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## SILENCED EPISTEMOLOGIES: THE POWER OF TESTIMONIES AND CRITICAL AUTO/BIOGRAPHIES FOR CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

### ABSTRACT

*The central theme of this article is the question of whether the narrator of a witness account or a critical auto/biography can also be the (co-)author of a scientific or literary written record. Based on reflections from her own biographical research on revolutionary movements in the Global South and oppressed and silenced groups, the author has identified the characteristics of testimonies which she has positioned in relation to Santos' Epistemologies of the South. The research is reflected through the author's contemplation of her fieldwork over the last ten years and through examples of literary written records which have empowered social emancipation; it shows how the pedagogy of testimonies can be used innovatively in learning and research as well as how testimonies can also make a fruitful contribution to much-needed considerations on silenced epistemologies in the classroom and in society.*

**Keywords:** *testimony, critical auto/biography, epistemologies, South, antiracism, education, research, counter-hegemonic movements*

### UTIŠANE EPISTEMOLOGIJE: MOČ PRIČEVANJ IN KRITIČNIH (AVTO)BIOGRAFIJ ZA SODOBNO IZOBRAŽEVANJE – POVZETEK

*Osrednja tema prispevka je vprašanje, ali lahko postane pričevalka ali pripovedovalka kritične (avto)biografije hkrati tudi (so)avtorica znanstvenega ali literarnega dela. Avtorica s pomočjo Santosovih Epistemologij Juga premišlja tiste značilnosti pričevanj, ki jih je identificirala prek biografskih raziskovanj ob revolucionarnih gibanjih na globalnem Jugu, iz izpovedi zatiranih in utišanih družbenih skupin. Na podlagi ugotovitev terenskega raziskovanja, ki ga je opravila v zadnjem desetletju, kot tudi prek analize najbolj odmevnih pričevanj, ki so korenito pripomogla k širši družbeni emancipaciji, prispevek pokaže, kako se lahko pedagogika pričevanj inovativno uporablja tako za izobraževanje kot tudi za raziskovanje, predvsem pa, kako lahko pričevanja prispevajo k sodobnemu razumevanju utišanih epistemologij tako v predavalnici kot tudi v širši družbi.*

**Ključne besede:** *pričevanje, kritična (avto)biografija, epistemologije, Jug, antirasizem, izobraževanje, raziskovanje, protihegemonika gibanja*

## INTRODUCTION

Until recently, those who were being researched – victims, *indignados*, rebellious, impoverished, marginalised social groups, ethnicities, oppressed and ‘muted groups’ (Ardener, 1975) – were mostly considered in the context of rationalisation, objectification and alienation. Although many disciplines<sup>1</sup> make use of modern biographical and qualitative research methods, espousing various forms of engagement, promoting activist, militant field research and observation, it is still common for the oppressed to be researched and treated only as objects in the research of certain phenomena, events, and processes. They are treated as objects that are unable to (equally) participate in the process of creating a scientific project even if they have provided the raw material for the analysis, or the epistemology.

When testimonies and critical auto/biographies began to appear among revolutionaries, workers, indigenous people, marginalised communities, illiterate, muted groups, and oppressed communities in the middle of the 1970s, they shook a number of scientific disciplines and, in some places, as will be seen in the third section, even some political regimes and national or global institutions to the core. The precursors to the intersection of biographical research and the social sciences were the works of Engels (*The Condition of the Working-Class in England* in 1844), the life history research on Polish immigrants by William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki in 1920, and the biographical research of Orwell’s *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) and *Homage to Catalonia* (1938). ‘Co-research’ with the oppressed was developed also by the Italian operaismo and Autonomia movements; workers’ co-research was then covered in France by the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, and in Spain by the journals *Teoría y Práctica* and *Lucha y Teoría*, as well as numerous others. Beside the critical and engaged ethnographers, cultural anthropologists, participative researchers and journalists who tried to nurture and develop these kinds of approaches in the twentieth century (for example, Galeano (1971) or Sainath (1996)), we have seen a resurgence of examples and reflections by scholars, researchers, journalists and artists, particularly in the last few decades, who work and walk with counter-hegemonic movements (Roy, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; Klein, 2007; Mato, 2000; Malo, 2004; Shukaitis, Graeber and Biddle, 2007; Hall, 2009; Vieta, 2014, to mention just a few of many).

