ARTICLE | # NEWSROOMS AS NON PLACES

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ABSTRACT – The objective of this article is to analyze the meaning of journalists' voluntary turnover in the configuration of the space that they have historically occupied: newsrooms. Drawing on Auge's concept of non-place and fieldwork in the leading newspapers of three northern Mexican states, it is discovered that the recurring recreation of turnover events transforms newsrooms from spaces of permanence into spaces of transition; that is, from places to non-places. The scope of this phenomenon transcends the entry and exit of a certain generation since it erodes the identitarian, relational and historical character of these spaces.
Keywords: Mexico. Non-places. Journalism. Turnover. Newsrooms.

REDAÇÕES COMO NÃO LUGARES

RESUMO – O objetivo deste artigo é analisar o significado da rotatividade voluntária dos jornalistas na configuração do espaço que historicamente ocuparam: as redações. Com base no conceito de Augé de não-lugar e do trabalho de campo realizado junto aos principais jornais de três estados do norte do México, conclui-se que a recorrência de eventos de demissão transforma as redações, de espaços de permanência em espaços

de transição; ou seja, de lugares em não-lugares. O alcance deste fenômeno transcende a entrada e saída de uma determinada geração, pois corrói a identidade, o carácter relacional e histórico destes espaços.

Palavras-chave: México. Não-lugares. Jornalismo. Rotatividade profissional. Redações.

LAS SALAS DE REDACCIÓN COMO NO LUGARES

RESUMEN – El objetivo de este artículo es analizar el significado de la rotación de personal voluntaria de los periodistas en la configuración del espacio que históricamente han ocupado: las salas de redacción. A partir del concepto de no lugar de Augé y trabajo de campo en los principales periódicos de tres estados del norte de México, se descubre que la recreación recurrente de los eventos de renuncia transforma a las redacciones de espacios de permanencia en espacios de transición; es decir, de lugares en no lugares. El alcance de este fenómeno trasciende la entrada y la salida de determinada generación, pues erosiona el carácter identitario, relacional e histórico de estos espacios.

Palabras clave: México. No lugares. Periodismo. Rotación de personal. Salas de redacción.

1 Introduction

The financial recession of the newspaper industry has contributed to the increase in attention to phenomena such as job satisfaction, burnout, and turnover from the international community of journalism scholars (Liu et al., 2018; MacDonald et al., 2016; Reinardy, 2017). Beyond the wave of closures and cutbacks that this process has caused, this body of works has shown that the decline in the economic activity of this productive sector can also manifest in the mental and physical health of journalists, as well as in their turnover intentions.

Despite the relevance of these phenomena, publications related to them are still scarce in Latin America (Beza & Gutiérrez, 2018; Mellado & Castillo, 2012; Reyna, 2019a). Instead, studies focused on professional culture predominate (Amado, 2017; Oller & Viera, 2019; Mellado et al., 2021). Intending to contribute to the development of the field of journalism studies, this article proposes not only to analyze the phenomenon of turnover but to question its meaning in the configuration of the space that journalists have traditionally occupied: newsrooms.

Based on Augé's (2008) concept of non-place and fieldwork in the leading newspapers of northern Mexico, we have found that voluntary turnover is turning newsrooms from spaces of permanence into spaces of transition; that is, from places in an anthropological sense into non-places. The scope of the change transcends the entry and exit from the journalism of a certain generation, as it erodes the identitarian, relational and historical character of these spaces and makes new generations enter them with less or no incentive to reestablish them.

In contrast, micro-blogging and instant messaging platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp are emerging as the place for journalists who have not yet enacted their turnover intentions. Such transformation derives both from the reduced influence journalists perceive to have in their workplaces and from their need to establish horizontal relationships —among their peers— to cope with intense and unsatisfying workloads. In other words, as journalists feel that they are not considered in the decision-making process of their newsrooms-organizations, they are taking refuge where their voices are heard.

The article is organized into three sections. The first section develops a theoretical framework for the study of the impact of voluntary turnover on the changing nature of the configuration of the space historically occupied by journalists: newsrooms. The second section describes the research design employed. The third section presents the analysis of the empirical research carried out in the newsrooms of the leading newspapers of Baja California, Nuevo Leon, and Sonora, accentuating the erosion of their identitarian, relational and historical character.

