

The role of the journalist in Colombian film noir: opposing the quest for truth and visualizing state repression

El papel del periodista en el cine negro colombiano: oposición de la búsqueda de la verdad y visualización de la represión estatal



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Abstract:

This article analyses the character of the journalist in four Colombian noir films, *Perder es cuestión de método* (2004), *El Rey* (2004), *La historia del baúl rosado* (2005) and *Antes del fuego* (2015). Our hypothesis posits that in American film noir, the journalist is often depicted as a truth seeker who fulfils a heroic role. Through textual analysis, we aim to identify similarities and differences between the functions of the hero and the symbolic task proposed by the Theory of the Story. This analysis will enable us to determine whether the journalist in these films is presented as a truth seeker who succeeds in fulfilling their task. In two of the movies, the journalist is portrayed as a truth seeker, but despite uncovering the truth, they are silenced by the state or its corrupt representatives. In *La Historia del baúl rosado*, the journalist is depicted as an opponent driven by a desire for professional success, while in *El Rey*, they serve merely as an informant of events.

Keywords:

Journalists in cinema; colombian film noir; colombian crime cinema; latin american cinema; north american film noir.

Resumen:

Este artículo analiza el personaje del periodista en cuatro películas colombianas del género negro o criminal, Perder es cuestión de método (2004), El Rey (2004), La historia del baúl rosado (2005) y Antes del fuego (2015). Nuestra hipótesis plantea que el personaje del periodista en el cine negro norteamericano se representa como un buscador de la verdad que logra su cometido como un héroe, pero en Colombia representa una tarea inútil ante un estado ausente o represor que impide el triunfo de verdad alguna. Mediante un análisis textual se identifican las posibles coincidencias y divergencias entre las funciones del héroe y el destinatario, y el cumplimiento de la tarea simbólica propuestas por Jesús González Requena en la Teoría del relato para identificar si el periodista se presenta como un buscador de la verdad y logra cumplir su tarea en los filmes estudiados. En dos películas el periodista es un buscador de la verdad, pero, aunque logra descubrirla, es silenciado por el estado o sus representantes corruptos. Asimismo, en La historia del baúl rosado se presenta como un antagonista movido por su deseo de éxito profesional y, finalmente, en El Rey, es un informador de la historia, sin importancia como personaje.

Palabras clave:

Periodistas en el cine; cine negro colombiano; cine criminal colombiano; cine latinoamericano; cine negro norteamericano.

1. Introduction

1.1. The representation of crime in Colombian and Latin American cinema

Colombian cinema has addressed the theme of crime throughout its history, from the controversial recreation of the assassination of General Rafael Uribe in the di Domenico brothers' *El Drama del 15 de Octubre* (1914), later venturing into the detective genre with *El Amor, el deber y el crimen* (1926). However, the impetus towards the noir genre came in the 1970s with the Cali group, which combined horror and social criticism in films such as *Pura Sangre* (Ospina, 1982) and *Carne de tu Carne* (Mayolo, 1983). In the 1990s, the emergence of "*Sicaresca*," focusing on crime linked to drug trafficking, was seen in films such as *Rodrigo D. No Futuro* (1990) by Víctor Gaviria and *Rosario Tijeras* (2005) directed by Emilio Maillé. In this case, the exploration of the *sicario*, or hitman, unfolds within a context of poverty and marginalisation.

In this regard, Colombian cinema is similar to the observations made by Paula García Talabán in her study of the Latin-American detective novel, where she asserts that, in Colombia, "the detective novel shares the stage with the local genre of *Sicaresca*, [however, in the former] authors such as Santiago Gamboa and Rubén Varona stand out" (García, 2014: 72). This

developmental trajectory parallels Latin American detective novels which are reflected in cinema, adapted and fused with other genres to influence the portrayal of crime.

On the other hand, the crime narrative in Latin America has evolved significantly, moving away from the classic crime genre to establish its own characterisation, which is reflected in the region's rich tradition (Forero, 2010: 51). In Argentina, this evolution is strengthened by integrating literature and noir, adapting works by Borges, Cortázar, and Sábato. This tradition has been reinforced in Colombia since the 1990s (Pöppel, 2001: 65), particularly following the enactment of the Film Law of 2003. This genre also thrives in various Latin American countries, including Brazil, Uruguay, Mexico, Cuba, and Chile. While influenced by the American crime novel, it has developed its own characteristics, such as the presence of social anomie, reflecting ideological confusion and the challenges in identifying social norms (Forero, 2010: 51). Anomie is common in the noir and detective genres. Still, its prevalence differs in the North American and Latin American contexts. These divergences are related to interactions between individuals and the law and the legitimacy of institutions and the State in each respective context (Forero, 2010: 54).