This brings us to the key question of this paper: Can the narrator, witness, or subject who testifies about a completely unknown, muted reality become the subject and author (or at least the co-author) of the reality, history or situation she is presenting, narrating, witnessing, living, and ‘consciously grasp’ it (Finger, 1984)? The question is therefore twofold. First, it is based on an epistemological premise. Can the narration of oppressed subjects or groups contribute to science in a way other than as just the objects of scientific research and/or interpretation? Can statements become other than “merely vehicles for expressing

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1 Among others, sociology, ethnography, social history, philosophy, psychoanalysis, psychology, feminist epistemology, the oral history movement, and increasingly also pedagogy and adult education, such as the life history approach presented by Ollagnier (2002).

beliefs” since “they are the central bearers of epistemic significance themselves” (Lackey, 2008, p. 72)? Second, the key question is based on oppositional postcolonial studies: “Can the work of a social scientist from a coloniser country contribute to postcolonialism other than being the object of postcolonial studies” (Santos, 2010, p. 240), particularly if we acknowledge that academic work takes place in a structured and situated field of activity with its own demands and power relations, criteria of distinction and mental schema which exercise, effect, and often limit how knowledge is produced (Bourdieu, 2000)? If it is hard to answer the question, ‘Can the victims, who had been silenced or even repressed and tortured for decades, speak?’, it is even harder to answer the question, ‘Who can speak for the victims?’ and ‘How?’

In the next section I will briefly present examples of how I had to face this question of (co-)authorship and (co-)interpretation on multiple occasions while working and walking with counter-hegemonic movements and why I feel it is a subject worth serious consideration. Following that I will highlight some notable and authentic examples of the testimonies of women (and their new epistemologies) and present the obstacles they and their testimonies faced both in the process of recording and following publication. In the discussion section, the characteristics of testimonies developed in the third and fourth section are proposed and the role of this newly defined testimony in critical theory and research is considered. These theoretical reflections may be innovative for pedagogy if we continue to consider the fundamental role of education to be one of social transformation (Freire, 1972, 1973), otherwise referred to as ‘knowledge-as-emancipation’, and knowledge conceived of as solidarity (Santos, 2010).

## **TESTIMONY AS A NEW GENRE AND IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH PROCESS**

I confronted the issue of authorship in scientific and literary work during my qualitative field work with revolutionary movements in Latin America and India, which I carried out in the context of my own scientific projects.<sup>2</sup> In combination with biographical research, I also used militant research (Colectivo Situaciones, 2003; 2005) which is not only innovative in terms of methodology but theory as well (for more on this argument, see Shukaitis, Graeber and Biddle, 2007; Hardt, 2011). When meeting, working and walking with rebels, revolutionaries, and the oppressed, I recognised that in some cases their testimonies differed from standard narratives or life stories, which I define more precisely below, as they introduce notable epistemological and pedagogical specificities. I am speaking of witnesses who are still in danger in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with contracts put out for their ‘removal’. In the short history I am familiar with (and during this time I have worked

<sup>2</sup> For my post-doctoral project titled Social Dimensions of Sustainability through the Processes of Dematerialization and Resocialization (Slovenian Research Agency), I researched revolutionary movements in India and Venezuela between January 2007 and December 2008, and before that in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador in 2005 and 2006. The results of the field research as well as the innovative approach of ‘co-research’, among other things, was recorded (Gregorčič, 2009; 2011).

and cooperated with many), these witnesses have suffered physical and psychological violence; many were arrested, tortured, intimidated, and some have already been murdered because of their work.

