

# The Narratives of War

LUIS FELIPE VALENCIA TAMAYO<sup>1</sup>

Article received on April 18, 2018, approved for publication on June 2, 2018  
Traducción: María Del Pilar Gutiérrez, Departamento de Idiomas - Universidad de Manizales

## Abstract

The understanding of wars hardly occurs at the moment in which they are carried out. It is much more common to find war in the story that is made of it, when the days begin to complete and the years outline their outcomes. Thus, from the very beginning of literature as an exercise that tries to build bridges between what possibly has happened, the story of the facts is imposed as an interpretation of what happens when men confront each other and weapons become their arms. This is an essay, in which a reflection of the above narrative phenomenon occurs, in two perspectives, poetry and cinema. From this interpretation, there is a view on war conflicts today.

**Keywords:** Wars; History; War literature; War movies; International conflicts.

## 1. Introduction

During the month of March of the year 2003, the United States and its allies attacked diverse places of Iraq. Many still can remember the images in a live transmission of the incursions that were given by land and by air. The helicopters were seen as part of a visual spectacle that seemed taken from the movies and the explosions did not seem as cruel as they really were because, in their immediacy, they made believe that everything was programmed pyrotechnics. However, the viewers of the world were before the first bloody images of the twenty-first century. The live transmission of acts of war had been an objective of journalists since television began to trace the new characteristics of journalism. For those days in March, the cameras were well disposed to achieve the best shots, as if they were going to give testimony of a football game. There were stands arranged so that no one would miss what was happening there in Iraq.

However, no one knew for sure what was happening. At best, inserted in a web of events that had become explicit since the attacks on the Twin Towers and other places in the United States in the so-called 9/11, what was said was that there, in Iraq many things will blow because powerful weapons of mass destruction hid in that soil. So society was looking at

---

<sup>1</sup> Writer, Professor of Literature and Humanities at Universidad de Manizales. Master in Philosophy of Science and Language (Universidad de Caldas), with investigative interests in art, philosophy, history, languages, literature, and sociology, among others. Email: lufevata@hotmail.com

the search, the sparkling research of the elements with which, it was assumed, the rest of the planet would be attacked if this type of preventive incursions were not made. The live broadcast by the powerful television networks, was not only a sample of the advantages that came to offer the technology of the century that had just begun; it was a way of doing the oversight of what was being done in those distant lands. However, ultimately, no one knew for sure what was happening.

What was being attacked? Were the victims guilty of something? What were those buildings that fell like playing cards? Before the smoke and the flames, there also arose questions. The television broadcast only emphasized the overflight of the helicopters, the range of the guided missiles, and the search for weapons of mass destruction. It was as if the reporters simply described what was at stake; yes, just like sports reporters and commentators.

By the end of 2003, the Venezuelan writer Fernando Báez published a text in which he referred to what had been lost in Baghdad in those months of military incursions. The author talked about everything with dismay, for he had witnessed the looting and abuse of the invaders. In particular, it chronicles in detail, what nobody else told about the ways in which the raids, left cultural history turned to ashes.

(...) and then came what I thought was a nightmare: I found an atmosphere of war in the crassest style. The light, filtered with reservations and ambiguity by the windows, left to view furniture destroyed everywhere and thousands of papers on the floor. The reading room, the wooden file with the catalog of all the books and the shelves, themselves, had literally been destroyed without mercy. However, as I continued on my way, the scenes increased their power of shock. The structure was so severely affected that I judged it precarious: it would hardly bear the impact of a minimal tremor. There were still ashes all over the floor. The metal files were burned, opened and emptied largely (Báez, 2003, p. 63).

Of course, Baez is talking about the Baghdad Library and its destruction. When wars occur, the conditions of culture and books are seldom present. Everything is lost. Moreover, while nothing is made to last forever, wars, political, economic and religious positions in conflict, have been in charge of saving victims over time. More than a million lost books, more than fifteen million documents that have vanished forever, thousands of precious objects plundered, broken, unrecoverable, left those days of war in what we saw with some perplexity on television.

As such, what in recent years has been presented as a pyrotechnic spectacle hiding in the background as warlike phenomena of all ages: we must destroy the enemies. We must wipe out their past, their institutions, their books, their documents, their jargon, their knowledge. As it shows and seems an irrefutable evidence, the hidden television that leaves all the space for speculation. The focus of an information leaves so many things loose, and, most of the time, we let unnoticed.

What remains in the inkwell, is precisely what fire manage do. In universal history, great has been the role of fire for everything that represent the life of man. In war, he has determined the value of triumph and defeat at the same time. So many papers that have been burned in

the passage of man on Earth, speak of how we wanted to erase history. It must also be said -recording the emblematic scene of *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*, by Giuseppe Tornatore (1988)-, the celluloid burns and even faster than paper, and in the breath of this fire, the images of what has been humankind, get lost forever.

In 2012, the Dutch filmmaker Benny Brunner presented a documentary work in which he delves even more on the phenomenon of fire and the transformation of society. In the case of his film, entitled *The Great Book Robbery*, the exploration returns to the issue of memory and oblivion, refining his reflections on the ways in which the State of Israel has wanted to wipe out the Palestinian past. The documentary, which thanks to the Internet can be shared as a detailed work on conflicts and the desire to eradicate enemies, again poses one of the most interesting and difficult questions of the intellectual life of man: what is it that we really know about what has happened? In the continuous disolution of libraries, over the centuries, in the coming and going of the borders, in the death of so many and in the misadventures of billions of documents and witnesses, do we know for sure something of what has happened?

## 2. War as a memory

The documentary works that have focused on analyzing the problems left by the war, fortunately, have grown. Through interviews, testimonies, approaches to the places where the harshness of fighting and disappearances have occurred, the cameras have tried to maintain the life of what has happened. It is a special narrative; is the narrative that seeks to recognize victims and victimizers, and what have been the facts that are worthy of being part of a greater contemplation in viewers, scholars, researchers and moviegoers around the world.

