



Article

Adriana Negreiros and a Feminist Ethics of Testimonial Narrative: Reflections on *Life Will Never Be the Same*

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Abstract: I seek to analyze the narrative construction of the reporter's book *A Vida Nunca Mais Será a Mesma (Life Will Never Be the Same Again, 2021)*, which tells stories of sexual violence against women and also features the first-person account of the author herself, Adriana Negreiros. I try to understand (a) how journalistic fundamentals such as precision and objectivity are articulated/tensioned with lacunar and fragmentary traces of testimony; and (b) how adopting a feminist/gendered perspective on journalistic narrative can bring to light traumatic female experiences that, throughout history, have been placed in the background. To do this, I examine the book and an interview conducted with the author in 2023, concluding that a feminist approach to journalism and testimony can open up affective spaces for women's stories to be told.

Keywords: rape; journalism; feminism; testimony; ethics

1. Introduction

Virginie Despentes recounts that when she was raped, in 1986, at the age of 17, the violence she suffered was forbidden, unheard of: "[...] men now do what women have taught them to do for centuries: rename the thing, embellish the act, beat around the bush, but above all never use the word to describe what they have done" (2016, p. 29). In *King Kong Theory*, published in 2006, she states that "[...] as soon as rape is called *rape*, the whole female surveillance apparatus kicks in: do you want people to know about what happened to you? Do you want everyone to see you as a woman who was a victim? And anyway, how did you get out of it alive, without being a patent whore?" (Despentes 2016, p. 32, my translation and emphasis).

Jacqueline Rose (2022, p. 17) reflects that sexual violence hovers at the "edge of the visible world", with men such as Harvey Weinstein remaining "hidden in plain sight"; it is, she says, "one of the hallmarks of the century we live in" (2022, p. 202). Four decades after the violence suffered by Despentes, the Hollywood producer's crimes were unmasked (some of which he was convicted for), and rape is no longer a whispered word, a forbidden name for one of the most prevalent forms of violence against women in contemporary times. Nevertheless, it remains an underreported crime for a myriad of reasons, and the prevarications for men to escape blame persist.

Brazil is no different. According to the 17th edition of the *Brazilian Yearbook of Public Security (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2023)*, in 2022, the country registered an 8.2% increase in rape cases; of these 74,930 cases, 60% were against people under the age of 14. Of all the victims, the majority were Black (57%), and 89% were women or girls. Among victims under the age of 13, 60% of crimes were committed by family members and 20% by acquaintances, while among victims over the age of 14, 14% of rapes were committed by an intimate partner. Not surprisingly, 58% of rapes took place at home. The data are part of what the yearbook calls the "explosion" of violence against women in Brazil and has alarming layers: a study by the Applied Economics Research Institute (Ipea, in Portuguese) indicates that only around 13% of rapes in the country are reported, which would bring



Citation: Gomes Barbosa, Karina. 2024. Adriana Negreiros and a Feminist Ethics of Testimonial Narrative: Reflections on *Life Will Never Be the Same*. *Journalism and Media* 5: 1112–1123. <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia5030071>

Academic Editors: Rebecca Stringer and Andreu Casero-Ripollés

Received: 6 January 2024

Revised: 19 July 2024

Accepted: 16 August 2024

Published: 20 August 2024



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the statistics to around 822,000 cases a year. The explanations for the increase include the visibility of the crime—its naming and inscription in the field of the visible—and female empowerment, which would increase reporting, but also the harmful consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in cases of rape in close proximity and those involving children and adolescents.

Brazilian feminist Helleieth Saffioti (2015) investigated the characteristics of gender violence, including the prevalence of intimate perpetrators (father, husband, grandfather, brother). Muniz (2017, p. 43, my translation) highlights the historicity of gender violence in Brazil, noting that while the legislation has advanced in recent years, granting equal rights to Brazilian women, “in public and private spaces, they are still discriminated against, unequally considered and treated [...] they still suffer, in various degrees, some kind of violence, evident in different practices”. Those legal achievements result from decades of feminist interventions in Brazilian politics, culture and research, but are still unable to change the pervasive misogynist culture.

Faced with this epidemic situation, which Rose (2022, p. 8) classifies as “reigning violence”, of a homicidal nature, in which all forms of violence against women have increased (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2023) not only in Brazil, the veil of silence about the crime has progressively fallen. A sign of this is that, in recent years, several women have recounted the rapes they suffered in testimonial narratives that range from fiction to journalism. One of these works is the journalistic book *A Vida Nunca Mais Será a Mesma* (*Life Will Never Be the Same Again*) by journalist Adriana Negreiros (Objetiva 2021, 299 pages).

