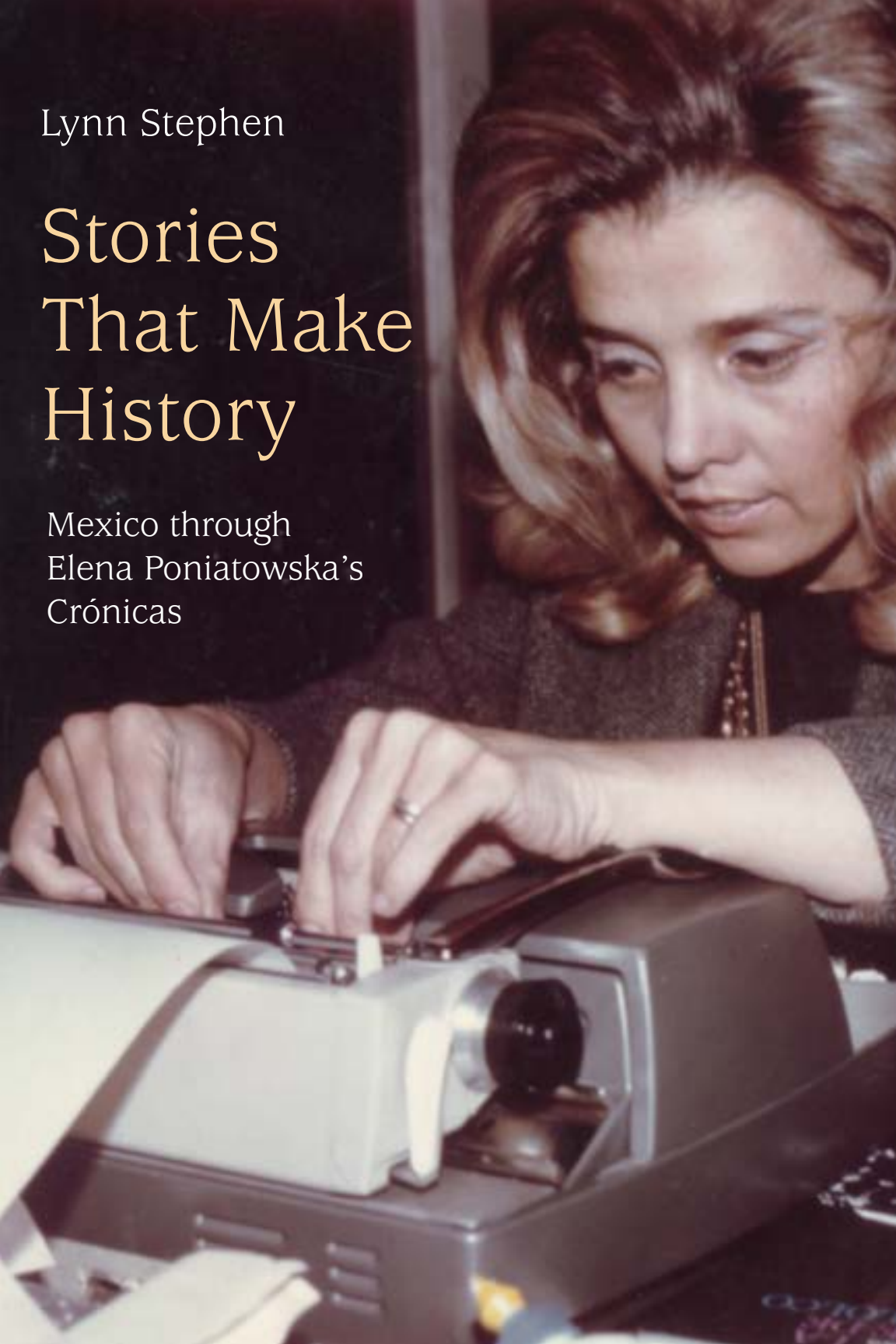
Lynn Stephen

Stories That Make History

Mexico through Elena Poniatowska's Crónicas



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Cover art: Elena Poniatowska at her typewriter with a copy of *La noche de Tlatelolco* on her desk, c. 1971. Courtesy of the Fundación Elena Poniatowska Amor, Mexico City, Mexico.

Contents

Abbreviations

AMLO	Andrés Manuel López Obrador (president of Mexico)
CND	Convención Nacional Democrático (National Democratic Convention)
CNH	Consejo Nacional de Huelga (National Strike Council)
Comité ¡Eureka!	Comité Pro-Defensa de Presos Perseguidos, Desaparecidos y Exiliados Políticos de México (Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners, Disappeared and Political Exiles of Mexico)
CUD	Coordinadora Única de Damnificados (United Coordinator of Earthquake Victims)
EZLN	Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation)
IACHR	Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
IGIE	Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts
INI	Instituto Nacional Indigenista (National Indigenist Institute)
IPN	Instituto Politécnico Nacional (National Polytechnic Institute)
MLN	Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (Movement of National Liberation)
MESA	Mecanismo Especial de Seguimiento del asunto Ayotzinapa (Special Follow-Up Mechanism for the Ayotzinapa Case)
MORENA	Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (National Regeneration Movement)
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement

PAN	Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party)
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution)
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)
TRIFE	Tribunal Federal Electoral (Federal Electoral Tribunal)
UNAM	Universidad Autónomo de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico)

Acknowledgments

This book emerged as an idea after a visit from Elena Poniatowska to the University of Oregon in May 2010. She delivered the Bartolomé de Las Casas Lecture in Latin American Studies. First, of course, I thank Elena for coming to Eugene, Oregon, but most of all I am thankful for our beautiful and ever-deepening friendship that accompanied the process of writing this book over the past ten years. I have greatly enjoyed my trips to Mexico City to visit with Elena and her family and to continue our conversations in Chimalstac over meals, tea, and more.

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After Elena's visit to Eugene, I taught a class, Seminario de Migración e Inmigración Indígena," at the Instituto de Estudios Antropológicos at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. There I was generously hosted by anthropologist Hernán Salas. It was during this time that I first visited Elena in her home and broached the idea of a book to her. Hernán was encouraging of this project since its beginning.

The summer before beginning a sabbatical in the fall of 2011, I went to Mexico City in late July and August to record my initial long interview with Elena over several days. My colleague and friend Gabriela Martínez, professor of journalism and communications at the University of Oregon, accompanied me for part of that visit and also helped with some video recordings in Elena's home. I thank Gabriela for this initial work together

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Introduction

On Testimony, Social Memory, and Strategic Emotional Political Communities in Elena Poniatowska's Crónicas

TO TRAVEL ACROSS THE ZÓCALO in Mexico City with Elena Poniatowska is to see her connected to her readers and public. In July 2012, I spent an afternoon with Poniatowska as she participated in a rally for Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), following national elections in which he ran for president a second time (the third time ended up being the charm). The rally took place in the midst of a large annual book fair, the Feria Internacional del Libro del Zócalo (International Book Fair of the Zócalo).

Ostensibly, we were crossing the Zócalo to look for a particular book Poniatowska was interested in. Instead, we spent at least an hour inching across this large public square as Poniatowska signed her books, primarily her crónicas, for dozens of people. In contemporary Mexico, the term *crónica* can refer to shorter essays written as reports for newspapers or to longer journalistic pieces written in a polished literary style, sometimes described as testimonial narratives. From thirteen-year-olds to people her own age to entire families, people commented again and again about how much they loved her books. Most mentioned *La noche de Tlatelolco* and *Nada, nadie: Las voces del temblor*. People had purchased these books and others, and they wanted her to inscribe them, which she did with unfailing

Figure I.1 Elena Poniatowska at the International Book Fair in the Zócalo, July 2012. Photograph by author.

patience, writing personalized inscriptions for each fan and agreeing to be photographed with most of them (figure I.1).

"This one is for my grandmother," who lived in Tlatelolco, said a young man with a small child in tow. "What is her name?" asked Poniatowska. "It is María de la Luz," he answered. Poniatowska slowly opened the front cover of a copy of *La noche de Tlatelolco*, gently folded it back, and carefully inscribed the book, dedicating it to María de la Luz. She often decorates such dedications with a drawing of flowers or hearts. She writes them in a careful script, with fat cursive letters and emphatic punctuation that exudes enthusiasm.

