

## “British-LatinX Writers: Self-Representation of the New Latin American Diaspora in the UK”

### Abstract:

This article analyses the first major anthology of English-language British LatinX writers published in the UK, *Un Nuevo Sol. British LatinX Writers* (flipped eye publishing, 2019). The texts included in this anthology of poetry, short fiction and drama explore the configurations, manifestations and representations of the LatinX experience within the contemporary British canon. The multi-layered texts that form this book illustrate how the British LatinX community represents itself through literature in a distinctive way which also questions existing stereotypes and expectations. *Un Nuevo Sol* is a good example of the diversity of the literary techniques used by British LatinX authors. These techniques cover from code-switching to magical realism, although realism and experimental writing seem to dominate most of these texts. This is representative of the way in which the literary production of this super-diverse community in the UK results in a super-diverse literary style, as illustrated in this anthology.

Key Words: British LatinX writers; British *latinidad*; Diaspora; Exophonic Writing.

## 1.- AN INTRODUCTION TO *UN NUEVO SOL* AND BRITISH LATINX WRITERS

*Un Nuevo Sol. British LatinX Writers* (*Un Nuevo Sol*, henceforth), published in 2019, is the first anthology of poetry, short fiction and drama published in English by British-based authors of Latin American origin. It is also a collection that illustrates how British LatinX authors represent themselves within a literary canon that does not quite belong to them. Fresh data shared by Queen Mary University of London and the Trust for London indicate that around 250,000 Latin Americans live in the islands, approximately 145,000 based in London (McIlwaine and Bunge, 2021: online).<sup>1</sup> The Latin American community is actually London's second-fastest-growing migrant population from outside the European Union. However, the Latin American community in the UK has been largely ignored from official discourses on migration (Román-Vázquez and Retis, 2021; Berg, 2020). *Un Nuevo Sol* represents an essential step towards increasing the visibility of a minority ethnicity that refuses to be categorised within certain categories, such as BAME (which is an acronym for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic), especially considering how conflictive this acronym is itself.

Recent scholarship (Carlisle, 2006; McIlwaine, 2007; Però, 2008; McIlwaine, Cock and Linneker, 2011; Granada, 2013; Berg, 2020; Román-Vázquez and Retis, 2021; among others) has focused its attention on the underrepresentation of the Latin American community in a British context, primarily highlighting the experience of Latin American citizens living and working in London. The capital city, in this particular case, represents what Steven Vertovec would call a 'super-diverse' metropolis, referring here to the "different convergence of factors surrounding patterns of immigration since the early 1990s" (2007: 1049). London, alongside other big British cities, appear to be the ideal loci for the development of a new identity paradigm thanks to the migratory movements from Central and South America to the British Isles. The waves that took the Latin American community to the UK cannot be as explicitly identified as, for example, that of the Windrush Generation due to its multiple migratory circuits (Román-Vázquez and Retis, 2021: 7). Accordingly, Latin American migration to the UK is a much more complex and intricate process than it may appear, due to differing European migratory regulations and the socio-economic situation of highly heterogeneous regions such as Central and South America.

This complex reality of Latin American migration to the UK is chronicled through the literary production of this relatively recently-arrived community. Thus, this article departs from the hypothesis that *Un Nuevo Sol*, albeit an excellent source of analysis of British LatinX writers, is illustrative of the intricate diversity of British LatinX writing. More specifically, the main thesis statement of this paper is that this super-diverse community in the UK, using Vertovec's previously quoted term, will necessarily result in a super-diverse literary style, as illustrated in this anthology. Accordingly, it is important to highlight from the outset the fact that the editors of this collection of texts utilise the term 'British LatinX writers' rather than 'British LatinX writing' in what

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<sup>1</sup> Wright (2021: online) suggests that official figures under-estimate the real number of Latin Americans in the UK and offers an alternative estimation of around one million migrants, taking into consideration the significant number of undocumented people living and working invisibly within the UK.

would appear to be a conscious decision. *Un Nuevo Sol* is an anthology of texts by authors belonging to a shared community; however, the editors did not intend this collection to become representative of a new concept, that of 'British *latinidad*', since it focuses on individual writing rather than on a potential concept that has not yet been defined.

Three are the main key concepts which have appeared so far in this article and which need further discussion: 'Latin American', 'LatinX', and 'British LatinX'. 'Latin American' is mainly a geographical reference that points to the centre and south of the American continent, including many Caribbean islands; that is, to those territories once colonised by the Spanish and Portuguese empires. It is also, as Juan Flores suggests, a cultural marker to refer to the people originating from the Latin American diaspora (2004: 184-5). However, editor Nathalie Teitler clarifies at the very beginning of the introduction that accompanies *Un Nuevo Sol* that the contributing authors consciously decided to employ the term 'British Latinx', without a capital X, themselves to avoid "the gender binary implicit in Latino/a" and adds that "[t]he 'X' can be seen as a symbol of resistance, not only to gender binaries but also to race binaries" (2019: 11, capitalized in the original). Both Teitler and the authors included in this anthology are aware of the debates regarding the appropriate terminology that must be used in certain contexts, such as the one referring to authors of Latin American origin or background in the UK. The genesis of this anthology is political, as Teitler highlights herself (2019:12). Thus, this article will use of the term 'LatinX', with a capital 'X', as a response to *Cultural Dynamics* 29:3 special issue, published in 2017 and edited by Claudia Milian, titled "Theorizing LatinX". This special issue is paramount to understand the conflictive dimension of the capital 'X'. Accordingly, 'X' indicates difference, which is exactly the intention of this anthology of literary texts. For Milian, "[i]ndividuals and networks challenging the exclusion produced by rigid gender assignment and ethnoracial expectations have gravitated towards the LatinX configuration" (2017: 121). The term 'LatinX', with a capital 'X' to highlight difference and resistance, engages with a number of important issues. Milian justifies her decision to use the capital 'X' by exploring contemporary debates regarding terminology. For Nicole Guidotti-Hernández, for example, "[t]he x in Latinx carries the affective overload for that which is not recognized fully, fully articulated, or that defies static ethnic national conceptions of being" (in Milian, 2017: 124). Similarly, for Cherrie Moraga "the X links us as Native people in diaspora" (in Milian, 2017: 127), which leads Milian to assert that "the X has been a significant precursor to the exploration of self-naming and of going from being an 'un-identified' group to new political subjects" (2017: 127). However, other contributors to this special issue are not so confident regarding the effectivity of the term 'LatinX'. Richard T Rodríguez, for example, affirms that "[t]o insist that everyone identify as Latinx [...] seems to me one way *not* to be respected but subsumed under a letter that anyone can claim" (2017: 204, emphasis in the original). In this vein, Russell Contreras goes a step forward and considers that the term 'Latinx' "could result in ignoring the oppression around gender identity and sexuality" (2017: 177). However, both Teitler and the contributing authors to *Un Nuevo Sol* are comfortable with the term 'LatinX' with a capital letter to the point that the 'X' appears in capitals on the cover of the book. This is due to the fact that this book "is an attempt to begin to claim an identity; to be named. To be present" (Teitler, 2019: 13). It is for this reason that this article makes use of the terms 'LatinX' and 'British LatinX' in order to respect the

