framework of meaning that, in addition to feeding on the socio-analytic pattern, explores methodological conceptions of collaborative ethnography and autoethnography. The first one feeds us with an integral idea of collaborative dynamics as a reality that runs through the entire development of the research experience (Lassiter, 2005: 16), from the conceptualization of the project to the materialization of a field bet conceived as the territory of a co-theorization (Rappaport, 2007: 9): a collective co-production of conceptual vehicles that, by relating the academic ways of conceiving and abstracting with the concepts developed by the women immigrated to New York with whom we work, generates new forms of theorization and new logical pathways for conceptualization.



The autoethnographic proposal, in turn, gives us the centrality of an aesthetic and evocative inclination of the texts, the research products, and the means for their socialization within and outside the academic field, paying special attention to the use of narrative tools and of fictions such as the idea of character, scene and plot (Ellis and Ellingson, 2000). This logic is part of the manifest intention of engaging the recipient or reader of the materials produced by the research with the thoughts, actions, and emotions generated during its development (Ellis, 2004: 142).

In relation to this concern about the encouragement of recipients' commitment to materials produced by research work in social sciences, as well as the deployment of strategies for the growth of the social impact of research, we have found the proposals of "ethnography-fiction" (Martos-García and Devís-Devís, 2015) and "ethnographic fiction" or "creative non-fiction" very stimulating (Sparkes, 2002). This perspective, emphasizing the empowerment of an empathic function of writing and representing the data and results of the research processes, not only affects the reporting of facts, but also does so in a way that moves the reader toward a deeper understanding of the object of study by building an emotional bond with it (Cheney, 2001: 1). To do this, he proposes the use of a narrative that explores fictional formats for the communication of research and the narration of phenomena, situations and data produced in becoming a researcher, that is, the communication of empirical evidence within a form of fiction writing (Clayton, 2010: 272). On the one hand, this perspective underlines the traditional relevance given to narrative rationality in the field of anthropology and sociology, illustrated, for example, by the importance of life stories as a "classical" ethnographic technique that collects stories "in lowercase" and in the first person of common subjects who operate in the terms of "any protagonists" (Arjona and Checa, 1998: 4). On the other hand, "ethnography-fiction" represents an innovation by placing at the center of its proposal the practice of a narrative dramatization that articulates the writing and communication of research based on typical elements of fiction stories, such as (a) the development of characters, (b) the use of scenes, and (c) the use of plots that generate dramatic tension (Sparkes, 2002: 5).

In this hybridization between innovation based on the incorporation of a fictional narrative and emphasis on the traditional qualitative interest of sociology and anthropology in stories, our research project goes beyond the methodological proposal of "ethnography-fiction" to extend the relevance of fictions beyond the strict framework of research writing and the question regarding the format in which the results of research processes are presented. As we will see later, our use of fictional narrative does not

only address the desire to explore new formats for the communication of research, that is, it is not only proposed as an attractive code for the socialization of the results of a research process, but which also constitutes a tool for the development of research itself, that is, for the production of knowledge.

### 1.1. The narrative socio-analysis

The *Sensibili alle foglie* collective (Sensitive to the leaves) is a production and work cooperative founded in 1990 by a group of prisoners connected to the cycle of social struggles opened in Italy around 1968 and which in that country spanned the entire decade of the seventies<sup>3</sup>. Taking narrative as their main tool, they have focused part of their activity on the elaboration of a creative rereading of the socio-analytical practice and its methodological assumptions. Focused fundamentally on de-institutionalization projects of people stigmatized by the prison brand, they locate their interventions in a methodological field that they have called “narrative socio-analysis,” a way of researching and composing in common through group narration as a fundamental analyzer.

This research intervention proposal, born in the Roman prison of Rebibbia in the last decade of the last century, includes in its configuration the wake of basic elements present in the development of the original socio-analytical interventions as they were described by Lapassade: (1) institution of a self-managed assembly which is called a “project,” (2) a ritual of group meetings, and (3) the construction of an analyzer that in the Italian case is made up of the narration and construction of stories. Curcio, Prette and Valentino succinctly explain the meaning and scope of the narrative analyzer:

The short story of problematic events that occur in everyday relationships within a group, an association or an institution inevitably verbalizes a tension and, therefore, holds the code of a conflict, the dialectic of a crisis. Each narrative in this sense, in addition to being constituted as a primary source of knowledge, is also configured as an analyzer of power devices and processes that reproduce dominance and cause suffering, anxiety, fears, inequalities, and hierarchies. (Curcio, Prette and Valentino, 2017: 232).

People carry in the cultural marrow of our human condition a narrative impulse that is often oriented toward building a bridge between the unknown, which includes both change (the future) and the atavistic and

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3. About this cycle of social struggles in Italy you can see: Balestrini and Moroni, 2006.

mysterious that has always shaped us, and the known in the form of apparent facts that emerge when confronting the given social world (Vera-Herrera, 2017: 49). We make sense through the stories, and when the narrative process is configured in a group way, the common sense inserted in the stories becomes a kind of *common sense*. Unlike the universal, conceived by Western rationality as something that exists in each member of the species in isolation, that is in each one of us, the common is that which occurs only in the relationship, in the “between” that unites us and separates us (Illuminati, 2009: 53). The common narrative weaves and links us as well as reveals us through projections of what we have experienced that go further, forcing us to question and imagine. When the common production of stories is placed at the center of a socio-analytic exercise, the narrative activity brings out two of the fundamental elements of the socio-analysis that we have exposed in previous pages: (1) construction of a *situation* and (2) research work with an *analyzer*. Let’s see in the next pages the presence of these two elements in group narrative activity within a socio-analytical experience.

