

Theatre of War: Lola Arias' Documentary Theatre as Innovative Tool for Historical Dialogue



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Abstract The work of internationally renowned playwright Lola Arias explores the limits of historical representation working on the idea of “remaking” troubled pasts with the participation of their real protagonists. In her film *Theatre of War* former soldiers from Argentina and UK who participated in the Falkland-Malvinas war (1982) represent their past experience in the war and interpret their own roles in that violent conflict through a fascinating and intriguing dialogical experience. In line with the latest studies on historical culture, conflict, and history education, this chapter will analyse the potential of this cultural production in promoting multiperspectivity, historical dialogue and social understanding through its key aspects: (a) Substantive contestation of official narratives about historical events, usually nationalist and/or imperialist, by contrasting them with historically silenced voices; (b) a fundamentally dialogical approach to these new narratives, that provides a space for empathy which does not simplify existing conflicts; and (c) the mediation of a wide variety of historical resources that reinforce the denaturalization of historical accounts, making possible a horizon of new critical elaborations on the past.

Keywords Documentary theatre · Historical dialogue · Multiperspectivity

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Documentary Theatre as a Promising Tool for History Education

Recent research in the context of studies on cultural memory has highlighted the privileged position of the media in the configuration of imaginaries and narratives for the representation of the past (Erll & Nünning, 2008; Rigney, 2018). The circulation of these representations and their relationship with the formal and informal learning of history is today a central issue in the field of history education (Kansteiner, 2017), as this volume shows. Series, video games, films, novels, reenactments, and experiences of living history are some of the objects of study that have garnered growing interest among researchers, but there are less explored fields. This is the case for documentary theatre, whose quest to represent “the real” leads to a staging starring the remembrance and reenactment of episodes of the past carried out by people who actually lived through the events, strongly supported by different types of historical documentation. The origins of this genre date back to the 1930s, and its way of interrogating reality and questioning modes of representation has frequently led to a comparison of its praxis with historiographic methodology (Ben-Zvi, 2006). In this chapter, we analyse *Theatre of War*, a film by Lola Arias about the Malvinas/Falklands War that is part of a research process¹ involving this theatrical genre. The works of this director have generated analyses of great interest in the cultural field (Blejmar, 2017; Graham-Jones, 2019; Maguire, 2019). This chapter will explore the promising possibilities that documentary theatre offers to history education when working with a multiperspective approach to the past, both in formal and informal settings, from a dialogic approach. The interesting encounter between dramaturgy and the digital format of film, which make *Theatre of War* a cultural product not easily classifiable, allows us to think about an ease of reproduction and a high possibility of dissemination that is not always possible with a strictly theatrical format. The growing digitisation of content also allows for the promotion of this type of cultural production in the classroom. In fact, an increasing number of studies have addressed the use of different types of film production in history education (Marcus et al., 2018; Peters, 2020; Seixas, 1993; Wineburg et al., 2001).

Both the demand for Argentine sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and the recent war regarding this issue (1982) have been strongly linked to the construction of national identity since the nineteenth century (Lorenz, 2014). The teaching of history had essential importance in the popularisation of this cause. As in other cases, since its inception, linked to the birth of nation-states, history education has been and continues to be (Carretero, 2011) an important engine in the construction of strongly essentialist national identities. As we will discuss in this chapter, for

¹ The film is part of a larger project that the playwright—a world reference in the genre—has been carrying out since 2014. Arias considers this project a “social laboratory”, and thus far, it has led to a video installation (Veteranos, 2014, <https://lolaarias.com/es/veterans/>), a play (Campo Minado, 2016, <https://lolaarias.com/es/minefield/>) and the film studied herein (Teatro de Guerra, 2018, <https://lolaarias.com/es/theatre-of-war/>), three different productions that share the language of documentary theatre in innovative formats with a strong role played by digital resources.

years, the narrative of these events has been configured as a master narrative that imposes its characteristic univocity of the nation-state and makes invisible both the agency of specific groups and visions different from the official narrative (Carretero & Bermúdez, 2012). In Argentina, on April 2, the *day of the Veteran and of the Fallen in the Malvinas War* is commemorated every year in public spaces and schools through different activities. The Malvinas War is part of the history curriculum,² that is, a compulsory subject of formal education.