editors and authors' conscious decision to be named as such to highlight how it feels "to live the experience of constantly translating yourself on all levels; to be accustomed to people addressing a version of you that bears little resemblance to your actual identity" (Teitler, 2019: 17).

Taking all this into consideration, the different parts of this article will provide a context to Latin American migration to the UK and provide an analysis of the different poems, short fiction and drama that conform this anthology. The working hypothesis will be backed by an analysis of some of the characteristics found in the texts in order to explore the self-representation of LatinX authors in an Anglophone British context. Specific attention will be paid to the different narrative techniques utilised by authors to create a sense of unique and particular kind of writing.

## 2.- THE LATIN AMERICAN MIGRATION TO THE UK AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

The Latin American community is a numerous and heterogeneous one with a rich cultural legacy that has a chequered history of colonisation and independence. It amalgamates indigenous peoples from the south of the USA, the Caribbean, Mexico, Central and much of South America, as well as creole people who have a Hispanic background as the result of centuries of colonisation by, mostly, the Spanish and Portuguese Empires. The revolutionary processes that took Central and South America, as well as the Caribbean, to become mostly independent were also diverse as one revolution invariably led to another through countries like Mexico, Cuba or Venezuela (once colonised by the Spanish Empire), whilst others, such as Belize or Guyana (that belong to the Commonwealth) achieved their independence through other means.

The history of Latin American migration to the UK is a recent one. Although well-known historical figures such as Venezuelan revolutionaries Francisco de Miranda or Simón Bolívar lived in London for some time, it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that the first waves of Latin Americans arrived in the UK. Most of them fled from the dictatorships that different coup d'états installed in Chile, Argentina or Uruguay. Amaranta Wright, for instance, suggests that around 2,500 Chileans emigrated to the UK in the early 1970s, following the assassination of Salvador Allende which led to the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, due to policy changes implemented in the Immigration Act of 1971 that "made possible for Latin Americans to be granted work permits in the UK" (2018: online). Years later, many of these new migrants returned to their countries of origin once democracy was restored. Despite this, the 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed another significant wave of Latin American migration to the UK. In many of these cases, this migration was due to the inherent violence and economic instability of either their countries of origin or their host countries. Official figures show that two-thirds of Latin Americans living in the UK have arrived since 2000 and that most of those are re-migrants. These figures suggest that most of these new British citizens of Latin American origin emigrated to mainland Europe before, later, moving to the UK. For most of these cases, Spain was their first host country for obvious reasons (they share the same language and cultural background), but the economic crisis of 2008

hit Spain in an unprecedented way, forcing also Latin American immigrants to look for their living elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that British institutions do not consider Latin Americans, or LatinX for the matter, as a specific ethnic group increases their invisibility (Blair, 2019; Berg, 2020). However, regarding the Latin American community as a homogenous ethnic group could be highly misleading since Central and South America comprise of countries with different historical and ethnic backgrounds. As previously mentioned, Latin Americans are indigenous, white, black and mixed-race; they speak different languages, whether Spanish, Portuguese, Nahuatl, Quiché, Aimara or Quechua. They worship different deities, possess different beliefs and different cultural traditions. Thus, gathering all these differences under the same label could be deemed conflictive. Some of the differences between the terms ‘Latin American’ and ‘LatinX’ have already been pointed out at the end of the previous section. However, it is important to bring back this debate in order to specify what brings a group of people together beyond the ties of Latin America. Juan Flores considers in his 2004 article titled “The Latino Imaginary: Meanings of Community and Identity” some interesting issues within a USA context that could also be applied to our UK context. For Flores, the terms ‘Hispanic’ and ‘Latino’ are the two main terms used in a USA context to make reference to “people from Latin America, or of Latin American background” (2004: 183), although he also recognizes that in this USA context, neither ‘Hispanic’ or ‘Latino’ are fully acceptable since people prefer to refer to themselves as ‘Mexicanos’ or ‘Mexican-American’, for example, which are terms that acknowledge the huge internal differences of a usually homogenized community that represents an entire continent. Consequently, “the concept ‘community’ itself, is relative according to the perspective or position of the group in question: there is both a ‘Latino community’ and a ‘community’ in the Latino sense of the world” (2004: 184). According to the author, the Latino community is an imagined community, following Benedict Anderson’s postulations, since it is “a quintessential present-day example of a social group etched and composed out of a larger, impinging geopolitical landscape” (2004: 185). In the last decades, and as Flores also acknowledges, new migrants have settled in different parts of the world (not only in the USA), favouring the emergence of differing LatinX cultural manifestations such as, we could argue, *Un Nuevo Sol* in a British context.