The scenarios and genres may also vary. From creative connections much more striking than usual, filmmakers and television directors have provided very personal works of art about what have been the splinters that war has left in their souls. Ari Folman, for example, is one of the most personal Israeli directors and writers of the early twenty-first century. In 2008, he presented his film *Waltz with Bashir*, a moving animated film in which he, in a very intimate and delicate way, explored the imbalances of memory in cases of shame and extreme blood and fire. Folman, in fact, executes through art, a therapeutic exercise in which he can talk about the shame of those days of the Lebanon War in 1982. The director was part of the Israeli army at that moment in history, and he was inserted in something he prefers to remember like a trip in which he fought against what he says, *he would rather never have lived, or relived it again*.

These labyrinths of memory have given rise to multiple inquiries about what happens to the mind once it goes through traumatic situations. What is remembered? What is forgotten? The elements pass to the laboratory, are analyzed and create interest in issues related. One of the most frequent questions is the memory from victims and victimizers. Very often, truth slips in the contradictions, exaggerations and cuts of what has happened. A whole nest of

problems for hermeneutics and even for psychology. In the midst of everything, the narrative emerges as the common ground in which conditions lie in order to tell what has happened. Ari Folman remembers, the nightmares that torment the dream of his interlocutor, but he cannot get a clear idea of what he had lived. It is as if the thought resists assuming that he has been protagonist of the misfortune. Before the astonished look of the victims, many are the inmates who fail to recognize that they are accused of the cruelties, but at some point, memory comes to the surface, like a hand that digs out of the grave, and claims its stage presence in its entirety.

In the same sense, there have emerged various stories and films about people shot down by the memory of what they lived in wars. *Poster Girl* (Sara Nesson, 2010) is one of those strange works in which, the life of a woman who was part of the American troops in Iraq is explored. She was the image of posters that encouraged the recruitment of more girls for the cause of the banner of progress and peace that Americans offer. Robynn Murray, a young woman who was losing her sanity, a case of split personality. In the film, Murray returns home with a completely altered personality, with clear signs of post-traumatic stress, symptoms reflected in her mind and in her actions. Subsequently, and as the time passes, like Ari Folman the young woman only wants to vindicate herself. The problem, however, was making people understand her condition and provide her with medical treatment.

With the fervor placed in a historicist condition, the postulates of nationalist discourses, most of the times, manipulate to trick moral issues and expose, as flexible, the conditions of a crime committed against others. If the person in front of me is a possible enemy, it is good to anticipate his outrages; if the one who speaks differently and dresses strangely is conspiring to attack us, it is better to cut the problems at the root. The narrative justification of the actions of war is linked to notions of law that still continue to be exercised, and that at the time of execution, they always have a livelihood at hand. The great genocides of the history of mankind have not had any reserves to defend themselves in favor of a superior option, a revealed story, a path of history, which subsumes all the acts of men.

The struggle to understand what has happened and from where it has been conceived, has been told in different ways under the rubric of directors and scriptwriters soaking up what wars have been. In 2010, for example, the veteran British director Ken Loach presented, along with his friend and screenwriter Paul Laverty, the film *Route Irish*. The title refers to the dangerous space between the airport of Baghdad and the so-called *Green Zone*, a place that identifies the American and allied fortification, installed in Iraq after the 2003 takeover. Unlike other films, the above approaches the Iraqi case from the North American point of view -the recognized *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2008) and the *Green Zone* itself (Paul Greengrass, 2010)-. *Route Irish* is established as a revision of an aspect that is rarely mentioned in the news, stories and references about the capture of Baghdad: the recruitment of mercenaries. The film moves the horizon of reflection from Iraq to Liverpool and tries to involve in its spectators a reflection on what really happens in the mind of a man who has been in the war and who has lost his best and only friend. The capture of Baghdad takes a back seat and remains as a terrain that is not worth investigating; now the look is oriented to elements that are always assumed in the war zones but that are left out of mention because they seem obvious, like carrion birds.

Frankie has died in strange circumstances in the *Route Irish*, but Fergus, the character on which the reflexive dimension of what has happened in Baghdad focuses, not only faces the memory, but also the reality of life that awaited the friends at home: Who has killed Frankie? Why? In the devastation, in a break with his own way of being, Fergus -a tough and complex character, very well played by the actor Mark Womack- is solving the crossroads thanks to the recording of a cell phone call in which has been recorded, what apparently happened with his friend. In that way the dark objectives appear, the unholy companies emerge as the shadows of the good interests of the international war, of the preventive attacks. With this, once again appears the pain of what has been let go and the trauma that becomes a condition for which evolution still does not have the best recipes or outputs.

### 3. The dissolution of the subject

Many of the stories that have been raised as feature film speeches have to do undoubtedly, with that tone of complaint about the consequences of war. The perspective of subsequent suffering is part of what is assumed in the personality of the combatants as well as that of their families. Sometimes clear inquiries about clinical cases that end up have been shown as true lessons of what the internal struggle is, in order to understand what has to be lived. A film that, without doubt, appears as a classic related to this subject is *Jacob's Ladder* (Adrian Lyne, 1990).

The distortion, the ambiguity before the reality, the incomprehension, the dissolution of affective bonds because of something that cannot be tackled even with affection, are part of the elements from which it is narrated, almost that in a postmodern way, what it is the story that every man who has seen the landscape of war. In addition, the statement "almost within postmodernity" is not free. The encounter with the narrative that emerges as testimony of what war has been, is some kind of a broken or cracked mirror.

Keith Jenkins is one of the thinkers who, within the fields of postmodern thought, has forged a series of interpretations of what historical knowledge can be. While it is not necessary to agree with his approach, as often happens from the current in which he is inserted, the critical view of the historical story may elicit a different approach to a very old problem as it is the objectivity of who narrates. It will not be reached in these lines to the absolute negation of everything that has been presented as past -as the postmodern criticism assumes as a consequence of its criticism of knowledge- but at least one can understand a very particular fact of the narratives and it is that of the invocation of a subject that narrates, that pretends to tell what happened or to remember with honesty what apparently it witnessed.