The people who stopped her were from all walks of Mexican society and many appeared to be working class, from what are called "las clases populares." Throughout this hour, I realized I was watching Poniatowska literally wading into her public. This book explores the power of Elena Poniatowska's crónicas and her public presence in creating what I call "strategic emotional political community" and influencing the historical memory of many Mexicans. As her interactions at the book fair illustrate, Poniatowska has forged a strong connection to her readers. One of the ways she has done this is by questioning the stance of the distanced and objective observer in her crónica writings and public persona. She has progressively

pushed against the assumed divide between journalism and activism, between observation and participation. While her first book-length crónica, *La noche de Tlatelolco*, is explicitly written by someone who was not a direct participant in the student movement and is based on interviews prior to and after the 1968 massacre of students—from her reporting on Mexico's "Dirty War" of the 1970s when she was an advocate for the rights of political prisoners and the disappeared, to her account of the 1985 earthquake when she became an activist supporting one of the organizations that came out of the quake, to her crónica of the 2006 occupation of the Zócalo by Andrés Manuel López Obrador and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD, Party of the Democratic Revolution)—she documents her own participation in the occupation as well as her observations about the thousands of men and women who sustained it. In her journalistic crónicas with the Zapatistas in the 1990s, she becomes an ardent supporter of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN, Zapatista Army of National Liberation) and a public fan of Subcomandante Marcos and his writing. More recently, in her engagements with the movement seeking forty-three disappeared students from Ayotzinapa in 2014, Poniatowska not only writes and talks about the disappeared and their families but uses public spaces such as the Feria Internacional del Libro (International Book Fair) in Guadalajara to help the families gain access to news media and the public.

Elena Poniatowska at a book fair in Mexico City, surrounded by a multigenerational crowd of enthusiastic readers who call her name, talk to her, take photographs with her, and ask her to sign copies of books: this is just a snapshot of the interconnected stories this book tells about Poniatowska, her mastery of the crónica, and her and their roles in Mexican politics, culture, and memory. These stories include how Poniatowska has used the crónica along with public performances and dialogues as political tools; how her evolution as a writer and journalist defied the division between observation and participation; and how through time, based on her chronicling of crisis events, she helped shape an influential narrative of contemporary Mexican history.

In building narratives of history, we are always confronted by the fact of multiple and complex truths and the stakes and consequences of particular episodes and events. We also have to consider how these narratives are connected to individuals and communities of people. How do they make their way into a critical public formed by different kinds of people? How do particular versions of events come to take hold in print media? How are

they shared, memorialized, and reproduced through time? What role does the writing style through which events are captured in print media have in engaging readers? How do writers engage in different kinds of public performances and dialogues that may augment the force of their writing and their personas in the eyes of their publics? How does engaged writing influence politics? Taking a close look at Elena Poniatowska as a public figure and chronicler of Mexico can help us answer these questions.

Her singular approach has made her deeply significant to many Mexicans and kept her relevant on the Mexican political and cultural stage for more than sixty years. If we look at Poniatowska's writing career through time, we can clearly see how her method urges us to dig deep in our quest to understand the truth, how different truths emerge, and how we can engage with what may ultimately be the unknowability of history. We can also see how, through her crónicas, Poniatowska has built a multistory house of collective memory.

Her writing as public engagement with Mexican politics along with her performative politics in multiple venues contributes to the consolidation of Poniatowska as a significant Mexican political figure. She is perhaps the Mexican writer who has had the greatest impact on oppositional politics during the past four decades. She has done this through the power of words, emotional expression, personal writing, and stories in a style very different from masculine writing of the same period. Through respect and a deep probing of her characters' emotions, she connects them to her readers across class, ethnicity, race, and generations. Through telling the stories of those left on the outside looking in, of the poor and working classes who are the builders of popular culture, Poniatowska widened and deepened who is visible and heard in Mexican history. One of her most important vehicles for doing this is through the crónica.

On Telling Stories. Whose, How, and Why

The crónica is a major genre in Mexican letters that is malleable in nature and can be tied to earlier narrative forms such as "The History of the Indies of New Spain and Islands of the Mainland" by Diego Durán, commonly referred to as the Durán Codex, published around 1579. In Mexico, the crónica is a literary genre that serves as the major bridge between politics and culture. Poniatowska has excelled in both short and long forms of crónicas; analysts of her early career (when she was a journalist specializing in interviews) even credit her with inventing a particular Mexican

crónica style and a unique style of fiction built on real-life characters and situations, along with writer Carlos Monsiváis.[1] Her longer crónicas are known for their gripping narratives, such as the layered stories that help us see, smell, hear, and feel the tragedy of the earthquake in Mexico City that registered 8.0 on the Richter scale, as documented in *Nada, nadie*. Testimonies shared orally and told into a tape recorder or written up in detailed notes and translated into a text are the building blocks in her crónicas.

In Mexico, historians Eugenia Meyer and Alicia Olivera de Bonfil published a seminal article in 1970, "La historia oral: Origen, metodología, desarrollo y perspectivas" (Oral history: origin, methods, development and perspective). As part of the research team that founded the Departamento de Investigaciones Históricas (Department of Historical Investigations) at the government-funded Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (National Institute of Anthropology and History), they worked with others, including Winberto Jiménez Moreno, to organize a sound (oral history) archive in 1959, "with the objective of retrieving and preserving live testimonies from distinguished people from political and military life during the Mexican Revolution of 1910."[2] In 1968 they concentrated their oral history project on all kinds of survivors of the Mexican Revolution, whose stories were deemed of urgent importance because of their advanced age. In 1985 Olivera de Bonfil published *Mi pueblo durante la Revolución* (My town during the Revolution), which highlighted testimonies of the revolution from the oral history archive at the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. Meyer published accounts of socialist education in Mexico under President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40), exiles from the Spanish Civil War in Mexico (who arrived during the Cárdenas presidency), exiles from other Latin American countries, and other topics—all based on oral histories.

In their article, Meyer and Olivera de Bonfil lay out guidelines for how to conduct oral histories and note that "humble people, less culturally evolved, are more accessible for interviews."[3] While today we would clearly question the idea of people being "more or less culturally evolved," the importance of Meyer and Olivera de Bonfil's project at the time was to validate a wide range of perspectives on the Mexican Revolution and other historical events and to affirm the role of oral accounts in the construction of historical narratives. The fact that this movement happened in Mexico City at the same time that journalists were pursuing interviews and using oral testimonies in their newspaper and supplement stories is no coincidence. The use of tape recorders, transcriptions of what people said, and then their editing and publication was a growing practice in Mexico in

the 1960s and 1970s. Elena Poniatowska's use of testimonials she collected, previously published testimonies and narratives, and newspaper articles in her first book-length crónica, *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971), is consistent with the legitimization of oral histories and narratives in the Mexican academy through the work of Meyer, Olivera de Bonfil, and others.

Oral testimony refers to a person's account of an event or experience as delivered from their lips. It is an oral recounting of a person's perception of a past event through sight, sound, smell, and other sensory information. It signifies witnessing and is often performative and public.[4] The practice of oral testimony has been broadly defined as a form of retrospective public witnessing of historical events that are "essentially not over" and are "in some sense brought into being by the process (itself interminable) of testimonial witnessing."[5] In this way, oral testimony can become a vehicle for broadening historical truth by opening up who legitimately speaks, and is heard, in a given society.

There is a robust literature on the role of *testimonio* (testimony) in Latin American social movements and politics, and in determining what kinds of "truths" are captured through testimonies.[6] Spurred by David Stoll's book *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (1999), which questions the objective "truth" of *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1983), an Indigenous Guatemalan's published testimony about the violence and genocide perpetrated against her family and other Indigenous peoples, the debate has taken many different directions. In my 2013 book on the role of testimony in a Oaxacan social movement that displaced the state for several months, I take the position of the film critic José Rabasa: all "forms of collecting testimony are by definition forms of engaged dissemination of the truth."[7]

Poniatowska's crónicas and other writings have been crucial in broadening Mexican historical truths and perspectives. Poniatowska's friend and fellow chronicler, Carlos Monsiváis (1938–2010), pointed to Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlaltelolco* and *Fuerte es el silencio* (1980 crónica of political prisoners, the disappeared, and victims of Mexico's Dirty War of the 1970s) as seminal contributions to the contemporary genre of Mexican chronicles.[8] Beth Jörgensen, a longtime analyst of Poniatowska's work, writes that the contemporary Mexican chronicle, which is "perched on the threshold between literature and advocacy, narrative and essay, document and figure, elite and popular culture, and investigation and advocacy . . . makes a contribution to democratizing culture and to imagining a more inclusive and authentic democracy."[9] While Poniatowska's crónicas do all of this,

they also do something more. They forge direct emotional connections between the oral testimonies of the people whose stories she tells and readers. Channeling her ability to create complex and rich characters in her novels, Poniatowska uses this same technique to communicate the full humanity of those whose stories she shares and links them to larger political, economic, and social relationships and structures. One of the main conduits of communication is human emotion. In order to develop the concept of emotional strategic political community, I am particularly interested in how testimony forges emotional connection. How do people giving public testimony on repression and traumatic events and those listening become emotionally connected to each other? Can they, through this connection, act together to denounce, document, and create political impact? Are they part of emotional communities tying speakers and listeners together through shared emotional connections linked to difficult and tragic events? As I explain later in this introduction, the concept of "emotional community" is proposed by Colombian anthropologist Myriam Jimeno as a way of positing how it is that people can become connected through traumatic events.[10] The oral narratives in crónicas and in public performances by writers such as Poniatowska bring listeners and readers into community with those whose stories are shared. The transfer of what are told as oral testimonies onto the written, textualized page and their dissemination can play an important role in whose voices are heard, and by whom. Testimonies collected and widely disseminated through crónicas and in other forms can influence the way that historical events are remembered and canonized.