Theatre of War constructs a novel narrative about the Malvinas experience that manages to break with this trend. The common thread of the film is the encounter between six war veterans, i.e., three Argentines, two British and a Nepalese - *Gurkha*, member of a special unit of the British army - who, under the direction of Arias, put their experiences at the service of a very novel, and undoubtedly surprising, way of recounting the war and its causes and consequences. Although later we will develop in more detail the importance of this initiative for history education, let us acknowledge that understanding the causes and consequences of relevant historical events is precisely a central objective in a meaningful and critical understanding of the past (Seixas & Morton, 2013). Thus, in this chapter, we will try to show how this film achieves this purpose through three of its main characteristics: (a) the substantial questioning of official narratives about historical events, usually of a nationalist and/or imperialist nature, through their contrast with voices traditionally silenced; (b) an essentially dialogical development of these new narratives, which breaks with the univocity of the nation-state; and (c) the denaturalisation of historical accounts through the mediation of a wide variety of historical resources.

The Presence of Malvinas/Falkland in School History

Lola Arias addresses the war experience of the Argentine and British veterans of the Malvinas and, through it, points to the heart of national identities and their process of construction by citizens and societies. The Anglo-Argentine war took place between April 2 and June 14, 1982, after a decision by the Military Junta to break off diplomatic negotiations and establish Argentine sovereignty over the islands by war. It ended with a victory by the British army. However, the sovereignty of the islands is still in dispute today.

It was a short war of 74 days, but the Malvinas cause has occupied an important symbolic place in the collective memory of Argentina as a fundamental milestone in the process of building national identity. The British occupation of the islands began in 1833. However, since 1910, during the first centenary of independence, there has been the notion that Argentina is the undisputed heir of the entire territory of the former Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, including the archipelago (Pineau & Birgin, 2018), despite the lack of coincidence between the territory of the Viceroyalty and that of present-day Argentina. The 1930s were a turning point in the construction

² <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/educacion/efemerides/2-abril-malvinas>.

Fig. 1 Delia Giovanola, mother of Plaza de Mayo, holds up a placard proclaiming “the Malvinas are Argentinean, the disappeared too” (Photo Amado Bécquer Casaballe <https://journals.openedition.org/orda/3548?lang=es>)



of a “national cause”, with a strong component of British anti-imperialism (Santos La Rosa, 2019). That British anti-imperialism, in fact, is still present in school teacher narratives. In Argentine schools, it is taught that the most immediate precedent of the independence of 1810 was the rejection of the “English invasions”, which are presented as the first experience in the construction of national identity.

The claim of sovereignty over the archipelago has functioned since the nineteenth century, in the words of Rosana Guber, as a national metaphor (2001) and collective representation (2012). The Argentine civic-military dictatorship, installed since 1976, played a role in the physical disappearance of tens of thousands of people in a context of generalised repression, the violation of human rights, and the suspension of democratic guarantees (Feierstein, 2011). With General Leopoldo Galtieri at the helm, he tried to capitalise on this national sentiment shared among large sectors of the population and practically the entire political spectrum through military offensives on the islands. He thus intended to overshadow a moment of deep crisis of the regime, which nevertheless received a fatal blow through the disaster that resulted from defeat in this war, precipitating the end of the dictatorship and the recovery of democracy. Support for the war, however, was massive. The nationalist and anti-imperialist cause³ had more weight than the apparently irreconcilable differences between Argentines in relation to the dictatorship. A very significant visual example can be seen in an image that shows one of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo protesting the disappearance of people and at the same time claiming the sovereignty of the islands (Fig. 1). After the defeat, a silence was imposed in Argentina that did not help in the social processing of this difficult episode. The Malvinas conflict was from that moment linked to the most bloody dictatorship that the country had ever known, adding another layer of complexity to a claim that occurred a long time ago.

³ In fact, that support also occurred in broad Latin American sectors, as illustrated by this article by Gabriel García Márquez in the Spanish newspaper *El País* on April 14, 1982: https://elpais.com/diario/1982/04/14/opinion/387583205_850215.html.