One such remarkable witness was the revolutionary Berta Cáceres, co-founder and leader of the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras that I worked with in 2006 in Intibucá, Honduras. After twenty-two years of libertarian work she received the Goldman Environmental Prize, the world's most prestigious award honouring grassroots environmental activists, in April 2015, only to be killed on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2016 (for more on Berta and other women behind the myths, see Gregorčič, 2017). For decades the witnesses and creators of self-determining revolutionary struggles have been fearlessly, with dignity, and without compromise opposing the terrifying pressure of capital, organised hatred, execution by war coalitions, and neoliberal plundering and devastation (Gregorčič, 2011). They have been exposing the history of oppression *in vivo*, both in the theory and practice of their everyday battle for a life of dignity, in their narrations and in their 'conversation of humanity' (Dewey, 1966). In this sense, what this paper is concerned with is far removed from mainstream narratives, auto/biographies and, to a certain extent, even critical narrations. It strives instead to illuminate the words and thoughts, the screaming, roaring and crying of millions of 'sub-humans' (Santos, 2014) – those who do not have the *Urrecht* to be human (ibid.), those who are called terrorists because they are struggling to survive in contemporary 'societal fascism' (ibid.) which uses 'abyssal thinking' and produces 'sub-humanity' (ibid).

In order to reference my various experiences in the field and to translate these alternative rationalities I tried to bring scientific discourse (the citing of sources, observation notes, descriptions of situations, etc.) closer to literary discourse: to be consistent to the poetics, the language and the emotions of the testimonies which, to a certain extent, had already reconstructed and reinvented the scientific record itself. Examples of this are the Zapatistas' designations of governance, teaching and learning (*mandar obediciendo* – to lead by obeying; *educar aprendiendo* – learning-by-teaching) (Gregorčič, 2011), or Berta Cáceres description of the struggle to prevent the building of dams on the river Río Blanco, which has spiritual and ancestral importance to the Lenca people in Honduras and signifies lives: "When we started to fight for Rio Blanco, I would go into the river and I could feel what the river was telling me. I knew it was going to be difficult, but I also knew we are going to triumph, because the river told me so".<sup>3</sup>

I had a similar experience in 2011, when I found myself recording the testimony or critical auto/biography of a young Roma woman from Slovenia, Jasmina Ahmetaj, whose arranged marriage meant she was sold and sent to Germany where she experienced numerous forms of abuse. Later, when she had managed to flee back home, she became an activist for the rights of Roma women in Slovenia, and unplanned, we recorded her

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3 Berta Cáceres speaking in a profile video on the Goldman environmental prize webpage, <http://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/berta-caceres/>

critical autobiography, *A girl with candies* (Ahmetaj and Gregorčič, 2013), with some elements of testimony. If Jasmina had been a celebrity and not a silenced victim, no one would have seriously questioned whether this was autobiography or testimony, if the work was credible or fictitious, who wrote it, and why it was written in that way. But as a Roma co-author, she faced a number of problems and had to explain and defend the authenticity of her life story over and over again.

All the experiences from my field research and collaboration with muted and oppressed groups and individuals led me to question my own work. If they had all the necessary support, motivation and (self-)learning, could witnesses become the (co-)authors of what is being studied, (co-)interpreters of their own life experiences, events, situations and histories, as generally applies to writers and scientists? On the other hand, how could they use this to contribute to the development of science, a community that is in many ways imprinted within hegemonic globalisation and is increasingly narrow-minded, monolithic, and predetermined or monocultured, if we enter further into Santos' critique of hegemonic epistemology and rationality (Santos, 2014)? Could the inclusion of witnesses into the scientific research process as co-researchers be subversive to scientific discovery itself? Can we obtain study materials for various scientific disciplines in this way? Finally, could science benefit from this? Perhaps 'the ecology of knowledges' (ibid.) could envision testimony as another form of knowledge and criteria of rigour that operate credibly in social practice. For now, however, such approaches towards 'an epistemology of seeing' (ibid.) are, so to speak, held in solitary.