Poniatowska has challenged the idea that she "gives voice" to the people whose stories she records, transcribes, and publishes: "I always believed that the people had a strong voice. When they say that 'the people don't have a voice,' I say that, on the contrary, they have a very powerful voice. The voice of the people is much stronger than the conventional voices that we are used to hearing."[11] But a voice captured on an audio recorder and then filed away and never transcribed or played back does not resonate beyond the moment of telling. If, however, the recording of a voice is transcribed and included in a newspaper article that is read by thousands, it is "heard" by many. In the case of the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, as I explore in chapter 3, Poniatowska first tape recorded narratives of survivors on a daily basis, wrote them up, and published them in *La Jornada*. Later, in 1988, they were published as a book titled *Nada, nadie: Las voces del temblor*.[12] The daily publication of the narratives in 1985 helped bring

survivors' experiences to the entire country. As a published writer of crónicas, Poniatowska has a critical role in amplifying what she says are already strong voices.

The key, then, to the effectiveness of crónicas, like the oral histories Meyer and Olivera de Bonfil published, is the amplification of voices that are often silenced, actively delegitimized, or confined to family and neighborhood conversations. Poniatowska agrees that this is a legitimate focus for her work: "Rather than give voice, what I have been doing is to gather voices that have not been heard before. This has been a fascinating process for me because it opened up a world for me that was very creative and that I learned so much from. I learned a great deal from the people I encountered in the street. And I keep on learning."[13]

Why Crónicas?

Poniatowska credits her self-taught training in journalism, which began in the 1950s, with giving her the tools to solicit testimonies and craft them into the narratives of crónicas. Poniatowska joined the *Excélsior* newspaper in 1953 to write for the "society" column. Since that time, what has remained of central importance to her is the question of "¿para qué?" (what for?). What are the stakes in journalism and publishing crónicas? What are the consequences of bringing forward particular points of view and getting them into the public record? How can writing and publication be political tools? When I asked her to define the genre of the "crónica," Poniatowska highlighted these questions through her emphasis on the "¿para qué?"

> I think that you have to respond to the crónica with the four or five fundamental, basic questions of journalism, which are: how, where, when, why, and then you always add another question, which is *para qué*, what for? Why does it matter? These are the fundamentals they teach to any journalist when they start their career. . . . But for me, you always have to add, why. Why are you telling something? I believe that the crónica is an event that you observe and you try to be the most objective possible, but you are always limited by who you are as a person.[14]

While she mentions trying to be "objective," she tempers this by acknowledging that how a writer observes and captures an event on the page is always linked to who the writer is. In this sense, a writer's politics will likely influence how they document and interpret particular events.

In discussing the genre of the crónica in relation to other literary genres in Mexico, Poniatowska believes that the Mexican public is more interested in crónicas than novels.

> The material of real life is so amazing that it forms the basis for stories that are far superior to anything that could be plucked from a writer's imagination. In the case of the crónicas in Mexico, the great chroniclers [*cronistas*] really have been more important than novelists. You could think about the case of Monsiváis, who is an extraordinary chronicler. . . . A fabulous crónica goes so much further than any novel. For example, you have the case of one year, 1994, which includes the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio, presidential candidate of the PRI [Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)]. The same year Subcomandante Marcos and the EZLN burst on the scene in Chiapas. And that very same year, the wife of Luis Donaldo Colosio, Diana Laura—who was a lovely woman—dies of cancer. Before she dies, she refuses to take the arm of Carlos Salinas de Gortari [who was the actual president of Mexico at the time] when he offers it. You couldn't find a greater amount of Shakespearean tragedy than this.[15]

Mexico provides ample dramatic material for crónicas and that has been the case since their start. Poniatowska places contemporary Mexican crónicas and cronistas in a genealogy beginning with Bernal Díaz del Castillo, originally a foot soldier in the army of Hernán Cortés in the conquest of Mexico and later the governor of Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala, present-day Antigua, Guatemala. His chronicle, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (The true history of the conquest of New Spain), was completed in 1568. As she explains, "Mexico is a country linked to the Chronicles of the Indies, from Bernal Díaz del Castillo and from others who sent their chronicles to Spain. We have cronistas who go much further than novelists and they cover an entire epoch. The important thing in a country as big as Mexico is to document the country."[16] She identifies in some ways with chronicler Díaz del Castillo as he moved through Mexico for the first time, chronicling what he saw, informed by his foreign Spanish background. Poniatowska felt a powerful sense of discovery as her own writing developed and she came to know the many different Mexicos that existed in parallel to her life as a child in an upper-class family with many privileges. When she came to Mexico City from France at age ten, everything was new and interesting to her: "I remember arriving in Mexico.

In contrast with France where I came from, when I looked at the map of Mexico, I saw zones that were yellow and it said, 'zona por descubrir,' zone still to be discovered. That was fascinating to me."[17] The zones "of discovery" on the map Poniatowska saw as a child erased Indigenous precolonial crónicas. Ethnohistorians of Mexico point to the importance of Indigenous codices in the genealogy of crónicas, which begins long before the conquest. The largest collection of preconquest Indigenous documents are Mixtec Codices, which contain genealogies, biographies of particular individuals, mythologies, and accounts of ceremonies and important events.[18] The history of crónicas has deep roots in Mexico, a perspective Poniatowska endorses in general and in relation to her own work.

Heralded writer and chronicler Carlos Monsiváis also discusses crónicas in relation to the era of conquest in Mexico. In the prologue to his edited book, *A ustedes les consta: Antología de la crónica en México* (You will make known: anthology of the chronicle in Mexico), Monsiváis begins with an epitaph that links the past and present through the written form of the chronicle: "And the Aztecs arrived from Aztlán unto Lake Tenochtitlán, and observed the signs as prophesied, and there with the nopal, eagle, and serpent, a crowd of reporters and chroniclers awaited them."[19] This passage subtly suggests how time travels through chroniclers, linking the Spanish chroniclers and seemingly present-day reporters to the arrival of the Aztecs from Aztlán to Lake Tenochtitlán. While splashed with Monsiváis's ironic sense of humor, the epitaph is quite serious in relation to what Monsiváis identifies as key to the definition of a chronicle: "a literary reconstruction of historically verifiable events, characters, and atmospheres in which attention to language and form prevails over the immediate demands of reporting information."[20]

Crónicas and Gender

While historically many chroniclers have been male, recent scholarship on colonial women writers has also analyzed those who wrote letters, inquisitorial transcripts, and wills and testaments as part of the genre. Valeria Añón suggests that although women's writing was often relegated to the "private sphere," if we look carefully at the colonial written record, we can find forms of chronicle that women wrote that were directed to public authorities.[21] For example, a letter from Isabel de Guevara to Governess Princess Juana, written in Asunción in 1556, narrates the conquest of Río de la Plata while highlighting the role of women in that process.[22] Other

documents such as wills and testaments reflect women's direct voices and articulate their desires. Isabel Moctezuma (Mexico, 1510–1550) and Francisca Pizarro (Cusco, 1534–Madrid, 1598) are examples of women who left such documents.[23]

Michelle McKinley's pathbreaking book, *Fractional Freedoms: Slavery, Intimacy, and Legal Mobilization in Colonial Lima, 1600–1700*, uses legal and ecclesiastical archives to highlight hidden sources of women's testimony, suggesting that they serve as a kind of crónica. For example, slave women used *censuras hasta anathema* (censures until damned)—publicly stated demands issued from the pulpit during Mass "requiring those with knowledge of an event or action to provide truthful testimony or suffer the consequences of excommunication" or ultimately damnation—to gain a forum.[24] McKinley's original use of religious archives and her skill in highlighting the testimonies of enslaved women as legal and everyday protagonists who occupied multiple identities and fought for their own and their children's freedom have added much to our understanding of how colonial women saw their world and worked to have their experiences chronicled and documented. While discussions of contemporary crónicas often emphasize their hybrid nature and connection to orality, if we are able to expand our notion of varied "discursive forms and other traditions in which the importance of orality . . . takes center stage," we can successfully include many more women as chroniclers of the colonial period in Latin America.[25] While that is not my primary focus here, I feel it is important to recognize the current work being done to broaden the analysis of crónicas throughout Latin America history, particularly those written by women.