Where did the identity of this territorial issue come from? Public education played an important role in extending the discussion of sovereignty from the intellectual sphere to broad sectors of society. The subject became part of the mandatory curriculum in the 1940s under the different Peronist governments, and in the year 1946, it was decreed that all maps included in textbooks would be approved by the Military Geographical Institute to ensure that “national sovereignty” was respected (Pineau & Birgin, 2018). This power of supervision of national maps has continued to this day, and even recently, a new mandatory map has been distributed in all schools that include not only the aforementioned islands but also Antarctic territories (Parellada et al., 2021). Beginning in the 1960s, recognition by the UN of the British occupation reinforced the presence of the claim of sovereignty, constituting an important pillar in massive and transversal support for the cause (Pineau & Birgin, 2018). Education played a decisive role in the promotion of a “love for the nation” essential for the consolidation of a hegemonic national narrative (Carretero, 2011; Zembylas & Schutz, 2009). The promotion of this “national sentimentality” (Berlant, 2012) was one of the primary objectives in the type of citizen construction to which the historical education of a country with a large migratory presence such as Argentina was oriented (Bertoni, 2001).

Between the end of the war and 2006, the approach to the Malvinas conflict was limited mainly to school commemorations, focused mainly on tributes to the fallen and the indisputable rights of Argentina over the archipelago. The date of April 2 continues to be a national holiday and event marked by school, despite curricular renewal in which the Malvinas issue is reincorporated with new conceptualisations that link the origin of the war with the intention of the dictatorship to hide an impending crisis⁴ (Pineau & Birgin, 2018).

In Great Britain, on the other hand, the meaning of Malvinas/Falkland is very different. Most likely, a large part of the population did not know exactly where the archipelago was before 1982, and Malvinas/Falkland does not carry relevant weight in their daily lives today (Porto & Yulita, 2016). However, the conflict coincided with a moment of resurgence of British nationalism under the government of Margaret Thatcher (Guber, 2012) and received significant popular support. The electoral gains that the prime minister obtained from the victory by the British troops in the South Atlantic accounted for this: the conservatives went from seeing her re-election in danger in the February 1982 polls to winning the 1983 elections by a wide margin (Porto & Yulita, 2016). A speech by Margaret Thatcher to the Conservative Party in July 1982 focussed on the mobilisation of British nationalism during the war: ‘The lesson of the Falklands is that Britain has not changed and that this nation still has those sterling qualities which shine through our history’ (in Hewer, 2013, p. 145). The nationalist exacerbation would not be left out of other areas of the Thatcher government. For Kenneth Baker, first Secretary of State for Education and creator

⁴ In line with these new conceptualisations, in 2014 the Malvinas and Islands of the South Atlantic Museum was inaugurated, located in the Space for Memory and for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights, on whose premises the former Mechanical School of the Navy (ESMA) worked, a former clandestine centre for detention, torture and extermination.

of the National Curriculum of 1991, “Pupils should be taught about the spread of Britain’s influence for good throughout the empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries... These things are matters in which we should take great pride” (in Haydn, 2014).

It has been noted that the collective memory of Malvinas began in 1982 with an Argentine occupation/recovery (Hewer, 2013). The contrast of the Argentine and British cases is very interesting in this regard. Some authors speak of an “imperial amnesia” (Grindel, 2013; Mycock, 2017) and “colonial forgetting” (Hewer, 2013) of students in relation to the British past, at least until the end of the 1980s. As Hewer (2013, p. 145) explains, the Second World War created an imprecise narrative of maritime invasions and “adventures”, the day of the Empire was replaced by that of the Commonwealth, and a “state of generalised ignorance” was consolidated. Since then, the question of how to address the colonial past remains far from closed. The absence of an in-depth debate on the way in which school history should be taught seems to be evident in school content that maintains imperialist bias and does not incorporate postcolonial critiques (Mycock, 2017).