As a cognitive phenomenon, the story is a narrative of something that is assumed to have happened and that one wants to pose as the cause of certain conditions that are experienced in the always-elusive present. It is from this condition that all eyes are reaching a conviction that, many times, is contrary to the gaze of others.

Enunciating this issue allows us to return to the narratives that, from film and television, assume contact with war and conflicts. Jenkins is wrong to argue that everything presented as history, is nothing more than an ideological whim that wants to pass as truth, what cannot raise as a matter of knowledge but as a phenomenon of language, that is, pure rhetoric. Nevertheless, he is not misguided when he shows that, in his engagement with the narrative, history is a literary matter of the first level. (Cinema in its intimacy is a narrative phenomenon and, likewise, as a factor of substance, it becomes theater).

If the case of history and narrative, Jenkins thinks that a film like *Jacob's Ladder*, would be the standard option under the perspective of what happens to us is narrated. The difference between reality and hallucination is diluted; the understanding of the present by account of the past is distorted. The subject, who narrates, is not even aware that there is a fiction inside his story. Everything is unconfigured, like the portraits and paintings of the British painter Francis Bacon, precisely one of the authors on which the aesthetics of Adrian Lyne's film is based.

All this dissolution -which makes, not only the stories of what happened in the war, but all the narratives that try to tell a phenomenon of the past, end in the backpack of literary affairs-, emphasizes a fundamental problem that is found in the outline of all the disciplines that seek to approach the truth: how do we know that what there is, or was, is-or happened-as it really is-or happened? The postmodern exit is simple: nobody has the power to offer a story as superior or a response more objective than another does if we cannot correct this problem.

However, within what we want to explore here, we can, at least, situate ourselves in a place of understanding the narratives of war that gives us something more than simply letting everything be equally valid. If we stay with the postmodern rupture, we cannot even talk about justice or a notion of a dignified right. The executioners would manage to sell us a narration of what they did as if they were the victims and the victims, already silent, would be condemned to make their stories the fable that anyone would like to tell.

## 4. What the story tells

*Just as Jacob's Ladder* presents a very painful and truculent dissolution of what is the subject that suffers the aftermath of war, and serves as a reflection of a postmodern narrative, there are films that manage to overcome the narrative challenges imposed by war facts. *Fatherland* (Christopher Menaul, 1994) is a film that explores World War II and its consequences from the very triumph of Nazi Germany. If you can imagine, then, you can narrate. The phenomenon invokes a condition of creativity in which counterfactual thinking imposes a *raison d'être* to tell a story. Literally speaking, this type of narrative, called uchronia, consists, precisely, in assuming that the past can be understood because we have the consequences of what has happened.

*Fatherland's* position, as a narrative proposal, is to see a different outcome for the war and a current state of affairs in which the principles of Nazism are the values of the European community. The film, based on the homonymous novel by the English writer Robert Harris, an author who has focused his work of fiction as a historiographical reflection from the epochs of the Roman Empire and the Second World War. Thanks to exercises like his, literature emphasizes his role in the alternative construction of narrative dimensions for history and for life itself. It is curious that from the postmodern point of view the result of Harris' intention with his novel *Fatherland* can be considered as a historical narrative in itself, that can share disciplinary validity with so many other stories that tell us about the conditions of the Second World War and its obvious consequences in the contemporary world.

Here it is from where it is emphasized that it is not the same to assume a story as true, with the evidences and testimonies of those who have participated or witnessed the facts, to assume all the stories as possible fictions since there is no way to counteract the distance between us and the question about what really happened. The difference may be very tenuous, moreover, there is a lot of distance between a novel (and the film) as *Fatherland* and a book that conditions its outlines to research about what was World War II or a documentary that pose a series of sketches about what happened in Nazi Germany. If the intention of an author, such as the aforementioned Robert Harris, were to write a history text under the same support with which *Fatherland* has written, then it could not be taken as a sane being. Here it is from where it is emphasized that it is not the same to assume a story as true, with the evidences and testimonies of those who have participated or witnessed the facts, to assume all the stories as possible fictions since there is no way to counteract the distance between us and the question about what really happened. The difference may be very tenuous, but it can be seen that there is a lot of distance between a novel (and also the film) as *Fatherland* and a book that conditions its outlines to research about what was World War II or a documentary that pose a series of sketches about what happened in Nazi Germany. If the intention of an author, such as the aforementioned Robert Harris, were to write a history text under the same support with which *Fatherland* has written, then it could not be taken as a sane being.

Fiction allows to trace a type of approach to war that, although extreme, helps us to understand the phenomena of the past and their consequences in the present. Quentin Tarantino wrote and directed a film in which it is also valid to avoid a reflection on the handling of history and the stories that can be derived from what has been seen as true horizons of study of what has happened. *Inglourious Basterds* (Quentin Tarantino, 2009) is a film in which there is an enclave with the known history about the Nazi occupation in France and, in general terms, with the characters and elements of the Second World War. In the setting, in the management of the scenery, the costumes and even the languages spoken, Tarantino has clearly specified what he was interested in as part of a specific historical situation. However, fiction allows him to skip the road and dare alternatives for narrative deployment. This is how, in that scenario, he imposes a story of revenge in which a woman causes the great leaders of Nazism to fall into her hands and she tightens them with all her strength. Reality? Fiction? Without appealing to a reading of certainties at all costs that do

not admit discussions or more inquiries, what can be said is that the ways in which fiction works, make reality simply become a springboard for everything that is even considered inconceivable happens to be a narrative object.

Did not the story of Captain America (*Captain America: The First Avenger*) also emerge from that terrain of World War II? In the film (Joe Johnston, 2011), which in turn is based on the comic book of Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, we explore the gaps that appear in the history of the twentieth century when, according to certain documents, several types were made of experiments on the soldiers to guarantee better warriors on the battlefields. From that simple idea, a story emerges, the intuition of who imagines possible worlds before facts that are taken for established, with dates of beginning and even closure.