In this article, I seek to analyze the narrative construction of the book, which tells stories of sexual violence against women and also features the author’s own first-person account, to understand (a) how journalistic fundamentals such as precision and objectivity are articulated/tensioned with the lacunary and fragmentary traces of testimony (Seligmann-Silva 2008); and (b) how adopting a feminist/gendered perspective (Gomes Barbosa and Varão 2018) on journalistic narrative can bring to light traumatic female experiences that, throughout history, have been placed in the background (Kaplan 2005). To this end, in this qualitative study, I examine the abovementioned book and an interview conducted by the author in 2023¹ using the methodological procedures of narrative analysis in qualitative research, in which the categories emerged from the encounter between the theory and the object. I argue that the book employs a feminist ethics towards journalism and towards women’s testimonies, being built around the credibility of their word; the tension between journalistic canonic practices and feminist approaches; and the gendered nature of rape. By doing so, the book builds an affective community around the testimony of rape narratives (and other related gender-violences), a movement turned possible in the wake of contemporary feminist activism. This paper is immersed in the Brazilian tradition of studying reportorial books to analyze and dissect the original and unique journalistic practices they often produce.

2. Context

Published in 2021, Negreiros’ book is part of what many researchers (not without controversy) refer to as the fourth feminist wave. Carla Rodrigues (2016) places it around 2011, although she recognizes that, as a wave, it has been going on for a long time. Temporally, it is marked by digital and street activism, exercised mainly (but not only) by subalternized bodies: Black women, trans women, lesbians, prostitutes, poor women, women from the slums, etc. (Rodrigues 2016, p. 66, my translation). It links global movements such as the Slut Walk (Marcha das Vadias in Portuguese), which spread from Canada in 2011, and the #metoo movement, to relevant national and local expressions from the Global South, such as #foracunha, #orgulhocrespo, #meuprimeiroassedio, #meuamigosecreto, #agoraéquesãoelas, #chegadefiuuiu, #deixaelatrabalhar, #foratemer, #elenão #niunaamenos, #nipresanimuerta², among other hashtags, indicating a strong digital presence that also materializes in marches, demonstrations, and occupations of public and political spaces.

“All of this is happening at the same time, forming the fourth feminist wave. [...] From my point of view, waves are a useful metaphor for denouncing the back and forth of oppression”, explains Rodrigues (2016, p. 67), for whom feminisms establish dialectical relationships of advance and retreat, launching themselves against oppressions of gender and sexuality. Each wave differs from the other; they have novelties but also repetitions, given the plasticity of structural sexism in Brazilian society. Rosana Pinheiro-Machado (2019, p. 8) characterizes these new horizontal forms of activism and collective mobilization in the Global South as based on affects and “feminist hope that transformation can emerge from the alliance between bodies in the streets”. Part of this context of being together are the student occupations in Brazil in 2016, led in many cases by girls and based on the alliance between bodies vulnerable to neoliberalism, the austerity policies implemented in the country, and the lack of funding for education. Under the ultra-right-wing government of Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2022), it was also female bodies that most actively resisted the masculinist and misogynist ideology in force. It was, according to Pinheiro-Machado (2019), young girls—especially Black, indigenous, and peripheral—who led the resistance. It is necessary, Pinheiro-Machado says, to invest in the “potential of the slam mines, in the new elected leaders, in the fruits of Marielle (...) to give way to new political practices and political figures that are connected to the emerging forms of struggle of the 21st century” (2019, p. 194, my translation).

In the midst of these uprisings that destabilize the certainties and entrenched positions of patriarchy, works such as *Missoula* (2015), by Jon Krakauer; *Hunger and Not That Bad: Dispatches from Rape Culture* (2017 and 2018, respectively), by Roxane Gay; *What We Talk About When We Talk About Rape* (2018), by Sohaila Abdulali; *Know my Name* (2019), by Chanel Miller; *Abuso: A Cultura do Estupro no Brasil* (2020), by Ana Paula Araújo, among others (such as the aforementioned *King Kong Theory*), have addressed the issue of violence against women and, in particular, rape³. From different perspectives, approaches, and objectives, all the authors place sexual violence against women—and, eventually, the violence they have suffered—at the center of their narratives.

In this context, *Life Will Never Be the Same* builds its enunciation from a unique place. It is a reporter’s book: a dense journalistic practice, beyond the reports of daily journalism and “on the margins of journalistic theories and writing manuals” (Zamin 2011, p. 393), which combines “journalistic rules and techniques with the incorporation of elements that are outside this formulation, which allows, in terms, to break with a limited discourse” (Zamin 2011, p. 394, my translation)⁴. One of the hallmarks highlighted by Angela Zamin concerns the process of recovering the subject of journalism in reporters’ books. This is what I consider to be the distinctive feature of Adriana Negreiros’ book: she tells the stories of women who have suffered sexual violence and also her story as a victim. In this way, the author occupies the dual position of narrator and survivor, and from there, she acts as a witness to the other women she listens to, while simultaneously bearing witness to her own traumatic experience.