Kimberly D. Hudson draws on Iris M. Yung’s idea of ‘community’ to affirm that “when ‘community’ is perceived as static, apolitical, homogeneous, and lacking ambiguity, it can become a totalizing mechanism that suppresses difference” (2012: 167). The perception of the Latin American community is often flawed in a similar way because, in reality, it is multidimensional and transcultural. As the label ‘Latin American’ would imply, the suppression of within-group differences contradicts the very nature of being Latin American. This labelling is possibly another reason to avoid using certain terms such as BAME in general and, in particular, to avoid applying it to such a complex ethnic, cultural, and historical reality as LatinX. BAME, as an example of how

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<sup>2</sup> According to official data offered by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística, unemployment in Spain went from 8% in 2006 to almost 26% in 2012, reaching a peak of 51% of youth unemployment. For more information: <<https://www.ine.es/>> (accessed 8 June 2021).

conflictive certain terminology might be, is a term that became really popular in the Anglophone world in the last few decades. In the UK, BAME is an umbrella term that used to be utilised by British institutions to refer to non-white British people. Accordingly, the LatinX community would fall into the ‘minority ethnic’ group defined by the acronym itself, together with Gypsy, Irish Traveller, Muslim, Eastern European or even South European. It is due to this apparent problem that the term is now being reconsidered because it gathers several communities under an acronym that is not easily recognisable for those being categorised. There is such a controversy around the use of this acronym that in March 2021, the UK Commission of Race and Ethnic Disparities recommended that the government stop using the term BAME because it “emphasise[s] certain ethnic minority groups (Asian and Black) and exclude[s] others (Mixed, Other and White ethnic minority groups)”.<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned above, the LatinX community in the UK should be identified as distinctive and heterogeneous, with many characteristics illustrated through the arts. It is an internally diverse group that gathers from political exiles to labour immigrants in its diaspora to the point that, for Mette Louise Berg (2020), they form one of the most interesting new migrant groups in the islands. British big cities, such as London, Glasgow or Manchester, constitute the ‘super-diverse’ metropole where British LatinX are “newly arrived migrants when super-diversity intersects with super-austerity against a background of everyday bordering practices, ‘hostile environment’ policies, and increasingly deregulated labour market” (Berg, 2020: 478), in a clear reference to what being a migrant implies in post-Brexit Britain. In this context, LatinX literature written from the European diaspora serves, once again, as an identity marker. The literary production of British LatinX writers must be as super-diverse as the community itself. British LatinX writing, understanding this as a work-in-progress paradigm, might imply the emergence of a contesting form of self-representation. Their identity, following Hall’s 1996 postulations around this term, goes beyond the simple adscription of a group of people to a specific ethnic group. LatinX identity, in this global context, is also conformed from outside its borders, whether they are physical or metaphorical ones. It needs to transcend national borders, as Fernando Ainsa vindicates in his *Palabras nómadas* (2012), in order to capture the universalist spirit of Latin American cultural identity.

### 3.- *UN NUEVO SOL* AS A CASE STUDY

As Patria Román-Velázquez and Jessica Retis highlight, there are narratives now being produced “through which Latin Americans recognise themselves as such in diasporic and transnational spaces” (2021: 4). *Un Nuevo Sol* is a statement of intent from British LatinX authors who contribute a distinctive voice within such a competitive literary context. A literary initiative like this contributes to the diminishing of the underrepresentation of the British LatinX community in favour of the construction of

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<sup>3</sup> The British government also recommends the use of the term ‘ethnic minorities’ to refer to all ethnic groups except the White British group, also using the term ‘White’ or ‘Other than White’ in official documents when space is limited. For more information: <<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/writing-about-ethnicity>> (accessed 8 June 2021).

what Román-Velázquez and Retis call ‘British *latinidad*’ (2021), though this is also a concept that has not been properly defined yet due to both the lack of historical distance and evidence to undertake such an approach.

*Un Nuevo Sol*, edited by Nathalie Teitler and Nii Ayikwei Parkes,<sup>4</sup> is a collection of texts by ten authors who were either born in Latin America and emigrated to the UK or whom are of British or Latin American heritage, that is by both first and second generation migrants in the UK.<sup>5</sup> It comprises of 27 poems, two short stories, an extract from a play and a sample from a novel, plus an interview between editor Nathalie Teitler and playwright Gaël Le Cornec which doubles as an epilogue. As Arthur Dixon highlights, this book “demonstrates the diverse ways in which British Latinx writers approach their origins, evince them on paper, and sometimes come to terms with identity crises unseen anywhere but in their own work” (2020: 106). The topics tackled switch from issues of dislocation and cultural dissonance to sexual identity, whilst the narrative and poetic techniques include code-switching, moments of magical realism, realism and experimental writing.

### 3.1.- LATIN AMERICAN AUTHORS WRITING IN ENGLISH FROM THE UK

Half of the contributors to *Un Nuevo Sol* are native speakers of English, whereas the others have either Spanish or Portuguese as their first language. Therefore, this anthology could also be considered as an interesting example to study exophonic writing. It is quite rare to find exophonic authors of Latin American and/or Spanish origin in the UK, however, it is a phenomenon that is becoming more commonplace within the USA. Four first-generation<sup>6</sup> migrants contribute to this anthology using English as their non-native literary language: Mexican poet and translator Juana Adcock; Argentinian poet Leo Boix; Brazilian playwright Gaël Le Cornec and Brazilian poet Patrizia Longhitano. Migration also implies for these authors a radical linguistic shift. Language is not such an issue for those Latin American migrant authors based in

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<sup>4</sup> Nathalie Teitler is an Argentinian-born cultural activist and academic who founded Dancing Words, a poetry-dance company, in 2015. Nii Ayikwei Parkes is a British poet and fiction author who lived in Ghana, his parents’ home-country, as a child and whose works have been translated into several different languages.