Representing the Voice of the Nation

In Argentina, the key role of school institutions in the promotion of national sentiment has been based not only on the teaching of history but also on a particular type of patriotic ritual that involves the reenactment of past events: school events. Within them, the Malvinas conflict, approached from military history and negative sentiment towards the enemy (Flachsland et al., 2010; Lorenz, 2014), in this case, of English nationality, has occupied and continues to occupy a privileged place in achieving this objective. National events began to be celebrated in Argentina, as in most Latin American countries, towards the end of the nineteenth century. Originally, they took place in public spaces, but in 1887, they entered schools (Bertoni, 2001; Carretero, 2011) within the context of a set of public policies aimed at generating national cohesion between ethnically and culturally heterogeneous populations. Child participation was one of the central aspects of festivity programmes on all national dates. In this context, one of the first official measures related to the commemoration of national events was the creation of so-called “school battalions” (Bertoni, 2001). School battalions were composed of children from various schools who, uniformed and armed as soldiers, were instructed by the military and paraded or formed with the army corps. They commemorated, almost a century after the events of independence, a heroic national past, of which the army was not only the mentor but also the guarantor of a future that awaited them as Argentines and defenders of the nation. The national events entered as festivities in Argentine school events and never again left the schoolyard, trying to promote a civic and military identity in the image and likeness of the ideals of the time. In the opinion of some analysts, these events, as models and educational projects, are symbols of the “failure of the Argentine project”

(Escudé, 1990) because instead of favouring a plural vision of the past, they installed an authoritarian and *caudillista* conception of the past nation-state.

These commemorations are cultural tools that aim to forge a sense of community and a national collective and public memory (Wertsch, 2018). Additionally, they function as a meeting place for the educational community (Parellada, 2019). Unlike other forms of reenactment, which receive increasing attention from research (Agnew, 2007; Agnew et al., 2019), reenactments in the framework of school commemorations have been very little studied and, in the few allusions, pose challenges regarding offering a complex view of historical problems (Carretero et al., 2022). In the representations to which we refer here, the students follow a ritual that hardly escapes a univocal narrative of the nation that tends to sediment essentialist views of history. The structure of historical school reenactment is mainly composed of three stages: a) ceremonial, dedicated to the cult of national symbols, such as hymns; b) discursive, during which the teachers or the directive transmit the historical story that is commemorated; and c) expressive, during which the students perform some artistic representations, often theatrical, in reference to the events that are remembered (Carretero, 2011). The Ministry of Education guides the celebrations linked to the Malvinas War: “On November 22, 2000, the national government established April 2 as the Day of the Veteran and of the Fallen in the Falklands War. Remembering this date in school has different objectives: to honour the soldiers killed in that war, to know the historical facts related to the Malvinas, and to inform about the current situation of the islands and about Argentine claims”.⁵

The discursive structure that appears most in these school reenactments coincides, in general, with the dimensions of the historical discourse that characterise the national master narratives. Importantly, these dimensions are part of both the cultural and educational production of historical content (Carretero & Bermúdez, 2012) and the consumption of that content by students (Carretero & van Alphen, 2014). Thus, the following can be distinguished:

- (a) Historical subject. The historical subject, the main voice of the story, is essentialist and is established in terms of inclusion and exclusion. It is imagined through a logical operation based on the distinction between exclusion and inclusion, i.e., “we”, the Argentines, and “them”, the English. In addition, all members of this national community are seen as a cohesive, homogeneous part, without considering the possibility of different and heterogeneous groups of nationals.
- (b) Identification process. School representation contributes in a fundamental way to this process of linking affections and personal value judgements to the aforementioned unification and opposition. Through these commemorations, a shared identity is reaffirmed from a very early age, with very intense emotional ties generated through music, dramatisations, and parades; that is, embodied experiences that leave indelible affective marks. This is especially true when they are introduced at an early age and are repeated every year of schooling. Nationalism

⁵ <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/educacion/efemerides/2-abril-malvinas>.

is such a powerful cultural tool because it arises from this process of cognitive and affective identification.

- (c) Monocausal and simplistic cause. Why did the war occur? Historical events tend to be simplified around “unquestionable” themes such as the search for freedom or territory. Basically, it is a monocausal explanation for which there is no room for contradictions and complex explanations, much less the possibility of alternative views.
- (d) Moral dimension. This dimension is particularly important and is closely related to other patriotic representations, such as the Pledge of Allegiance to the national flag. The commemorations linked to the Malvinas War often have a military aroma that clearly connects with the process of building loyal and patriotic citizens. This loyalty implies, by definition, a moral dimension that contributes greatly to the distinction between the ingroup and the outgroup.
- (e) History of the heroes. This dimension is closely related to the previous dimensions because the protagonists of school recreations are heroic figures. In the case of school anniversaries marking the Malvinas War, the combatants have long been represented as heroes who defended the nation, attributing to them a voice that, paradoxically, on many occasions makes the soldiers’ own extreme experience invisible and obscures the possibility of presenting more complex and structural social and political causes.