## **TO VERBALIZE OPPRESSION, ENVISION NEW SOCIALITY AND REINVENT SOCIAL EMANCIPATION**

Two ground-breaking examples of testimonies which undermined the class, political, patriarchal, cultural, and racial foundations of the oppression of indigenous communities in Latin America are those of Domitila Barrios de Chungara and Rigoberta Menchú. I first encountered Barrios' testimony in the rebel work settlements of Chhattisgarh, India, among thousands of oppressed and impoverished miners and *adivasis* (indigenous people) who, in 2007, had been fighting a thirty-year struggle against the repression of alliances between foreign capital and the Indian government (Gregorčič, 2011). The Chhattisgarh Liberation Front (CLF) is probably one of the most progressive revolutionary groups in independent India; it was created as an exceptionally creative and socially productive synthesis of self-organised miners, industrial workers and *adivasis* (diverse indigenous communities of small farmers and gatherers), forming a so-called green-red coalition (Sadgopal and Namra, 1993; Gregorčič, 2011). It was at that time that I came to know how the words of Barrios, a poor female Bolivian revolutionary, could easily be translated into the emancipatory struggles of other cultures, different societies and different political systems; how local and marginal rebel practices could ignite battles on another continent, where the oppressed who were rebelling and resisting faced different everyday realities; and finally, how inestimable the contribution of a witness could be for the creation of a

community, for the recuperation of revolutionary history and for the reinterpretation of social realities.

In 1977, when Barrios was forty years old, her first testimony on the Bolivian indigenous people, miners, mothers, and female revolutionaries was recorded by the Brazilian ecofeminist, educator and sociologist Moema Viezzer. With her book, *Let me Speak*, the flames of the radical anti-colonial struggle of the Aymara and the Quechua quickly and unexpectedly spread from the tin mines of Bolivia to indigenous people, workers, students, and activists in Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, all the way to the Indian miners, *adivasis*, doctors, and trade unionists in the CLF. Barrios' testimony unexpectedly inspired numerous social movements, including socialist feminists from Yugoslavia, who listened to her at a United Nations conference in Mexico in the 1970s, and European feminists and democrats, who offered her shelter from the Bolivian dictatorship in the 1980s during her exile in Europe.

Born into the mining families' struggle for survival in Potosi, Bolivia, a city which until the 18<sup>th</sup> century had supplied most of the world's silver but is today the foundation for the global market of tin cans, she started on the revolutionary path to liberation before she was even aware of the violence of dictatorships and the global dimensions of oppression (Galeano, 1971; Zibechi, 2010). Her testimony familiarised more than one movement with Marx's *Das Kapital* and other works even before her second testimony, *Here Too, Domitila!*, which she wrote together with Bolivian journalist David Acebey, was published in 1985. As another female Indian revolutionary emphasised, Barrios' testimonies have become "a bible of the revolutionary struggle against neoliberalism in the CLF"<sup>4</sup>, but despite being a ground-breaking libertarian *memoir*, these works were never included among important sociological and humanistic literature.

The same can be said for the testimony of Menchú, a twenty-three-year-old woman from a rebellious, autonomous Mayan community, from a revolutionary family, who with her narrative told the world a somewhat different story about Guatemala, a personal story of suffering, and a chronology of the struggle Indians faced in the middle of a bloody civil war. In 1983, when she wrote her critical autobiography together with ethnologist Elisabeth Burgos-Debray (*I, Rigoberta Menchú*, Menchú and Burgos-Debray, 1984), Guatemala was still thirteen years away from the end of its civil war, and Menchú was in exile. In four decades of terror, violence, abuse and killings, the highest price was paid by the indigenous Mayan communities who, despite colonialism and imperialism, were still autonomous at that time. A number of critics attempted to undermine the veracity of Menchú's testimony. Stoll (1999), for example, maintained that she could not have been witness to some of the murders or deaths of family members and that she could not have been physically present for all of the things that are recorded in her account. But her testimony, similar to that of Barrios, does not speak of personal experience; it

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4 From an interview with Sudha Bharadwaj, a lawyer for the Chhattisgarh Liberation Front (CLF), which I recorded in Bilaspur, India on 1st November 2007.

continually uncovers the silenced collective experience of the Indians, the poor Ladino people of Guatemala, farmers, and revolutionaries. This can be seen clearly in the formulation which is repeated throughout the entire testimony and with which her narrative begins: “This is my testimony. I didn’t learn it from a book and I didn’t learn it alone. I’d like to stress that it’s not only *my* life, it’s also the testimony of my people” (Menchú and Burgos-Debray, 1984, p. 1).