Historically, women's crónicas have not received the same attention as men's have in Mexico. The "premier" urban chronicler of Mexico City is usually considered to be Salvador Novo (1904–1974). In fact, Novo was named the official chronicler of Mexico City in 1965 by President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. Novo launched his writing career in the early 1920s and became a poet, essayist, journalist, and member of an avant-garde "non group-group" of writers. While known for his writing, he also became a figure of popular culture himself, frequently photographed and appearing on radio and television. Writing thousands of articles on Mexico City that painted the city in vibrant terms, he cultivated a "provocative public persona, conspicuously exploring frivolous or banal themes precisely at the time when intellectuals were expected to act as solemn guides for a nation that was emerging from ten years of civil war."[26] Doing little to hide

his homosexuality, Novo celebrated the boom in popular culture through newspapers, magazines, radio, and cinema, bringing them to the attention of urban Mexicans. Closely linked to official government circles—and supporting the official version of events in the 1968 student massacre in Tlatelolco—Novo had a consistent conservative tone to his writing. He later was of interest to a broader public because of his pioneering role as an "out" gay writer in Mexico.[27]

At the same time that Novo was writing in Mexico City, so was Cube Bonifant. In fact, her first column was for *El Universal Ilustrado* magazine in 1921, the same publication that would become a stepping-stone for Salvador Novo. Writing what was ostensibly an advice column for women, she offered "sharp social and political criticism that would undoubtedly have been censured in more serious sections of newspapers."[28] She went on to write film criticism for the next twenty years, providing both historical context about films and comments on trends and genres. She acted as well, and became a public persona. Known for her acerbic wit and confrontational style, she pioneered a kind, ironic humor and contentious writing that other chroniclers later followed. Because she was female, Bonifant was expected to write for an audience of women. As Viviane Mahieux, who analyzes the writing of Bonifant and other female urban chroniclers in Latin America, notes, "rarely could a female chronicler walk out of the feminine page to other sections of a publication without an anxious editor pointing out the unique status of her gender."[29] Bonifant began to write for the daily *El Mundo* in 1922 in a column called "Solo para ustedes" (Only for you). But the name was later changed to "Solo para vosotras" (Only for you women).[30] In writing about radio in a different publication, she simply signed her initials. By writing about film for much of her later career, she was able to escape the gender straitjacket to some degree, but open coverage of news and politics in the mainstream sections of newspapers was not an option for her or other women writers. They had to fit their critical commentaries into other spaces.

Bonifant's early career writing for women in some ways foreshadows that of Poniatowska, who first wrote for the society section and stuck to the interview format. She also wrote often about Mexican literature, film, and culture. If seen from a gendered point of view, the form of the crónica that Poniatowska became known for, beginning with her book *La noche de Tlatelolco*, could be seen as a skillful adaptation, innovation, and reinvention of the spaces to which female journalists were confined. The style she developed in writing shorter essays about everyday Mexicans, in interviews,

and in observations that were published in supplements and parts of the newspapers not formally defined as "news" is consistent with the kind of limits put on women's writing. By publishing her 1968 crónicas in book form in 1971, she was able to break out of the gendered spaces of newspapers and cultural supplements. As the formats and number of newspapers, magazines, and other print media grew from the 1960s on, the options for where and how to publish also grew. Poniatowska's commitment to focusing on women in her newspaper and book crónicas have helped her forge a connection with female readers and to profile women as participants in history in ways that were often overlooked by other reporters.

While male writers such as Monsiváis, a close friend of Poniatowska's, use wit and keen intellectual insight to engage with politics and popular culture, they do not use emotional expression or engage with the emotions and feelings of those they portray to connect with readers. Poniatowska does, and that, I suggest, is an important part of the power of her writing. At a larger level, Poniatowska has also made the sentiments, experiences, and insights of a wide range of different kinds of Mexican women legible and legitimized in Mexican society. Her crónicas, in particular, have emphasized the participation of women in a wide range of social movements and have illustrated the importance of their activism. As a woman writer who has elevated women in her writing for five decades, she has also participated in widening the participation of women and others in the Mexican polity.

The Power of the Crónica

In his 1987 essay "De la Santa Doctrina al Espíritu Público (Sobre las funciones de la crónica en México)"—often known as his complaint about why not enough attention is paid to crónica writing—Monsiváis outlines some key functions of the crónicas in Mexico: "Why has the crónica been situated in such a marginal position in our literary history? Neither the enormous prestige of poetry, nor the omnipresent seduction of the novel are sufficient explanations for the almost absolute disdain for a genre that is so central to the relationships between literature and society, between history and daily life, between the reader and the formation of literary taste, between information and amenity, between testimony and the primary material of fiction, between journalism and the project of nation-building."[31]

Discussed by literary analysts as a hybrid text or "liminal genre," the chronicle sits at the intersection of fiction and nonfiction.[32] As Jörgensen notes, in Mexico "literature is not systematically divided into fiction and

nonfiction texts," providing the opening for genres like the crónica, which straddles both categories.[33] She goes on to examine how the role of language itself and postmodern theorizing about language and discourse offer tools for helping us see how "skepticism toward what we know about the world and how we know it increasingly pervades literary writing, historiography, journalism, anthropology, and ethnography."[34] Jörgensen suggests that if histories of events are understood not as "what actually happened" but as discourses "not in the service of truth, but of power," then this produces an instability in textual categories.[35] Jörgensen's insight that histories and narratives of events should be taken as discourses in the service of power is important. What I hope to document in this book is how Poniatowska's crónicas—through their narration of historical events from multiple perspectives, often highlighting the voices of those who are not in power—push back on power. Discourse cannot be taken as "the truth" but as a part of the human experience of events. Thus, the versions of events we find in Poniatowska's crónicas should be seen as broadening history. She is telling stories that make history, as the title of this book suggests.

Jörgensen further argues that beyond making a case for "reality" in nonfiction (which one can question based on language as constitutive and not reflective of human perception, memory, and communication), there is little else that "separates nonfiction and fiction as verbal texts."[36] There are, in fact, more similarities than differences between the two:

> all manner of linguistic registers, narrative structures, and rhetorical devices are common in all modes of storytelling. Most importantly, the story itself, whether it be characterized as historically based in nonfiction or hypothetical in fiction, is equally employed in both forms, and the strategies of emplotment construct a meaning that exists only in the narrative, and not, even for nonfiction, in some preexisting, original form that writing has somehow retrieved. Here is where the distinction threatens to blur. In the recognition that the plot or nonfictional narrative shapes or composes its thematic "content" and does not simply transmit a meaning already contained in real-life events, nonfiction seems to cut loose from its moorings to the referent and edge toward fiction.[37]

Many of the conventions of storytelling are common between fiction and nonfiction, blurring the distinction. In crónicas, the nonfictional narrative shapes the interpretation of the oral testimonies. In *Nada, nadie,* for example, each individual oral narrative achieves its meaning not in isolation but because of the larger narrative structure it is a part of. The

power of crónicas comes from their storytelling conventions and the ways in which individual experiences are interpreted as part of a wider, collective experience. In the case of Poniatowska's crónica *Nada, nadie*, for example, the testimony of Judith García, "My Family Was Not Killed by the Earthquake; What Killed Them Was the Fraud and Corruption Fostered by the Government," achieves its power both through García's individual experience and the emotional communication of her raw fear and terror—"I thought, 'I'm going to die; I'm on the fifth floor, I'm going to die.' . . . I knew I was being ejected. It occurred to me to look for the window frame, and I thought that by falling from the fifth floor I was going to be the one killed"—and its connection to a larger interpretive frame.[38] After detailing how her family died and by some miracle she survived, García continues, "I want to state that the people who died didn't die because of the earthquake; that is a lie. People died because of poor construction, because of fraud, because of the criminal incapacity and the inefficiency of a corrupt government that doesn't give a damn about people living and working in buildings that can collapse."[39] This oral testimony coexists within the larger structure of the book, which builds layer after layer of similar stories, and then oral testimonies from social movement activists who point to a long history of poor construction, fraud, and government ineptitude.

While Jörgensen places crónicas within the set of overlapping conventions that characterize fiction and nonfiction, Linda Egan proposes what she calls "an Indigenous theory of the chronicle," which arises "out of the works themselves."[40] Her analysis is based on the work of Monsiváis as a journalist and theorist.[41] She suggests that a crónica does the following:

- Includes history . . . and [because it translates local and national experiences into literature, is the incomparable ally and accomplice of history], but itself is not history;[42]
- Belongs to the field of journalism but exceeds the brief length of both straight news reportage and opinion-page essay;
- Enjoys close kinship with the essay, but stretches and ultimately overwrites that form's staid boundaries;
- May contain the testimony of witnesses or others . . . without becoming what is understood today in Latin America as *testimonio*; and
- Ostentatiously helps itself to the same narrative tools used by the short story and the novel, and thus may, at least in part and some of the time, resemble fictional discourse.[43]

These characteristics that Egan identifies underscore Jörgensen's point about the fuzzy line between fiction and nonfiction. My primary concern here is to explore the power of the crónica in using cultural forms to transform politics and how we remember historical events. In this project, its hybridity and mixing of genres within the space of a storytelling narrative is precisely the secret to its transformative power. Crónicas, perhaps more than other literary forms, have the potential to reach a broader audience, and therein lies their power.