The book also coincides with the strengthening of the debate between gender and journalism in Brazil. In the last decade, several scholars and research groups (Lago 2020; Silva 2014, and others) have been analyzing media coverage, proposing a theoretical framework for a gendered journalism; studying journalistic professional *ethos* in relation to gender and sexuality; investigating gender (and race) subjects in newsrooms, etc. This work’s scope concerns the two first tendencies, as it analyses a media work (albeit a non-canonical one) and, as it does so, intends to consider more broadly the relation between feminism and rape coverage in journalism.

It is important to examine these texts as, according to Ann Kaplan, most people have access to trauma through the media—“mediatized trauma” (Kaplan 2005, p. 2), even though the experience of being in the world is marked by traumatic events daily, especially for minoritized, dissident bodies. The further a body is from the notion of capitalist and heteropatriarchal “validity” (Vergès 2021), the more subject it is to precarious conditions

(Butler 2016) and to various traumas. For Kaplan (2005), art and representation can be ways of working through pain, even if the traumatic wound remains open.

The criminal definition of rape in Brazil, contained in article 214 of the Penal Code since 2009, is “to constrain someone, by violence or serious threat, to have carnal intercourse or to perform or allow another libidinous act to be performed on them” (República Federativa do Brasil 1940, my translation). From a feminist perspective, Rose (2022, p. 22, my translation) recalls that one of the core reasons for rape is “to ensure that women are women and nothing more, to fix them as women”. She cites a lecture in which Gayatri Spivak treats rape as “a crime of identity as well as the ‘indestructible unconditionality’ of the human” (Rose 2022, p. 161, my translation), which is generally practiced against women.

3. Materials and Methods

The narrative of *Life Will Never Be the Same* is organized into 17 chapters, as well as a Prologue, Epilogue, a note about the book, a list of sources, and notes. Each chapter presents an account of sexual violence, placing it in the political, legal, cultural, and social context of the period, highlighting key events in Brazil’s (and women’s) recent history. Simultaneously, it maps the constant and increasingly brutal resistance to advances in women’s rights by ultra-conservative movements in the country. The timeframe of the narrative, from which it also goes back in time, is 2003, when Adriana was raped by a stranger in a São Paulo shopping mall.

The last chapter takes place 10 years later, in 2013, when the journalist’s father (who never found out about the rape) dies, and it goes on until 2014. In the Epilogue, Adriana moves forward in time to 2017, when she was gathering information for her first book, *Maria Bonita: Sex, Violence and Women in the Cangaço*, published in 2018⁵. Conversely, the prologue features an email exchange between Adriana and her lawyer in 2020, when she started writing the book about sexual violence, and goes back to 2003, when she sent her first report about the rape to the defender.

In each chapter, she tells the story of a woman and discusses a contextual aspect, focusing on the Brazilian context, historically marked by events of violence against women and girls. Although the book focuses on rape, the testimonies and events present in it demonstrate the “continuum of violence” phenomenon. It is described by Cynthia Cockburn (2004, p. 43), when talking about conflict and war zones, as a flow between different kinds and acts of violence against women and girls. The continuum can be perceived in the Brazilian society, as it highlights the connections between “the social, the economic, and the political, with gender relations penetrating all these forms of relations, including economic power”. Thus, gender emerges in the various forms of violence that occur in different spaces and times, and in distinctive forms of relations.

The narrative also evidences the difficulty to disentangle women from cycles of violence that, sometimes, comprise families’ generations—from grandmothers to granddaughters and beyond. Elsewhere, I stated that “under patriarchy, rape is a traumatic experience that integrates the construction of the female gender; in this sense, being raped, or being subject to rape, is part of what it means to live as a woman” (Gomes Barbosa 2020, p. 10, my translation). It is possible to expand this assertion to all types of gendered violence, as the book’s narrative makes clear, and conclude that gender violence starts in the past and continues in the present.

The first chapter begins with Adriana’s testimony, then moves on to the testimony of Gisele, who was raped as a teenager by an acquaintance during a football World Cup match in 1994. The Belém do Pará Convention (in 1994), the advances made by feminist movements (1970s), and the Nairobi Conference (in 1985) are also addressed, as well as the femicide of socialite Ângela Diniz, in 1976, and the following campaign “Who loves does not kill” campaign (1980), in reference to the acquittal of her killer, Doca Street.