This narrative diverges from North American narratives in its portrayal of power dynamics and the perception of the system. While narratives in the U.S.A. centre on a solid democracy and the individual character's motivations, Latin American depictions highlight a system controlled by corrupt elites and a distrust towards the functioning of the state (Giardinelli, 2013: 231). The Latin American narrative reflects a system controlled by corrupt elites, upholding a fictitious democracy to preserve the power of an oligarchy. In contrast, in the North American stories, the law plays a more decisive role compared to Latin American stories (Forero, 2010: 57). Furthermore, trust in the State's functioning is crucial in distinguishing these narratives. North Americans maintain trust in the individual's potential triumph, whereas, for Latin Americans, individual triumph is unlikely and meaningless due to the prevailing distrust towards the system. In the Latin American context, authors employ the noir genre as a tool to denounce social injustice and oligarchic corruption, serving as an ideological instrument (Giardinelli, 2013: 225). Javier Sánchez Zapatero and María Marcos Ramos (2014) agree that American film noir also reflects social, historical, and political realities, depicting North American society's anguish, insecurity, and complexity. However, this shared characteristic is not opposed to the contradictions between American and Latin American filmmaking.

1.2. The journalist is an archetypal character in film noir and crime narratives

Colombian cinema has explored the crime narrative and its relationship to the journalist's role, revealing divergences from the American noir genre. Noel Simsolo (2009) highlights that in iconic films like *The Turning Point* (1977) by Herbert Ross, *The Captive City* (1952) by Robert Wise, *Park Row* (1952) by Samuel Fuller and *Deadline USA* (1952) by Richard Brooks, journalists are portrayed as whistleblowers against corruption. However, works such as *While the City Sleeps* (1956), directed by Fritz Lang, criticise media sensationalism and the lack of journalistic ethics. Simsolo, however, cautions about the limited acceptance of such films among audiences, asserting that "The American viewer wants to see adventurous, colourful journalists, amateur detectives, servants of justice, whistleblowers, or courageous war correspondents. They are not interested in seeing them as a murderer, liar or con man" (Simsolo, 2009: 335).

Studies, such as those by Ofa Bezunarte Valencia *et al.*, highlight the exaggeration of journalist stereotypes in North American cinema, depicting them as driven by an awareness of their social function, albeit constantly navigating within blurred boundaries. Nevertheless, they assert that “it can be concluded that a very high number of film journalists are quite obsessed with their task” (2010: 159). Vélez Cuervo (2015) agrees, depicting the journalist within the archetype of the truth seeker as one of the most frequent in film noir (41). However, in the Colombian noir genre, this character is not prevalent, as out of the 24 films analysed by this author, only three feature the character of the journalist, and only one fully aligns with this archetype.

On the other hand, Spanish cinema has often been juxtaposed with North American cinema, and in both regions, dichotomous narratives emerge where the journalist is portrayed as a hero committed to the truth (Barris, 1976; McNair, 2010; Ehrlinch, 2006). In North American society, journalists are generally represented as individuals dedicated to uncovering falsehoods and contributing to strengthening democracy (San José de la Rosa *et al.*, 2020: 318). On the other hand, in Argentina, Giacomelli (2020) examines the evolution of the detective genre in Argentinian cinema compared to trends in the same genre in Hollywood during the 1940s. The study concludes that Argentinian crime cinema integrates its own generic models, giving rise to distinctive expressions of crime cinema featuring characters and situations that reflect the context of urban Argentina, while refraining from incorporating American conventions and emphasising the role of journalism in shaping the crime narrative. This bears a close resemblance to the nature of Colombian film noir, which, as mentioned above, adapts to Colombia’s cultural and political reality, giving rise to the fusion of genres to represent crime.

The analysed works reveal a redefinition of the concept of the hero in Colombian film noir, illustrating an adaptation of the crime narrative to the Latin American reality and deviating from the North American portrayals of the dedicated and ethical journalist.

In the limited body of research, Andrés Vélez Cuervo’s *República Noir. Cine Criminal Colombiano (2000-2012)*, published in 2015, stands out as an exhaustive study that delves into Colombian film noir. The author contends that the crime narrative is an essential element for classifying film noir. In addition, he examines the characters from a psychoanalytical approach, the use of traditional archetypes such as “the seeker of truth,” the “persecuted,” and the “femme fatal,” as well as the presence of heroes whose characteristics deviate from conventional patterns, even embodying antiheroic traits. Contrary to this perspective, Alejandra Laverde, Carlos Berrio, and Fernando Arenas argue that Colombian journalists are often represented as individuals constrained by power dynamics and victims of their own ambitions (Laverde *et al.*, 2022: 48). In this paper we aim to contribute to filling the existing gap in Colombian film noir research, by examining how this film genre adapts and evolves within the specific context of Latin America, with a particular emphasis on Colombia. Specifically, it focuses on the character of the journalist as an archetypal character in crime cinema (noir, police, neo-noir, among others)

1.3. Theoretical framework

This analysis is based on the theoretical approach by Jesús González Requena in his work *Clásico, manierista y postclásico: los modos del relato del cine de Hollywood*. The author defines the story as the journey of a subject’s desire (González, 2006: 521); in other words, the stories pivot around a main character or protagonist, and the suspense lies in their endeavour to

attain an object of desire. This gives rise to a basic structure of the story centred around three key elements: subject, desire and opponent. The opponent is considered the axis of scarcity, driven by their pursuit to fulfil their desire.