To date, several dozen books, studies, analyses, even testimonies and critical auto/biographies have been written about people who have experienced what is now referred to as ‘forced disappearance’ (*desaparecidos*) and about Menchú’s testimony (for example, see Smith, 2003; Avant-Mier and Hasian, 2008; Lather, 2000). Regardless of whether Menchú’s testimony is (sufficiently) authentic or not, her case has also shown that it is difficult or nearly impossible to silence a testimony about the reality of an oppressed people. Despite numerous attempts, critics were unsuccessful in overthrowing her testimony or in discrediting her, as her testimony was the first time the collective experience of the Mayan people had shed light on the atrocities and realities which had previously been silenced. Ten years after her first book was published, and three years before the end of the Guatemalan civil war, she received the Nobel Peace Prize and became a world-renowned activist for Mayan rights.

A number of similar witnesses could be placed alongside Barrios and Menchú, especially from Nicaragua, Cuba, Chile, Mexico and Salvador, who entered the literary and scientific world stage with force in the 1970s and 1980s. These witnesses had no special intention or even the desire to address the public, or to tell of their own personal experience, pain or knowledge. However, these written records brought the witness and her community some form of liberation. As a rule, a testimony calls for changes which most often also occur. These can be individual, collective or even wider social ones. When a witness breaks with the ordered or forced tradition of silence inherent in the dominant discourse, she establishes an alternative means of transmitting hidden messages, looks for new ways of ‘placing different experiences’ (Tratnik, 2008) and awakens an entire body of a silenced world which society has not yet seen. For that reason, and despite the number of qualitative research projects on modern migration and refugees, it is not surprising that science has responded unsuccessfully and weakly to the needs of victims, both in the countries of refuge for exiles, and in the countries the victims of war are fleeing from.

In the same way, we have watched the powerlessness of science in opposing the hegemonic and hostile policies governing migration issues, something which is once again pushing us towards a racist Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Balibar, 2004) and into a form of social fascism (Santos, 2014). This is why new libertarian approaches, which would more easily and with a greater sensibility for testimonies and witnesses speak in favour of humanist goals and new epistemologies (Santos, 2010; 2014), are also needed in education in order to reinvent social emancipation. The best attempt in this regard has been made by Lackey (2006; 2008), who claimed that both the speaker and the hearer must make a positive epistemic contribution to testimonial knowledge, and that “in order to make genuine progress

in the epistemology of testimony, we need to stop looking at what speakers *believe* and focus instead, on what speakers *say*” (Lackey, 2006, p. 97). As we have seen from the examples presented above, someone who testifies is someone without their own special story, someone who tells one of the many stories and experiences lived and struggled through by their peers, companions, fellow fighters, or members of the same group, collective, ethnicity, or gender. The witness screams for (self-)liberation, and their testimony, more for others than for themselves, brings a kind of social liberation, public recognition, recognisability and identification to the situation. Furthermore, these testimonies have trans-cultural potential within the marginalized or oppressed group, in relation to the state or society, and within the global context of counter-hegemonic efforts for other worlds (*otros mundos*).

### **INDIRECT REPRESENTATION OF LIFE: TO ENCOUNTER OTHERNESS, FIGHT FOR RECOGNITION AND REAFFIRM PLURALITY WITH AN ETHIC ‘FROM BELOW’**

A testimony is most commonly written by means of mediation – through or with another person, as in the case of Barrios, Menchú, and in my collaboration with Ahmetaj. For this reason, it is an indirect representation of a life, and thus an intervention. It is an intervention of experiences, memory, situations, events, or something that, for various reasons, was not able to be told, put into words, reported or revealed. The other person might write down the testimony and publish it merely because the witness is not literate or because, for a number of reasons, the witness cannot write it down herself – although she does have life experiences which must be communicated to the next generation, and she is prepared to speak about them publicly. There are many such cases of testimonies from the victims of war, the Holocaust (Frankel, 1991; Young, 1990; Stone, 2000), dictatorships, apartheid, pogroms, institutionalised violence, and more.