## 2. Conversational situation and narrative analyzer

Previously we have gone through the situationist proposal of resignification and institution of other meanings through the construction of situations that imply “a non-mediocre expansion of life,” as well as “a decrease in the monotony of the instituted.” The way in which our socio-analytical project has addressed the creative activity around the construction of a situation has to do directly with the explicit demand of the women who immigrated to New York who participate in the experience. One of the key drivers of their commitment to the current research proposal is the desire to make themselves visible and communicate without mediation their conditions of existence and the states of mind associated with their lives as Mexican migrant women, most of whom are undocumented. This desire to escape from the systematic role of object of the statements of others through a recovery of their condition as subjects through the enunciation itself, is guided by several basic criteria of visibility exposed by women: to become visible (1) to the Anglo-white and African-American local population, especially those who objectify undocumented immigrants based on stereotypical images; (2) to Latin American women who share with them the triple condition of women, immigrants and undocumented in the United States; (3) to the sons and daughters of immigrants, many of them already born in United States territory, inhabitants of an educational system full of flaws, and with whom communication is not

easy on many occasions; (4) to many of the immigrated Latin American men with whom they live through complicated relationships charged with complexity clothed with the daily and molecular weight of misunderstanding, abuse, and discrimination; (5) to Mexico and the social ecosystems from which they come, through which an often idealized image of the emigrant status circulates and, in not a few cases, a lack of knowledge of the reality of the lives of emigrants on the other side of the border.

This complex demand for visibilization was made increasingly urgent by the arrival of Donald Trump at the White House in January 2017. Both the explicit speech of the current president of the United States, openly hostile toward emigrants living in the country in an undocumented situation, as well as the climate of legitimacy and empowerment of the most racist positions in the country, favored by Trump, are the source of concern and anguish that have been verbalized by the women participating in the project. This state of mind has led them to propose a definition of the space opened by the research initiative as an intervention collective in the current local situation, fraught with uncertainty, insecurity, and concern for undocumented people.

After an analysis of this situation and the manifest situation of vulnerability of the women in the project, the group defined the meaning of the socio-analytical activity based on four basic coordinates: (a) the relevance of constructing a *communicative artifact* that accounts for the demand for visibility mentioned above; (b) the use of the *Internet* as a security territory thanks to the possible anonymity that it facilitates and as a means of easy access to the contents produced by our activity; (c) experimentation with the languages and codes of *fictional narratives*, particularly those of serial formats, as they constitute ways of communicating with which most of us are familiar today.

From a technical point of view, the group has been inclined toward the use of the *podcast* to create a space of a radio nature and of an episodic nature that includes in each of its broadcasts the serial development of a radio soap opera based on the experiences lived in the first person by the immigrant women participating in the project. This inclination for radio stories has been derived from a reconnection with the important role played by some radio soap operas in the childhood and youth of many women in Mexico and in the rest of Latin America, whose memory remains alive in many of them, as well as of the traditional centrality that the languages and universes of soap operas play in the confection of collective imaginaries in the aforementioned geographical coordinates, especially in the case of women.

Based on these premises, the group has become a space for socio-analysis that has produced a situation of rupture with daily life based on play with creativity, imagination, and learning around the stories and codes of media communication. In the course of the experience, the group narrative activity has been instituted as in *space-time otherwise* snatched from the normality of a day to day trapped in the survival and anguish generated by the monotony of the instituted. Blandie, Isabel and Aída help us illustrate this point:

Thank God I am here, and this is a peaceful haven. It's as if everything stops and we can be somewhere else and rest from the noise (Blandie).

I spend the week running, but I know that this time is where everything stops, and the other doesn't exist (Isabel).

Having a safe place where you can take out the things you have inside is a treasure. It's a luxury to be able to talk (Aída).

The group construction of stories is based on a conversational activity that constitutes an essential requirement and fundamental tool of narrative work<sup>4</sup>. The conquest of the possibility of conversation operates in the terms of a true event of subtraction from the established existential normality. The speed of life we have in today's hyper-precarious urban environment, particularly in "monster cities" like New York, prevents us from having the necessary peace to stop and chat. "*I'm so used to the noise... Everything in life is noise and racing,*" says Blandie. We live in a way that, in the same way that we increasingly tend to hear, but not listen, we speak, but we do not converse. Eduardo Grillo, a member of the local knowledges experience, Andean Project of Peasant Technologies (Pratec)<sup>5</sup>, offers a contrast between the western urban conception of talking and the Andean peasant way of living it that complicates the understanding of the conversational experience, helping us to understand

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4. All the testimonies that we reproduce in this article, as well as the fragments of conversation that we transcribe, have been collected in the periodic work sessions of the project. These sessions have been held since February 2018, mainly on Saturdays, in our own homes or in the accounting management and advisory office where Blandie works. All the locations of our activities are located in Brooklyn. The average periodicity of the meetings has been fortnightly, although we have gone through some difficult stage when it comes to making the daily development of the research project compatible with the remunerated activities and obligations that we have.

5. Pratec is a collective constituted in Peru by a pool of professionals dedicated to training dynamics, research, farm invigoration, and dissemination of the knowledges of the Andean-Amazonian peoples.

the relevance and depth of a conversation that is increasingly taken from us: “[...] *the conversation is not reduced to dialogue, to words, [...] the conversation involves the whole body. To talk is to show one other reciprocally, it is sharing, it is the community, it is dancing to the rhythm that at all times corresponds to the annual cycle of life*” (Apffel-Marglin and Pratec, 1998: 32).