This type of disquisitions, highlight that not only the individual who narrates is split, but also the story itself fractures as a phenomenon that allows the imagination to twist its threads and its plots. As products, criticisms, debates, and other works of fiction that try to redirect the way of reflections on the past, appear. Here, there can be a great amount of stories. From *Inglorious Basterds* -the fiction film- a documentary was released in 2012 entitled *The Real Inglorious Bastards* (Min Sook Lee) that reviews the entire historical basis of the Tarantino film, emphasizes the attempts of some small groups of soldiers and commands that face the Nazi troops. In this way, obstacles are encountered in the path of objectivity; the network of knowledge that tends towards reality makes us have a map, a panorama, of what it is. We may not reach the definitive answer, but something is done by the construction of that bridge between thought and life itself, with still great mysterious.

Otherwise, the dissolution would be higher than usual. In Colombia, for example, there are attempts to explore what has been the armed conflict in much of the twentieth century, have been crossed by a gloomy and hopeful look, at the same time. On the one hand, we have the stories of the victims, a series of stories that are shaping a vision of what has happened from the experience of its protagonists that have been objects of different humiliations and violence. Interviews have turned into books (see Guzmán, Borda & Umaña, 1980), confessions have become book pages, and kidnappings have also become a place in the field of history. They are the same men and women who have suffered the intensity of violence in Colombia who have been giving account of what has been a conflict that historians and sociologists have also looked at with a series of other categories and concepts of approach.

In addition, nevertheless, nothing stops being complex. The psychological burdens under which the elements of construction of a story of someone suffering, make that the reconstruction would be a personal adventure of vindication of the subject. In fact, it is this an exercise of confessing (before a camera, before a journalist, before a chronicler who wants to give a rubric to what is the experience of others). A liberating exercise. Along with personal writing, and as well as the same confession that some religions, pose as a formula, to purify the faith; the revelation of what is lived is part of the raw impacts that the configuration of historical accounts can have when there has been so much violence, a lot of blood spilled.

In that aspect, the stories that have to do with war can easily be divided into two sections. A fraction would collect all the works that arise from the historical inquiry by those who have dedicated themselves to explore a good part of their lives a particular aspect of the past. It is no secret to anybody, that historians are little more than bookworms that have stopped day by day to recapture a panorama of a fragment of the time that was gone. A second fraction, on the other hand, would be the testimonial trace of those who tell us, through a hybrid genre between literature and history, what they lived, in that soil so catastrophic, many times as it is that of wars and human conflicts. Another case would be the guidelines of the fiction to tell what could happen within what happened, as in the cases of the mentioned stories that arise from a very likely ground but in which the protagonists and the circumstances of their actions are consequences of the narrative imagination of authors who, are aware, are telling stories.

Following in the Colombian case, there are narrations that are and located in different slopes of the conflict, to tell us, according to their gender and intention, what has happened. For example, in the specific case of the so-called *period of Violence in Colombia* (a period of history that is inscribed between 1946 and 1966), can give an understanding about the phenomenon of the narrations there. Famous has been the case of the book that carries, precisely, that name: *Violence in Colombia* (Borda & Umaña, 1962, 1964). Because of top-level social researchers, there are inserted, in not only the documents that are part of any historiographic exploration, but the testimonies and even the anecdotes that reflect those bloodthirsty years. The purpose of its authors was dedicated to the observation of a history that persisted as a scourge of national life and to the clarification of the origins and becomings of that violence, that was making part of the personification of a notion of Colombian pride. For this reason, the intention links to those who tell us their perspective and in stories and reflections, give us a true and well-founded consideration of the guidelines they propose. The authors have not been victims or victimizers of what has happened under that period of history, although connections can always be found, but what is important here is the point of view from which their paragraphs are oriented: collect testimonies and analyze what has happened and their (with or without) reasons.

Another adjustment links to those who narrate as victims. In this, the support can be as confessional as you want or you can play with the genres while considering, as a narrative dimension that oscillates between the journalistic and the literary. *The years of the 'tropol' (revolt): stories of violence* (2000), is one of those books in which the reader can end up highly disgusted with the vexations of a chilling social conflict in those decades of the so-called *Violence in Colombia*. Alfredo Molano, the author, related to the sociological framework in which these investigated phenomena, links a series of chronicles that attempt to compare the voices of those who have passed as victims of the conflict. Clearly, the elements he uses are those of literature: narrative voices, time management and even dialogues, in brief stories that outline what the Colombian troop has been. The most important thing here is to approach or read book like this, under the clause that the author is telling us things that really happened. His idea is not to entertain or terrify us but to build an element of creation under literary genres known to generate this type

of effects. Molano's idea is to show a true frame in which given stories contain what characters want to tell us.

However, a breaking element makes a grimace of what has emerged as a verifiable historical account. Along with the testimonies, the interviews, the documents, the witnesses and many other elements that participate in the configuration of the stories of historiographical intention, such as the imagination. That restless mental condition that works in some men more than in others is also the pleasure of immersing oneself fully in the configuration of the events and crossing the voices and the facts themselves to give them a vision as different as everyone has. Following the thread of that same phenomenon, to give an example, not many years ago, a sort and fun book, entitled *The Garden of Delights* (2005). The author from Antioquia (Colombia), Guillermo Cardona, used history as a pretext to let his imagination fertilize the known stories (perhaps more true), to impose, with all the literary resources at hand, a particular orientation of the things. In this case, the dialogues, the handling of the times and the characters, although in flirting with what happened on April 9, 1948 -the day of *The Bogotazo*, the touchstone of those years of violence-, are available for give verisimilitude to a fun, and at the same time, painful story of what happened in those days. Juan Roa Sierra, who in history happens to be simply the man who killed the liberal caudillo Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, is in *the Garden of Delights* a poor unemployed boy who does not know what to do with his life, although he has the pride to feel blessed by his physical attributes. Between magic, witchcraft, religiosity, family life and a Bogotá that stopped in time with the pride of a strange culture influenced by Americans and communists. A narrative is configured. It does not seek to be a historical document or to be considered as probable alternative of what happened in 1948, but there is a funny inclination of the imagination before a historical event. It differs, for that reason, from other readings because this novel will not impose the clauses that other type of books on the same subject, even, on the same day (For example , *El Bogotazo, memorial of the forgetfulness*, of Arturo Alape (2000), but arranged with special encouragement because the author's intention is another. Fiction in its greatest splendor imposes a dynamic in which real events subjugate to the imagination, and the vocation to move or entertain or demonstrate narrative talent, arises with force to spice what is simply a deception in which we agree to participate. We are not told how things were at that historical moment, but we realize that these possibilities are provided by the imagination.