Making Possible an Impossible Dialogue

In contrast to the fundamentally univocal narrative structure, whose dimensions we have just described, that has traditionally characterised school events related to the Malvinas War, *Theatre of War* has an essentially dialogic character. Certainly, this gives it not only an innovative character but also a disruptive and deeply critical and reflective character. In the film, two veterans of the war, Lou Armor, British, and Gabriel Sagastume, Argentine, meet in front of a map of the islands and hold the following dialogue, which summarises the central arguments of the dispute between the two countries:

- Lou: But, they were discovered in the 16th century, right? By John Davis?
- Gabriel: No, no. Hernando de Magallanes discovered them before that.
- Lou: Really? OK. Were not the French the first to have a colony there in 1764?
- Gabriel [Nods and points to the map]: And here was the first colony. However, the French recognised Spanish sovereignty.
- Lou: I see. So Spain bought them from the French.
- Gabriel: No, no, they did not buy it. They paid expenses to the French, so they were Spanish, and then, we inherited them, and they’re Argentine.

- Lou: But, you told me that Spain bought them from France. Let's admit it: they were no-man's-land until the British settled in 1833. And, since then... Nine. Nine generations. Nine generations of islanders.
- Gabriel: Nine generations because you occupied them by force in 1833, but we never stopped claiming them. Even the UN has recognised that there is a conflict between both countries. And you never want to negotiate.
- Lou: The negotiations... ended. Well, I think you must have stopped negotiations on April 2, 1982, when you attacked right here [points to the map].
- Gabriel: The islands, they are, they were part of what remains of the British Empire. It is a colony.
- Lou: But, there was a referendum. The people who lived here held a popular consultation. They said they wanted to remain an overseas UK territory. So, you ended the negotiations and started the war. They held a popular consultation. They said they wanted to remain an overseas territory. What comes next? Another war?
- Gabriel: Because the inhabitants are the ones who remained from that invasion.

After the dialogue, Lou and Gabriel look at each other with resigned faces. Next, on a black background, two masks of Margaret Thatcher and Leopoldo Galtieri appear, slowly approaching and kissing (Fig. 2). They move away, look at each other, and remove their masks: in reality, the masked individuals are Gabriel and David (another of the British veterans). It seems evident that Lou and Gabriel are not going to agree on the sovereignty of the islands, but in the process of making the film, a very clear point of union emerges between them: both have suffered the consequences of an extreme event - war - which, ultimately, could only bring favourable consequences for the nation-states and eventually for their political leaders at that time. The unfavourable consequences for civil society are shown in detail in each sequence of *Theatre of War*, which provides a lucid possibility after distancing oneself from the conflict that by appealing to national sentiment and the strong emotions that it mobilised, Galtieri and Thatcher set a trap into which both societies fell and whose consequences have effects even today, in a very stark way in war veterans. The film thus shows the contradiction between the logic of the nation-state and that of civil society, which can internalise the arguments of this trap, as seen in the appropriation of the masks of Thatcher and Galtieri that Gabriel and David adorn. According to Bakhtin (1986), the nation-state speaks for people in a ventriloquial way. War is presented by leaders and by political discourse, whether nationalist or imperialist, as a teleologically inevitable and even desirable event when, however, it represents a terrible experience for people



Fig. 2 Lola Arias (2016). *Theatre of War*. Gema Films (Ref <https://www.infobae.com/cultura/2018/09/12/lola-arias-y-un-experimento-social-sobre-la-guerra-de-malvinas-pensaba-que-los-ingleses-habian-sufrido-menos/>)

and societies. The direct confrontation caused approximately one thousand deaths (655 Argentines and 255 British), and the veterans' associations of both countries have acknowledged the particularly high number of suicides among ex-combatants; notably, it was very difficult to access fully reliable statistics regarding such deaths (Slipczuk & Martínez, 2019). By moving away from the official discourses and the prominence of the states, the film uncovers the perverse lying within the nationalist and imperialist discourse, accounting for the neglect and lack of attention suffered by the combatants during and after the conflict. If in the case of Great Britain the soldiers were professionals, the Argentines were mostly conscripts: replacement soldiers from compulsory military service, sent to war without adequate training and equipment.