Graph 1. The basic narrative outline of the story



Source: created by the authors based on *The Theory of the Story* by Jesús González Requena (2006)

However, there is also the potential for a symbolic narrative structured around four core figures: “the mentor, the hero, the Object of desire, the Opponent- through that proto-function which is the Task” (González, 2006:5 62). In this case, in addition to the axis of scarcity, there is an axis of donation. That is, the subject is tasked with fulfilling a duty donated by a mentor, symbolising the paternal figure in the narrative who performs four functions in the narrative: “formulating the prohibition, stating the mandate, granting the magical object, and sanctioning the victory” (González, 2006: 526). Consequently, the mentor plays a crucial role in symbolic narratives since it is only through their presence and the execution of their functions that the subject can adhere to the task and, ultimately, become a hero.

Graph 2. Narrative scheme of the symbolic narrative



Source: created by the authors based on *The Theory of the Story* by Jesús González Requena (2006)

The postulates above constitute the key tenets concerning the narrative structure of the symbolic narrative, which are complemented by elements of writing or filmic enunciation. The latter can be understood as all filmic resources and aesthetic possibilities accompanying the narration. In other words, these encompass all the resources outside the plot but are integral to narration, such as the choice of character names, staging, camera angles, and movements, among others. These can be subordinated to the narrative structure to elucidate the functions of characters (for instance, presenting the hero in a close-up, or with costume or props and incorporating setting elements typical of a heroic representation, as in Westerns), or they may represent the figures in an ambiguous way that conceals the characters’ true intentions, mainly when there are doubts about the hero’s ability to accomplish their task or when the mentor acts unethically. These elements are relevant when analysing the character framed within the archetype of the truth-seeker, which is the present study’s focus.

1.4. Hypothesis and Objectives

Our hypothesis posits that the character of the journalist is portrayed in North American film noir as a truth-seeker accomplishing their task as an individual hero. In contrast, Colombian films depict journalists as representative of a futile task

in the face of an absent or repressive state that obstructs the triumph of any truth. We have set out the following objectives to demonstrate this:

Analyse the role of the character of the journalist in film noir to determine whether there are some distinctive characteristics in the representation of this character in North American films, as found in previous studies on the subject.

Identify the qualities involved in constructing the journalist as characters in Colombian film noir and crime films based on the selected films' film writing and narrative structure.

Compare the results regarding the characterisation of the journalist in classic North American film noir, considering the treatment of this character in the Latin American context, specifically concerning the unique approach of Colombian cinema.

2. Method

Our research is based on the most extensive investigation available on film noir in Colombia, published by Vélez Cuervo in 2015. The author documents 24 feature films of this genre produced in Colombia from the late 20th century to 2012. During this period, Vélez identifies three cinematic works in which the figure of the journalist plays a prominent role in the plot. Consequently, these works have been included in our study. Specifically, these films are *Perder es cuestión de método* (2004) directed by Sergio Cabrera, *La historia del baúl rosado* (2005) by Libia Stella Gómez, and *El Rey* (2004) by Antonio Dorado. However, our research has been extended until 2022, enabling us to include *Antes del Fuego* (2015) by Laura Mora in the sample. This work can easily be categorised as belonging to crime cinema according to the postulates of the authors mentioned above.

In this regard, our corpus has been consolidated with these four feature films for two fundamental reasons: firstly, these works can be classified within the crime cinema genre, offering a broader perspective of film noir. Secondly, the figure of the journalist plays a pivotal role in the development of the plot, either as the main character, opponent, or narrator.

However, as the research by Vélez Cuervo (2015) analysed the role of the journalist in Colombian film noir and also determined the qualities shaping these characters, our study employs a qualitative method and the methodology of audiovisual textual analysis focusing on two fundamental categories of the films: narrative structure and filmic representation.

We viewed the four films and analysed them using a textual analysis sheet in which the films were studied based on the following analysis categories: firstly, the narrative structure was broken down into elements that allowed us to determine the functions performed by the characters, particularly the journalist as either hero or not of the story, defined by their task of seeking the truth. Secondly, the category of filmic representation pertained to the elements of image and sound, aiming to identify how these resources were used to represent the plot, the character's motivations, the function each character fulfils, and other aspects crucial to constructing meaning through these formal procedures. The following is the devised textual analysis sheet.