The conversational practice involved in the socio-analytic narrative recreates part of the quality of the conversation pointed out by Grillo. Aída’s purse serves as material that speaks to us in this sense: when she arrives at the meetings, she remains clinging to her purse, which hangs around her neck like one more part of her body, until, in the course of the work session group and conversation, Aída finally detaches herself from the object, forgetting it on a table or on a chair. The initial zeal with which she guards her purse has to do with the importance it has for her: Aída makes a living selling tamales on the street and the purse is the recipient of the money that comes in from sales and from which she extracts the change in daily transactions with her customers. Hence, she guards it like a treasure, but also carries it like a chain. When she comes to our meetings, she brings with her the work and the monotony established in her day-to-day life. The narrative activity involves a conversational escape in which Aída ends up disconnecting. “*Everything stops and the other does not exist,*” Isabel has commented in this regard.

Along with the possibility of a temporary break from the subjection to the forced experience of the instituted, the construction of the conversational situation in the narrative activity puts into play the quality of a true conversation. According to cybernetician Gordon Pask, the father of an interesting conceptualization exercise in the conversational event, it is an interaction that (a) requires a symmetry in the relationship and that (b) necessarily imposes a transformation on the interlocutors, that is, that they do not leave the conversational interaction in the same position in which they entered<sup>6</sup>. In the case of group construction of stories, the transformation implicit in all real conversational practice is emphasized by the transformative quality of the narrative activity itself. Elías Canetti links in his conception of narrative activity as *metamorphosis*, precisely, the symmetry of the relationship between the interlocutors and the idea of transformation pointed out by Pask:

And the poet [narrator, troubadour], thanks to that gift, must keep the access open between people. They must be able to become anyone and everyone, even the smallest, the most naive, the most incapable of mortals. Their desire to

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6. On the theory of conversation, see: Pask, 1975.

experience others from themselves, from within, should never be determined by the goals of our normal, virtually official life; the desire must free itself from any attempt at success or prestige, it must arise from passion itself, the passion for metamorphosis. [...] Only metamorphosis — in the extreme sense in which I use the term here — makes it possible to feel a person behind their words; the true existence of whatever life is cannot be apprehended in any other way (Canetti, 2017: 23-24).

In this experimentation of others from themselves, as in the constant opening of access between people to become anyone, resonates the echo of a symmetry, an empathy, an intersubjectivity, and a transformation. That is, with Canetti, the form of a narrative situation that necessarily requires *listening* in a time and a culture in which, as anthropologist Carlos Lenkersdorf (2008: 39) points out, we know how to listen, but we are not good listeners. In the way of life and the dominant modes of subjectivation in our days, in which the centrality of always being producing something is imposed, listening opens us to the possibility of a connection with a diverse rationality: at the time of listening we do nothing but listen, we receive in order to give and it is the others who speak to us and take us out of the center where our ego prefers to be to command, those who produce, integrating us with them in a dialogic experience. The crucial and inalienable nature of listening in the group construction of stories forces us to learn to listen, to teach each other, that is, it gives us a space-time of transformation in the midst of a generalized social context of the deaf, while contributing methodologically to the research purpose of the project: “the listening position expresses the maximum possible openness of the research subject” (Ibáñez, 1986: 57).

When we participate in an experience of narrative socio-analysis, this listening constitutes, above all, a continuous reception of testimonies: the stories that are created are nourished by the life lived and the stories about it that are shared in the first person. What is put into play is a kind of can opener that, through an emotional work that it draws from within, not only produces a story that structures events, but also expresses feelings. As Maori researcher Linda Tuhiwai Smith points out, testimony is a way of telling in which the voice of a “witness” is equipped with space and protection (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999: 144). In this protected space, the testimony is produced from a specific and first-hand knowledge of what has been experienced. In the narrative of this knowledge, strategies and information about the social ecosystems that the testimony gives account for are revealed due to their always situated nature. In the process of constructing our radio soap opera, for example, the cre-

ation of the plot through which the character of a Mexican woman recently arrived in New York will pass provides knowledges about the immigrant condition that is supported by the narration of a specific testimony:

It's like Alice in Wonderland, some tell you over there, others over here, and you defend yourself. Alice gets lost and asks questions and they answer her, it's the same. For example, yesterday we were selling tamales and a recently arrived Mexican boy was asking us for an address of a pizzeria where they were giving work, and from there he said, and we told him to ask at greengrocers, *dry cleaners*, in many places. And it is almost always the people you meet who are going to give you the job reference (Aída).

This work narrative, which builds characters and creates a story from testimonies and group conversations, unfolds in its evolution plots<sup>7</sup> that distribute its development throughout the twelve episodes that make up the first season of our radio soap opera. The result is what we have called a “plot map,” following the language of professional creation of fictional media content of a serial nature, that is, a diagram that contains all the stories that give shape to the narrative universe of the season, organized according to the characters that participate in each of them, as well as distributed by episodes according to the development of their dramatic action.