<sup>5</sup> The contributors to this anthology are Argentinian poet Leo Boix, Mexican poet and translator Juana Adcock, Chicano author Armando Celayo, Brazilian-born authors Gaël Le Cornec, Patrizia Longhitano and Luiza Sauma, and British-born authors Karina Lickorish Quinn, Marina Sanchez, Maia Elsner and Katherine Lockton. They were all based in the UK when this anthology was published in 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Generally speaking, those who emigrate to a foreign country as an adult or are near-adult age are first-generation, whereas those who are born in the host country of those first-generation migrants and identify themselves as such are usually referred to as second-generation migrants. There is a third term that is becoming more popular in Diaspora Studies, 1.5-generation migrant, which makes reference to those children who emigrate with their parents at a very early age and acquire the language of the host country as their first language. Brazilian-born London-raised novelist and short fiction writer Luiza Sauma could perfectly be considered as a 1.5-generation migrant author contributing to *Un nuevo sol*.

Spain, for instance, or other Spanish-speaking countries; but this changes once they move to the UK. The non-native English speaking contributors transcend monolingual borders with their writing. They inhabit what Chantal Wright (2008) describes as a ‘Grey Zone’ when dealing with the concept of exophony.<sup>7</sup> Exophony refers to the phenomenon of writing in a foreign language, a practice that is becoming increasingly common in Europe due to the different migratory waves that took non-native authors to countries where those languages are not the official tongue. Literary texts by Moroccan authors writing in Spanish, Turkish authors in German or Scandinavian authors in English are now being published to illustrate how contemporary migration enriches the literary scene of their host countries. The fact that migrant writers decide to write in the language of their host country and not in the language of their home country is highly significant, and this is precisely what *Un Nuevo Sol* illustrates: the grey zone they inhabit “between a national literature and the literature of a host country surpass and subvert the conceptual apparatus of literary critics, university departments, teachers and readers” (Wright, 2008: 27).

As mentioned above, Latin American exophonic writers are still a *rara avis* in European literatures. This rarity is why an analysis of the works by first-generation migrants like the ones participating in this anthology is as pertinent as ever. The in-between creative space that they occupy is significant to the in-between social and political status they hold. As pointed out by Flora Roussel, “exophony appears as an act of redefinition of space, time, persona, people, things, etc. and calls into question subjectivity as much as materiality” (2020: 165). It implies self-displacement from one’s native language to assume another that does not belong to them and, therefore, it is an act of appropriation. The resistance to the monolingual paradigm that we find in *Un Nuevo Sol*, which is practised not only by exophonic authors but also by those British authors of Latin American background, represents a process of defamiliarisation from the concept of ‘native language’. It is a process of deconstructing and reconstructing one’s linguistic identity in new terms.

There are two main strategies followed by these authors to illustrate this: multilingualism and plurilingualism. The most obvious multilingual example found in the book is Katherine Lockton’s poem “Mi lengua”, where the poetic voice self-translates the poem from Spanish to English:

Mientras comia mi cereal esta mañana  
While eating my cereal this morning  
se cayó mi lengua en mi plato. Se quedo ahi  
my tongue fell off into my plate. It stayed there  
nadando en la leche mientras mi mama me hablaba.  
swimming in milk while my mum spoke:  
No he podido decirle que no puedo hablar.  
I couldn’t tell her that I could no longer speak. (43)

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<sup>7</sup> Although she also uses other concepts such as ‘axial writing’ or ‘postnational writing’, Wright advocates for the use of the term ‘exophonic writing’ to define contemporary literary practices of writing in a foreign language.

The poem itself, as its title indicates, reflects on the use of two languages for different generations to communicate. Multilingualism refers to the knowledge of two or more languages or the coexistence of various languages in a society. Still, it does not imply a direct interaction between the different linguistic systems (Mohanty, 2009). This interaction is why the poetic voice of this poem self-translates itself. Although Spanish appears to be the privileged language in this poem, there is an obvious reference to Gloria Anzaldúa's 'Wild Tongues' which, for the Chicana author "can't be tamed, they can only be cut out" (2016: 76). As in this case, the mother tongue of the poetic voice falls off, preventing any further communication. The mother tongue is Spanish, that is why it appears first in the title and in the verses; however, this mother tongue has been replaced by English, as it appears in the poem by the immediate translations of the different verses. Accordingly, Spanish and English are foreign to each other in the poem; that is, they are two independent linguistic systems that do not flow naturally. Despite the obvious typos that are found in the text (for example, the lack of some of the written accent in verbs such as 'comía', 'quedó' or 'cayó'), the poem *does* include the typical Spanish typography 'ñ'. Self-translating is understood as a necessary act for communication between generations, above all when these generations speak a different language as their first language. Hence, the poem assumes that English and Spanish are separate mental units that cannot interact. One replaces the other once the mother tongue falls off.

Plurilingualism, however, is found in other poems thanks to the effect achieved by code-switching. Plurilingualism is a term that conceives language as a fluid process, building a communicative competence to which all knowledge and language proficiency contributes. It implies that different languages are mentally integrated, although not equally assimilated. The foreign language, English in this case, integrates into the cognitive system alongside the mother tongue due to the speaker's separate linguistic experiences (Bailey, 2007). This integration does not mean that languages co-exist in harmony; on the contrary, English is the privileged language and Spanish occupies a secondary place within the context of these poems. Three poets offer plurilingual experiences: Argentinian-born Leo Boix, Mexican-born Juana Adcock and British-born Maia Elsner.<sup>8</sup> In these cases, Spanish appears together with English as a natural practice. Leo Boix, for instance, uses the Spanish language in italics:

Your baptism was *una estafa*. You had large scales  
[...]  
That wasn't even a full submersion. *El cuerpo seco*. (25)

Whereas Juana Adcock's "Truth Is Structured Like A Fiction" does not highlight Spanish in any way, naturally using both languages within the poem:

Truth is structured like a fiction:

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<sup>8</sup> Maria Elsner's "On Not-Translating Neruda" is also a good example of an experimental poem that reflects on the challenges of translating Spanish into English. The poetic voice questions straight-forward linguistic equivalents, highlighting the impossibility of offering an accurate translation of any given text without losing some of the uniqueness of each language.