The witness can decide on and seek out a mediator, or the mediator may recognise the significance of a testimony and assess whether the story should be disclosed publicly, for political or any number of other reasons. It can be published posthumously, when the second person organises the written records, journals, and stories of the witness, structures them in a scientific or literary form, and reveals them to the public. Such is *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which is also particularly relevant since it stands as the classic example of critical attempts to prove that a testimony was not genuine. A multitude of literary and other critical records on Anne’s diary were published. They accused it of inauthenticity because of its apparent fabrications which, seen through the eyes of a young Jewish girl, opened up a new code for viewing fascism, the Second World War, dehumanisation, and also a minority perspective, or a view from within; a view from the perspective of multiple marginalised identities and victims. Today we know that despite everything, it is included at the core of primary school literature around the world and has had dozens of successors in young girls who have borne witness to wars in Bosnia, Iraq and elsewhere (for example, see Filipović and Challenger, 2006).



Testimony is an encounter with otherness; it is part of a genre of its own (Eaglestone, 2003). As opposed to other literary genres, testimonies are, as a rule, ground-breaking in a wider context, for society, and for the community in question. They become fundamental historical, political or social sources regardless of doubts and criticism: they can no longer be silenced, as they are created with the intention of being transmitted to the public, to never again be suppressed. Since a testimony calls for a kind of encounter and cooperation between the witness and another person – a mediator, editor, or some kind of writer or translator of the story into scientific (or literary) language –, it more often than not uncovers something new, something still unsaid, unwritten, untold, long silenced, even forbidden, taboo, scandalous, objectionable or incriminating in some way (Ahmetaj and Gregorčič, 2013).

With the inability of the social sciences to counter Europe's newly emerging ethnocentrism, there has appeared a need for a reconsideration of the anti-racist perspective in various social science disciplines. In this respect, it would be useful for education to once again recall Boler's 'pedagogy of discomfort' (1999), which argues for the need to situate the often isolated and isolating work we do in education in a historical and political context, one that accounts for class, economic, and power relationships that we both identify and are identified with. Since emotions are part of the social body and political practice, they must be experienced in education – they should be used as sites of resistance instead of a form of social control. Since testimonies are a participative method which allows one "to write history from the bottom up instead of writing it from above" (Ollagnier, 2002, p. 282) and, as has been emphasised, since they are most often written through mediation, as an indirect representation (and thus intervention), they are useful in both the classroom and the field, for study and research, for the recognition of new epistemologies and linguistic hierarchies, such as the current dominance of nouns over verbs, where, according to Holloway, the active form of speaking is separated from and subordinated to nouns (Holloway, 2010). This applies to the struggle against prejudice, discrimination and hatred, to the placement of new discourses of suppressed and silenced voices into scientific and literary writing. In disrupting the "apartheid of knowledge", we move toward "developing emancipatory strategies for anti-racist social justice research" (Huber, 2009, p. 650). This applies to "learning from words", to the testimonial exchange that requires both the speaker and the hearer (Lackey, 2006; 2008), and to the need to "listen across differences" (Haig-Brown, 2003, p. 418).

In addition, though there is value for society in a wider sense, for the witness of the testimony herself there is usually no special emancipatory, political or therapeutic value, as the testimony presupposes that the witness is already an articulate, strong, emancipated person with a clearly and consistently formed position on a given reality. But this is not always the case. In this regard, a testimony also comes close to a critical autobiography, such as the work of Dolores French, who has been fighting for prostitution to be recognised as any other form of paid work (French, 1992). She writes her story herself, a prostitute who does not declare that she is a victim but bears witness to the role of a worker who lives an

emancipated life, as one of many workers who seek to legally carry on in their profession. Testimonies are, however, significantly different from critical autobiographies in that the witness rarely writes them herself. A testimony can also be about the performativity of an auto/biographical discourse, so that a witness, through the process of writing, creates her own identity and the identity of a group but no longer as a victim; instead she is like a protagonist in the social questioning of borders, identities, permissions and norms; she screams in the direction of 'postabyssal thinking' (Santos, 2014).