## 5. The offers of the imagination

Human beings still ask ourselves what goes through the minds of other beings, like the animals that accompany us. As they do not speak, it is difficult for us to translate the whole spectrum of what they can feel, although the closeness and love that we profess, they lead us to invoke sensations and even words in what only their eyes say. Despite everything, we trust silence and transparency in their requirements. A different thing happens among men, even if trying to avoid transparency in the sayings and deeds of other men. Daniel Dennett (1995) has referred to this in his works on consciousness. Under the theory of the mind, he has explained the phenomenon of intentionality, and how human beings harbor a space that

not all species have for the invention of lies and the most pompous deception. In everyday life, this issue continually harasses human and family relationships. Many things can also be said of this in intellectual and academic life, but here this mention serves us, for the time being, to qualify the inquiry that make these paragraphs about the accounts of the war.

Among normal people -peaking to the theory of the mind: people who do not have severe brain deficits-, it is easy to show that if something arises as history (within a discipline and some elements that are studied and require research), then trust is paid to the extent that the story that emerges from there, is consistent, both, with the evidence and with the consequences of living it. For this reason, the problem of narrative fiction arises, which demands a suppression of that confidence to enter another type of experience that can go from sadness or horror to delight and give pleasure. A historical novel, for example, configures a basic level of participation of certain historical facts to tie there an invention in which the reader is asked to stop having the same qualms that would make a serious historian. Under this entire look at the literary and cinematographic creation of all times.

During much of the cultural history of the West, Troy has been mentioned and the war that Homer tells us in *The Iliad* (1973) as a fiction of what were the mythological times. When talking about the characters of that magnificent work, it was alluded to entities that represented singular values of all that was the spirituality and religiosity of the ancient peoples. In this there was no problem because, as has been said, human beings have an intellection that allows us to enjoy what we are told more by the art of the word, rhetoric, the art of argumentation and storytelling, that for its real connection with reality. In that good part of cultural history, very few men attacked the Homeric work simply because their heads did not fit the mythical fantasy. The curious thing is that only since the nineteenth century, the Trojan War was a highly probable element of the life of the Ancient times. In addition, this is striking because not always come to the rescue of fiction from history, usually has been the opposite. The archaeological element, of course, has been in this case in the first row.

What history cannot tell us is that the Trojan War happened just as Homer tells us. However, that there was room, great losses, without equal warriors, is something that became closer and closer to our vision of that past that, of course, is still crossed by the fiction of the Greek rhapsody. What the imagination gives us is a respite from the gaps: just as the poets of those generations of men that were responsible for giving their national heroes the best strokes and even the most profitable blessings. The narrators of today persist in the will to guide their stories in the exploration of infinity of meanings to what the battles of our time can be. In the cinema, in the narrative, in the dramaturgy, the adjustments of the disciplinary history invoked to flavor what the stories of our misfortunes are.

That things could be different, is something that is always pointed out in all the debates about what really happened. The kidnapped who leave captivity, narrate their adventures in the hands of their captors, the humiliations, the memories of those days, the nightmares of those nights without requiring anything more than what their minds indicate as true. In the Colombian case, for example, the books of people who have regained their freedoms are inscribed in the field of conflict but within the framework of what have been their most

personal interpretations of what has been lived and what has been suffered. As testimonies, no one will question what has happened, but as soon as more voices begin to emerge that remember the same circumstances, the contradictions will show that the imagination can deceive itself in the understanding of phenomena. For this case, compare the two books of Ingrid Betancur (*No silence that ends*, 2010), and Clara Rojas (*Captive: Testimony of a kidnapping*, 2009), is aware of how they can perceive, under the same circumstances always so ethereal phenomena like those of human relationships in areas where friendship, passion, conflict, anger, resentment, humiliation and despair come to the surface. It is as if we could only approach what happened with a forbidden door because not even their guardians have the keys to let us through. In any situation of conflict, no matter how many stories are offered, there is always a closed space, closed even for its own protagonists because no man can speak fully of the complete panorama of what happened.

However, limiting ourselves to a version of things has not been the way out; neither it has been to say that history has no meaning, because it can never be adjusted to reality. What has been done is to permeate everything through fiction, a narrative challenge that imposes its own codes and that provides the opportunity to refresh the memory of what our ancestors and we have done in the world to refine a bit a reflection towards where we are going.

Everyone can remember that fascinating interpretation of Tom Cruise of a former Vietnam fighter who, after the war, is dedicated to rebuilding his spirit in line with the pacifist movements of the seventies. The film, *Born on the Fourth of July* (Oliver Stone, 1989), narrated the life of a man that could well be the metaphor of a transition in war stories. In the first place was the childhood of the hero, his place in a story of the grandeur of a people who had to do justice to the bad people by freeing oppression from the helpless of the world. It is the sample of a proud warrior, who turns his mind into an ally for combat. Vietnam was the reason why many young people felt that their dreams of becoming superior, of being really men, came true. Marked by that vocation the ranks of the armies widened and the good boys went out to seek manhood. In second place was the assembly of the conflict and the ideas of a better world in which each of the warrior boys was the protagonist. Vietnam was paradise to purge the soul and make everything honor. In combat, each boy would be willing to give his life for his country and for the ideas that had made the United States the best country in the world. In the last place comes the awakening. As the film focuses on the memories of ex-combatant Ron Kovic, what its director, Oliver Stone, wanted to offer a poignant tale about post-conflict morality and the true manhood of defeat. All the dreams of greatness of those adolescent heroes of the sixties became swamp and blood. These consequences could not be under rug swept.