Encountering Reality through Storytelling

Why do people in Mexico like to read crónicas? Due to their specific form, Jörgensen suggests, crónicas permit an encounter with reality and combine "the power of storytelling with the power of critical commentary and analysis within the authorizing frame of nonfiction discourse."[44] Several other characteristics, Jörgensen highlights, contribute to the appeal of crónicas to a broad audience. The crónica "seamlessly blends fact with fiction and the urgency of on-location reporting with a more literary attention to style and aesthetics. . . . It freely borrows characteristics of the short story, the essay, and the ethnographic narrative in offering a perspective that frequently runs counter to official or authorized versions of events."[45] By drawing on the drama of real life, blending it with the aesthetics of storytelling and striking photographs, invoking a prominent orality of language and testimony—that is, retelling what happened from multivocal perspectives—the crónica draws readers into intense emotions and often crisis situations.

In her discussion of what she terms crisis chronicles, Jörgensen comments on how both Monsiváis in *"No sin nosotros": Los días del terremoto, 1985–2005* ("Not without us": Days of the earthquake) and Poniatowska in *Nada, nadie* not only document the tragedies that thousands of people suffered in the earthquake but also "delve into existing structural factors that cause or exacerbate catastrophic events and the potential for a constructive challenge to the status quo."[46] In the case of Poniatowska, I would build on Jörgensen's observation to say this is a fundamental characteristic of all her crónicas, and is part of the ways in which her written works as well as her very public persona have contributed to a powerful narrative of Mexican history and politics.

Egan suggests that cronistas such as Monsiváis and Poniatowska deliberately position themselves to report on sites of struggle and social

movements—an observation with which many would agree. She suggests that crónicas can be understood as critical mirrors of society: "The crónica positions itself in a public space to hold up a critical mirror to society caught in the act of re-inventing itself. . . . But the cronista, practicing what has aptly been called transformational journalism, will choose to report on thematic sites where struggles over power implicitly contain the greatest potential for change."[47] Thinking of crónicas as critical mirrors makes a great deal of sense, particularly in their ability to reveal structural causes of inequality and injustice through a literary form that uses storytelling to convey this information. The movement between the first-person voice of the author and the third-person voice of others telling what happened to them is one of the conventions that makes this possible.

Unlike newspaper stories that in the past could be thrown away and thus were somewhat disposable (at least until the advent of the digital archiving of newspaper stories, which may give them eternal, if not a very long, life), the compiling of individual stories and testimonies in books gave that form of crónica perhaps a different purpose. Documentation of testimonies at a particular point in time—as Poniatowska does in her crónicas—does not freeze the meaning or significance of those testimonies in the moment. Each time they are recited, read, and remembered, they acquire new meaning in a new context. And it is also the emotion embedded in such public testimonies that allows them to transcend specific historical contexts. In this way, social memory can be thought of as having ever-changing and distinct relationships with time.

The models of time that many Indigenous peoples work with can provide us with important insights here. Rather than assume that time is linear and that we as humans exist on one plane marked by a distinct past, present, and future, the knowledge systems of Native peoples—such as the Nahua, the Maya, the Nasa, the Mixtec, and the Kahnawake Mohawks—can link the past, present, and future through one event, through one feature of the landscape that marks a significant occurrence, or through a ritual, a song, a prayer, or a map.[48] If we think of a testimony or collections of testimonies on the written pages of crónicas as symbolic objects, like a prayer or genealogy that has emotional force through its telling and reproduction, then we can see it as a continual generator of emotion and memory.

Crónicas and Strategic Emotional Political Communities

Poniatowska's crónicas—often containing firsthand testimonies of intense suffering, trauma, and resilience—result in the construction of what Myriam Jimeno has called "emotional community."[49] I build on Jimeno's concept to explore how textualized oral testimony can spark emotional and political connections, often across economic and social difference. This is not to deny the often-entrenched racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender hierarchies that permeate the network of people who provide and listen to someone's testimony about a traumatic event. Rather, it is to suggest how emotion—such as the fear felt in looking for disappeared loved ones after an earthquake or after detention by police—can serve as a link across difference to forge strategic emotional political communities that, in turn, can have an impact on how tragic events are remembered and, through historical memory, forge paths for current political action. In most cases, this network of testifiers and readers, what I call a *strategic emotional political community*, are brought together in a shared political ethic.

Here I would like to briefly unpack the four components of this concept and their individual and mutually constituted meanings. *Strategic* may recall for some the concept of "strategic essentialism," coined by postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to describe how marginalized and minoritized groups mobilize around a shared identity to represent themselves. Much discussed in anthropology and ultimately disavowed by Spivak herself because of the way the concept was used by nationalists, my intention here is not to channel the original Spivakian sense of the word.[50] The word *strategic* here refers to the ways in which flexible and differentiated communities have both been documented by writers such as Poniatowska in particular political junctures in order to move forward a particular political agenda but also in terms of the kinds of choices involving intentionality and selectivity that is part of how Poniatowska and any writer or chronicler gives meaning to a particular event. Tragic and dramatic events like earthquakes, massacres, and, as I write today, pandemics tend to magnify existing inequalities and injustices. Often social movements and other forces for change emerge out of these moments, and in that sense, they work strategically in the space created by the rupture of the "normal" or status quo. Strategic in the sense that I am using it here in relation to emotional political communities has to do with when, how, and with what means an event, a group of people, a social movement, or other phenomena are represented by an author. Politically strategic means that an author like

Poniatowska aims to create a community and intends for it to have a political dimension, such as pushing the government to reform. At the same time, politically strategic refers to the intention to build a sector of critical and politicized readers and actors, usually in concert with others.

Emotional in this concept has to do with the embodied, affective dimensions of connection that are wrought in life through shared participation in events and how such connection is crafted on the page by a writer such as Poniatowska. One of the distinguishing characteristics of Poniatowska's writing is her unique ability to capture the personalities, feelings, and affective dimensions of those she writes about and connect them to larger events but also to readers. I say much more on this in the pages ahead and also in relation to the concept of emotional communities coined by Jimeno.

Political refers here not only to institutional and electoral politics but in relation to the ways that Poniatowska and other writers work in crafting their political participation and performances to include informal politics such as activism, media campaigns, theater, rallies, and now social media. Poniatowska has been one of the major Mexican figures over the past four or five decades who has helped redefine what counts as politics in Mexico. In the case of Poniatowska, this redefinition has come not only through her writing and coverage of other forms of politics but also how she herself has functioned as a political actor, often but not always outside institutional and electoral politics.

The term *community* has a long and complex history in anthropology, history, and other social sciences. In 1983 historian and political scientist Benedict Anderson published his book *Imagined Communities*, in which he explains how people came to perceive themselves as connected in imagined communities called nations after the Industrial Revolution, primarily through the means of print capitalism. A nation, he wrote, "is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[51] The nation is imagined as a community because, despite inequality and exploitation, "the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship."[52] The imagined community, Anderson suggests, exists between people who feel connected but don't actually know one another. Anderson's suggestion that part of what defines a community comes primarily through imagination is problematic here. The strategic and political aspects of the communities Poniatowska documents and is a part of actively creating involve serious effort—the

crafting of writing, its dissemination, and connections with readers but also the building of active networks and the creation of meaning. There is nothing imaginary about the work involved in creating these connections.

Assumptions about the coherence of imagined communities across differences, inequalities, tensions, and conflict also need to be troubled. Strategic emotional political communities are not static. They are flexible and people can move in and out of them at different points in their lives and in time. The emotional intensity that may come out of a particular experience such as the student movement of 1968 can change over time for those who were there. The ways that such experiences are captured and given meaning on the page and in political performances by actors such as Poniatowska and many others can and does work to preserve and expand what might be called a strategic left emotional political community through time, and render it as a touchstone for oppositional politics in Mexico. The creation of and work of keeping this strategic emotional political community functioning and connecting it to the making of history is at the heart of my discussion.

Beginning in the late 1970s, Poniatowska became a public activist at the same time that she documented social movements. She was a part of building strategic emotional political communities through participating in ongoing public protests in the late 1970s dedicated to pressuring the government to account for political prisoners and the disappeared, through being a public advocate for and organizer to support the labor union known as the Sindicato de Costureras "19 de Septiembre" (Nineteenth of September Garment Workers Union) that grew out of the 1985 earthquake, through advocating for the EZLN, and through using her public-speaking platforms to keep the forty-three students from Ayotzinapa disappeared in 2014 in the public eye. She also wrote crónicas as newspaper articles and books that continued to build relationships between readers and the people whose stories and social movements she documented. Wedding activism to writing permitted her to do this.