Some authors of testimonies, narratives and life histories also attribute (self-)therapeutic properties to the process for the narrator, either in the process of bearing witness or during writing (Gilmore, 2001); others consider it a form of self-directed learning (Pineau, 2000) or something half-way between research and therapy (de Gaulejac, 1987). If witnesses speak out on abuse, they do not just help themselves but begin to bring their plight to the attention of society in general (Urek, 2008). If we look at the hitherto most recognised examples of testimonies in world literature, it is most often strong personalities who speak out; they are not healing themselves or their communities but are addressing society as a whole, becoming the voice of an oppressed community, and are actually influencing emancipatory processes in society in general more than they are affecting their own personal liberation, which the cases of Barrios and Menchú illustrate. Unlike therapeutic autobiographies or other personal narratives, testimonies are initially created for others, for society, to make something which had been suppressed known, to break the silence, to reveal, to uncover, and to encounter Otherness through words (or in the case of Zapatistas, with the use of verbs in place of nouns).

To conclude, our analysis argues that the content of a testimony most often reveals various strategies of survival, struggle or liberation which are being pursued by the witness, the community they belong to (more often), or even by a minority within a minority community, as in the case of Jasmina, a young Roma woman from Slovenia (Ahmetaj and Gregorčič, 2013). Testimonies often sharpen the need of society at large to comprehend the injustice, the deception and the dehumanisation taking place. They achieve this with an ethic from below, an ethic that resonates among people struggling and among witnesses. The witness is not making a confession, but rather is observing social processes and demanding a realisation of what has been previously prohibited, not yet established, socially unacceptable, suppressed, silenced or oppressed. The witness does not place blame on others, does not repent and does not beg; the witness fights for the recognition of something which is hers.

## **DISCUSSION**

In the context of Bertaux's approach to biographical research, testimonies as life histories are always the result of a life story already accompanied by its analysis, reflection, re-thinking, theoretical and political contextualisation (Bertaux, 1981). Witnesses are often not merely sources of information but the bearers of 'specific' expertise, knowledge,

and sometimes even epistemology – ways of coming to a scientific understanding. In the same way, autobiography cannot be anything other than inter-textual, discourse-responsive and inter-subjective (Stanley, 1992). Do testimonies and critical auto/biographies then not open up a new space for research and the creation of study materials and analyses which, in addition to cultural studies, social studies, and literature, profoundly affect the field of pedagogy? Here and there, this question has been raised by methodological reflections and discussions on the ethics of research in scientific works. The question of a research subject's authorship and co-authorship of a new epistemology, or at least part of an epistemology, has not. However, as we have seen in the third and fourth sections, some sociologists, educators, journalists and others have already introduced this idea, and had witnesses recorded into or directly sign the scientific and/or literary work.

The question of whether the narrator of witness accounts or a critical auto/biography can also be the (co-)author of a scientific or literary written record is relevant as the testimonies of ground-breaking libertarian memoirs and critical auto/biographies have been opening up new space for research and creating study materials since the end of the 1970s. In addition to affecting the social sciences and literature, they are also making profound headways in the field of pedagogy. When testimonies and critical auto/biographies began to spread among revolutionaries, workers, indigenous people, marginalised communities, illiterate, silenced groups and oppressed communities, they profoundly shook a number of scientific disciplines and, in some places, as seen in the third section, even some political regimes and national or global institutions.

Ignored by Western science and forgotten by Eurocentric critical tradition, “all knowledges are testimonial, because what they know about social reality (their active dimension) also reveals the kind of subjects of knowledge acting on social reality (their subjective dimension)” (Santos, 2014, p. 207). And precisely because all knowledges sustain practices and constitute subjects, testimony should be reconsidered at least as incomplete, hidden knowledges, and not actively produced by contemporary science as non-existent knowledges. Following this direction, I have structured testimonies of subjectivities, those which are embedded in self-determining revolutionary struggles and those of silenced protagonists of suppressed or oppressed groups, or ethnicities that I had researched, according to the following assumptions: first, in lieu of the dominant liberal speak and societal fascism (Santos, 2014, p. 48), the testimonies of the oppressed put forms of oppression into words. By naming the efforts for social emancipation, they are not just recuperating the loss of critical nouns (such as class struggle, revolution, dependency, alienation, fetishism, etc.) by subverting them with added adjectives (for example, ‘human rights’ turns into collective, radical or intercultural human rights, etc.), as noted by Santos (2014, pp. 33-34), but introduce new discourses, characterised by the use of verbs in place of nouns, which is the opposite of what Holloway (2010) noticed in our current dominant form of discourse. Two such examples have already been indicated in the Zapatistas’ terminology above (for more, see Gregorčič, 2011). Such discourses began to impregnate counter-hegemonic expressions mainly after the