Table 1. Textual analysis Sheet

Character Analysis Sheet of the Journalist in Colombian Film Noir					
N° file	Film identification				
Title and year				Director	
Genre/subgenre				Screenwriter	
Storyline					
Theme					
Scenario					
	Narrative Structure		Filmic Representation		Comments
Character	Hero		Film shots		
	Subject and/or ally				
	Mentor		camera angles/ shot types		
	Opponent				
Desire or Motivation			Shot composition		
Task or protofunción			Camera movements		
			Color grading		
Other narrative devices			Costume		
			Set dressing		
			Other film resources		
Final remarks					

Source: created by the authors based on *The Theory of the Story* by Jesús González Requena (2006)

This instrument allowed us to determine the motives driving characters, particularly the journalists represented in the films, distinguishing between motivations rooted in the pursuit of truth or driven by personal and professional ambitions. It also enabled us to ascertain who opposes the task, in this case, whether it is a representative of the state or hegemonic powers (such as the elite or media owners) preventing the journalist from carrying out the task even after uncovering the truth, thereby rendering their efforts useless. Ultimately, this analytical approach allowed us to verify the proposed hypothesis.

3. Results

Perder es cuestión de método (2005), based on Santiago Gamboa's (1997) novel of the same name, begins with the discovery of a strange and gruesome crime. Víctor Silanpa, a journalist in a bad job and sentimental situation, becomes the main character of the story when Colonel Aristófañes Moya offers him the opportunity to cover the story and, incidentally, unravel the crime. A dynamic of mentor and receiver is established between them, not only due to Moya assigning him the task of investigating the crime but also because he is a representative of authority, asserting, "I am not much more than me; I wear this uniform" (00:03:50) regarding his affiliation with the National police.

However, Moya's role as a mentor weakens, primarily because he extorts Silanpa, demanding that he draft a speech for him in exchange for the scoop. This speech serves as a guarantee for Moya to gain entry into a support group that will help him lose weight as he grapples with morbid obesity resulting from his obsession with food. Another potential mentor emerges when Víctor Silanpa turns to his former boss and mentor, Guzmán, who has the necessary wisdom to guide him in uncovering and telling the truth. However, this alternative mentor is fighting his own battle with reality, as evidenced by his admission to a psychiatric hospital, raising doubts about his capacity to fulfil this function.

Silanpa is portrayed as a character lacking in heroic traits and even seems pathetic in some aspects, as he is asthmatic and suffers from painful haemorrhoids, rendering him fragile and vulnerable. The Colonel describes Silanpa as a "starving journalist" (00:03:00) who also lives with a mannequin with whom he converses when he feels lonely. Despite his limitations, he is a journalist with outstanding investigative skills, albeit driven more by the pursuit of public recognition and the desire to rekindle his relationship with his ex-wife rather than the search for the truth.

The film introduces other characters, such as Emir Estupiñán and Quica. The former is an honest man seeking justice, underestimated in the film because he believes in the system and the law. Eventually, Estupiñán becomes Silanpa's loyal ally as he endeavours to uncover what happened to his missing brother, who ultimately turns out to be the murder victim at the film's outset. Upon discovering this truth, he declares, "I propose a toast to my brother... a victim of the injustice and corruption that devours this country, which makes the poor poorer and more submissive and the rich richer and more powerful" (01:27:34).

On the other hand, Quica is a young prostitute who becomes entangled in the investigation when used by Silanpa, knowingly placing her in jeopardy, once again underscoring the ethical complexities faced by the journalist. Ultimately, Silanpa abandons her to fate when compelled by Moya to remain silent and publish an alternative version of events following his discovery of a real estate corruption network in which the Colonel is implicated, who benefits by blackmailing those involved.

The outcome highlights the futility of individual triumph over a corrupt system in which no one will be convicted of this crime. The Colonel, through extortion, coerces those implicated and forces Silanpa to fabricate a false account of the events. Corruption and economic power prevail over justice and truth, resulting in a prevailing sense of defeat. Silanpa, rather than emerging as the hero of the story, becomes just another pawn in the corrupt system's game.

In this work, the main character lacks the necessary qualities of a hero due to his weaknesses and self-centred motivations. Despite this, the film portrays the journalist as a character with the skills needed to uncover the truth, although it matters little because he alone cannot challenge and overcome the system.

It proves futile to oppose institutions co-opted by individual powers, which in this work are ridiculed through the portrayal of Moya's morbid obesity and speeches detailing his inability to control his food consumption. The unrestrained indulgence of local culinary delights serves as a humorous counterpoint to popular cinematic traditions. However, the film not only satirises authority but also those who believe in justice, as exemplified by the character of Emir Estupiñán, whose surname implies that he is foolish for believing in the potential for justice in Colombian society.