As if to teach me una lección, como si tomara  
disciplinary action, the microphone fell  
on my keyboard, breaking off  
the accent key, chingándose  
la tecla del acento, como para decirme:

Thou shalt renounce your own language (113)

The effect achieved by code-switching is different depending on whether Spanish is highlighted in italics or not. In both cases, Spanish is used to express the ambivalence of the language in a plurilingual linguistic context. It represents the in-between status of Spanish as part of the interlanguage<sup>9</sup> of exophonic writers. On the one hand, Spanish occupies a subordinated position when highlighted, as though it does not belong to the text and therefore needs to be included in italics to indicate to the reader that it is a different language. On the other hand, Adcock reflects on the need for migrant poets to write in the language of their host country. As the language for oral communication, English inevitably conditions creative writing; however, linguistic codes might vary. English has colonised the poetic voice of this particular poem, forcing it to renounce its own language. Adcock, who is a translator herself, is fully aware of language dynamics in an Anglophone environment such as the North American (she was born and raised in Mexico) or the British (she has been living in Scotland most of her adult age). For Adcock, as for Anzaldúa (2016: 77), language is alive and that is why any interlanguage that evolves from language contact should never be considered as incorrect.

Writing in a foreign language also implies a certain level of cultural detachment, affecting identity in a particular way. Identity is a concept that fluctuates depending on different facts and which is also in continuous change and transformation. Hall (1996) differentiates between two identity practices: the practice shared by a group of people according to the similarities within a group and its members, and the practice that determines a group of people from another group depending on the dissimilarities found amongst its members. Language, in many cases, is symbolic of either these similarities or differences. Identity not only relies on what a specific group of people share but also on what makes them unique. It is “the result of the dialogue of power and resistance conducted between different points in friction” (Alonso Alonso, 2015: 133). The identity of Latin American migrants in the UK differs from that of Latin American migrants in the USA or Spain and Portugal. The historical connection between Latin America and the UK is not as strong as that shared by the same Latin American countries and those whose empires colonised them historically. Since Latin America is not part of the Commonwealth, or maybe thanks to that, the cultural referents of these communities are rarely shared or not fully appreciated. However, and as Gaël Le Cornec points out during the interview that finishes this anthology, the Latin American stereotypes created in the USA have, largely, filtered through to the UK. This filtering

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<sup>9</sup> The term ‘interlanguage’ was postulated by Larry Selinker in 1972 to make reference to a separate linguistic system based on the observable output that results from a learner’s attempted production of a target language norm. It is a linguistic system that allows efficient communication between speakers of different languages when one of them is neither a native or fluent speaker.

complicates the creative practice because there might be many referents lost or misinterpreted in translation.

### 3.2.- QUESTIONING SOME OF THE KEY STONES OF LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Writing from the diaspora is a transnational practice and, thus, Latinx diasporic writers question both physical and metaphorical borders since their literary practice implies the “reformulation of the sense of Latin America and its nations as cultural, geographical and literary units in the present-day context of accelerated globalization” (François, 2019: 221). British LatinX writers might be conditioned by numerous expectations; one of them being the narrative technique used in their writing and the way in which said writing relates to, what is generally known as, ‘Latin American literature’. Certainly, it was the Latin American Boom of the 1950s onwards which shone a spotlight on Latin American literary production. Authors such as Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez, Juan Rulfo or Isabel Allende became world famous thanks to their representation of Latin America through their particular brands of ‘magical’ or ‘marvellous’ realism (Zamora and Faris, 1995; Menton, 1998; Padura Fuentes, 2002; Heady, 2008). However, the late 1990s witnessed a radical shift towards a more realistic and harsh representation of the violence that traverses the continent from north to south (Fuguet and Gómez, 1996; O’Byrne, 2011; Aínsa, 2012, Alonso Alonso, 2019).

Magical realism is a cultural referent that can easily be misunderstood in a foreign language. According to Homi K. Bhabha, it constitutes the “literary language of the emergent post-colonial world” (1990: 7). Although magical realism, as a literary practice in postcolonial nations, has turned global, it was a frequently-used literary practice during the Latin America Boom. Generally speaking, magical realism is a narrative technique that aims to represent the intangible aspects of life in literature, often presented as if it was an intrinsic part of the Latin American reality. Magical and supernatural elements, thus, characterise these texts where impossible things happen. Magical realism appeared, in Latin America, as a “response to the ‘othering’ that accompanies Western colonization” (Warnes, 2009: 152) in the 1950s. Ozymoronically, it is a manifestation of Latin American transculturation. It includes elements of indigenous folklore, religious beliefs and other allegories found elsewhere on the continent. *Un Nuevo Sol*, as it would be expected, also provides examples of magical realism in some of the poems and, above all, in the extract from Gaël Le Cornec’s play about a child refugee.

The anthology begins with a poem where magical realism can be easily identified. Leo Boix’s “Bautismo” tells of, what appears to be, a Catholic exorcism that the poetic voice recounts as if it were an unavoidable part of early life:

[...]  
Priest wore strict black, your family congregated  
for the grand occasion. As ceremony started  
your head grew bigger, wider, your black longue flew  
in all directions. You had a dress made of fibreglass.  
[...]