The revision of bloody historical events is always subject to a series of egotistical justifications that make the results, being bad, be seen as minor evils, or being good, be seen as extraordinary enterprises of the spirit and humanity. This has been taught to us by the politics of all times. As imagination gives meaning to disaster and irrationality, political leaders - the worst politicians, who are also the most famous - endow events with a specific meaning, assuming that their reflection is evidence of how blessed they are to understand the folds of the order of the world and even the will of God.

What Oliver Stone showed in his work, is how those justifications were undone. If the imagination could give publicity to the idea of a warrior, sow the seed so that new men would dedicate their lives to save the homeland of the enemies that approached the door, because that was the reality to replicate. Forgotten, humiliated, crippled, when not dead, the warriors returned home wondering why they were so naive. Many died deceived, others had at least their voices to manifest what was wrong and how incautious they had been in making decisions that others had taken for them since long ago.

Each conflict can be seen, thus, raised in several horizons: the need to defend a cause (usually, it is presented as a value superior to all, such as freedom, democracy, equality, a system of virtues in which everyone feels comfortable); the threat of a foreign organism that behaves like a virus; the training of boys who are whispered in their ear that they can be the heroes of the hymns of a new dawn; the reality of the battle, the harshness of the confrontation, the death, the ruthless scenes of human butchery and the cruelty to which men can arrive; the awakening, the disappointment even of the same life that has been offered to nonsense and to the symbols of what one does not know for sure what it is, like freedom, democracy or other virtues that sound good. In each one of those horizons, one can put the necessary and just imagination to bring up all kinds of stories. It will be exaggerated a bit, because it is the office of the mind not to know how to contain and appeal to words, something that is not in reality but in our internal worlds, and a plot will be given to everything so that, according to the needs of who tell the stories, the impressions can be more profitable.

## 6. The metamorphosis of war

One of the conflicts that is best narrated is that of Vietnam. Both in books and in films, Vietnam even seems to have ceased to be the name of a country to refer to a generation, a condition of conflict and defeat, a circumstance that renewed the way of understanding wars. Before Vietnam, the great imaginary of war had the strength to make each young man want to bring out his masculinity on the battlefields. Under a political-religious-cultural ideal, those boys refined their whole way of being to become warriors. After Vietnam, things have not been completely the same, and while the ideals of the old-style soldier persist, something has changed in the way of seeing the battlefields.

Cinema and literature have also arranged their structures so that things look different. In addition, the translation of this curious phenomenon that arose from a war that is more known than many others in history are under the new clauses of understanding of what politics, religiosity and a pacifist culture really mean. Many stories of the war that preceded the phenomenon of Vietnam were part of a prestigious wave of publicity about what could be the manhood and honor of young people. Enshrined as stories of cowboys in which the best were those with superior marksmanship and agility, the narratives of the war were a tug of the ears on the importance of fighting and conflict to defend those values that were at risk. Even today, as has been seen, that remains a most eloquent slogan. However, before

Vietnam, there was no lack of films that transgressed those imperatives of propaganda and that, as had already been done from various cultural fronts of the avant-garde, expressed their reservations to the stipulated in war.

*All Quiet on the Western Front*, is an anti-war film that may well be shown as one of the ones that inaugurates the metamorphosis. Based on the homonymous literary work of the German writer Erich Maria Remarque, it points out the elements of the disappointment configured as the defeat of an illusion in the trenches of the First World War. Paul Bäumer is the young soldier who will personify a new way of being, that of liberation, as if he were the first man to leave the cave and want to warn others, what really happens. Nevertheless, here it is worth noting that, for those times (the novel, written in 1929, the film, directed by Lewis Milestone, and presented in 1930), the strength of the arms race was as strong as conservative or republican speeches as always. The disappointment of the war, if a lot, was a secret scattered with distrust. Many other films can approach the idea proposed by Remarque with his book, however, the nuances of anti-war cracked by the denunciation of the sins of others. That is, from where it has been made, the accusation does not show the war but the evils that others have done, linking the story he wants to tell to the very phenomenon of the narrative that personifies the hero and the anti-hero, the good ones and the bad guys. The very metamorphosis of war implies that she is the anti-heroine.

A second film that can be nominated along with *All Quiet on the Western Front* is the poignant, cruel, even shocking, *Johnny Got His Gun* (Dalton Trumbo, 1971). There was already the air of the seventies and the social revolutions that, in the United States, would become the condensation of the universal symbols of feminism, rock and roll, pacifism, the search for greater economic and social equality, and the establishment of a better civil rights charter. The cinema, guest of honor, would have to give his brushstrokes to a framework that would completely change the interpretation of youth itself and the desire to live this, which, as Calderón de la Barca says, is simply a brief dream. Trumbo created a story in which the aftermath of the war (in the case of his film, proposals within the event of the First World War), was the very rupture of the soul and the body, the horror of being part of an existence in which others had already decided, what the others had to do and suffer with their bodies. Films like this seemed alien to the institutionally proposed reality from the altars of politics, that until the seventies became the very emblem of a generation that woke up to the sins of their parents. The strength of a wave that came from a decade ago, took on a height. Being an artist now invoked peace and spirituality instead of the painful and shameful invocation for war. To be young was to raise the flag of peace, to seek freedom, to show displeasure, to make life what he wanted while not looking to harm anyone. The terrain was firming so that the new physiognomy of the war story would emerge from the souls of writers, poets, writers, authors and witnesses showing how deceived everyone was when they praised, like mad Quixotes, the power of arms and the benefits of wars.