The next three chapters also begin with Adriana’s testimony. In the second, she recalls the story of Gisele and tells the case of G., who was raped in Recife on a bus, under the passengers’ passivity. In chapter three, the context is the case of the Maniac of the Park

(1998), a Brazilian serial killer who raped and murdered at least 11 women. The journalist introduces the story of Naima, a young woman who suffered marital rape. In chapter four, the journalist's testimony serves as a starting point for a discussion on legal abortion.

Chapter five focuses on the discussion of girls and "novinhas" (Brazilian slur for sexualized young girls, mostly underage) and brings in cultural phenomena such as the miniseries *Presença de Anitta* (with a plot similar to *Lolita*) to contextualize the story of Carolina, who was raped as a girl by her grandfather. Temporality moves from the narrative present to the past: the never elucidated femicide of the girl Araceli Cabrera, in Espírito Santo (1973), and the day of her death, May 18, when the National Day to Combat Sexual Abuse and Exploitation against Children and Adolescents was created, in 2000. The OAS report (2001) on the case of Maria da Penha, in 1983, victim of two attempted femicides by then-husband, which left her paralyzed, comes into focus. Adriana's testimony closes the chapter, as in the following two.

The sixth chapter continues the stories of Gisele and Naima. Adriana's testimony closes the session. Next, the book introduces an account of Paula, who was brutally raped by her husband. It discusses the Brazilian Civil Code and the Federal Constitution, Brazilian soap operas, and the release of the book *Gender Trouble* (1990) by Judith Butler.

In the eighth chapter, Adriana recounts her testimony, followed by data on rape, national legislation, and the judicial process she faced. The next chapter presents the Champinha case (2003), who, along with four adult men, kidnapped and murdered a teenage couple. It was the trigger for a bill to reduce the age of criminal responsibility from 18 to 16 years presented by then-deputy Jair Bolsonaro. The story of Tatu, who was abused as a child by her father, is followed by the Maria da Penha case and the discussion on domestic violence.

Adriana's testimony leads to chapter 10, which goes back to the release of Susan Brownmiller's book *Against Our Will* (1975). The discussion on abortion legislation in 2004 in Brazil and the conservative reaction to it precede the conclusion of the trial of Adriana's rapist. Chapter 11 addresses the defeat of the abortion debate, changes to the Penal Code, the case of Boadyr Veloso, who married the girl he had raped and escaped conviction (2004), and it recalls Carolina's story.

In chapter 12, Elisa, Gisele's daughter, is harassed by her stepfather. The context is 2006, when the Maria da Penha law was approved. Adriana's testimony is taken from the fear that the rape remained with her three years later. The case of Lidiany, a teenager imprisoned in Pará for 26 days in a cell with 20 male inmates and repeatedly raped (2007), is also a theme in the chapter. The chapter returns to the story of Naima.

Adriana's story begins chapter 13, which discusses rape in universities. It also continues the story of Tatu, post-traumatic stress syndrome, and the transformation of rape into a heinous crime (2014). Decisions by the São Paulo courts and Adriana's case follow. The next chapter tells the story of Amanda, who was raped by her aunt's husband; her lesbianism is the motto for the discussion of corrective rape. The section also covers the case of Doctor Roger Abdelmassih, from 2009. He raped at least 50 patients who sought his expertise in in vitro fertilization treatment.

The 15th chapter begins with Adriana's account of an interaction with Jair Bolsonaro and recounts how the far-right politician gained media attention supported, in part, by misogynistic positions on rape. Rape culture appears in jokes and in the controversy over abortion during the 2010 presidential campaign. Chapter 16 brings the story of Isis, raped by a stranger who broke into her house, followed by Adriana's story.

In the last chapter, the death of Adriana's father marks a provisional end to her testimony. The narrative opens up to feminist militant campaigns such as "I don't deserve to be raped" or "Break the silence". The figure of Bolsonaro returns to the fore. In the Epilogue, Adriana's story re-emerges—demonstrating how it never really ends—within the context of Michel Temer's (2016–2018) government dismantling gender protections, the enactment of the sexual harassment law, and the #elenão campaign.

4. Discussion

Adriana Negreiros explains that when she decided to write a book about rape culture, she thought in the usual way for a journalist: to report other people's stories. However, as she reflected on the work, she realized that she was a source: "The character whose story I know best is my own. Maybe it doesn't make sense for me to give up that story in the name of supposed journalistic objectivity" (Negreiros apud [Gomes Barbosa 2023](#); my translation).