Aunt Susi told the story. They put you down  
on a chequered floor, called 75 ageing Sisters  
of the Discalced Carmelites, who in turn  
gave you rose water, *aceite de romero*, rubbed you  
in pig's fat all over, thrice prayed for your soul,  
until you calmed down, & all went back to normal. (25)

Religious referents, like the ones appearing in the poem, are recurrent in this anthology and unavoidably connected to magical realism. Boix rewrites the idea of removing original sin in new terms by using Catholic imagery as part of the central trope that structures the poem. The poetic voice describes the mutation of someone who is being baptised. This someone, who is not identified as human since they have “large scales instead of pink skin”, transforms into a monster during the ceremony, which is described as “a estafa” [a swindle], before, finally, going “back to normal” (25) on the rite's completion. This transformation is regarded, by the poetic voice, as an everyday practice, as if it were expected. It is considered part of Latin American imagery through which anything, even reverting a monster back to normal, is possible by a baptism ceremony. These are not the only religious referents used by Boix. Indicators of the weight of religion in Latin American literary tradition can also be found in “Judgement” and “Saint Jerome” as these poems revisit the concepts of sin, hell and martyrdom.

As previously mentioned, Gaël Le Cornec contributes with an extract from a play called “The Other”, which she describes as a “magical realist play about a refugee child running away from war” (67). The play is inspired by classic fairy tales and follows the point when the child protagonist tells a bedtime story to the doll she carries everywhere with her. Both the girl and the doll are trapped in a giant's hut and, through a hole, she can see how the giant's hut gets surrounded by pumpkin-headed soldiers who, together with the giant, “start walking towards the girl / giant men giant hands / approaching / the girl” (71). The extract included in this anthology highlights the dangers of migrant children who flee from violence alone only to find themselves trapped by the same violence from which they are trying to escape. The girl, distressed and traumatised, uses the fairy tales she recites to her doll as a means of calming herself, although she is quite possibly aware of the fate that awaits her. This play, thus, could fall under the label ‘trauma narrative,’ which is used to elaborate on how certain experiences can impact individuals. Cathy Caruth (1996) believes that fiction has historically been used to turn trauma into a reading narrative whilst myths and legends have played an indispensable role in softening certain traumatic events. Storytelling, as a practice, and as illustrated in this play, is an exercise in recounting a traumatic memory in the present and, thus, trauma becomes a communicative act.

The author uses magical realism as an umbrella term to narrate a drama driven by fantasy to hide trauma. It is arguable as to whether this play is an example of magical realism, at least in the traditional sense, as the cultural element that the term ‘magical realism’ implies is not clearly identifiable. However, after the Latin American Boom became a global phenomenon, magical realism has been used to refer to texts that include fantastic elements, supernatural events or folkloric practices; i.e., texts, much like this one, that containing elements that could be deemed ‘exotic’ since they do not match Western rationalism. Lyn Di Iorio and Richard Perez (2012) postulate a term that

could be applied to such texts that do not meet such requirements: ‘moments of magical realism’. They posit that not all works containing marvellous or supernatural elements should be classified as magical realist works and, instead, call for differentiation between those works deemed magical realist for cultural reasons and those that merely feature elements that could be construed as such. This expression, ‘moments of magical realism’, has become useful in contemporary literature in categorising those texts that, like Le Cornec’s, are inspired by the Latin American Boom but do not quite fit into the literary movement itself.

Even though code-switching and magical realism can be identified in this anthology, the truth is that most of the contributing authors resist their utilisation, as will be explained below. This may be due to fatigue of what Graham Huggan calls ‘the postcolonial exotic’; that is “the hypercommodified status of the ‘multicultural’ or ‘Third World’ writer, or of literary categories such as magical realism or [...] the Latin American ‘Boom novel [...] to recognise the prevalence of the word ‘exotic’ as a marker of metropolitan commercial appeal” (2001: 19). As a matter of fact, magical realism as a distinctive Latin American marker does not dominate the narrative techniques used by British LatinX authors in *Un Nuevo Sol*, which might indicate a rejection of the symbolic systems that represent cultural differences at the detriment of creative freedom. This resistance places British LatinX authors in yet another ‘grey zone’, recovering the term used above while discussing exophonic writing. Lockton, Boix, Adcock and Le Cornec indeed engage with certain characteristics of the Latin American Boom but they adapt these to their own literary interests in order to speak to a broader LatinX experience.

### 3.3.- REALISM AND EXPERIMENTAL WRITING AS THE CATALIST FOR BRITISH LATINX WRITERS

The remaining authors use realism and experimental writing in their poems and short stories, distancing themselves from defined trends within Latin American Boom literature. Realism allows authors to reflect on identity and sexual issues in a more straight-forward way, while experimental writing provides the necessary tools to play with conceptual ideas. Experimental writing will be here understood as those narrative techniques that add some unexpected effects to both poetry and short-fiction, as it will be explored below. One could argue that code-switching and magical realism are experimental writing techniques. Indeed, they were during most of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until they became mainstream in Latin American literature, unavoidably assisted by the publishing industry.

Juana Adcock, for instance, contributes to *Un Nuevo Sol* with an experimental flash-fiction, entitled “The Christmas Tree”. It opens with the narrator disturbingly revealing that “[a] couple of months ago I had my skin surgically removed and replaced with a network of incandescent light bulbs in four different colours, like a Christmas tree” (103). Adcock uses the resources of speculative fiction to place the reader within an unusual situation that is entirely accepted as factual by the narrator. Speculative fiction is an umbrella term that includes characteristic elements of sub-genres such as science fiction, fantasy, horror or even the aforementioned magical realism. For Ingrid Thaler, it is a broad term that implies “an imagining of the future via the present with an

awareness of the past that permeates the present” (2010: 2) and, therefore, allows authors to imagine alternative possibilities for literary creation. Transforming into a Christmas tree, thanks to science, is not questioned or regarded as impossible in the text. What is more, after describing the physical reactions to this mutilation, the story ends with an explanation of the motivation behind the procedure:

What I want to do is send colourful, intermittent lights as far as they will reach. Did you know that the favelas in Brazil are already painted in bright colours? I’d seen them in pictures before but they really are bright beyond description. So taking my Christmas lights there might seem like carrying river stones to the river. But still, that’s what I do. (103)

Speculative fiction here allows the author to transcend the limitations of form and space in order to question our rational view of the world. In this case, Adcock adds unusual elements into a naturalized narration in order to explore creative possibilities.