**PLOT MAP FIRST SEASON**

	<b>Episode 1</b>	<b>Episode 2</b>	<b>Episode 3</b>	<b>Episode 4</b>	<b>Episode 5</b>	<b>Episode 6</b>
<b>PLOT A</b> Laundry	Rosa's Laundry as a much-loved place in the community. Eviction letter arrives in 2 days. SHOCK	Neighbors assembly. Problems in New York with housing. Their gas has been cut off and they are going to cut off electricity and water (problem for Laundry). Some neighbors are afraid. Through the neighborhood church they get a lawyer.	They go to court and take shelter for several days. They need proof of rent payments. Description legal labyrinth and defenselessness.	They look for receipts and talk about “Mexican ways” with the documents. Contrast with “gringo ways.” The owner never gave them receipts. Discussion between neighbors.	Good news: they've managed to stop the eviction momentarily.  Language problems.	

7. In narrative, the plot refers to the set of events in a story according to the causal and temporal order in which the events occur. In its classical conception, the plot is divided into presentation, middle and ending, revolving around one or more conflicts that function as creators of narrative tension.



	Episode 1	Episode 2	Episode 3	Episode 4	Episode 5	Episode 6
<b>ROSA</b>	Character presentation: does not want to know anything about men. "I laugh because I'm in love with life, I don't need a man." Children presentation: feeling of guilt with the eldest-Adrián-(born in Mexico)	Washing machine breaks in laundry. Start of sexual tension (URST) with technician (Glenn Thomas, a Panamanian posing as an Antillean). They think he is African American and speak in front of him in Spanish (cue to funny plot)	First confrontation between children. Henry and Adrián, the day the eldest one goes to college. Silvia and Lucía joke about Rosa's URST with Glenn. Final episode: it is revealed that he is not African American. Funny	Celebration of La Guadalupeana: Justin (youngest son) does not want to dress traditionally. Conflict with Rosa. She finds Adrián a Marines flyer. Concern. The women talk about Glenn.	Conversation with Adrián about Marines. Rosa very worried: the boy wants to enlist. Conversation with Lucia: "he believed the story of this country." Rosa says it's a pride that he becomes a soldier. They argue. Glenn asks her out, but she says no.	Adrián is going to the Marines. Rosa very depressed. Glenn cheers her on. She's going to go out with him.
<b>SILVIA</b>	Presentation. Son (Kevin, 7 years old) very naughty and nervous. Call from very jealous husband. Silvia proposes Rosa to set up a "little beauty corner" for women in Laundry.	Preparations "little beauty corner." Women and self-esteem. Take care of each other. Jealous and controlling husband called again.	Inauguration "little beauty corner." Detail husband controller again. Very nervous and uncontrollable son.		Violence by the husband. Desolate Silvia. She talks about it with Rosa and Lucia. "Fucking men"	School: her child has attention deficit problems. They put him in a special group. Very worried and helpless. She talks to Rosa: X-ray of public education in NY. The problem is also in families.
<b>DOÑA LUCÍA</b>	Lucía's arrival: Election day when Trump wins. She falls in Laundry by chance: Cuevitas found her lost on the street. (She has an apartment address on a street with the same name, but in Queens -we'll find out later -). PRESENTATION OF CUEVITAS	Trouble looking for a house. The odyssey of finding a house in New York. She finds a small room near laundry.	She needs work: they explain how to do (Alice in Wonderland). They send her to an agency. She finds a job and it's horrible (Jewish house cleaning). She's going to leave it and go to sell flowers. Rosa proposes to place her in laundry.	Flower stand organization in laundry. UN-VEILS: SHE HAS COME TO LOOK FOR HER MISSING EMIGRATED SON. The only thing that is known is that he came from L.A. for NY. The home address on the paper is her son's, but he has gone, and she has been told that he never lived there. Strange.	Cuevitas has found out that the same address from the paper exists in Queens. Lucia goes there. Her son no longer lives there. They find out who lives with "Steve." They get a surname from an old letter. Brooks. It seems that she is a white gringo lawyer. Strange.	Google search for the so-called "Steve Brooks." A thousand come out. They find several who lived in L.A. Lucia starts visits. No results. Sadness and impotence.

**PLOT MAP FIRST SEASON**

	Episode 7	Episode 8	Episode 9	Episode 10	Episode 11	Episode 12
<b>PLOT A</b> Laundry	Unexpected turn: a Real Estate agent has bought the building (previous owner sold it with false payment details). They cut off electricity, water, gas, heating. Total harassment to tenants.	Assembly. They agree to stop paying the rent. They sue the new owner. Assaults: glass breakage, serious threats, etc. A LOT OF TENSION AND FEAR. Snow-storm, very cold. Lawyer contacts activists.	Some tenants leave the building. Widespread discouragement. Harsh living conditions in the building	News from the court arrives: eviction from laundry. Owner tries to dismantle the building's fire escape. Tenants lock themselves in the laundry and chain themselves to the fire escape.	Building sit-in and resistance	THEY SAVE BUILDING FOR NOW. LAUNDRY TOO.