The dialogicity and multiperspectivity of Arias's work are of key relevance, therefore, when thinking about alternatives to the master narratives. Multiperspectivity, in the context of historical education, indicates that the subjective and interpretive quality of history must be correlated with the coexistence of a diversity of narratives instead of with a single closed narrative. Although there is an important consensus in the current research field of history education on the suitability of applying this dimension, the research shows that there are difficulties on the part of teachers when working on it in class (Wansink et al., 2018), particularly in postconflict contexts, where it is especially sensitive to controversial topics (McCully, 2012; Psaltis et al., 2017; Tribukait & Stegers, this volume; Tribukait, 2021). In this sense, the multiperspectivity-dialogicity binomial is the central issue (Van Boxtel & Van Drie, 2017).

Theatre of War provides an excellent visualisation of these dimensions in action. The dialogue between opposing visions manages to make different points of view

understandable without renouncing complexity or avoiding conflict: it is assumed as a starting point that historical problems do not have a closed answer but are subject to different interpretations. This presupposes an implicit claim that the contents of history education, especially in regard to recent violent events, have a fully didactic meaning when they are presented as problems to be discussed and solved and not as solutions already found and indisputable. Thus, *Theatre of War* shakes official nationalist narratives by putting in the centre of the debate voices that have been silenced thus far. Although Arias bases her work on the memory of veterans, the scaffolding on which the story is built shares many elements with the methods of historiography in the elaboration of historical knowledge. In addition, it very effectively investigates the way in which the interpretation of past events determines current conflicts and impacts people's lives. Ultimately, it manages to establish a dialogue between people that could well be the basis of a dialogue between societies.

Deconstructing the Master Narrative Through Historical Sources

To interrogate particular events and belief systems through the creation of new versions of events (Martin, 2006), documentary theatre gives an indisputable centrality to primary sources, i.e., both documents and objects, and to personal stories. This centrality of sources is a clear element of union within a historical education concerned with breaking with the essentialist narratives of a national nature.

History has often been defined as a result of the interpretation of evidence, often appealing to a metaphor of a “puzzle” and pieces that must be put together to reconstruct the past (Seixas & Morton, 2013). One of the most significant proposals in the line of teaching history with a focus on how the discipline itself is constructed, that is, teaching how to think historically, is developed by Wineburg (2001). This proposal has undergone important developments in the last two decades (Nokes, 2017) and is based on the promotion in students of three heuristics applied by historians when scrutinising primary sources: corroboration, sourcing and contextualisation. The type of complex reasoning that the management of these three heuristics entails could be, in addition, as has been developed in recent studies, especially convenient for navigating, with a critical spirit, through digital environments characterised by an overabundance of information and a lack of rigour (Wineburg, 2018). Seixas, on the other hand, has placed the focus much more broadly on the importance of the interpretation of sources (Seixas, 2017), breaking down in much more detail the questions involved in their analysis. Strong commitment to the analysis of historical evidence in which the models of historical thought have deepened has been without a doubt fundamental for the renewal of teaching. However, in recent years, it has been pointed out that teaching models tend to assume a certain view of history, as a discipline, as “neutral terrain” that ensures a sort of essential objectivity, once again avoiding cultural differences and negotiations of meaning in the reception (Thorp &

Persson, 2020). Dessingué (2020) insists on the need to relativise this objectivity, taking into account that archives provide very partial access to a past that, ultimately, we will never be able to cover in its entirety and that, therefore, is subject to various interpretations.