We can evidence how the film explores the complexity of the journalist who, although able to uncover the truth, will never bring it to light because the interests of power will force him to tell a fictional story.

Regarding the filmic representation, the film follows some genre conventions, employing a *chiaroscuro* colour scheme and staging in cold tones typical of an urban nocturnal setting. The scenes and the elements of the setting construct sordid places where clandestine activities, prostitution, and vices are represented. These formal elements clearly express, through shots, angles, frames, costumes, and settings, the place each character occupies in the narrative structure, their function in the plot, and their personal motivations. Colonel Moya is depicted as a caricature of power, characterised by his ridiculous obsession with food and his portrayal as a childlike obese man enslaved by his desires and ambitions. Moreover, the weakened presence of the mentor is embodied in an older-looking and sounding wise man, like Guzmán, yet mentally fractured. Finally, Silanpa's heroic impossibility as he succumbs to his desires and fears of his failure as a journalist and as an abandoned husband is evident early on through his physical characterisation, his unkempt wardrobe, and consistently wearing a faded overcoat. Furthermore, his personal space reinforces his struggles, as he shares a room with the mannequin given to him by his mentor before being committed to a mental health clinic and to which he confesses his insecurities about Monica, his ex-wife who does not answer his calls and is continually present in photographs and on his computer screensaver.

Antes del Fuego adopts a similar approach in constructing the journalist as a truth seeker. This film revolves around Arturo Mendoza's determination to uncover the true motives behind the seemingly staged murder of his friend and colleague Roberto Sepúlveda "*El Gordo*," suspiciously made to look like a suicide. The investigation uncovers a conspiracy related to the Colombian Palacio de Justicia takeover, a historical event in 1985. Milena Bedoya, a final-year journalism student, is also involved when she arrives at Mendoza and Sepúlveda's office to work as an intern the day before Sepúlveda's death.

Mendoza is known in the media for hailing from an influential political family, being the ex-minister of justice's son, now deceased, admired by those who knew him. Despite being a trained lawyer like his father, Mendoza chooses to pursue a career

in journalism and is recognised for his honesty by a former university classmate who has become a lawyer for mafia groups, when he says, “You are the most decent guy I know” (00:26:38).

In this context, a heroic character is shaped by a mentor who is up to the challenge. A father who has passed on a legacy of righteousness to a son who sets aside his economic comfort and social status to pursue a poorly paid and sacrificial yet honourable and crucial profession, especially in the corrupt environment of 1980s Colombia.

Although “*El Gordo*” dies early in the story, his ghost continues to influence the plot. His death serves as the call to adventure and the catalyst for the investigation, transforming him into a retroactive mentor figure, as he was the first to uncover the truth about the network involving guerrillas, the army, and the mafia.

Milena Bedoya plays a crucial role in the film, joining Arturo in the quest to uncover the truth behind “*El Gordo’s*” death. She serves as an ideological counterpoint to Arturo due to her humble background. She is the daughter of a mother left alone with her children after her husband’s murder during a robbery. Her mother works as an employee at the Palacio de Justicia cafeteria, making the discovery of the guerillas’ plan to take over the building significant for Milena, as it exposes the danger her mother is in.

“*El Gordo*” was murdered because he discovered the guerrillas would take over the Palacio de Justicia in collusion with the mafia and the military and army intelligence, which had knowledge of the takeover. This is why members of military intelligence threaten and rape Milena and suggest that Arturo withdraws from the investigation: “Do one thing, Arturo: forget about this case, man. Close that investigation” (01:12:47).

The film ends tragically when Milean becomes trapped in the takeover and falls victim to it. Although the ending may be subject to interpretation, the military voice declares, “We hope that if the sleeve is there, the vest doesn’t appear” (01:22:05). At the same time, the camera focuses on Milena, implying her disappearance. Years later, Colombia’s justice would discover that this phrase was an order issued to make civilians suspected of being guerillas vanish. All this was orchestrated by the army, an institution that relaxed the security of the Palacio de Justicia to facilitate the takeover and later eliminate the guerilla command trapped in the building.

The film adheres to noir genre conventions through its urban setting in a cold, rainy city like Bogota. The main character wears a typical journalist outfit, a blazer or woollen vest in ochre, brown and greys, an unkempt beard, a constant cigarette in his hand, and round glasses he only wears when seen reading at his perpetually messy desk. Cold tones and opaque images characterise the colour scheme. Archival footage of the takeover of the Palacio de Justicia creates a connection with documentary filmmaking and highlights its relationship with the historical event that inspired the film. Regarding the shots, close-ups of the characters predominate, intensifying the drama surrounding the events. Moreover, camera movements are strategically employed to track characters during dramatic moments and impending danger. An essential aspect is the avoidance of explicit depictions of violent or sexual acts, a characteristic of the classic narrative mode where the use of film resources is determined by the significance of the symbolic narrative event rather than its spectacularisation.