Jimeno suggests that people who have lived through and commemorate horrible events, such as the massacre of Naya carried out in Timba Cauca in 2001, create an emotional identity.[53] We can see that the identification process involved in creating emotional community does not center on concepts of identity such as ethnicity, class, race, or gender but on creating networks of connection through shared emotion. Such connections may eventually articulate into political action, and in that context result in shared identities, but the processes of identification involved in creating

emotional community work somewhat differently than those linked to structural identity categories of difference. The concept of emotional community requires important discursive work, the creation of shared symbols, and the production of connection across difference—processes that work against compartmentalization and tensions that emanate from the production of opposing conflict-based identity categories.

The process of creating emotional community is centered in the act of one person narrating his or her experience of suffering to another so that it is not identified only with the victim "but is extended to other audiences who can identify with the experience and be moved by it."[54] It produces not just a moment of compassion but also a connection, sometimes political, that can be translated into concrete actions. This raises the question of whether we can separate emotional and political communities. My prior research on social movements would suggest that the answer is in the very way that people talk about and narrate their own experiences of repression, resilience, and action. There is no neat analytical way to separate emotions as experienced in the body (rapid heartbeat, tightening of the neck, tensing of the muscles, perhaps a rise in body temperature in the case of anger and fear), the description of events, and then the way an individual feels. Afterward, when people share an oral narrative about something that happened, the emotional experience is part of what they narrate. Take, for example, this testimonial from *La noche de Tlatelolco* by Diana Salmerón de Contreras:

> I was still clutching my brother's hand, despite the fact that there were other people between us and I tried to pull him closer to me. Some students were lying there on the ground between us, some of them dead and others wounded. There was a girl right next to me who had been hit square in the face with a dum-dum bullet [bullets designed to expand on impact]. It was ghastly! The entire left side of her face had been blown away.
>
> The shouts, the cries of pain, the weeping, the prayers and supplications, and the continuous deafening sound of gunfire made the Plaza de las Tres Culturas a scene straight out of Dante's *Inferno*.[55]

As a reader, I am drawn intensely into the text by the anguish and fear Diana felt—first in the moment of this experience but also as reflected in her telling of it. As a listener and reader, I am connected emotionally to her and indirectly to the scene and experiences of others she alludes to. Humans have used oral narrative as a mode of knowledge transmission

for a very long time. If we want to truly understand the ways that emotions work in narrative, in the creation of memory, and in ethical-political viewpoints and strategic actions, it does not make sense to conceptualize them as separate.

The experiences of testifying, listening to, and reading others' testimonies are key to how political perspectives develop not only in individuals but also in how these individuals connect with others to analyze the world from a partially shared optic (often cognizant of difference at the same time), and in how groups of people can participate in shifting public political discourses and perceptions. Analyzing this process entails scaling down to document the pivotal, emotive experiences of individuals; scaling across to see how actors who experience a shared trauma connect with one another; scaling out to see the networks constructed through testifying, listening, and reading; and scaling up to see how this strategic network or emotional/political community can take on a larger ideological life in relation to other public discourses and ideologies. As suggested by the example of Diana's testimony and what happened on October 2, 1968, in Tlatelolco, the emotional connection her testimony brings connected her first to Poniatowska and then through the publication to other readers. The chapters that follow further develop how this process can involve politicization of readers and the building of political and emotional connections through public events that memorialize tragedies like the student massacres of 1968.

In a larger sense, we might think of different levels and kinds of participation in emotional communities. There are the emotional communities formed by those who share an immediate experience of suffering from the same event, and by those who share a similar experience in a different context. Emotional communities can also include those who are empathetic listeners; they may be not be suffering directly, but they are willing to act and to take risks to bring tragic and horrific events to light, and they will work to prevent their recurrence. Such listeners might be considered part of a strategic emotional political community.

Meeting Elena

In the mid-1980s, I lived in a Zapotec community in Oaxaca, Mexico, and frequently visited friends in Mexico City. Going from a small town of five thousand to the largest city in the world at that time was challenging but exciting. I got to know the city riding around on the Mexico City Metro, jostled together with thousands of other people as we wove our way

underground through the city. Most exciting to me was the chance to read a wide variety of Mexican newspapers and visit bookstores. I first became familiar with Poniatowska's crónicas when I read *La noche de Tlatelolco.* I found her work in what is now known as the "old" Gandhi Bookstore in Mexico City, near the Miguel Ángel de Quevedo subway stop. I was living in Mexico when the 1985 earthquake occurred. I flew to Mexico City to try to help out with the organization of civil society and made it in time for the second aftershock. The aftermath of the earthquake and the Mexican citizens' amazing participation in recovery efforts made a lasting impression on me. Poniatowska's crónica about the earthquake, *Nada, nadie: Las voces del temblor*, was not published until 1988, when I was back in the United States and working at my first tenure-track job in anthropology at Northeastern University in Boston. The book was an important source for anyone trying to understand urban social movements in Mexico City and elsewhere.

In thinking about how my perspective on Mexican history was influenced by Poniatowska's crónicas as a graduate student, I came to wonder about how her work had affected other readers, in Mexico and the United States, and their ideas about Mexican history. As an anthropologist, I ended up documenting some of the same social movements as Poniatowska, including urban social movements that grew out of the organizing of civil society after the 1985 earthquake, as well as the story of the Zapatista uprising in the 1990s and its impact not only in Chiapas but elsewhere in Mexico, including Oaxaca.[56] I felt a kinship with her method, and perhaps with what I perceived to be her ends.

For the past two decades, I have framed my work as collaborative activist ethnographic research.[57] Collaboration implies cooperation, having a share or part in a process. Being an activist suggests that one is aligned with and committed to a particular sociopolitical process. Ethnography invokes the self, rich description, and interpretation as a means to knowing, while research suggests uncovering information and interpretations. Thus, as an activist anthropologist, one is open about one's political sympathies and alignment. Furthermore, through processes of collaboration in defining the questions to be studied, how to study them, and who participates, the division between "object of study" and the researcher is blurred. Participants in a study can include a wide range of people who participate not just as interviewees but also as intellectuals who conceptualize, analyze, and in some cases cowrite.[58] I see myself as an anthropologist who also identifies as a participant in a larger shared project with those whose lives I

am documenting. Creating this sense of a shared project involves pushing against the distinction between observer and participant—something I felt was present in Poniatowska's work. This perspective also has a significant history in Latin American social science. For example, Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda originated the concept of participatory action research, a method that "attempted to erase the distinction between researchers and researched, and to rewrite the history of the peasantry from below using novel formats."[59]

A further question of interest to me as I began to contemplate the role of testimony and emotion in social movements and politics was the role of readers and print media, particularly historical accounts that brought in multiple voices. In studying Poniatowska's crónicas and through my three decades as a researcher in Mexico, it became evident to me that her work was of crucial importance in shaping an influential narrative of Mexican history. When I had the chance to get to know Poniatowska on a visit she made to the University of Oregon in May 2010, and in subsequent conversations in Mexico City, I wanted to try to understand how this happened. Many people I spoke with about her work mentioned her novels, but the majority always talked about her crónicas. How, I wondered, did these crónicas contribute to understandings of Mexican history? Did they influence politics? Could we consider her a political as well as cultural actor in Mexico?

While the formal sphere of "politics" is so often relegated to elections, political parties, politicians, and the interpretation of political scientists—often but not exclusively men—I seek to broaden how we understand and remember Mexican history and politics. The actions and writing of figures such as Poniatowska are primarily interpreted as part of the literary cannon, which indeed they should be. However, because I personally have documented and written about Mexican history and politics as an anthropologist and ethnographer, I view Poniatowska's contributions through a different lens. Much like an ethnographer, through her crónicas, Poniatowska has captured the daily lives, opinions, and experiences of many people who are not in the circles of power. She has also captured the lives of the elite and famous in her novels and interviews. Poniatowska's published crónicas have reached a broad, critical public that has thrived in Mexico from the 1950s to the present—particularly through print media, as I discuss in chapter 1. The versions of historical events she has created by assembling a multitude of voices—along with many others' works—have helped influence how some people in Mexico remember these events. Part

of their power is in their ability to harness a reader's emotions. I suggest that we consider readers a part of strategic emotional political communities that persist through time.