It is much easier today, in the twenty-first century, to contemplate these films with the naturalness of being part of that generation that sought to sow seeds of peace, transgressors at the time. In the same way, the rifles take on margaritas in their mouths of fire, and the

soldiers sing their misfortunes - and not their honors - in musicals such as the famous *Hair* (peculiar work of Broadway, 1967, and then film adaptation, 1979).

## 7. Twenty-first century codes

The plots that were embedded in the recent narrative of the war have Vietnam as an explicit reference to its consequences. They overcome the honorable military condition that has been the usual source of the Great War stories in the history of humanity and subject viewers and readers to a moral scrutiny of what has really happened. And, although the character is always very attractive (the man, the woman, the soldier, the army, the nation), who goes out to defend himself, to collect revenge, to call justice by means of weapons and the rawness of combat, Societies have recently faced these responses with an ambivalent feeling.

You only have to see the grief with which the families of recent years receive calls to military service. There is very little that can be said about it. The military service remained as a space for some volunteers or for parents who have believed that the defects of the upbringing that they gave to their children will be hidden with a few months in the army. Conscientious objection, which sounded like a grave sin in the generations of the first half of the twentieth century, is today, in the middle of the twenty-first century, a virtuous condition that speaks of hope, peace, love, solidarity that must exist between humans.

In Colombia, the narrative of the war had a chapter on television that came with the influence of the plots that were linked to what came as a story after Vietnam. *Men of honor* (Jairo Cañola, 1995) was a series that claimed the values of being part of the National Army. In it, all actors played different characters linked to the usual grades of the military hierarchy. As a series that encouraged a particular vision of the country, war, morality, everything was modeled so that the ideals were the invitation to viewers to support what was executed there as a struggle between Good and Evil. Production and the handling of the battles are hardly logical in a television that has not had the resources available to make the stories of the war something that comes to be compared with the stories of the great studios of international television. However, there was the call for attention: half an hour of publicity that would invite new young people to feel part of the national values.

In this dispute, a political and narrative vision characterized by the conflicts that can be felt in the environment, ask questions like these: what should be the true values of international relations? In order to counteract the impulses of the organizations an increasingly larger amount of pacifists, libertarians, egalitarians, feminists, make war sound a great misfortune. Is war an unavoidable necessity of human societies?

The twenty-first century includes the demands of those years in which everything began to tremble, to the institutionality of the armed forces and the virtues of conflict. To deny the very nature of men by denying war has wanted to impose itself as a value for the greatness of the communities of tomorrow. Nonetheless, wherever you keep looking, the conflicts

and their histories later, despite the fact that the disasters of the war are looked at with greater stinging.

Movies and series such as *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *M.A.S.H.* (1970), *China Beach* (1988), *Tour of Duty* (1987), *Platoon* (1986), *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987), and even the very first part of *Rambo* (originally called *First Blood* [1982]) marked a closure to conflicts. They joined the great list of books that reviled wars and suffering to let us see the other side of honor.

We are witnessing today the narratives that show a double horizon of reflection on conflicts; we oscillate between the spectacle itself, the pyrotechnics and the technology that are implemented to put an end to the “enemies”, and the powerful revolt of the conscience, the twisting that upsets the mind and makes the experience become sorrow.

In 2015, a striking work was made to the Oscar de la Academia award in the category of best documentary short film. *Hotline Crisis, Veteran Press 1* (2013), by director Ellen Goosenberg Kent, appeared on the international scene quickly becoming a valuable reflection on the aftermath of the war. It broadens our view of what, only in the North American case, has happened therefore. Among veterans who return home, there are an average of twenty-two suicides a day. A whole issue that improves the creation of a last-minute resource to prevent the numbers from growing: a telephone help line. Only in the last two years, the center of attention -a kind of call center to avoid the ultimate misfortune- the number of employees went from one hundred to two hundred and fifty. All people, trained to answer the calls of men and women who seek a friendly voice, a consolation before the debacle of the conscience, before the consequences of the trauma. At the month, the center receives, at the same time, about twenty-two thousand calls. The figure makes you think, sure. The documentary puts us before the abyss, the fracture of the mind that, after the war, completely collapses. There is no selection in conflicts; from Vietnam to the recent episodes of fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, veterans call the crisis line with the last breath, with blood boiling, hands only assisted by the desire to end a final suffering. Concussion is inevitable.

But, why does the crisis arise? Do you live inside with a demon that, at the least carelessness, shows its power? One of the most interesting facts is linked to the fact that the environment in which a war veteran usually moves invites him to return to it. Whether by the news, or by the images on the television, or by the headlines of the press, what the documentary shows is that the crisis persists because the reasons for the conflicts persist. The traumas reappear as when going to the cinema or listening to some music revives dimensions of love and lack of love-two sides of the same coin. And, thus, the situation of the snipers on the roofs of Iraq is rediscovered, such as the internal combat suffered by the character of *American Sniper* (Clint Eastwood, 2014) or the bipolarity that destroys and collapses Carrie Mathison in the iconic series of our time *Homeland* (Howard Gordon, Alex Gansa & Gideon Raff, 2011). The psyche receives its stone and the crystal is completely fragmented. Even with tweezers, it is not recomposed.

It was in 2010 when the same author of *Hotline Crisis, Veteran Press 1* (Ellen Goosenberg, 2013), presented one of her most brilliant works: *Wartorn: 1861-2010*. The look of

Homer, in which the Trojan War made only heroism, is here studded with what may be the pain of Ulysses. Returning warriors do not find themselves. Honor is transgressed by suffering. This last one does not validate or give a better flavor to the first, but it taints it and overflows it.