On the other hand, *La Historia de baúl Rosado* (2005) shifts its focus away from the journalist and centres on the police detective, Mariano Corzo, tasked with investigating the apparent crime of a young girl whose body is found in a boot. The character representing the journalist is Hipólito Mosquera, who seemingly demonstrates adept investigative and storytelling skills by disclosing significant details of the case in the newspaper *La Verdad*, where he is employed.

From the film's first few minutes, the enunciation reveals that Corzo lacks the necessary qualities to be a hero. Despite being a detective, he is constantly haunted by the image of his deceased mother and her death. Prefect Castillo, his boss, assigns Corzo the task of investigating the crime, and he apparently possesses the qualities of a credible mentor by virtue of his position as a representative of the law. However, doubts about his ability to fulfil his role also extend to Castillo, depicted as obsessed with philately, a hobby he indulges in during working hours, consequently neglecting his police duties.

Hipólito Mosquera is portrayed as a shrewd journalist who is always one step ahead in the investigation conducted by Corzo. Therefore, he is the protagonist's opponent. His ability lies in acquiring details of the investigation and narrating entertaining stories that mock the police precinct, particularly Corzo, thereby boosting sales of the newspaper *La Verdad*. He goes so far as to make up that the boot where the girl was found is pink. He is so confident in his professional success that he even promises his sister, "I'm sure this chronicle is going to get us out of poverty" (00:17:22).

Success comes soon, and Mosquera is promoted to editor-in-chief of the newspaper because his articles boost the newspaper's sales. It does not matter that his former boss cautions against the sensationalism of his writing or that his former colleagues, now subordinates, insist that the story of the pink boot cannot be the only front-page topic. "Sales are sales. If you don't sell, you don't exist" (00:38:51) is the newspaper owner's justification for Mosquera's actions.

The fable takes shape as Corzo, despite his flaws, slowly connects the story of the pink boot with another case involving the theft of corpses from the local morgue.

Hipólito has crafted a narrative fueled by the desire to grow professionally by recounting a sensational story that boosts his newspaper's circulation. The film's title suggests this from the outset: *La historia del baúl rosado* (*The Story of the Pink Boot*) is simply a story, a fabrication with no other crime than the theft of the corpse. Although Hipólito flees to another city for fear of being exposed, his actions bear no consequences as the case is closed, thanks to Prefect Castillo being pressured by the newspaper owner where Hipólito works. This suggests that official institutions, such as the police force, are subject to the media's and their owners' interests.

The film stands out for its aesthetic proposal, highlighting film elements representatives of the genre, such as colour saturation and the interplay of *chiaroscuro*. However, its narrative structure is compromised by the absence of a central crime. From the beginning, the title and the sounds of a typewriter suggest the fictional construction of the story, manipulating the detective and the audience, challenging genre expectations with a plot full of deception and enigmatic characters. This ambiguity in the narrative is reflected in the portrayal of dubious characters, misleading clues, and confusing motivations, fostering an environment of uncertainty in the plot. Furthermore, the film emphasises indeterminacy in cinematic resources, especially evident in its emphasis on visual aesthetics over symbolic aspects of cinematic narrative. This makes the film seem artificial and detached from authenticity, as it does not seem to go beyond generating an aesthetic nostalgia for film noir.

Finally, *El Rey* (2004) diverges from the previous works, as the journalist is not characterised as the protagonist or opponent. Instead, the journalist assumes the role of the narrator, recounting the story of Pedro Rey, a prominent drug trafficker who rises from the popular sectors of Cali, Colombia. Thus, Julio González, the journalist, declares his role in the work, “He left me his testimony to tell you how it all started” (00:01:28).

González becomes a diegetic narrator, appearing in several sequences as a secondary character, as the plot focuses on Pedro, who seems to embrace a value system grounded in notions of friendship, loyalty, helping the helpless, and caring for the welfare of his community. However, his newly acquired wealth, the need to stay in power, mixed feelings, and the complexities of the human soul soon transform him into a heartless man who resorts to violence to maintain his status.

Pedro’s desires act as the driving force leading to his downfall, a characteristic that frames the work in the trajectory of the protagonist’s rise, splendour, and eventual downfall. The film also incorporates other elements typical of the crime genre, in this case, gangsters, such as the corrupt cop, dishonest and illicit connections between the mafia and politics, and a love triangle that determines Rey’s downfall. These elements adapt to the Colombian context and are depicted with a certain originality. Pedro Rey’s point of view does not allow for the identification of heroic elements; we are only witnesses to the character’s descent towards his inevitable and violent end. Identifying heroic figures or apparent mentors within the narrative structure is impossible. At times, Rey seems to have heroic attributes that gradually diminish as he falls into the axis of scarcity within a framework of ethical ambiguity, preventing the construction of a symbolic narrative for the character. Regarding the film elements, the artistic direction excels in recreating the atmosphere of the period in which the story unfolds. The staging includes details, settings, and scenarios that immerse the viewer in the atmosphere of the 1970s, conveying the feeling of an era marked by drug trafficking.