Objects and documents are very present in *Theatre of War*. In the work of Lola Arias, reflection on historical evidence is an important theme. The military uniforms, the footwear, and the magazines of the time that the father of one of the Argentine veterans kept are constitutive parts of the narrative. In an important moment of the film, for example, Marcelo Vallejo reads in his own diary what he wrote upon his return to Argentina after the defeat:

When we arrived at the regiment after three days in the Lemos school, eating and going to the toilet, because they gave us Epsom salts to purge us, the whole town of Mercedes welcomed us. The buses that transported us entered, and no one could stop the family members. Each one in their world was looking for their loved ones. However, there were also the relatives of the fallen [in combat], who asked desperately for their children. When they could not find them, we did not know what to say. We would send them to another bus or say “they are coming on another trip”. We were not prepared for this. In addition, we made comments between us: “Che, did you see Sergio’s mother asking for him? Echave’s mother? And everything like that. We each went to our companies, and they began to give us plastic bags with our civilian clothes. I had jeans, a t-shirt and a pair of trainers. We dressed and went to Plaza de Armas, where they put us into formation. I don’t remember anything that was said. And they sent us home. I left the barracks with my dad, and we went to the bus stop. So, the scenario changed without time to process anything.

The document is key to understanding the history of Marcelo, but it also accounts for a historical moment that actively tried to be silenced. In fact, it was. Upon their return, the ex-combatants were forced not to tell anything about what they had experienced on the islands and were condemned to selective oblivion because the very issue of the Malvinas War was associated with the dictatorship. The mothers who in Marcelo’s diary ask about their children and the soldiers who maintain uncomfortable silence speak of the dead that no one took care of at the end of the war.

Along with these objects and documents, the type of fundamental historical evidence in documentary theatre is, as we said, the protagonists’ stories. In this sense, it has a link with oral history that, within historiography, builds on the reconstruction of the past using testimonies as a source. Theatre of War is not an historiographical work, but it can provide some interesting elements to think about in synergy with history education. In this specific field, working with oral sources is often characterised as promising. In relation to their use in historiography, for the study of contemporary times, oral accounts are a way of approaching stories absent from written documentary sources; that is, they enable the presence of groups largely silenced in hegemonic historical narratives. Faced with the question of whether oral history challenges traditional pedagogy and how, Llewelly and Ng-A-Fook (2017) identify some possibilities that place it in a path oriented to the promotion of historical thought and away from the memorisation of events: direct work with evidence, in a dialogic space, conducive to the collective construction of historical knowledge and the possibility of deconstructing and constructing narratives around conflictive

pasts. Transversally, they highlight the fact that work with oral history casts a critical view on the constructed character of stories about the past.

It is precisely on this idea that the work of Arias pivots. In addition, it does so in a way that allows us to delve into the very nature of the testimony and its context of production. The recourse to documentary theatre operates here by discussing—and inviting the spectator or student to do so—not only the construction of historical narratives but also “epistemic privilege”, which ascribes to the ex-combatants the possession of an indisputable “truth” of the events due to having lived them (Tozzi, 2009) and which frequently operates when listening to eyewitness accounts. In working with oral sources, it is essential to take into account that the way in which personal stories are constructed is directly linked to the narratives that circulate in the cultural memory of the societies in which they are inserted (Rigney, 2018). It is possible, then, that invisible groups resort to hegemonic narratives when reconstructing their experience. This is very clear when Lola Arias reflects on the process of writing the work with the veterans:

Sometimes [the participating men] wanted or needed to be portrayed as heroes, even if they were not so aware of it. However, they wanted to bring back this epic of war in different ways, not because they felt they did something amazing but in a more unconscious way. As men, they were still carrying this idea of transmitting this epic of war. (interviewed by Philip Bither, 2019)

This also allows us to reflect on the complexity of considering these silenced voices, taking care to avoid the danger of victimisation. The agency of veterans is fully recognised in the film, precisely to the extent that their story is not only recovered and enunciated but is also challenged. In the film, this is achieved, once again, through the use of dialogue, contrasting them with an “other” with which one must argue. Despite appearing at times testimonial, the story had a script, required many hours of rehearsal, had staging, and cast six men who, in addition to being veterans, joined the project as performers, that is, as actors without previous experience on stage but actors still. With the recourse to the film under construction, Arias recalls both the constructed character of the story and her own authorship, thus distancing herself from the danger of being trapped in the literalness of which Carol Martin warns in her reflection on the possibilities of documentary theatre (2006). The stories of the veterans are real, but they are not presented as unquestionable ontological entities; however, they are part of a project. It has been put at the service of discussion and consensus on how to represent what unites them and what separates them. The memory of these experiences ultimately becomes a living element subject to change.