The richness of the author's experience as a character in the journalistic work tears through the veil of objectivism that usually cloaks journalism, founded on a bourgeois and patriarchal logic of knowledge: "In an unbiased and objective journalistic "truth" one does not think about which aspects of reality deserve to gain public attention and what aspects deserve to emerge". From a feminist perspective, objectivity in journalism should no longer be a well-shaped topos. Instead, "it is constructed as the possibility of a discourse of voices that enunciate it [...] forms a new subject from each time and space, and one that is continually unfinished and open yet remains itself" ([Gomes Barbosa and Varão 2018](#), p. 17). In this sense, reporting on rape often presents a challenge to canonical journalistic elements, such as fairness. The authors pointed to the difficulty to conciliate the propositions of a gendered (or feminist) journalism with notions of objectivity, impartiality, and other ethical precepts and accuracy in rape coverage. The fragmented, private, contradictory, silent characteristics of these traumatic narratives demand non-canonical approaches.

Significantly, in Adriana's book, the "I" appears at the beginning of chapters 1, 2, and 3: "Since it all happened, there hasn't been a single May 24th when *I haven't* replayed the events of that Saturday" ([Negreiros 2021](#), p. 9, my translation); "The sky was still clear when *I parked* my gray Renault Clio 2000, four-door, on the first floor of the Eldorado Shopping Mall" ([Negreiros 2021](#), p. 24, my translation); "[...] *I looked* ahead when I noticed a bus approaching—a thoughtless act, a reaction to the fright caused by the noise of public transport" ([Negreiros 2021](#), p. 41, my translation and emphasis). This journalistic subjectivation occurs not only in the materiality of the book but also in other stages of the production process. She states that the reporter's position in the relationship with the interviewees was much closer: "When I said this [her abuse] to all the interviewees, a relationship of complicity was already established between me and them, which was fundamental" (Negreiros apud [Gomes Barbosa 2023](#); my translation).

Adriana's radical openness in sharing a limitrophe experience such as rape, with both her interviewees and readers, is also another rupture in the hierarchical distances between the observer–observed and narrator–reader phenomena that usually guide journalism. It places her in a position of vulnerability that is unusual and uncomfortable for journalists, who always seek the safety of firm, high ground, from which they can safely observe the life that is being laid bare in front of them (and below), to narrate it to an audience that they want to grow close to, but without opening up to them.

It also lays bare the fragility of this supposedly neutral position in a way that is different from (but eerily close to) Lillian Ross's definition of her style, according to David Remnick: "Somewhere along the way, a critic used the phrase 'fly on the wall' to describe my journalistic 'technique'", she said. But Lillian rejects the description. "What madness! A reporter producing a story can't pretend to be invisible, let alone a fly; he or she is seen and heard and approached by the people they are writing about. A reporter is always chemically involved in a story" ([Remnick 2015](#), p. 10).

While producing a powerful testimonial report, Negreiros does not abandon some of the fundamentals of journalistic practice, notably accuracy and checking. Precision is marked throughout the book by attention to dates, years, the social actors involved in the actions, legal texts, and speeches, which are referenced as notes whenever necessary. In addition, Negreiros constantly resorts to specific cases that illustrate/prove the themes she deals with, such as in chapter 11, which addresses the case of judge Edilson Rumbelsperger Rodrigues to show the judiciary's disregard for compliance with the Maria da Penha Law. In the passage, the author uses excerpts from several of the judge's sentences. This can already be seen in the book's prologue, which includes Adriana's telephone conversations and,

subsequently, an email from her lawyer: “We found your folders and I’ve selected here what I thought would help your story. The e-mail you sent me is there” (Negreiros 2021, p. 6, my translation). Even though she is the subject of the traumatic experience, Adriana does not abandon verification resources and other memorialist devices to obtain the greatest possible accuracy, even if the story to be told is her own (these devices also help her to fill in gaps in her memory, as I will discuss later).

Kovach and Rosenstiel (2003) state that “[t]he discipline of verification is what separates journalism from entertainment, propaganda, literature or art” (p. 113), and in order to verify the information, journalists use personal methods. In trying to reconstruct and report her experience, Adriana resorts to emails, police, and legal documents to try to fill in the gaps of what she could not remember.

“These documents helped me a lot in reconstructing the story and also other things, such as diaries from the time, email exchanges with other people. From then on, I did a journalistic investigation into my own case, and one thing keeps pulling on another, keeps making me remember. Of course, there’s also a lot of editing of memory, right? [...] But it’s a story that I build from my past and also very much from what I can reconstruct. I didn’t intend to produce an objective document, in the sense of being absolutely indisputable on any issue, because we know what our memory is like. But I made a great effort to tell the story, in many quotation marks, as it happened, in other words, to be faithful to the facts” (Negreiros apud Gomes Barbosa 2023, my translation).