	Episode 7	Episode 8	Episode 9	Episode 10	Episode 11	Episode 12
<b>ROSA</b>	<p>"Rosa's dream": she dreams that she is in her town. They talk about what they miss about Mexico. Hunch: something has happened to her mother. The flame: very emotional. Her pregnant sister (she hasn't seen her in 20 years). Dinner with Glenn.</p>	<p>Henry left his girlfriend. The girl tells him that she is pregnant. SHOCK. Silvia blames the girlfriend "for not taking care of herself." Lucia says no: "You have to take care of yourself." Lucia says no: "You have to take care of yourself among women." Big conflict with Henry. Rosa feels good with Glenn.</p>	<p>Devastated Rosa: she has raised a son who does not know how to love and another who has become a gringo. She is going to talk to the girl: the boy will be her grandson and she will help her. Conflict with Glenn: she calls her a fool for supporting the girl, "she asked for it." Very macho. Disappointment.</p>	<p>All-out conflict with Henry.</p>	<p>Glenn appears. She apologizes to Rosa. She locks herself in the building with her. They kiss!!!</p>	
<b>SILVIA</b>	<p>Doctor gives strong pills to her son. Confused Silvia. She has to decide whether or not to give them to him. Decides not to because of a testimony of a mother who went through the same thing.</p>	<p>They threaten her at school for not medicating her son. She tells Rosa. The lawyer tells them that schools get money for "special children." Outraged. The lawyer is going to help her. Detail husband</p>	<p>Conversation about fruits (plum-mango and NAFTA). What has happened in the field in Mexico. Resolves son situation at school with lawyer. He is sad because things are not going well at home.</p>	<p>The husband gives her a brutal beating: hospital. Lucia finds her. She lets Rosa know. Problem in hospital for not having papers. Police: panic. Rosa tells them, but Silvia does not want to report: she is very afraid.</p>	<p>Silvia leaves her husband and locks herself in the building with her children</p>	
<b>LUCIA</b>	<p>Depressed. Silvia encourages her. They keep searching the Internet. They find a photo of a Steve Brooks with her son. They put a message on it. There is no answer until he finally arrives: he is with her son (Juan Carlos).</p>	<p>Visit to Juan Carlos. He is gay. He is very sick (cancer from work). The story of Juan Carlos and Steve.</p>	<p>Juan Carlos' difficulties in getting treatment due to not having papers: they only authorize half the medicine. He gets worse.</p>	<p>Juan Carlos gets much worse and eventually dies. Lucia rejects.</p>	<p>Completely dejected and with nothing to lose, she locks herself in with the others in the building</p>	

**Table 1.** Plot map of the first season. Authors' own creation.

Unlike the work of professional screenwriters on television, *podcasting* or radio, for whom this map only orders and represents fictional characters and stories with a merely narrative purpose, our plot map works as a research device that transforms the narrative situation into an analyzer. On the one hand, the diagram reflects the construction of stories and characters that, arising from testimonies and first-person accounts of

the singular and plural, express the reality of the women involved in the project. On the other hand, the map openly exposes the discourses and imaginaries based on the representations that are put into play, as well as the type of solutions that are proposed for the plots and the dramatic tensions activated in the story. In this way, it is plotted and woven at the intersection between expression and representation of reality, appearing in this double movement of unveiling two types of key relationships for the analysis: (1) the relationships between characters draw the first clues of a *sociogram*<sup>8</sup>, whose design is worked on in groups; while (2) the relationship between the instituted and the instituting hidden in the ways of life and subjectivation of women is revealed, making visible the blockages, contradictions, determinations and hidden dynamics. The collective work in talks and workshops makes all these materials explicit, deploying a systematic exercise of reflective analysis that runs in parallel with the narrative activity of making a fictional serial story about Latin American women living in undocumented situations in New York.

Close to what Maffesoli (1996) calls “sensitive reason” and “organic thinking,” the narrative-analytical process that we have just described develops from ways of reasoning linked to experience. The sensitive reason implicit in the knowledges generated from the testimonies in the socio-analytic course of a narrative experience contributes to transforming the lived into experience. In the course of everyday life, we do not usually stop to observe and try to understand our relationships and the depth of the structural determinations that affect our ordinary vicissitudes. Normally, we limit ourselves to living them, without considering them as processes to be observed and decoded. Narrative socio-analysis, however, makes narration an analyzer that, by being configured based on concrete lived experience, analyzes us and activates self-analysis exercises. Thus, when presenting a testimony in the process of building a story or creating a character, for example, the testimony is discussed and related to other testimonies that are analyzed and discussed. This group analysis of the testimony helps us to make sense of what has been experienced from a concrete analyzer: the story that we are building. This story not only incorporates the testimonies in the form of plots and characters, but the development and structure of the story itself is determined from the group analysis exercise that is carried out in the course of the narrative work. Socio-analysis, in this way, is embodied in the story itself.

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8. Sociograms are social maps. They are a mode of analysis that focuses on the way in which social ties are established within a given ecosystem. On the sociogram see: Alberich, 2008; Martín, 1999.

In this regard, we have been stimulated by the proposal of hybridization between testimony, narrative and conceptual formulation mentioned by Gloria Anzaldúa in an interview with María Henríquez Betancor (Anzaldúa, 2000: 242). In the proposal of the Chicano feminist, the passage from *auto-historias* to *autohisteorías* refers to an activity of self-narration that implies a construction of meaning and knowledge of a non-heterodetermined nature.<sup>9</sup> Based on our experience with narrative socio-analysis in New York, we understand that the idea of *autohisteorías* refers to conceptual elaborations and leaps based on life lived from collective narratives of oneself, that is, they account for an analysis construction activity and conceptual frameworks based on the sense that emerges through stories that collect concrete existential experiences and journeys lived in the first person of the singular and plural.

We can illustrate this crucial issue with an example taken from the work of making plots and characters for our radio soap opera. In the course of the conversation about the fictional characteristics and vicissitudes of one of the characters, we noticed something that catches our attention: despite the fact that we are talking about the character of a Mexican woman who immigrated to the United States, the testimonies of the women who participate in the project and inhabit the same condition of the character that we are creating do not resort in any case to the term “immigrant” or “migrant” to name themselves. From the question asked in this regard, a conversation is triggered in which fundamental elements for the production of meaning are pointed out:

My heart does not accept it. “Immigrant” seems like a goodbye word to me. We do not understand that word, we have not integrated it. Being an immigrant is knowing that you have no right to anything (Isabel).