2 Theoretical framework

Newsrooms have been the place of journalists since the mid-19th century. With the industrialization and professionalization of journalism, came the time when it was determined that the writing, editing, and layout of newspapers should be carried out in a space exclusively dedicated to it. For Nerone and Barnhurst (2003), newsrooms make sense once the editorial work (writing, editing, and layout) is separated from the mechanical work (printing) because until then there was no division of labor between the work of an editor and that of a printer; in other words, the editor of a newspaper was the person who printed the newspaper.

Through photographic evidence from the 1930s, Hardt and Brennen (1999) find structural similarities between newsrooms and textile sweatshops, with typewriters replacing sewing machines. Thus, Nerone and Barnhurst (2003) argue that typewriters were key in the institutionalization of the newsroom as the workplace of journalists, as they were the technologies to anchor them to a desk. In this sense, these spaces are, from their origin, heteronomous spaces where decision-makers have tried to control news production vertically.

In Mexico, newsrooms emerged at the end of the 19th century, between the 1870s and 1880s, when newspapers began their transition from an artisan workshop to an industry (Del Palacio, 1995). It is within the context of this transformation that it is determined that reporters —an emerging figure in the journalism of the time — had to work in a room with their newspaper colleagues. This process did not develop uniformly throughout the country but it was expressed in different ways throughout the national territory. For example, in the North, it began during the 20th century, when it became necessary to gather journalists in a workplace (Cejudo, 2013).

To contribute to the study of the impact of voluntary turnover on the configuration of the space traditionally occupied by journalists, this article elaborates on Augé's (2008) concept of non-place. For this author, a non-place is "a space that can be defined neither as a space of identity nor as relational nor as historical" (p. 83). He uses this denomination to conceptualize spaces of passage, of transition, such as airports, highways, shopping malls, and hotels as opposed to places in an anthropological sense.

In her studies on the industrialization of American journalism, Wallace (2005, 2012) argues that the establishment of New York's newspapers in high skyscrapers and on the main avenues of the city was not random but had an intention: to communicate the power of the emerging industry. This intentionality can be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, there is an institutional dimension aimed at warning about the societal influence of journalism; on the other hand, there is an organizational dimension focused on attracting journalistic talent.

Thus, while the exterior of newspaper buildings became an urban landmark, the inside —especially their newsrooms — became a reference for the community of journalism professionals in a given city, state, or country. This means that, just as tourists used to visit newspaper facilities to get to know a place they considered to be

identitarian, relational, and historical, journalists aspired to be there to develop long-term careers. This remained relatively stable until the 2008 recession when working for newspapers lost part of its aura.

Although Augé's (2008) empirical referents are airports, highways, shopping malls, and hotels, his theorization can be extrapolated to the study of the structural transformation of newsrooms. In it, he argues that a non-place "never exists in a pure form [because] places are recomposed, relationships are reconstituted" (p.84). Does this mean that a place can become a non-place if, at some point, it loses its identitarian, relational and historical meaning? Or do places in an anthropological sense retain their status forever? What happens to churches that, emptied of meaning, become cultural centers?

Our interpretation of the concept of non-place is unorthodox. First, it seeks to conceptualize the organizational and spatial consequences of the recurring enactment of turnover events in the newsrooms of leading newspapers in northern Mexico, not to discuss if airports, highways, shopping malls, and hotels are or are not places in an anthropological sense. Second, it is interested in the change rather than in the continuity of the space historically occupied by journalists to examine the erosion of its identitarian, relational and historical character.

From an organizational perspective, Augé's (2008) characterization of non-places is relevant for emphasizing the transitory, prescriptive, prohibitive, and informative character of this type of space. The first characteristic alludes both to the fact that airports, highways, shopping malls, and hotels are connecting spaces to get from one point to another and to the presentism that predominates in them because there is no past to remember and no future to imagine. The second characteristic refers to their heteronomy, to the constant orientation to which they subject their passengers in transit.

These two characteristics correspond with what we observed in the newsrooms of newspapers in Baja California, Nuevo Leon, and Sonora during our fieldwork. First, these workplaces have been changed into transitional spaces by a generation that refuses to remain in them. To quote the metaphor that Beck (1998) uses to describe the fragility of employment in contemporary society: "It is like in the subway. I get on at one station, I get off a few stations later. When I get on, I am already thinking about getting off" (p.119). The difference is that the turnover in question is increasingly voluntary (resignations) rather than involuntary (layoffs).