In addition to this quest to construct as complete a meaning as possible—while simultaneously giving up the illusion of total coherence in this type of account—the author makes a point of clarifying that her account has gaps. This is the same strategy used in relation to the narratives of the other characters interviewed for the book. Making these gaps explicit puts a strain on traditional journalistic practice, which seeks to cover everything without “holes”. However, sexual violence against women is traditionally full of gaps: the traumatic event fractures the subject’s notion of linear temporality—the present is an eternal past that returns, and the future can never fully take hold; the temporal fracture of subjects split by trauma is also expressed in the near impossibility of narrating this experience, as it shatters the systems of perception and subjective representation, and if (or when) narrated, it has no pretense of completeness.

In addition, sexual violence in many cases leaves no traces, produces no forensic evidence, and has no witnesses, while traditional journalism demands the same proof of the facts as the courts, as Negreiros points out: “[...] there is a tendency in the judiciary to try to demand that the victim tell her story without any contradiction, as if she were a privileged and distanced witness to the fact and not a subject involved in that situation of violence, and therefore subject to all the trauma and forgetfulness that results from it” (Negreiros apud Gomes Barbosa 2023, my translation).

In most cases, a woman’s testimony is at the heart of a rape accusation, and “it has been in our culture since the Bible and the story of Joseph in Egypt that the word of a woman who accuses a man of rape is, above all, a word that we doubt” (Despentes 2016, p. 29, my translation). Disbelief in the word of a woman who accuses a rapist appears repeatedly in Negreiros’ book: in the defense of the shopping center where she was raped; in Tatu’s mother; in the public authorities who ignored Lidiany: “When the prison guards approached her cell, the teenager screamed, said she was underage, asked to be taken out of the dungeon. They looked at her, indifferent [...]” (Negreiros 2021, p. 180, my translation). However, by agreeing to be a witness to these women, Adriana Negreiros believes in them. Jeanne Marie Gagnebin (2006, p. 57) states that a witness is someone who refuses to go away, “who manages to listen to the unbearable narration of the other and who accepts that their words carry on, as in a relay, the story of the other”—precisely what the journalist does in the book. The very process of listening to them implies “constructing a witness where there was none before” (Kaplan 2005, p. 20).

Kaplan states that bearing witness has to do with the production of an ethical conscience, an approach to this split, wounded subject, and a sense of responsibility in relation to injustice. “Witnessing involves wanting to change the kind of world where injustice, of whatever kind, is common” (Kaplan 2005, p. 122). Adriana thus professes a committed journalism that believes in the words of women and invites those who read the book to be affected by the atrocities narrated. She does so, however, without giving up the fundamentals and “mechanisms to ensure the veracity of the facts” (Varão 2021, p. 13, my translation), such as the rigorous investigation mentioned by Rafiza Varão, checking precision and transparency in relation to the elements that could not be checked. In Tatu’s account, for example, the uncertainty about what the father had inflicted on his daughter is expressed in the words of the woman herself: “‘I blocked a lot of things’, she explained to Flávio [...] ‘I don’t know if he penetrated me, nor do I want to know’, she said” (Negreiros 2021, p. 145, my translation). It is an unverifiable gap, therefore, to which the journalist gives transparency.

Another resource used by the author, common to a feminist method of investigation, is the work on archives—especially the legal archives of her case, such as the police report and court proceedings. It is also important to note that the linear chronological structure adopted by the author in the narrative runs counter to the predominant aesthetic of traumatic narratives: fragmentary, hallucinatory, with repetitions and circularity (Kaplan 2005). In doing so, she produces a narrative that is more conventional and closer to the journalistic strategy of giving meaning and intelligibility to events, even those deeply marked by the shattering of the linear temporality and the symbolic. Adriana’s narrative does, however, contain a series of flashbacks to the past of the characters, herself, and society to contextualize the narrative presents of the stories. The use of flashbacks is an aesthetic element of trauma narratives (Kaplan 2005).

5. Results

By bringing these stories to light, the book creates an affective community around the painful truths of the experiences of women we do not know, but whose experiences affect us. In doing so, the journalist inscribes rape in the field of the visible—a private violence, almost phantasmatic due to its lack of evidence, “an event from which nothing would ever be the same again [...] the wound of a war that is fought in *silence and obscurity*” (Despentes 2016, p. 31, my translation and emphasis), which Kaplan (2005, p. 1) calls “silent traumas”. Kaplan (2005) comments on the fact that trauma has historically been perceived from the male perspective; in other words, the traumas suffered and inflicted by men have received more focus and are generally public or collective traumas, such as wars, while women’s traumas are usually private, such as rape and domestic violence. Even if they are private, however, they are not only individual traumas: although they can happen to every woman, they are social and epidemic phenomena, as feminist movements and studies have shown.