It is a word that separates, we never use it when we feel like family. The word migrant reminds you that you are unprotected and that you have no rights (Aída).

Who names what is researched? Who grants identities? Who names and classifies? These are questions that encourage the conversation and help us to inquire about the imposition of certain words, as well as the delimitation of a framework of meaning, encountering again and again

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9. “Autohistoria is a term I use to describe the genre of writing about one’s personal and collective history using fictive elements, a sort of fictionalized autobiography or memoir; an *autohistoria-teoría* is a personal essay that theorizes” (Anzaldúa, 2002: 578). The translation is ours.

the eminently problematic character of both the term “migrant” and its imposition from academic and institutional settings. Thus, in the problematization of this notion, we have been unlearning it, while reflecting on its non-neutral condition and its function as a social marker and power device:

The word “migrant” robs us of our experience... It is as if we were crossing the border all the time or, better yet, it permanently reduces us to the moment when we crossed the border (Aída).

We need to get out of that word because it makes us feel like people out of place. I have been here longer than I lived in Mexico. I have spent most of my life in the United States. Why do they keep calling me an “immigrant?” (Blandie).

Words like “migrant” or “immigrant” emerge in our analyzes as devices that imply the idea of constantly migrating. This idea does not fit the reality of the women in the project. Some of them have been living in the United States for more than twenty years, a country from which they have not moved in all that time. These are people who immigrated only once at a particular time in their lives, but who see how their entire existence is constantly defined by that specific moment that occurred more than two decades ago. That circumstance not only freezes their time in a past migratory experience, but it hides other vital aspects of their existence. “*We are persistent people who came to the United States from another land and who have put down roots in this country,*” says Aída. These roots are completely erased by the “migrant” signifier. In this way, other words and other names become necessary for us in an exercise of resignification that is equally clarifying and empowering. “*Migrants? We are not going to use those small words anymore, call us better with big words...great women, warriors,*” summarizes Aída in this regard. “*What we produce as knowledge is very important,*” Margarita replies.

### 3. Transduction and instituting impulse

Talks and workshops as an engine for the development of socio-analytical activity work from critical diagnoses of what has been experienced that put into play a reflective unveiling of the power devices that run through our existence. In the course of this experience, the development of the conversational pattern brings about modes of subjection that point to the limits and inconveniences of the established realities and imaginaries, while becoming active logics and frameworks of understanding of insti-

tuting quality. Along with the methodological relevance of doing narrative as a situation and analyzer, this process of unveiling makes explicit the *analyst* character of those who participate in the project from the academic field and who contribute views and languages typical of the social sciences. In this sense, our role conforms to the notion of “analyst” proposed by Lapassade in his description of socio-analytical projects:

In the group there is, in fact, a “monitor” who does not, in principle, transmit knowledge in accordance with the rules of traditional pedagogy. They let the group analyze itself, discover the “group dynamics.” But that monitor who remains silent is supposed to know, and is even the only one to know what others — practitioners — come to learn. The monitor knows what is happening, and perhaps even what is going to happen, the phases the group is going to go through. They are the group analyst (Lapassade, 1979: 23-24).

In our case, it is an explicit function that (1) provides a methodological proposal and an initial draft of the framework for the meaning of the initiative, (2) dynamizes the group experience by supervising the organization and planning of activities, (3) manages the log of the group’s activities by preparing a notebook as a diary and recording the working sessions, as well as (4) dynamizes and modulates these sessions in a combination of listening and intervention that, although prioritizing the first one at all times, helps to guide the meaning of the conversations and provides content based on the meaning framework defined by the group itself. In the course of our socio-analytical experience, our role as analysts has been emphasized by the demand from the women themselves, who have made explicit the value for them that we are university professors and contribute that quality to the group:

Oh, I don’t want to cry [gets emotional]... But really, when I found out you’re a university professor... Wow! I said, “*My God, I didn’t get into college, but I have a college professor.*” It’s so wonderful for me and so beautiful that when I come home and tell my son “*Today I took my class with my teacher*”... Because for me this is like I’m going to college and that was my dream (Blandie).

This point of view, expressed during one of the work sessions and shared by all the women, compels the analysts to make explicit, relativize and try to deconstruct the power relationship implicit in this type of bond at all times, avoiding the slightest hint of paternalism, while, however, taking care of the positive emotional effect that our university status can have on women’s self-esteem. In this sense, the journey from autohistorias to autohisteorías entails the construction of a meeting and negotiation place that makes explicit the non-hierarchical existence of two combined

analytical experiences: (a) those of those who come from the formal sphere of social research and the University; and (b) the particular way in which documented and undocumented Mexican immigrant women read and interpret, which is so different from the codes and language of the more conventional social sciences.

Based on this premise, it is not the same to request *feedback* or the practice of a return as an exercise in collaborative analysis in which people participate in the analytical activity and in the interpretation of their own speeches. The first involves only a translation, while the pattern of self-analysis and the collaborative production of knowledge move in the direction of a *transduction*. Sociologist Tomás Rodríguez Villasante offers a very useful synthesis of the meaning and scope of this term:

Social transducers would be networks that lead, acting as “devices” (mirrors and spirals), to energy transformations/leaps and information and action to enliven the own processes in which they are involved [...] some of their main characteristics [...]