Secondly, a combination of standardization, individualization, and job control deficit, as well as a culture of fear and strict codes of behavior, have made newsrooms prescriptive, prohibitive, and informative spaces. In them, journalists have little or no capacity to influence decision-making and are frequently reminded that they are unessential for the organization through the discourse "With you and without you, the newspaper will go on". This contributes to making them feel like passengers in transit rather than inhabitants of these spaces, establishing a vicious circle with the previous point.

Augé (2008) seems to be concerned with the emergence of non-places not only as spaces of transition but also as spaces of "solitude and similarity" (p.107). His gaze is nostalgic and focuses on lamenting the gradual erosion of the relationship between space and society caused by the advanced phase of capitalism, which he conceptualizes as "supermodernity". It should be noted that the original edition of *Non-places: An introduction to supermodernity* (*Non-lieux: introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*, in French) dates back to the early 1990s. At that time, the act of moving from one place to another could be extremely solitary and lacking in socialization.

Between the 2000s and 2010s, with the popularization of smartphones, this begins to change. Smartphones have become ubiquitous, and mobile technology allows their users to keep in touch with family and friends even while transiting non-places such as airports, highways, shopping malls, and hotels. While this may not have transformed non-places into places, it has taken some of the loneliness from their transients. In an interview with Wahl-Jorgensen (2008, p.964), Benhabib posits that this can be harmful because people walk around with a "bubble wrap around their brains".

With and against Augé, Varnelis and Friedberg (2008) develop a new concept of place to make sense of the augmented, mobile, virtual and networked spaces that emerge with the development of smartphones and their micro-blogging and instant messaging platforms. Instead of lamenting or celebrating the emergence of these spaces, these authors emphasize how the notion of place is modified by the permanent access to the Internet produced by mobile technology. Thus, they challenge Augé's (2008) approach by noting that the users of these technologies do not only occupy or transit through one space and that they can —virtually— be in several places at the same time:

> Much has changed since Augé's day. The proliferation of mobile phones and the widespread adoption of always-on broadband Internet connections in homes and offices in the developed world means that we are not necessarily alone, even if we are not interacting with those close to us. (Varnelis & Friedberg, 2008, p.20).

This conceptualization is key to our analysis of the changing character of newsrooms. If by following Augé's (2008) definition of non-place we can make sense of the erosion of the identitarian, relational and historical character of these workplaces, Varnelis and Friedberg's (2008) theorization allows us to approach the refuge of journalists in micro-blogging and instant messaging platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. Their presences and absences, as well as their mobility and immobility, can thus be questioned to enhance our understanding of the organizational and spatial consequences of the recurring enactment of turnover events.

3 Research design

How do we study the erosion of the identitarian, relational and historical character of newsrooms? The ethnography of newsrooms could suggest an anthropological approach, based on the participant or non-participant observation of the organizational dynamics of these workplaces. This would imply that the researcher could enter one or several newsrooms to carry out his or her fieldwork over a long period, in order to generate a dense description of what he or she observed. To avoid ethical conflicts, the researcher should have permission from the managers of these newsrooms-organizations.

In Mexico, such fieldwork is not always feasible. If surveying and interviewing journalists is complex due to the assent bias and deliberate falsification in which they tend to engage to protect their image and that of their organizations, organizational barriers are added to the on-site observation of their activities. In this country, news organizations tend to resist social research because they do not distinguish it from investigative journalism and fear that their secrets will be exposed to the public. At least in part, this explains the lack of ethnographies of Mexican newsrooms (Escobedo, 2018; Merchant, 2017).

At the beginning of our fieldwork in the newspapers of northern Mexico, when we had not yet defined the research techniques to be used, we were given access to *Milenio Monterrey*'s newsroom. We conducted some interviews, carried out some observation exercises, and even took photographs. When we tried to replicate this fieldwork in the other leading newspaper of Monterrey, *El Norte*, we encountered organizational barriers: not only were we not granted the requested access, but the journalists with whom we had already arranged a face-to-face meeting were asked to cancel interviews.