It is based on this premise that Kaplan (2005, p. 135) calls for structures that provide testimonial space for the testimonies of women, “who are still subject to patriarchal violence even as new subjectivities are being drastically revised in postmodernism, postcolonialism, and multiculturalism”. Adriana’s work can be understood as an attempt to offer this space by welcoming the narratives of Gisele, Naima, Carolina, Paula, Tatu, Elisa, Amanda, and Isis. I believe that the reporter’s book, as adopted by Adriana, can offer such a space, as it favors a feminist approach to sexual violence stories, instead of an episodic framing (Santos et al. 2021), typical of what Márcia Veiga da Silva (2014, p. 331, original emphasis) names as a masculine journalism: “[...] because it reproduces gender and power relations that are hegemonically prevalent in culture, historically produced social knowledge in certain instances of power, related to certain worldviews and the *status quo* [...] journalism is also produced by representations of sex, class, race, generation. More than that, journalism revealed itself to be constituted by gender. And the gender of journalism is male”.

In this sense, Adriana's encounter with feminist studies was fundamental to the way she frames rape in the book. Instead of an episodic approach, she seeks a contextual framework: "[...] certainly the fundamental premise of this encounter between journalism and feminism is the idea that my story was not an individual story. Our tendency in journalism is to tell cases, of such and such characters, sometimes giving the impression that those stories are very specific. And in the case of sexual violence, what happens is that the stories are usually told almost as exoticism. A woman who has been raped sometimes makes the news almost as if she were the victim of a lightning strike, as if it were something very rare. We see this a lot in the news about sexual violence. When I decided to tell my story and the stories of other women, the idea was precisely to show that they were individual stories but that they told a bigger, collective story" (Negreiros apud [Gomes Barbosa 2023](#), my translation).

Adriana also clarifies the feminist approach in her quest to deconstruct a patriarchal myth, much criticized by feminists, that the private space is a safe space for women: "Throughout the book, something that became very clear from the characters' stories is that the space of intimacy is the space of danger for many women" (Negreiros apud [Gomes Barbosa 2023](#), my translation). The author also mentions the valorization of experience, the first-person accounts, and the recognition that the narrator is "entrenched in the story". "What we learn in feminist studies cannot be devalued, of the character with their situated knowledge. [...] [I did this] also certain that my experience was valuable so that we could reflect on that topic" (Negreiros apud [Gomes Barbosa 2023](#), my translation).

This gendered approach to journalism is in line with what several authors have postulated. [Gomes Barbosa and Varão \(2018\)](#) stipulate, based on feminist epistemologies, that gendered journalism needs to be perspectivist, situated, and in favor of women. To achieve this, it is necessary to "reschedule coverage of women" because "the objectives of a gendered journalistic production are inseparable from the social problems that give rise to such agendas" ([Gomes Barbosa and Varão 2018](#), p. 18, my translation). Thus, we argue that "feminist journalism constructs its agendas and schedules its topics by framing them in terms of what women experience. Women's experiences must be brought to light, and they are important" ([Gomes Barbosa and Varão 2018](#), p. 18, my translation).

Bringing these narratives to light is also a gesture of survival on the part of these women in the face of trauma which, by being narrated and reinstated in language, can help heal this split subject. [Rose \(2022\)](#) states that "[...] telling the story, however unbearable and terrible it may be, is one of the ways to survive" (p. 200, my translation); "if we have to confront the reality of the violence of our times, the violence embedded in the depths of the life of the spirit, I would say that this [storytelling] is the only starting point" ([Rose 2022](#), p. 211, my translation). In this sense, the mediation of trauma through testimony relocates the traumatized person in a subjective timeframe. The book operates to the survivors who spoke to Adriana in a similar way to digital feminist activism, which [Gilmore \(2023](#), p. 2) calls narrative activism: "storytelling in the service of social change". The women who narrated through hashtags such as #metoo or #meuprimeiroassedio were part of an affective community working to overcome trauma. At the same time, the public visibility of the issue helps to increase attention to these almost silent violences, as well as demanded accountability from perpetrators ([Gilmore 2023](#)).

Narrating, however, is no easy task for women who have been raped. Adriana explains that feminisms were fundamental to her being able to tell her story and write the book: "I think this book was only possible because of the popularization of feminism, when there was a space for women to talk about the violence they had suffered and a space to welcome these stories. I think that #metoo and all the movements for women to break the silence in this decade, such as the #meuamigosecreto campaign, encouraged many women, including famous ones, to tell the stories they had suffered. (...) This encouraged me too (...) it was a story I could have told a lot longer ago. But I only felt validated to tell it now, so long after. And it was certainly my encounter with feminism that gave me the strength to do this" (Negreiros apud [Gomes Barbosa 2023](#); my translation).