Conclusions

“Memory is a minefield”.⁶ With this powerful metaphor, Lola Arias gives an account of the main theme that has structured her artistic production: the conflictive link between the past and the present and the way in which this affects the lives of people, especially in relation to violent pasts (June 6, 2016). *Theatre of War*, the film that we analyse herein, addresses the Falklands War in an unprecedented way: polyphonic, supranational, radically dialogic, under construction, and in which reenactment plays a central role. In the work of Arias, the dialogue between the real and the fictitious is put at the service of exploring the limits of historical representation, working on the idea of “remaking” conflictive pasts (Arias, 2020). The representation of historical events and their possibility of reconstruction and the place of official narratives and individual and collective memory in the configuration of the present are some of the issues that this project addresses. From them, the playwright unearths those mines hidden in the official narrative of the nation-state that had not been exploited, at least publicly. Her work shifts the focus from the common places of a sedimented historical account to new questions, highlighting some of the traps into which hegemonic memory falls. In doing so, it challenges the master narrative and opens a space for change. Undoubtedly, the construction of the story about the war experience of the six veterans has been affected by their participation in this project (Perera, 2019). Our conclusion, and the great success of these productions seem to account for this conclusion, is that these powerful works are capable of crossing and producing changes in spectators in general, and in educational contexts in particular, based on the following characteristics:

- (a) The substantial questioning of official narratives about historical events, usually of a nationalist and/or imperialist nature, through their contrast with traditionally silenced voices. It avoids the dichotomies and simplifications that frequently populate the opposing visions and uncritically reinforce the sense of national belonging to bet on a polyphony that goes beyond these borders. Thus, and returning to the dimensions of the narratives that we have previously analysed, in the work of Lola Arias, we see a plural and heterogeneous historical subject, a critical and reflective identification, a historical contextualisation of supposed heroes, a morality based on the person and not on the state and a complex political causality that does not avoid real conflicts;
- (b) An essentially dialogic development of these new narratives—In this way, it breaks with the uniqueness of the nation-state, offering a “neutral territory” (Blejmar, 2017, p. 8) on which the protagonists have the opportunity to speak within the framework of the full recognition of their agency; and
- (c) The denaturalisation of historical accounts through the mediation of a wide variety of historical resources such as archives, oral history, personal letters, photographs, uniforms and other types of objects that demonstrate their

⁶ Title of the central lecture by Lola Arias at the Royal Central School of the University of London, 6/6/2016.

constructed character and allow a horizon of new critical elaborations about the past.

Through these resources, *Theatre of War* manages to create a space of empathy, both among the performers and between the performers and the public that does not simplify the conflicts present and allows a genuine understanding of visions different from their own (Blejmar, 2017). Empathy has been identified as a key element of historical thinking in the operation of understanding contexts of beliefs and values of the past that can be radically different from our own (Riley in Helmsing, 2014). The empathy among the veterans and between them and the spectators deepens the dialogue, that is, a consideration of visions different from that of others that allow coexistence between non-coincident positions and, in this case, allows us to listen to them without forcing us to identify ourselves with them (Blejmar, 2017). In this sense, the work of Arias allows us to think about the ability that Landsberg (2004, p. 130) attributes to the “prosthetic memories” of producing empathy and social responsibility through, among other factors, the recognition of memories different from hegemonic, and the consideration of the need to “experience” history in novel formats, without renouncing the methods of historiography.

Documentary theatre in general, and the works of Arias in particular, represent a novel opportunity to deepen the discussion on new educational proposals that integrate both the processes of collective memory and historical thought, offering new and complex representations of the past. It allows us to think about the possibilities of imagining a construction of both history and memory overcoming national prominence and the univocity of the nation-state. The construction of a powerful dialogue between former enemies of war, that is, about an almost extreme idea of otherness, points to interesting clues when navigating the challenges faced by the multiplicity of narratives in the digital world.

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