My interactions with Poniatowska began with several days of long interviews and exchanges on July 27–29, 2011, that produced about 200 pages of transcription. She also provided me with copies of many of her books, photographs, unpublished pieces, and other materials. After our initial long interview, I began to visit Poniatowska whenever I went to Mexico City, at least once or twice a year, beginning in 2011. We often talked, went to events together, or hung out at her house. I had the privilege of meeting her children, her grandchildren, and some of her friends. My project is based on more than a dozen lengthy interviews with Poniatowska from 2011 to 2019, analysis of key crónicas she has written, secondary sources, interviews with people who worked closely with her, and interviews with and observations of people who have engaged with her crónicas. At the readings, speeches, and public conversations that I had the chance to attend with her, I observed her interactions with a wide range of Mexicans—students, the urban poor, the Indigenous, social movement leaders and participants, and mainstream politicians. I also observed reactions to her work in the public spaces where it was presented; often I spoke with the people at these events and thus have an ethnographic record of public interpretations and reception of her work. I also explored exhibits where her work was featured, where I observed and recorded the reactions of museum visitors. The process of working with her on this book and getting to know her over the past ten years has been an enormous pleasure and gift.

Stories in This Book

I use the lens of Poniatowska's crónicas to explore how this cultural form contributes to history. At a broader level, I am interested in how testimony, writing, and the voices of public intellectuals such as Poniatowska enter the critical public sphere (as discussed in chapter 1), influence processes of democratization, and impact social memory. Specifically, I address how contemporary crónica writing and publishing intersect with key political events through the creation of emotional connections wrought not only through the act of narration but also through its extension to a wider public who can identify with the experience and are moved by it. Poniatowska's development as a writer, public intellectual, and activist is woven through the chapters that follow.

On a morning Metro ride through Mexico City, after riders are packed into a car with most standing, grabbing a pole for balance, the lucky few sit down and open up their newspapers, Mexican true crime comic series, novels, or cell phones. Throughout the city, readers are engaged with these sources and also often talking to each other about what they read and the news of the day. Chapter 1, "Mexico City's Growing Critical Public: News and Publishing, 1959–1985," outlines how a critical public sphere developed from 1959 through the mid-1980s through print media. Drawing on recent historiography of the Mexican press, this chapter highlights the importance of cultural supplements, crime news, and the small circulation of more radical publications in broadening Mexico's critical public sphere as well as engaging different kinds of readers. In Mexico City, the opening of the press followed its own dynamic. There, independent publishing houses and news outlets that grew in some cases out of more official publication venues were critical to the dissemination of Poniatowska's and others' work. In order to understand why people like to read crónicas and potentially how crónicas and their readers contribute to building strategic emotional political community, this chapter suggests how different forms of print media engaged with the public and the role they played in developing a historical narrative. Annual events such as rallies, public lectures, debates, and museum exhibits that memorialize events such as the student massacre in 1968 further solidify the place of these events in the public imagination. Through documenting such events, print media further contribute to etching them in larger historical narratives.

During the summer and fall of 1968, the student movement in Mexico City was the topic of reporting, governmental meetings, and talk on the street. Student activists from the Consejo Nacional de Huelga (CNH, National Strike Council) moved about the city in mobile brigades, setting up lightning meetings on street corners to dialogue with people in their neighborhoods on the way to work. A march of thousands of students and workers moved silently through the city, signaling the government's own silence and the movement's desire to communicate that it was a nonviolent, peaceful movement.

On the night of October 2, 1968, military officers and police fired on students marching into the Plaza de las Tres Culturas (Plaza of the Three Cultures) in Tlatelolco. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, were killed. Chapter 2, "The 1968 Student Movement and Massacre," discusses Poniatowska as a chronicler of the student movement and explores how Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco* has become a staple in historical narratives about that

event and worked through multiple generations of readers to craft strategic emotional political community. Annual memorialization of the event and of Poniatowska's account of it reinforces and amplifies the power of this crónica and of Poniatowska herself as a writer and public intellectual. The story of what happened the night of the massacre in Tlatelolco has also served as a historical touchstone for other episodes of violence, such as the disappearance of forty-three student teachers in Iguala, Mexico, in 2014. Poniatowska's crónica about Tlatelolco and her ongoing activism defending the rights of the disappeared and of students continues to amplify the impact of this book and connect it to the present.

Following the 1968 massacre, some student activists went underground and others spread out across Mexico to organize peasants and the urban poor. Their optimism and desire to change the system were strongly opposed by the Mexican state, which initiated a period of repression, selective political killings, and disappearances known as the Dirty War. Poniatowska became a public activist for groups advocating for the poor and marginalized. In September 1985, when hundreds of Mexico City buildings were leveled in an instant, people were living on the streets, and the government was slow to respond, Poniatowska was there documenting what happened and the organized response of the people of Mexico City. Chapter 3, "A History We Cannot Forget: The 1985 Earthquake, Civil Society, and a New Political Future," analyzes Poniatowska's book *Nada, nadie* and follows its influence in building strategic emotional political community through the face-to-face organizing it documents and then through its replication, citation, and memorialization in the anniversaries of the earthquake.

By the 1990s, Poniatowska was a well-known writer and her texts *La noche de Tlatelolco* and *Nada, nadie* were widely read, particularly by those on the left, and taught in some schools. When the EZLN burst out of secrecy in January 1994, its charismatic spokesperson, Subcomandante Marcos, strategically reached out to public intellectuals and writers in an effort to harness their support. He let it be known that Poniatowska's crónica *La noche* was on his bookshelf and invited her to meet with him and the EZLN in Chiapas. Poniatowska accepted the invitation.

Chapter 4, "Engaging with the EZLN as a Writer and Public Intellectual," examines how Poniatowska's public dialogues with Subcomandante Marcos and other leaders of the EZLN used writing and publishing to broaden understanding and support for Indigenous rights and autonomy in the 1990s. The chapter also explores her engagement with Zapatista gender

politics and the ways that her own personal experience as a young, single mother who suffered assault pushes her to engage across large differences with Zapatista women. Poniatowska's personal dedication, admiration, and advocacy for Zapatista women are seen through her care for Comandanta Ramona at her house, the use of her newspaper columns to publicize and promote the ideas of EZLN women, and her ongoing references in public performances to their accomplishments. Poniatowska, among many others, forged face-to-face strategic emotional political community with and for the Zapatistas (particularly the women) and used her public appearances and writing as a political tool for the EZLN and its ideas. The chapter draws on Poniatowska's 2019 novel, *El amante polaco* (The Polish lover), as a source to illuminate her personal experience with gender inequality, sexual assault, and the challenges for women raising children alone. For Poniatowska, this personal experience was foundational in pushing her to engage with many marginalized women, including those from the EZLN, and center them in many of her crónicas. The appearance of the EZLN in Mexico's Zócalo and Congress in March 2001 were events Poniatowska helped advocate for and document, along with other public intellectuals.

Mexico City's Zócalo could be known as La Plaza de Protesta (Protest Square). On any given day, its vast concrete expanse is host to two or three different groups of people working to engage the public to understand their issues. Banners protesting mining, signs advocating for Indigenous rights, and encampments of discontented peasants are part of the daily scenery. Without protest, the Zócalo looks naked.

When AMLO was declared the loser in the 2006 presidential elections, he organized a very large-scale and ongoing occupation of the Zócalo in protest. The occupation became a small city with participants from all corners of Mexico and an army of organized people to prepare food and provide education and entertainment, medical services, and more. For Poniatowska, who participated in the occupation and also documented it, there was a direct connection to the kind of civil-society organizing that emerged after the earthquake. Solidarity and collective connection were daily and widespread.

Chapter 5, "*Amanecer en el Zócalo*: Crónica, Diary, and Gendered Political Analysis," explores how Poniatowska positions herself as both activist and chronicler in López Obrador's 2006 campaign and the occupation. This chapter also highlights her participation in formal politics, her friendship with Jesusa Rodríguez, her portrayal of the *plantón* (sit-in) and its people, and her portrayal of AMLO. She also provides a critical analysis

of formal political processes and at the end, of some of the forms of PRD organizing she observed. The chapter points to how, through this work, she has formally merged observation and participation in historical events and social movements. Her detailed descriptions of the people in the plantón and how they carried out political theater, dialogues, and events elsewhere in the city also suggest how the strategic emotional political community forged in the plantón was extended to other parts of the city. The harsh criticisms and even death threats she received for her political activism for López Obrador highlight the risks taken in combining activism with writing.