This new feminist wave, therefore, has created a space for Adriana to testify that her story is credible and welcomed, which is part of a time marked by the increased visibility of gender-based violence in Brazil. Gilmore (2023) explains that #metoo shifted a landscape where all women's testimonies of sexual violence were discredited to one in which some of them are now believed. For this reason, she argues, the labor of black feminists is fundamental. Similarly, in the Global South, as I said, those uprisings were—and are—mostly carried out by black, indigenous, LGBTQIA+, poor girls and women, voices who were traditionally unheard and silenced by journalism, the police, the justice system. This shift in the credibility of rape narratives (and other forms of gender violence) is directly related to the positionality from which they are told.

6. Conclusions

Adriana Negreiros is in line with this feminist journalistic enterprise, which she materialized not only in *Life Will Never Be the Same* but also in her book about Maria Bonita. For her, who is researching the subject for her doctorate, there exists a “feminist ethic that drives us and makes us look at some issues differently” (Negreiros apud Gomes Barbosa 2023; my translation). Thinking about feminist ethics requires, first and foremost, changing the point of view from which stories are told, given that stories have been told from the point of view of men's experiences.

It requires stressing fundamentals such as objectivity/objectivism as a fetish and assuming subjectivity as an inevitable intersection in journalistic praxis, situating the subject who narrates. It demands valuing women's experiences under the intersection of various oppressions, and it requires a political and ethical commitment that permeates all journalistic production: from the themes to editing, including research, listening, and writing, as advocated by works such as *Histórias de Morte Matada Contadas Feito Morte Morrida* (Oliveira and Rodrigues 2021). This is an urgent project to reimagine and revise the bourgeois and patriarchal foundations that underpin journalism, which have historically produced narratives that oppress, violate, erase, and/or re-victimize women. Echoing Gagnebin (2006, p. 57), only testimony and the act of witnessing can help us to “dare to sketch another history, to invent the present”.

Funding: This research was funded by FAPEMIG project number APQ 0125821, and by PPGCOM-UFOP PROAP funds.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The original interview with the author (in Portuguese), is published in <https://ariadnes.org/2023/07/25/adriana-negreiros-por-uma-etica-feminista-da-narrativa-testemunhal/> (accessed on 30 July 2023).

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

¹ The interview was conducted using the Google Meet app on 19 May 2023. It lasted 48 minutes, was based on semi-structured questions and was recorded for research and recording purposes only. The full text of the interview is published, in Portuguese, on the *Ariadnes* gender and media observatory: <https://ariadnes.org/2023/07/25/adriana-negreiros-por-uma-etica-feminista-da-narrativa-testemunhal/> (accessed on 30 July 2023).

² Those movements have strong regional characteristics, including references to national political episodes. Some of them are related to black feminism; reproductive rights; harassment denunciations; harassment in the workplace: #cunhaout (asking for the removal of Eduardo Cunha, then-president of the Chambers of Deputies); #curlypride; #myfirstharassment; #mysecretfriend (in reference of childhood abuse kept in secret); #nowit'sthem; #nomorewhistle (in Portuguese, a gesture of public harassment of women on the street); #letherwork; #temerout (about the removal of then-president Michel Temer); #nothim (which ignited street demonstrations against Jair Bolsonaro's first presidential bid, in 2018); #notoneless (in reference to femicides in Latin America); #notdeadnotjailed (against the criminalization of abortion in Latin America).

- ³ It is also important to include in this list the journalistic works *False Accusation: A True Story* (2018), by T. Christian Miller and Ken Armstrong; *She Said: Breaking the Sexual Harassment Story That Helped Ignite a Movement* (2019), by Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey; and *Catch and Kill: Lies, Spies, and a Conspiracy to Protect Predators* (2019), by Ronan Farrow—the last two are directly related to the #metoo movement and its developments.
- ⁴ Although Zamin (2011) and Marocco (2018) circumscribe reporter's books to works that, in addition to reporting events, discuss the construction of the report, I believe that the concept is useful to characterize the journalistic practice materialized in books within the reportage genre and a journalistic exercise with prominent authorial marks: "(...) they suppose an individual authorship that deviates from the journalistic discipline" (Marocco 2018, my translation). Simultaneously, as the authors point out, the concept helps to shift the focus away from literary journalism and toward journalism.
- ⁵ Maria de Déa, known as Maria Bonita (Maria the beautiful), was the partner of Lampião, a famous cangaceiro (bandit) from the early 20th century in Brazil and the first female in cangaço. The mythology surrounding her figure, including in Brazilian media, portrayed her as a protofeminist heroin. When Negreiros started to investigate her story—as well as other cangaceiras' stories –, however, she found out that Maria was subjected to innumerable violences since childhood, from rape to kidnaping. She was murdered by the police along with Lampião and other cangaceiros in 1938. Afterwards, they were decapitated and their heads were public exposed in Brazilian cities, with broad press coverage.

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