First of all, they are a learning device: transductions, by taking strategies and their synchronizations to another level, are simultaneously training their promoters.

Secondly, they tend to act in a network of links, between people and between groups, so they are devices for alliances between social sectors, or “action sets” [...]

Thirdly, they build force-ideas capable of overcoming critical nodes or bottlenecks in processes.

Fourth, they lead to the execution of a series of collective activities and some observable achievements for those involved.

The transducer is a learning device [...] If social experts do not learn in the process, it is because they are only repeating empty formulas of content. A good initial indicator of any process is to what extent everyone is learning from everyone, and having to reform their starting budgets. (Villasante, 2006: 36-37).

The narrative construction situation of the stories that make up our radio soap opera functions in our project as a space of transduction as an experience of learning, unlearning and a practical limit of the roles with which we began the process. Mexican immigrant women become familiar with the ways of analyzing those who come from the university, while we learn both the ways they interpret the speeches, and their ways of reading reality. From this point of view, narrative socio-analysis and collaborative

orientation are not an end in themselves, but rather a means for the construction of a collective level of concrete intervention around one's own research process and life. In this process, what we are trying to put into play is a meeting space between different people that operates as a territory for the production and communication of diverse knowledges and different ways of knowing and understanding from a basic premise: research does not swing on the application of a compendium of techniques and methods for the study of the social, but is built from the recognition that in social life knowledges, tricks, strategies, meanings, ethical inclinations, modes, and epistemological positions are produced that are very useful for the research activity itself.

If the quality of the transduction practice implies an instituting reason that goes beyond the instituted ways of producing knowledge, the use of stories implicit in narrative socio-analysis projects contributes to emphasize the instituting impulse in several ways:

- (1) As we have previously pointed out, all narrative activity is linked to a metamorphosis.
- (2) Narrative socio-analysis puts into play a form of narration different from the instituted way of telling stories, nowadays anchored to the production of *verisimilitude*.
- (3) It is a narrative that arises from a conversational experience based on what Lapassade and the *Sensibili alle foglie* collective call "drift conversations" (Curcio, Prette and Valentino, 2017: 233): discussions and sharing of testimonies that spread, mislead and divert, displacing the objectives and the initial meaning of the conversation until making the very pleasure of conversing the universe of meaning of the experience.

Compared to the words "narration" and "narrative," the term "*storytelling*" perhaps has a greater plasticity and descriptive efficacy for our exposition: it literally means "telling stories." The type of society in which we live is increasingly characterized by a centrality of *storytelling* that implies its determining presence in more and more orders of social life, including politics, business, *marketing*, the media ecosystem or the military, to cite a few examples. The discursive economy, that is, the production, accumulation, and circulation of discourses, has been revolutionized in our societies with the invention and development of the Internet, blurring the line that separates reality and fiction. Nowadays, *storytelling* practices are not only technologies for the modeling of speeches, but they function as a central space in which these are elaborated and transmitted,



in a context in which the immense proliferation and accumulation of stories has given rise to a new narrative order in which *storytelling* itself has become a battlefield and scene of conflict between “systemic stories” and “counter-stories.” As Christian Salmon (2017: 10) points out, current modes of domination rely on *storytelling* to trap reality in a narrative spider web that filters perceptions and instrumentalizes emotions. A fundamental ingredient of the supremacy of the systemic use of *storytelling* is the enclosure of narratives in the rationality of the *plausible* and the subsumption of the whole of life in its parameters of meaning; it is about producing realities that give the impression of being real, stories that are credible even if they are not true<sup>10</sup>. The plausible, which in our societies is dictated by the instituted discourses, among others, of the public power, the political class, the *mass media*, and the cultural industries, operates as a kind of censorship that ensures the continuity of the instituted social model. Part of the instituting character of the narratives that are constructed in socio-analytical projects lies precisely in the configuration of a distance in relation to this rationality of the plausible. The stories that we produce in the course of our project, for example, go beyond this rationality in the course of a process that unearths the true that underlies the reality and, beyond the reduction of possibilities implicit in the imposition of the plausible, activated in the sense of a creative overflow not only of the instituted ways of counting, but of the usual ways of researching. If the plausible tries to convince us that the discourse conforms to reality and not to its own laws, the socio-analytical work with the stories strips the discourses, the words and the language until discovering its distance from what is real, as we have seen above with the case of the term “migrant.” In our project, the narratives implicit in the radio soap opera we are working on do not pretend to be reality and, rather than represent it, try to channel and express it. If the fundamental principle of representation is that what is represented is always absent, the fact that our stories are nourished by the testimonies and self-analysis of the women who are the protagonists of these stories makes them at all times present subjects, and therefore, unrepresented.

The instituting character of narrative socio-analysis derived from its way of narrating and from the intrinsic quality of the stories, is completed by the nature of an activity that goes beyond the formal objective of our project (to create a radio soap opera as an analyzer). As we have explained in previous pages, what we have called “drift conversations” play an important role in our work sessions: exercises of dialogue and listening

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10. On the plausible, one can see: Barthes, Boons, Burgelin, Genette, Gritti, Kristeva, Metz, Morin and Todorov, 1970.

that go beyond the initial sense of the conversation until making the very pleasure of conversing the experience's universe of meaning. "Sorry, Angel... [laughter]. *We even forgot that you are here. We are sorry that we have started talking and talking about other things. You are going to say that we are gossipers,*" the women tell me in a work session in which for more than half an hour, unaware of the thematic object of the initial discussion, they have scratched a hole in the monotony to conquer a precious moment of conversation and sharing.