The journalist only serves to narrate Pedro’s story and, ultimately, to attempt to explain the emergence of individuals like him, a manifestation of the specific conditions prevalent in Colombia in the latter half of the 20th century. “Characters like Rey were born from the country’s corruption, economic and political double standards. North American interference and even the complicit silence of all of us who knew his story...” (01:27:14).

The film is structured through close-ups, prioritising dramatic events where characters’ gestures take centre stage. Sexual scenes and acts of violence are also explicit. In a film where these events are a fundamental part of the plot, the filmic representation adheres to this directive, leaving no space for symbolising them in the construction outside the frame, as dictated by the symbolic narrative. In this narrative structure, there is an absence of a hero or mentor, the character of the journalist is not a seeker of truth, a feature established by the the filmic enunciation elements.

4. Discussion

Antes del Fuego (2015), *El Rey* (2004), and *Perder es cuestión de método* (2005) narrate stories that took place in Colombia during the final decades of the 20th century, a period marked by increased organised crime, manifested in the rise of powerful drug cartels, and the strengthening of various subversive groups. This situation confronted a weak state incapable of governing

the territory effectively, and one co-opted clientistically by various types of regional, local, and private powers. In various ways, these three films represent how journalism observed and actively engaged in this historical moment.

In contrast to Simsolo's (2009) assertion concerning the reluctance of U.S productions to depict journalists as corrupt or submissive to those who are, in *Perder es cuestión de método* (2005), Silanpa possesses such a feeble nature that he cannot effectively oppose Colonel Moya. His only way of resisting him is by ridiculing him in a speech that holds little significance to the plot's development.

In contrast to the character of Silanpa, Arturo Mendoza, the journalist who takes centre stage in *Antes del Fuego*, is a man dedicated to a symbolic law. His pursuit of the truth is linked to the task assigned to him by his father and later by his colleague Roberto Sepúlveda, known as "El Gordo". The film portrays Mendoza as someone committed to always following the straight and narrow path and uncovering the truth, specifically, the truth that "El Gordo" had pursued before being murdered, is fulfilled in the film by this character. Consequently, unlike Silanpa, who is driven by desire and a deceptive task, Mendoza fulfils the conditions to be a hero.

However, the discoveries made by both journalists prove futile in the face of the overwhelming power wielded by those who control a state rife with corruption. These works assert that regardless of whether the journalists unearth the truth, it will never be disclosed if it contradicts the interests of the societal elites.

On the contrary, in *La Historia del baúl Rosado* (2005), the plot revolves around a mystery that ultimately proves deceptive for the journalist. Mosquera uses his journalistic skills to manipulate reality and fabricate false news, highlighting his lack of scruples and desire for recognition. His lack of professional ethics, determination, and ambition are evident as he is willing to transgress moral boundaries to achieve his goals. Moreover, he successfully maintains the deception until the film's end, manipulating the detective and the audience. He emerges as a symbol of corruption, representing the lack of integrity in journalism. He is not a seeker of truth but of success, leading him to manipulate that truth. His ability to deceive both the characters in the story and the viewers underscores the deceptive nature of the media in contemporary society. As suggested by Laverde *et al.* (2022), in *Perder es cuestión de método* (2005) and *La Historia del baúl rosado* (2005), a representation of the journalist can be observed as an individual submissive to the interests of power and, at the same time, a victim of their own ambitions. Finally, *El Rey* (2004) contradicts the previously analysed films. In this film, the character of the journalist does not play a significant role as either a protagonist or opponent in the narrative. Although he is the narrator, his role is not well-established; his voice appears sporadically, serving a limited function in the plot. It could even be eliminated without affecting the main narrative, and his role could be related to a documentary intention of the film or an imitation of the American genre, which often uses these narrative voices to recount events more intimately, closely, and truthfully through the protagonists' perspectives.

This truth is usually ascribed to the journalist, who, in this case, is not portrayed as a seeker of truth but rather as a mere storyteller. Nevertheless, the journalist provides relevant historical and contextual information that complements the story, which could be of interest to the Colombian audience and international viewers. As the film unfolds, the journalist provides significant data about the evolution of events, their societal impact, and the political landscape in the city and the country,

embedding the plot within a broader historical framework. The journalist acts as a bridge between the fictional narrative and the actual context on which the film is based, but his role in the story itself is more anecdotal. Also, Julio González, the journalist in this case, only makes a brief reflection, a *mea culpa*, on how Colombian society, including himself, permitted the emergence of characters like Pedro Rey. However, his position differs significantly from what is portrayed in American films, where, according to McNair (2010), the journalist takes a dichotomous stance, clearly establishing a difference between good and evil. In *El Rey* (2004), the journalist is only a narrator who does not take sides or even portrays the drug trafficker as a tragic hero, a product of Colombian society and a lack of opportunities.