As suggested by the constant occupation of Mexico City's Zócalo, public activism is a normal part of the continuum of Mexican politics. Student activism is expected, and each year on the anniversary of the massacre of Tlatelolco, students organize events and marches to commemorate the student movement and the massacre. In order to prepare for such events, students sometimes jump onto public buses and ask the drivers to loan them the bus for a period of time to transport their fellow students to events. In late September 2014, several groups of student teachers departed from the town of Ayotzinapa to head to the larger city of Iguala. There they attempted to commandeer buses. What could have been a somewhat normal occurrence went horribly wrong on the night of September 26, 2014. Chapter 6, "*¡Regrésenlos!* The Forty-Three Disappeared Students from Ayotzinapa," explores Poniatowska's journalism and speeches as well as her advocacy surrounding the disappearance of forty-three students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College in Iguala, Mexico, in 2014. Drawing from two examples of Poniatowska's public speeches and performances, the chapter suggests that Poniatowska, along with the missing students' parents and many other groups and individuals, helped keep the memory of the students alive and pushed the government to carry out a credible investigation of the disappearances. This last chapter is also a portal to the understanding of how repeated cycles of repression become compacted in Mexican social memory and can create new social movements with connections through time. The chapter describes how Poniatowska leveraged her status as a public figure and decades of accumulated networks and connections to bring attention to the disappeared students through using almost all her public appearances, lectures, and dialogues to advocate for justice for the disappeared students and their families. In doing so, she brought to bear the accumulated strategic emotional political community forged through her and others' activism and her writing.

As a public intellectual and writer, Poniatowska and many others have influenced public perceptions of historical events in Mexico, from the 1960s to the present. By mobilizing the hybrid form of the crónica, public dialogues, and performances as cultural and political tools, Poniatowska illustrates the importance of vibrant and accessible writing and speaking to shaping social and historical memory. At a larger level, when viewed collectively, Poniatowska's crónicas, activism, and performances can be seen as crucial building blocks in the forging of a multigenerational political community with others committed to achieving social justice for the marginalized and the silenced in Mexico.

Notes

Introduction

1. See Egan, *Carlos Monsiváis*; and Wood, Review. Mark Anderson refers to *La noche de Tlatelolco* as Poniatowska's pioneering "collective testimonials." He also suggests that Poniatowska's and Monsiváis's crónicas of the 1985 earthquake were likely published and timed deliberately to have an impact on the 1988 elections. M. Anderson, *Disaster Writing*, 179, 172.

2. Meyer and Olivera de Bonfil, "La historia oral," 381. As I noted in the acknowledgments, all translations of quotes from my interviews of Poniatowska and untranslated works of hers and of other sources in Spanish were done by Sylvia Escarcega in chapters 1, 2, 5, and 6. All translations of quotes from my interviews with Poniatowska, as well as untranslated works of hers and of other Spanish sources in the introduction, chapters 3 and 4, and the conclusion, are mine.

3. Meyer and Olivera de Bonfil, "La historia oral," 381.

4. Stephen, *We Are the Face of Oaxaca*, 109–10.

5. Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 7.

6. For a good summary, see Beverly, *Testimonio*.

7. Rabasa, *History*, 234; Stephen, *We Are the Face of Oaxaca*, 12.

8. Monsiváis, "De la Santa Doctrina."

9. Jörgensen, "Chronicle and Diary," 8.

10. Jimeno, Varela, and Castillo, *Después de la masacre*; Stephen, *We Are the Face of Oaxaca*.

11. Poniatowska interview by the author, June 19, 2015. Sylvia Escarcega worked with me on some of the translations from interviews I carried out with Poniatowska. I edited all final versions.

12. Poniatowska's *Nada, nadie* appeared in English in 1995 as *Nothing, Nobody,* translated by Aurora Camacho de Schmidt and Arthur Schmidt.

13. Poniatowska interview by the author, June 19, 2015.

14. Poniatowska interview by the author, June 19, 2015.

15. Poniatowska interview by the author, July 27–29, 2011.

16. Poniatowska interview by the author, June 19, 2015. "Crónicas de las Indias" refers to chronicles of the conquest period, which as a group are narratives from a Spanish point of view that document the colonization of the American continent.

17. Poniatowska interview by the author, June 19, 2015.

18. Boone and Mignolo, *Writing without Words*; Flannery and Marcus, *Cloud People*; Terraciano, *Mixtecs of Colonial Oaxaca*.

19. Monsiváis, "Prologo," 13.

20. Monsiváis, "Prologo," 13.

21. Añón, "Women 'Cronistas' in Colonial Latin America."

22. Añón, "Women 'Cronistas' in Colonial Latin America," 69–70; Lopreto, "Isabela de Guevara."

23. Añón, "Women 'Cronistas' in Colonial Latin America," 71.

24. Johnson, "Review of McKinley."

25. Añón, "Women 'Cronistas' in Colonial Latin America," 67.

26. Mahieux, *Urban Chroniclers in Modern Latin America*, 97.

27. Mahieux, *Urban Chroniclers in Modern Latin America*, 97.

28. Mahieux, *Urban Chroniclers in Modern Latin America*, 140.

29. Mahieux, *Urban Chroniclers in Modern Latin America*, 153.

30. Mahieux, *Urban Chroniclers in Modern Latin America*, 153.

31. Monsiváis, "De la Santa Doctrina," 753.

32. Corona and Jörgensen, *Contemporary Mexican Chronicle*.

33. Jörgensen, *Documents in Crisis*, 5.

34. Jörgensen, *Documents in Crisis*, 13.

35. Jörgensen, *Documents in Crisis*, 13.

36. Jörgensen, *Documents in Crisis*, 12, 15.

37. Jörgensen, *Documents in Crisis*, 15–16.

38. Poniatowska, *Nothing, Nobody*, 82.

39. Poniatowska, *Nothing, Nobody*, 83.

40. Egan, *Carlos Monsiváis*, 84.

41. Egan, *Carlos Monsiváis*, 84.

42. Monsiváis, "De la Santa Doctrina," 755.

43. Egan, *Carlos Monsiváis*, 84.

44. Jörgensen, *Documents in Crisis*, 143.

45. Jörgensen, *Documents in Crisis*, 141.

46. Jörgensen, *Documents in Crisis*, 143.

47. Egan, *Carlos Monsiváis*, 88.

48. On the Nahua, see Maffie, *Aztec Philosophy*; on the Maya, see León-Portilla, *Time and Reality*; on the Nasa, see Rappaport, *Politics of Memory*; and Rappaport, *Intercultural Utopias*; on the Mixtec, see Terraciano, *Mixtecs of Colonial Oaxaca*; and on the Kahnawake Mohawks, see Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*.

49. Jimeno, "Emoções e política"; Jimeno interview by Macleod; Jimeno, Castillo, and Varela, "Violencia, Comunidades Emocionales," 212–14.

50. Spivak, *Other Asias*, 260.

51. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

52. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

53. Jimeno, "Emoções e política"; Jimeno interview by Macleod.

54. Jimeno interview by Macleod.

55. Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico*, 223.

56. See Stephen, *Women and Social Movements*; and Stephen, *Zapata Lives!*, respectively.

57. See Stephen, *Transborder Lives*, 321–25; Hale and Stephen, introduction; and Stephen, *We Are the Face of Oaxaca*, 17–27.

58. See Hale, *Engaging Contradictions*; and Lassiter, "Collaborative Ethnography."

59. Robles Lomeli and Rappaport, "Imagining Latin American Social Science." See also Rappaport, *Cowards Don't Make History*.

Chapter One. Mexico City's Growing Critical Public

1. CNN en Español, "Elena Poniatowska recuerda."

2. CNN en Español, "Elena Poniatowska recuerda."

3. CNN en Español, "Elena Poniatowska recuerda."

4. Vaughan, *Portrait of a Young Painter*, 13.

5. Vaughan, *Portrait of a Young Painter*, 13.

6. The concept of a critical public is a variation on Jürgen Habermas's bourgeois public sphere. See Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*; and Vaughan, *Portrait of a Young Painter,* 12–28. On the political effervescence sparked by the Cuban Revolution and the formation of the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN, Movement of National Liberation), see Zolov, *Last Good Neighbor*. On UNAM as a center of political and artistic critique, see Monsiváis, *Historia mínima*, 355–68. See also Volpi, *La imaginación y el poder*.

7. Freije, *Citizens of Scandal*, 4.

8. See Rubin, *Decentering the Regime*, on the "perfect dictatorship." On opposition journalism, see Freije, *Citizens of Scandal*; and Vaughan, *Portrait of a Young Painter*. On regional papers and investigative journalism, see Smith, *Mexican Press*; and Gillingham, Lettieri, and Smith, *Journalism, Satire, and Censorship in Mexico*. And on crime news and other popular media, see Piccato, "Murders of Nota Roja"; and Picatto, *History of Infamy*.

9. Zolov, *Last Good Neighbor*, 8.

10. Zolov, *Last Good Neighbor*, 8.

11. Zolov, *Refried Elvis*.

12. Harrison, *Changing Habits*, 25.

13. Boggs, "Sanctuary or Prison?," 39.

14. The niece of Eduardo Correo, the editor of the Social Events Section of the paper, recommended her for the job, according to Bautista, "Todo comenzó en Excélsior." Unless otherwise noted, all background information and quotations