In this way, the meetings become spaces in which a kind of conquest of *sociability* unfolds in a time in which the hegemonic character of neoliberal reason, subjecting the generalized *ethos* to a permanent instrumental rationality, increasingly condemns and proscribes their existence. While *sociability* is the constitutive orientation toward the other that gives rise to the daily fabric of relationships, that is, the human inclination toward the construction of social ties, *sociability* implies a particular mode of social interaction that has a "playful" nature, that is, whose meaning is internal to the interaction itself and whose only purpose is the relationship itself (Simmel, 1997: 42-44). Based on this distinction, sociability refers to a form of sociality in which (a) nothing is pursued other than relationship for the sake of the relationship; (b) what is not common to the other participants of the interaction is excluded, as well as everything that has an objective importance for the personality (status, success, fame, wealth, etc.); and (c) a relational pattern is put into play regardless of both the calculation, as well as any rationality of an instrumental nature, that is guided by a purpose that goes beyond the relationship itself. A way of being and sharing that differs markedly both from the general reason of the modern world, and from the forms of life that it prescribes in an increasingly dominant way.

In this pattern of recovery of sociability, one of the most interesting components of the experience clearly emerges: the socio-analytical process is shaping an action set that operates as a space of care, placing affections and trust at the center of the production of knowledges, of learning and unlearning. The women express it as follows:

What we have here is a sharing of knowledges, intellectual, but also with a lot of heart. This is the luxury, the spiritual *spa* that I give myself [laughter]. [...] It's a part where you de-stress. I'm not much for dancing and things like that, but what we have here, the fact that I can stimulate myself intellectually with other people, with ideas, and also go with my heart, because it's only from here [points to head], fills me up a lot. [...] Here you are taking out the problem, you are saying it, we come and we take out what is hurting us. Here this is an escape, you take it all out (Aída).

When we get together, sharing, talking about interviews, but also about things that happen to us...This really helps us to be a family, because for me we are now a family... And we feel good, because there is a space to be able to express ourselves. [...] This is special for me and when I can't come because work prevents me, I feel bad and it makes me angry, because I need it (Isabel).

This “*family as a space of trust, knowledges and heart where it is possible to de-stress,*” we could say by collecting the overall meaning of the proposed quotes, is derived from a dialogical and collaborative nature of the process that, based on the differences, places in its center the construction of symmetrical relationships between subjects. In this sense, it is a relationship of interdependence in which we serve each other from the premise of not objectifying the other. Something that we could name as a kind of *subjectivity*: a set of subjects that, as bell hooks points out, constitutes the basis of the ethics of love<sup>11</sup>.

#### 4. As a conclusion

Throughout the text, we have shared some methodological keys from a co-research project that, using elements of socio-analysis and collaborative ethnography, is built around the practice of community narrative as a basic research tool. Located in the New York district of Brooklyn, the small space opened by the initiative is inhabited, fundamentally, by Mexican migrant women in a situation of undocumented immigrants and researchers who come from the university. Starting from an eminently reflective research prism, the agency between the two subjects is deploying an exchange between different ways of perceiving and processing reality. On the one hand, a rationality linked to the experience that we have described in terms of a production of knowledges of a sensitive nature, attached to the materiality of existence through first-person testimony. On the other hand, logics and systematizations of the praxis in social sciences that provide us with categories, meaning frameworks and methodological guidelines for the construction of knowledge about reality that, in our case, puts the focus on the lives of women undocumented Mexican women living in New York City.

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11. “A love ethic emphasizes the importance of service to others. Within the value system of the United States any task or job that is related to ‘service’ to others is devalued. However, service strengthens our capacity to know compassion and deepens our insight. To serve another, I cannot see them as an object, but I must see their subjecthood” (hooks, 1994: 249). The translation is ours.

This hybridization of different ways of approaching reality is completed with the community use of stories as a double research vehicle: (1) means of expression of the self-analysis and self-diagnosis exercises that make up the core of the research drift and, at the same time, (2) a central tool for the development of self-analysis itself. Based on conversations and practical narrative workshops in which we have played with media languages, the research group has produced a *podcast* story by episodes in which the polyphonic content of what the group has learned and shared about the life of undocumented Mexican women in New York is expressed. The set of plots that make up this story draws a representative map of the lives of these women who, collecting the results of the continuous and systematized exercise of self-analysis and self-diagnosis, not only informs about the existential realities they inhabit, but also reveals their speeches about these realities.

In this combination of co-produced knowledges, narrative activity has been revealed as an expressive tool capable of bringing out the intimate, nurturing the research process of an emotional mapping that, inquiring about specific aspects of the materiality of the daily life of undocumented women in New York, has generated knowledges about the feelings, contradictions, and pains with which these women inhabit the condition of their day to day. This way of knowing, placing trust, feeling, and the fabric of affective bonds at the center of its doing, has given rise to the unexpected construction of a kind of therapeutic effect of the research work. In this way, the epistemological background of socio-analysis is redoubled in the combination of this research perspective with the use of stories and the community narrative: the instituting nature of this way of researching is not only materialized in a reflective exercise that modifies the relationship of its participants with the ways of making sense about the experience, revealing contradictions and dismantling ideological puzzles, but also establishes a community space that “therapizes” and cares, in the words of the women themselves who participate in the experience, contributes to the transformation of its existence.

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