The portrayal of the journalist in Colombian film noir is not consistently uniform across the four analysed films. Therefore, it is not a significant figure within the Colombian film noir genre. The journalist is also not, as Vélez Cuervo (2015) claims, an archetype of the truth seeker; on the contrary, our findings contrast with this author's assertion, who refers to a notion of a hero without a specific definition. He generically uses this qualifier, even with characters who do not have heroic traits, or in other cases –subcategorising them as anti-prototypical heroes without describing their characteristics. The same occurs when applying the term antihero, a category that does not theoretically differentiate from the hero or the anti-prototypical hero.

The view of the evils affecting our society is also not uniform across these. Violence has different faces in these stories or is even omitted from films such as *La Historia del baúl rosado* (2005), which is set in a period of political turmoil in the country without addressing it in the narrative. *El Rey* (2004) is set in the 1960s and narrates the origins of drug trafficking in the country; *Antes del Fuego* (2015) portrays guerrilla violence and the political tensions in the 1980s, and finally, in *Perder es cuestión de método* (2005) corruption is exposed in all strata of Colombian society. Therefore, there is no cohesive thread among the films in terms of historical context. Still, they do become a kaleidoscope of myriad evils that have plagued the country for almost a century.

In summary, the films by Sergio Cabrera and Laura Mora depict journalists as representatives of futile tasks, as the hypothesis had suggested. On the other hand, in *La Historia del baúl rosado* (2005), the journalist is not portrayed as a representative of a task; on the contrary, he is an individual driven solely by his desire for professional success. However, this work does not entirely negate the hypothesis, as while the journalist does not perform any task, it illustrates the absence of the state. Although not depicted as an oppressor, the state is driven by private interests. A parallel situation occurs in *El Rey* (2004), where the journalist does not perform a symbolic task *per se*, as his only objective is to recount a story. Still, the work does present, like all the previous ones, an inept state ensnared by corrupt and mafia powers. Thus, the hypothesis is substantiated in two works, and two others, it is only partially validated.

5. Conclusions

We found four films that represent the character of the journalist in different ways. Although *Perder es cuestión de método* and *Antes del Fuego* feature two truth-seeking journalists, these figures do not accomplish anything in the first film because they are not up to the task. Despite uncovering the truth, it does not transcend; this discovery proves futile, mainly due to the society he finds himself in and the state's corruption, leaving no room for social transformation.

However, in *Antes del Fuego*, the historical context provides a profound ethical dimension to the journalist by questioning the actual events that affected Colombia in 1985. Through the pursuit of truth and the confrontation with reality, the two main characters are elevated to the status of heroes as they attempt to shed light on a dark period in their country's history. On the other hand, *La historia del baúl rosado* and *El Rey* present a different perspective. In the former film, a corrupt journalist does not seek the truth but, on the contrary, aims to suppress it. Hipólito Mosquera is a complex character that challenges the conventions of Colombian film noir. He manipulates reality out of ambition; his lack of scruples makes him a central figure in the plot. The revelation of his deception and its consequences underscores the corruption and lack of integrity in journalism and the system in general. This film experiments with the characters' ambiguity and the narrative's uncertainty, defying viewers' expectations and offering a critical perspective on Colombian society and media. This latter element connects it with *Perder es cuestión de método*, in which the journalist is defeated by the corruption of those in power who censor the press.

In the latter case, in the film *El Rey*, the journalist is a secondary narrator who does not play a crucial role, primarily serving to provide historical context.

Perder es cuestión de método and *La historia del baúl rosado* challenge traditional roles in film narrative, exploring the characters' weakness and corruption in Colombian society through stylistic elements that question conventional narrative structures.

In conclusion, each film represents the journalist differently in Colombian film noir. From individual struggles for truth against corruption, as seen in characters like Silanpa and Mendoza, to the manipulation and ambiguity of the characters like Mosquera and Gonzalez's narration of Rey's life. The films depict the complexity of journalistic ethics, systemic corruption, and the fruitless pursuit of the truth in an environment fraught with challenges and ethical and social contradictions.

Finally, it is essential to highlight that while this study compares Colombian film noir with American film noir, no textual analysis of any Hollywood film is performed in the latter case. In this sense, this research opens up possibilities for future investigations focused on the comparative analysis between cinema in both regions. This inquiry serves as a starting point to broaden potential comparisons through textual analysis since it addresses the four films within the film noir genre in Colombian cinema, which include the character of the journalist.

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8. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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