For this reason, we needed to resort to alternative methodological strategies such as non-probability chain sampling, better known as snowball sampling, and to the research technique of the interview instead of surveys or observation. Since our initial interest was the voluntary turnover in newspapers in northern Mexico, particularly in Baja California, Nuevo Leon, and Sonora, and not the changing nature of the journalists' workplace, we considered that the expression of these workers on their own terms was a priority and opted not to continue with the observation exercises initiated in *Milenio Monterrey*.

Notwithstanding the organizational obstacles and methodological decisions, by questioning journalists and former journalists in this region about their experiences and perceptions, we began to understand that newsrooms were being transformed from spaces of permanence into spaces of transition by a generation that refused to remain in them. This led us to Augé's (2008) concept of non-place and to pay closer attention to the erosion of the identitarian, relational and historical sense of these workplaces that was caused by the recurring enactment of turnover events.

In total, we conducted 64 interviews, 36 with women and 28 with men. The imbalance in favor of women responds not only to the growing feminization of newsrooms, but also to the fact that women are more likely to resign due to various sociocultural factors, and also to the fact that men were more likely to cancel scheduled interviews. Of these 64 interviews, 20 were conducted in Baja California, and 22 in both Nuevo Leon and Sonora (Table 1). This sample allowed us to reach information saturation as interviewees began to be reiterative beyond their organization or state of origin.

Table 1 – Distribution of journalists and former journalists interviewed

	Baja California	Nuevo Leon	Sonora
Women	10	13	13
Men	10	9	9
Total	20	22	22

Source: own elaboration.

All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. A total of 60 hours and 35 minutes of interviews were recorded, with the longest being 2 hours and 35 seconds and the shortest being 21 minutes and 35 seconds. For this article, open coding was carried out to classify the experiences and perceptions of journalists and former journalists in northern Mexico under Augé's (2008) three categories of analysis of place and non-place: identitarian, relational and historical character. Open coding was also carried out to process that related to the use of smartphones and their micro-blogging and instant messaging platforms.

4 Newsrooms as non-places

According to the journalists and former journalists that we interviewed, the newsrooms of the leading newspapers in northern Mexico are transitional spaces. For those who do not want to stay, they are transitional spaces because they do not find satisfaction in their working conditions and relations nor in their organization of labor, materializing their turnover intentions as soon as they can. For those who do want to stay, they are transitional spaces because the individualization and flexibilization of work do not allow them to develop long-term careers in them, as they can be dismissed at any time.

In order to analyze their experiences and perceptions of the changing character of these workplaces, we classified them according to Augé's (2008) aforementioned categories of analysis. This has allowed us to examine the broad spectrum of transformation according to their inhabitants, now transformed into passengers in transit. In this case, we are interested in accounting for the erosion of the identitarian, relational and historical character of newsrooms, as well as the displacement of journalists who are yet to materialize their

turnover intentions to micro-blogging and instant messaging plat-forms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp.

4.1. The erosion of the identitarian character

For most of the 20th century, journalists were represented as full-time workers who performed tasks of editing, reporting, or photographing in a consolidated news organization. Until 2019, the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE) (2014, p.6732) defined a journalist as a "[p]erson professionally engaged in a newspaper or audiovisual me-dium in literary or graphic tasks of information or opinion creation". With the turn of the century and the flexibilization of work in news organizations, the stability of employment in this productive sector was fractured and, with it, the identitarian character of newsrooms.

If journalists used to define themselves based on the news-room-organization that employed them, in the 21st century, they in-creasingly define themselves beyond it. In other words, journalists no longer introduce themselves only as workers of a certain newsroom-organization because their identities and professional trajectories are less and less linked to this type of workplace. This can be conceptual-ized as the erosion of the identitarian character of newsrooms and as the split of the journalist-organization binomial, since spatially and occupationally journalists have ceased to depend on a newsroom-organization to perform their labor.

Among the journalists and former journalists that we inter-viewed in Baja California, Nuevo Leon, and Sonora, there is a con-trast of perceptions and experiences that accounts for this transfor-mation. On the one hand, journalists born between the 1950s and 1960s express a strong identity with their newsroom-organization with phrases such as "I am a proud *Imparcialera* from that era [late 1980s]" (Journalist 1, personal communication, 2016). On the other hand, journalists born between the 1980s and 1990s state the op-posite: "as soon as I could, I took off my badge [from *El Imparcial*], I didn't like it" (Journalist 2, personal communication, 2016).