Contrary to what might be expected, migration is not a major issue in the pieces that make up this anthology. However, there are cases, such as Patrizia Longhitano’s “Priggishness” or Luiza Sauma’s “Agnes Agnes Agnes”, where the protagonists are somehow othered because of their ethnic or linguistic origin. It can be seen through expressions like “Yes. I told you, / she is not even second-generation English” (78) or due to their physical appearance: “Your hair [... ] It’s beautiful [...] Like dark honey” (85), but the truth is that one of the main characteristics of this anthology is the lack of explicit references to being a Latin American immigrant in the UK. These two examples are the only ones that illustrate the dichotomy of the practice of othering migrant communities within certain contexts. Whereas the poetic voice of Longuitano’s poem identifies the negative prejudices that her accent may imply to the locals, the protagonist of Sauma’s short story is an empowered young woman whose Brazilian background poses no problem at all. Othering practices, as described by Edward Said in his foundational text *Orientalism* (1995) were part of the *modus operandi* of different empires during colonisation and still remain today. In the two cases mentioned above, language and physical appearance catalyse this othering process but, as previously stated, these are the only two obvious references that imply a Latin American immigrant in the UK.

However, migration to the USA is present in “Fearless Freak”, an extract from Armando Celayo’s work-in-progress novel *Downward Is Heavenward*, as well as in Marina Sanchez’s poem “Wall”. The poem better represents the challenges of precarious migration into a hostile territory such as across the Mexico-USA border. The geographical and human violence of the borderland is exposed in this poem from the very beginning: “I will not describe those who die each year” (145) which illustrates what Mexican fiction author Emiliano Monge describes as the “último holocausto de la especie” in his novel *Las tierras arrasadas* (2015: 341). Travelling north for those illegal migrants is, indeed, dangerous. The violence found on this journey is manifested in the poem through the remains left behind by these migrants: “discarded shoes, clothes, kids’ backpacks, / empty plastic bottles and ladders, / the gun shells casings from the Migra, / the snorkels for swimming in the Rio Grande” or on the female body of “the women killed in Tijuana.” (145). The fact that Sanchez focuses her poem on the

Mexican-USA border is significant as she is based in the UK. The writing of this poem is clearly inspired by the decisions taken when Donald Trump was president of the USA and his propagandist rhetoric around building a wall at the border. The borderland is an important trope in Mexican contemporary literature. However, the fact that a British-based author decided to write about the Mexican-USA border and not about the Latin American migration in the UK is highly significant: it breaks with the readers' expectations of those who believe that a migrant author must write about their own experiences. Sanchez writes about migration, but not about her own migration. Instead, she focuses on what Celayo refers to as the "outcast among the outcasts" (133).

Dislocation is also exemplified in this anthology through different practices. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2004) describe the term 'dislocation' as the process of deconstruction, and subsequent reconstruction, of communal and/or individual identity within diasporic communities in a host country. It is, thus, a practice that implies some sort of identity reformulation in a foreign context. For some of the authors that contribute to *Un Nuevo Sol*, this reformulation implies writing back to their countries of origin historically. The geographical distance experienced by migrant authors allows this exercise of introspection. Leo Boix is, maybe, the author that best represents how a home country can be a recurrent source of inspiration. He contributes ten poems to this anthology, and Argentina is present in the majority albeit through different poetic strategies. "Triptych" and "Swallow" are the most experimental pieces where the reader must play an active role in decoding his references and metaphors. The notion of the return is recurrent through the allegory of the prodigal son who returns home. "The Swamp", through which the author references Argentina via culinary references like "*tortas fritas*" and "*mate*" (28) that guides the poetic voice back to Quilmes, a Buenos Aires provincial city that was inhabited by British immigrants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Aside from some geographical references found in "Ghazal: un paso al costado (a sidestep)", "Un viaje" or "Heliotrope", Boix also returns to his country of origin in "Alchemist's Furnace" to address Argentina's cruel recent history: Jorge Rafael Videla's dictatorship (1976-1983) was characterised by his army's crimes against humanity. The poem itself is headed by the testimony of Dr Norberto Liwisky [sic], who was imprisoned and tortured between 1978 and 1982 by La Brigada de San Justo.<sup>10</sup> Here, the poetic voice translates, into English, as it depicts the torture suffered at the hands of the dictatorship. This historical period, even though it was not the only dictatorship thrust upon Argentina during the twentieth century, is described in the poem as the darkest of times for a country ruled by "[p]opes, priests, *dictadores* [who] follow a mad procession" (29).

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<sup>10</sup> "*Sometimes they put me on the torture table and stretched me out, tying my hands and feet to a machine which I can't describe since I never saw it, but which gave me the feeling that they were going to tear part of my body off*" Testimony of Dr Norberto Liwisky (file No. 7397). *Nunca Más (Never Again)-Report of Conadeop – 1984.*" (29). Norberto Liwski is a doctor, an author and a researcher who was imprisoned and tortured during the Argentinian dictatorship. The description he offered during the trial to the military members of the Brigada de San Justo Juan María Torino and Rubén Boan are illustrative of the cruelty with which these fascist squadrons operated.

Karina Lickorish Quinn's short story "The Walls of Gringo Buckman" is also illustrative of how British LatinX authors write back from abroad to their country of origin or their parent's country of origin. In this case, the narrative voice tells the story of the titular Gringo Buckman, an American living in Lima as a complete outsider. It is interesting to realize that, within this British LatinX context, Lickorish Quinn utilizes a white US American in Peru who disassociates from the community around him as the main protagonist of the story. There might be many reasons for this decision, and one of them might be the need to reflect on different processes of cultural adaptation in the diaspora. In this particular case, Gringo Buckman does not allow himself to get closer to the community he decided to live in. It is questionable whether this is a privilege unique to US American expatriates or rather it is not; it is just the story of a grumpy US citizen living in Peru recounted by a narrator highly critical with Buckman's response.