Zapatistas' manifestos and declarations which have been spread in intercontinental encounters, communiqués and solidarity meetings.

The second characteristic I propose is that in a descriptive way, counter-hegemonic movements are reconstructing and reinventing social emancipation as an alternative rationality, rather than renouncing it. There is a search for alternative ways of disseminating suppressed, silenced messages, emotions and insights in resonance among themselves and with other counter-hegemonic struggles, rather than accepting the current biased hegemonic discourse. These processes are appearing through 'learning-in-struggle' and 'learning-by-struggling' (Hall, 2009; Gregorčič, 2011; Vieta, 2014) that are complemented by alternative systems to primary, secondary, and often even university education, thus replacing a non-existent, dysfunctional or inadequate public education system in the countries in question (see Gregorčič, 2009), which can already be seen as an emergence of 'knowledge-as-emancipation' (Santos, 2014). Both characteristics have been discussed in the third section of this paper in the testimonies and lives of Domitila Barrios de Chún-gara and Rigoberta Menchú.

In addition, attention should be paid to the next two characteristics that also go hand in hand: reaffirming community and plurality with an ethics 'from below' (Santos, 2010), and encountering otherness and the fight for recognition. Both characteristics could be theoretically explained with Santos' concepts of the 'ecology of trans-scale' and the 'ecology of differences'. The first confronts the logic of the global scale by recuperating what in the local is not the result of hegemonic globalisation and by suggesting the use of a cartographic imagination to deal with cognitive maps that operate simultaneously on different scales. The latter looks for a new articulation between the principles of equality and differences, and is predicated on mutual recognition (Santos, 2001; 2007; 2010; 2014). I was surprised that the characteristics of testimonies defined above were a distinguishing factor not only for the (indigenous) witnesses from Latin America, where surrealism has entered into the foundations of emancipatory movements and where many indigenous languages are primarily verb-based rather than noun-based, but also for witnesses and strugglers for counter-hegemonic globalisation in India and elsewhere, who (as I realised) already manifest some form of 'intercultural translation' as elaborated by Santos (2014).

Since a testimony is often the result of a life story or situation, and is already accompanied by an analysis, reflection, re-thinking, and theoretical and political contextualisation, or is inter-textual, discourse-responsive, and inter-subjective, as we argued with Stanley's notion of auto/biography, there is a strict division between scientific and non-scientific, literary, or popular writing. In this article, I showed that the narrations of oppressed subjects or groups can become a driving force for social emancipation just as cooperation between educators, sociologists, and journalists with witnesses has contributed to the epistemology of the oppressed, or in Santos' term, the epistemology of the South (Santos, 2010; 2014). I have highlighted a number of other advantages testimonies offer for education. With a testimony, which is as a rule created for society in general to break the silence, to reveal and uncover, ground-breaking realisations are opened up and they can

become, as shown by the examples, fundamental historical, political, and social sources of knowledge; they can no longer be silenced – they were created with the intention of never again being silenced, suppressed or non-existent.

It will be necessary to deal with these considerations within literary studies, the humanities and social sciences. In this respect, pedagogy has an advantage as testimonies form an integral element of education, just as education is inseparably intertwined with testimonies. Since the structures of power and knowledge are more visible from the margins, testimonies make an innovative contribution to a given context or epistemology, and simultaneously move freely from education to research and vice versa. Finally, some of the testimonies which were highlighted in this text have already been part of the educational process for decades, not only in oppressed communities but also in prevailing education systems, even though they were (co-)created by the oppressed and suppressed who did not possess the so-called ‘appropriate’ scientific and/or literary knowledge.

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