Goyanes and Rodríguez (2021) state that the job uncertainty generated by the financial recession of the journalism industry has installed presentism in the professional trajectories of journalists. Understood as an individual propensity to focus on the present, on the here and now, presentism is observable in the new generations,

who enter newsrooms without the intention of staying in them. This presentism, this being there until further notice, prevents journalists from developing an identity with their newsroom-organization even when they are employed by a leading newspaper such as *El Imparcial*, *El Norte*, or *Zeta*.

The concepts of presentism and labor uncertainty used by Goyanes and Rodríguez (2021) are sound with the notions of individualization and unemployment risk used by Reyna (2019b), insofar as they give meaning to the fragility of employment caused by the institutionalization of individual labor relations, between employee and employer. In northern Mexico, these transformations are compounded by the entry into the labor market of a generation of journalists with greater awareness of their labor rights, creating a combination between expectations and realities that blows up the identities with the newsroom-organization:

> There is no longer any identity with media or with newsrooms, whatever you want to call them, because [the news organizations] are very [abusive], they keep you in a precarious situation... there are no contracts...! So, [rather than being part of a newsroom], you feel like a reporter, rather, of your subjects, of your projects, or your work, and that is what you go around defending and bragging about. How are you going to feel part of a media outlet, of a newsroom, if they don't give you social security if they don't give you [anything]? (Journalist 3, personal communication, 2020).

For journalists who resign from a news organization but not from journalism, developing protean careers by moving from one organization to another without identifying with any of them or directly employing themselves as freelancers to offer their labor to one or several organizations, identity with their work replaces identity with their newsroom-organization. In a sense, this is what Beck (1998) has called the individualization of employment and unemployment but expressed as an unexpected and unwanted consequence of the erosion of the identitarian character of newsrooms.

For journalists who do not aspire to develop a career in journalism, the weakness of their identity with the newsroom-organization allows them to conceive their newspaper employment as a temporary employment, as a steppingstone into political or corporate communication. Working one or two years at a major newspaper — these professionals rationalize — allows them to demonstrate to their next employer that they can work under pressure and

stress. With the interview for their next job in mind, it is key for them to quit before they are fired and to emphasize that they left journalism to grow as professionals:

> I wanted to work at *El Norte* because I know it is a renowned newspaper, not only in Monterrey but in the country... And, well... I wanted it for my résumé, to have experience on my résumé. I did not get there with the idea of making a career at *El Norte*, no... To spend many years there... well, no. The truth is that I did not... I went in with the idea of getting the most out of it, to see it as an experience, and to learn. (Journalist 4, personal communication, 2016).

Spatially, both the displacement of identity with the news-room-organization towards an identity with one's own work and the conception of journalism as temporary employment empty news-rooms of identitarian meaning and turn them into transitional spaces, into what Augé (2008) has conceptualized as non-places. If the staff does not identify with their newsroom-organization, and if voluntary and involuntary turnover does not allow a sense of belonging to develop, a social reproduction occurs and it does not reestablish, but rather further erodes the identitarian character of newsrooms.

On this level, the organizational and spatial consequences of the recurring enactment of turnover events in newspapers in northern Mexico is that newsrooms lose their aura as referents of the jour-nalistic community of the region and cease to be attractive to new talent. This is recognized both by young journalists who state that "it is different [to] make a career in journalism than [to] make a career in a newspaper" (Journalist 5, personal communication, 2016) and by veterans who admit that newspapers are no longer "generating the brand or organizational loyalty that they used to" (Journalist 6, personal communication, 2016).

4.2. The erosion of the relational character

Since their origin, newsrooms have been heteronomous spac-es that attempt to control news production in a top-down manner. In northern Mexican newspapers, the modernization process initiated during the 1970s reinforced this prescriptive, prohibitive and infor-mative character by establishing a series of norms aimed at guiding journalists, from beginning to end, in the reporting, writing, and edit-ing processes. These norms were expressed formally in codes of eth-

ics and style manuals, and informally through a culture of fear. The aim was to monitor production and punish deviation.