It seems that speaking about the same, we have reached the point that Plato sentenced twenty-five centuries ago: "Only the dead have seen the end of the war". As inscribed in the very nature of the development of humanity, of societies and of the notions of progress, freedom, equality and even of love, war has been deployed as one of the demons with which it is most frequently confronted. It does not have to like us, it is there, like so many other things that we do not like and that are part of ourselves. Of the internal combat, that one every day can exist with its own whims and desires. To the combat in the battlefield, there are as wide similarities as calamitous differences. What has emerged from all this is a strange pleasure that seasons the conversations, the newspapers, the readings, the movies and the stories that accompany our lives: the pleasure of telling us in the conflict with the vague hope that it will disappear someday. Nevertheless, only the dead have seen the end of the war.

## References

- Alape, A. (2000). *El bogotazo: memorias del olvido*. 10ª edición. Bogotá: Planeta.
- Báez, F. (2003, diciembre). Atentado cultural en Irak: El enigma de los libros destruidos en Bagdad. *Revista Número*, 39. Bogotá, Colombia. pp. 62-67.
- Betancourt Pulecio, I. (2010). *No hay silencio que no termine*. Traducción del francés con la colaboración de la autora por María Mercedes Correa y Mateo Cardona. Bogotá: Aguilar, Santillana Ediciones.
- Cardona, G. (2005). *El jardín de las delicias*. Bogotá: Planeta.
- Dennett, D. (1995). *La conciencia explicada. Una teoría interdisciplinar*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- Guzmán Campos, G.; Fals Borda, O. & Umaña Luna, E. (1980). *La violencia en Colombia: estudio de un proceso*. 9ª edición (2 volúmenes). Bogotá: Carlos Valencia Editores.
- Homero (1973). *Ilíada*. 5ª edición. (Estudio preliminar de David García Bacca. Traducción de Luis Segalá y Estalella). Buenos Aires: Editorial W. M. Jackson, Inc.
- Molano, A. (2000). *Los años del tropel: crónicas de la violencia*. 3ª edición. Bogotá: Áncora Editores.
- Rojas, C. (2009). *Cautiva: Testimonio de un secuestro*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Mosaico de Gen.

## Filmography

- Altman, Robert (1970). *M.A.S.H.* 20th Century Fox.
- Bigelow, Kathryn (2008). *The Hurt Locker*. Summit Entertainment / First Light Production / Kingsgate Films.
- Broyles Jr., William; Young, John Sacret (1988). *China Beach*. ABC / Warner Bros. Television.
- Brunner, Benny (2012). *The Great Book Robbery*. Holanda.
- Cañola, Jairo (1995). *Hombres de Honor*. Ejército Nacional de Colombia / Teleset / Caracol Televisión.
- Cimino, Michael (1978). *The Deer Hunter*. EMI Films.

- Coppola, Francis Ford (1979). *Apocalypse Now*. United Artists (Omni Zoetrope Production).
- Duncan, Steve; Travis Clark, L. (1987). *Tour Of Duty*. Braun Entertainment Group / New World Television.
- Eastwood, Clint (2014). *American Sniper*. Warner Bros. / Village Roadshow / RatPac-Dune Entertainment / Mad Chance / 22 & Indiana Pictures / Mad Chance Productions / Malpaso Productions.
- Folman, Ari (2008). *Waltz With Bashir*. Coproducción Israel-Alemania-Francia; Bridgit Folman Film Gang / Les Films d'Ici / Razor Film / Arte France / ITVS International.
- Forman, Milos (1979). *Hair*. CIP Filmproduktion GmbH. MGM / UA.
- Gordon, Howard; Gansa, Alex; Raff, Gideon (2011). *Homeland*. Teakwood Lane Productions / Cherry Pie Productions / Keshet Broadcasting / Fox 21 (2011-14) / Fox 21 Television Studios (2015) / Showtime Networks.
- Goosenberg Kent, Ellen; Alpert, Jon; O'Neill, Matthew (2010) *Wartorn: 1861-2010*. Attaboy Films / HBO Documentary Films.
- Goosenberg Kent, Ellen (2013). *Crisis Hotline: Veterans Press 1*. Danna Perry / HBO Documentary Films.
- Greengrass, Paul (2010). *The Green Zone*. Universal Pictures / StudioCanal / Relativity Media / Working Title Films.
- Johnston, Joe (2011). *Captain America: The First Avenger*. Marvel Studios / Paramount Pictures.
- Kotcheff, Ted (1982). *Rambo: First Blood*. Carolco Pictures / Orion Pictures / Roadshow.
- Kubrick, Stanley (1987). *Full Metal Jacket*. Warner Bros. Pictures.
- Lee, Min Sook (2012). *The Real Inglorious Bastards*. Storyline.
- Levinson, Barry (1987). *Good Morning, Vietnam*. Touchstone Pictures / Silver Screen Partners III.
- Loach, Ken (2010). *Route Irish*. Coproducción GB-Francia-Bélgica-Italia-España; Sixteen Films / Why Not Productions / Wild Bunch / Urania Picture / Les Films Du Fleuve / Tornasol Films / Alta Producción.
- Lyne, Adrian (1990). *Jacob's Ladder*. Carolco Pictures.
- Menaul, Christopher (1994). *Fatherland*. HBO Films.
- Milestone, Lewis (1930). *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Universal Pictures.
- Nesson, Sara (2010). *Poster Girl*. Mitchell Block / Sara Nesson.
- Rado, James; Ragni, Jerome (1967). *Hair. The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical*. [Libro y musical teatral para Broadway].
- Stone, Oliver (1986). *Platoon*. Orion presents an Arnold Kopelson Production.
- Stone, Oliver (1989). *Born on the Fourth of July*. Universal Pictures.
- Tarantino, Quentin (2009). *Inglourious Basterds*. Coproducción USA-Alemania; Universal Pictures / The Weinstein Company / Lawrence Bender Productions / Neunte Babelsberg Film.
- Tornatore, Giuseppe (1988). *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*. Coproducción Italia-Francia; Les Films Ariane / Cristaldifilm / TFI Films / RAI.
- Trumbo, Dalton (1971). *Johnny Got His Gun*. World Entertainment.