Despite this authoritarianism, the journalists who were part of this transformation were satisfied and had a strong identity with their newsroom-organization. For them, those workplaces were spaces of permanence, not of transition, not only because they were leading a historic change in Mexican journalism, but also because the relational nature of the newsrooms of the time made them feel part of a family and wanted to make a long-term career in them. This sense of belonging was so powerful that it made them normalize adverse working conditions such as extended working hours:

> Before we were part of a family, now it is a company [...]. There is not the same spirit in the newsrooms, I do not see that. I do not see passion. I think the keyword is that because if you are passionate about something, you do not care if it sucks the life out of you [...]. The new generations now want schedules. Before we did not have a life and we did not care. The newsroom was our life, it was our second family. My colleagues from back then are still my friends because we created very strong bonds. And now, [the new generations] do not... Nowadays, everyone is on their telephones, with their headphones, writing... They write their news, finish and leave [...]. Now, the less you know about me, the better. There is no fraternity, they are not interested. (Journalist 1, personal communication, 2016).

In addition to schedules, journalists born between the 1980s and 1990s express dissatisfaction with the prescriptive, prohibitive, and informative nature of newsrooms, as they feel it reduces their ability to influence decision-making and turns them into mere reproducers of pre-established patterns of behavior. Even when some acknowledge having learned the basics of journalism in a newsroom-organization, they prefer to distance themselves from it in order to develop protean careers or employ themselves as freelancers because they know that in a newspaper, they will never have full control over their work:

> A newsroom gives you feedback all the time. You have people with a lot of experience in any number of subjects who also help you, but there comes a time when you already have your voice, you have your identity, you have your gaze [...]. I miss, sometimes, the noisy newsrooms and the party going on over there, and the support... but not much, to tell you the truth. I prefer to have, to feel that the text that comes out is completely mine, that there is no head that an editor put in that I don't agree with, that there is no last paragraph that was cut because there was no space, that a given name was removed because the director did not want it, but that everything that comes out is completely something that I did. (Journalist 7, personal communication, 2017).

Dissatisfaction with the ability to influence organizational decision-making is compounded by factors such as the gradual deviation from the modernizing ideals of newspapers and the omnipresence of smartphones at work and in the daily lives of journalists, as well as the institutionalization of a turnover culture in the newspapers of Baja California, Nuevo Leon and Sonora. With constant staff turnover and journalists' professional ideals becoming increasingly difficult to put into practice, the relational nature of newsrooms is eroded, and micro-blogging and instant messaging platforms emerge as a refuge.

In particular, the omnipresence of phones at work and in the daily lives of journalists is key to this transformation because it allows them to be and at the same time not to be in the newsroom. In their own way, this is what journalists born between the 1950s and 1960s complain about when they describe the new generations as connected to their devices, but disconnected from their environment, their peers, and their workplaces: "young people live in their world... they use their headphones, they are into their tablets, they are on their telephones... they do not see the world" (Journalist 8, personal communication, 2016).

Rather than chastising journalists born between the 1980s and 1990s for living with a "bubble wrap around their brains" (Benhabib in Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008, p.964), we need to analyze the significance of their shift from the physical space of newsrooms to the virtual space of micro-blogging and instant messaging platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. According to them, newsrooms as a workplace have lost meaning now that mobile technologies have made "it easier to be in the office without being in the office, or to be in the newsroom without being in the newsroom" (Journalist 4, personal communication, 2016):

> I think physical presence in the newsrooms is overrated. At *El Imparcial*, there was no point in being in the newsroom if the communication channels were murky and bureaucratized [...]. I think that the complaints from the old guard about us young people, the "egomaniac millennials connected to technology 24/7" has a somewhat perverse background: the presence and involvement in the newsrooms, which used to be aimed at molding and permeating the ideology or the position of the media in young journalists. (Journalist 10, personal communication, 2019).

For this generation, micro-blogging and instant messaging platforms are working tools and socialization spaces. Beyond their employment, authors such as Boczkowski et al. (2017) argue that

if something distinguishes this cohort is that they do not use but inhabit the networks. So, if their workplaces have "a super hostile environment, [with] everything very controlled" (Journalist 11, personal communication, 2016), for them it is natural to take refuge in the virtual space. This makes even more sense if we consider that their identities are increasing with the product of their work rather than with their newsrooms-organizations.

Following Augé (2008), the prescriptive, prohibitive and informative character of these workplaces erodes their relational sense and turns them into non-places, into transitional spaces. Instead of trying to re-establish them, the new generations of journalists limit themselves to transit to their next job while simultaneously inhabiting the virtual space. Thus, even if they do not interact with those who are physically close to them, they are never alone (Varnelis & Friedberg, 2008). This is key both for coping with intense and unsatisfying workloads and for defining their next step in the world of work.

4.3. The erosion of the historical character

During the last decades, the newsrooms and journalists of northern Mexico's newspapers have become unwitting scenarios and protagonists of a wide range of acts of violence. In Baja California, *Zeta* has suffered the murder of one of its founders, Héctor "El Gato" Félix, and the murder attempt of the other, Jesús Blancornelas, as well as the murder of one of its editors, Francisco Ortiz, and countless threats. In Nuevo Leon, *El Norte* has received multiple attacks on its facilities. In Sonora, *El Imparcial* has suffered the disappearance of one of its reporters, José Alfredo Jiménez, and *Expreso* has received funeral wreaths as threats.

These events have marked the community of journalists in this region (Beza & Gutiérrez, 2018; Merchant, 2018; Reyna, 2014) and have contributed not only to voluntary turnover but also to the reduction of enrollment in communication and journalism schools. Despite this, when visiting the newsrooms of these states, we found an absence of elements reminiscent of these acts of violence. The exception was *Zeta*, which had an altar in honor of Blancornelas in its reception and the typewriter that he used in its conference room. The rest were dominated by the front pages of historical events and by famous phrases of their founders and owners.

If, as Augé (2008) theorizes, non-places are spaces without history, the newsrooms of Baja, California, Nuevo Leon, and Sonora are also non-places because they are workplaces in which there is no past to recall nor a future to imagine. In short, presentism manifests itself both in the stay until further notice of the new generations of journalists and in the suppression of any element that refers to the collective memory of journalists. This favors the deterioration of the identity with the newsroom-organization and makes its workers feel like passengers in transit.

In Sonora, the disappearance and probable murder of Jiménez caused his fellow journalists to gradually leave *El Imparcial*. In several interviews, these journalists and former journalists listed the loss of the hypothetical nature of danger and the inadequate response by the organization as triggers of their turnover intentions. One of them stated that he decided to resign from the newspaper and from journalism when he realized that the priority of his superiors was to recover Jiménez's equipment rather than to find him dead or alive (Journalist 12, personal communication, 2017). This indifference made him and his colleagues confirm that they were replaceable:

> Here there is only journalistic memory of Mr. Healy, of Don José S. Healy, the founding father of *El Imparcial*, of his legacy as a philanthropist, as a businessman in journalism, as an exemplary family man, a Catholic, and of the foundation that bears his name. That is all the memory there is: family, institutional, patriarchal, hierarchical, but the journalistic memory, the tribute or the permanent presence that should be a reminder [not to] repeat past mistakes, no... It is condemning the fate of an organization and its personnel... It does not exist, there is not a single reference to Alfredo. There are no notes of Alfredo posted or pasted on the walls, there is no hallway or room that says, "Alfredo Jiménez newsroom." There is nothing: it is a cold, empty building, [that says:] "nothing happened here" (Journalist 13, personal communication, 2019).

In addition to events of violence directly targeting the newsrooms and their journalists, coverage of traumatic events, such as the fire at the ABC daycare center in Sonora, or the extrajudicial execution of two graduate students at the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM) in Nuevo Leon, is also erased from these spaces. In some cases, it is because decision-makers determine that coverage should be interrupted to protect their economic and political interests. In other cases, because they decide that coverage should continue despite the trauma of the journalists who were on the scene.

In *Expreso*, the coverage of the fire at the ABC daycare center, in which 49 children died, was "a tremendous mental and emotional strain [not only for] living and telling the stories of the parents [of the victims, but also for] the ethical debate about how much we should get involved" (Journalist 14, personal communication, 2017). Added to this physical and mental exhaustion was the trauma of the untimely entrance of the owner of the newspaper, Julio Luebbert, to decree the interruption of this coverage. This emptied this newsroom-organization of its personnel because it provoked a series of resignations and left it without the possibility of becoming a reference in the region's journalism:

> We were all very affected by the ABC issue in the newsroom. So, [the owner's decision to censor the coverage] was a very strong blow within the newsroom. And we thought it was just a tantrum, a spur of the moment, and that he was going to reconsider, but he never reconsidered. In fact, they reconsidered about a year later... or more!... maybe a year and a half later they dared to publish something, and small [...]. Maybe, if Aristegui [her resignation from *MVS Radio* to found *Aristegui Noticias* after a censorship event] had happened at that time, we would have taken it as an example to follow... Or else I don't know... Anyway, we lacked the maturity or vision to do something like that, something strong, right? Maybe because we were confident that the reader was going to react, that people were going to react... and people did not react. (Journalist 15, personal communication, 2016).

In this way, the heteronomous nature of newsrooms merges with the deficit of elements of journalistic memory and the journalists' diminished sense of belonging to reinforce the transformation of these workplaces into spaces of transition, of permanent turnover. By erasing the memory of the events that have marked the newsroom-organization, by pushing aside the journalists' point of view in the organizational decision-making process, it becomes practically impossible to reestablish them as places in an anthropological sense and their new incumbents arrive at them unaware of the history of the space that they occupy.

If newspapers are unable to communicate their historic character to their employees and to their audience, and if they do not strive to endorse it on a daily basis, in their print and digital editions, through socially relevant journalism, they inevitably lose the place they once held. In the 21st century, not even the great skyscrapers on the main avenues of the most important cities are enough to convey the journalistic industry's capacity for societal

influence or to attract new journalistic talent. Without a social base, without an identitarian, relational and historical character, the future of newsrooms hangs by a thread.

5 Conclusions

This article analyzed the transformation of the newsrooms in the leading newspapers in Northern Mexico from spaces of permanence into spaces of transition. Based on interviews with journalists and former journalists from Baja California, Nuevo Leon, and Sonora and emphasizing the erosion of the identitarian, relational and historical character of these workplaces, we found that the combination of the displacement of identity with the newsroom-organization to an identity with one's work, the intensification of their heteronomous nature and the absence of elements of journalistic memory is turning them into non-places and temporary work dwellings.

In contrast to studies on job satisfaction, professional burnout, and staff turnover in journalism (Liu et al., 2018; MacDonald et al., 2016; Reinardy, 2017), this article focused on the organizational and spatial consequences of the recurrent recreation of turnover events. Although the study of the impact of this phenomenon on the professional trajectories of journalists-turned-former journalists is of great relevance to the field of journalism studies, it does not allow us to observe its expression in the configuration of the space traditionally occupied by journalists.

In the same vein, beyond the emphasis on news production bequeathed by both the ethnography of newsrooms and the sociology of news, this article has shown that there are several phenomena commonly ignored by the global community of journalism scholars because they adhere to the dominant lines of research and perspectives of our field. This coincides with the criticism that Wahl-Jorgensen (2009) raised against the centrality of newsrooms in journalism studies, as it shows how these workplaces are losing their given character for the new generations of journalists.

Conceptually, both Augé's (2008) notion of non-place and Varnelis and Friedberg's (2008) theorization of augmented, mobile, virtual, and networked space have been extrapolated to the study of the structural transformation of newsrooms-organizations to make sense of the emptying of the meaning of these physical spaces and

the gradual refuge of journalists in micro-blogging and instant mes-saging platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. This con-ceptualization opens a line of research in the studies on job satisfac-tion, burnout, and turnover in journalism.

Using qualitative research techniques such as interviews and observation, future studies could interrogate the changing character of newsrooms not only in Northern Mexico, but in the rest of the country, and even in other countries. With the rise of digital-born news organizations and their propensity to network, newsrooms are losing their given character. Although some scholars have noted some new ways of organizing news work (Anderson et al., 2014; Deuze & Witschge, 2020; Hepp & Loosen, 2021), they have not yet examined their identitarian, relational and historical implications.

Although this article has focused on the newsrooms of the leading newspapers of Northern Mexico, its analytical perspective can be used to interrogate what is happening in radio and television stations, as well as in digital-born or digital-only news portals. During the covid-19 pandemic that began in 2020, especially the newspa-pers, TV, and radio stations in Mexico have forced their employees to return to their newsrooms and face-to-face newsgathering despite the risk of contagion. In response, a number of journalists —includ-ing some of our interviewees— have opted to resign from the news organizations that employed them and in some cases from journal-ism altogether. In short, this is an ongoing phenomenon.

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