The story begins with this introduction to Buckman's alienation:

Like the fresh pink skin under a scab, but all over – that was Gringo Buckman. Permanently peeling. Even the half-hearted winter sun, filtered through the Limenian neblina, was enough to scrape away the top layers of his flesh and leave him shiny and raw, like a hermit crab caught out of its shell. El cangrejo Buckman. Yes, Crabby Buckman we should have called him. (155)

This narrative voice, a Liman native who recalls her childhood memories from when she lived near Buckman's house, describes how her American neighbour never managed to adapt himself to the place in which he decided to live. The reasons that took him to Lima were unknown to the locals although many of them believed he worked for some American multinational that arrived in the country to export natural resources. Gringo Buckman was, thus, an immigrant in Peru, although the term 'immigrant' itself is never used in the text. The story revolves around his obsession with isolating himself from the capital city and its inhabitants, who "all looked the same to him", as the narrator acknowledges: "To him, we were replicates: copies of some original cast, identical – paper dolls cut from the same sheet and then divided and set loose on the city" (157). The short story illustrates an interesting example of reverse othering. In this case, the foreigner is othering the locals to the point that he rejects any contact whatsoever. He justifies his psychosis, arguing that Lima is an extremely dangerous place to the point that he builds a fortress around his house with "black bars like cages over the windows [...] padlocks and deadbolts" (158) and "an intercom system with one-way camera" (160) that culminates in his total isolation: "He was cut off. Disconnected. Utterly marooned within the ramparts of his concrete isle" (160). Years after these childhood memories, the narrative voice discovers that Gringo Buckman had died inside his house, and his corpse was found in a highly decomposed state. He had never left his house, renouncing to establish any kind of contact with his host country. Dislocation for Gringo Buckman culminated in a failed process of adaptation. He died surrounded by dirt and rats without ever attempting to assimilate.

Issues related to childhood, identity and sexuality can also be found in different poems. Brazilian-born poet Patrizia Longhitano explores these themes in her contributions titled "I, the poet", "Time, they say it's relative," and "Aristotle and the Octopuses". She does so subtly whilst reflecting on, for example, her role within society as a poet. "One day

I'll wake up and I'll be a real poet" (75) is the opening line of her first contribution to the anthology; which illustrates how inspiration can be found in both the home *and* host countries. The poetic voice celebrates multiculturalism as a source for inspiration, which can also be observed in "Time, they say it's relative", where the Amazonia and Italy are also mentioned. Longhitano, although born in Brazil, lived in Macau and Italy briefly before relocating to England. These locations enrich her writing with references that take the reader into geographical and spectral journeys: from 20<sup>th</sup> century Sicily to 21<sup>st</sup> century England whilst reflecting on the age of information to which we, and the poet herself, belongs.

A similar effect is achieved by Maia Elsner, who experiments with form and language in her multiple poems. Language and the role of translation are explored in her poem "On Non-Translating Neruda" whilst history and identity are the two major reoccurring topics found in her other contributions. "Extracts from *Dislocated*" is a multifaceted piece that highlights the complexity of identity-building. The reader plays a fundamental role in assigning meaning to its verses, which include references to the bible and the history of colonisation as well as flashes of Chicana imagery. Chicana writing is the name given to the literary production of Mexican Americans. It also makes reference to what used to be known as Aztlán, that is, the territory that was a part of Mexico until 1846 when, after the Mexican-American War, it became part of the United States. Thus, Chicana writing has a number of cultural and historical distinctive characteristics. Elsner, for instance, uses references to Malinche and to Llorona, two of the most important female Chicana figures. Malinche is a historical figure who is believed to have accompanied the Spanish conqueror, Hernán Cortés, before becoming his lover and the mother of his children. She is possibly the most iconic female figure in Mexican folklore. Whereas La Llorona, also an omnipresent female figure in Mexican folklore, represents the weeping mother and who, according to legend, killed her own children before spending the remainder of her days punishing herself for doing so. For Deborah Madsen, La Llorona "offers a powerful image that speaks to all the dispossessed people of the Americas as well as the Chicanas who find that the lives they lead cost them their children" (2000: 34). Born in London to Mexican parents, Elsner could be the contributor who best explores her cultural heritage through her writing even though she does not write about her parents' country of origin directly. She expertly interrogates the historical path that took her to become a British-born poet of Mexican background, and she does so without any kind of inferiority complex.

#### 4.- CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A BRITISH-LATINX WRITING PARADIGM

Extensive research on LatinX writing from the USA, including Chicana literature, has discussed issues related to race, ethnicity and identity (Anzaldúa, 1987; Grosfoguel, 1997; García, 2008; Mignolo, 2013; Jaksic, 2015; among others). However, little has been done to explore the representation of British LatinX experience through poetry, fiction and drama. There are British LatinX writers, some contributing to this anthology, who have been publishing their works in isolation. *Un Nuevo Sol* implies a change at this respect. This collection both meets and breaks expectations in this compendium of British LatinX literary production. The ten authors contributing to this anthology refuse to be pinned down by straightforward categorisations of their writing within either the Latin American or the British canon. By utilising the various narrative techniques

analysed in this article, their poems, short fiction and drama occupy an in-between creative space, inhabiting the grey zone of exophonic writing. This book illustrates Latin American heritage's linguistic, historical, and cultural variety and, as a result, enriches the British literary canon. For this reason, BAME is undoubtedly a term that fails to recognise the positive contribution of British LatinX writers. These authors claim to have their distinctive voice through their resistance to go unnoticed. As Le Cornec herself acknowledges during her interview with editor Nathalie Teitler, the LatinX literary tradition in the UK is still emerging. As *Un nuevo sol* illustrates, language assists authors to redefine themselves in a different cultural, social and political space. The resistance to the monolingual paradigm that we find in these texts, through multilingualism or code-switching, is an excellent example of the uniqueness of British LatinX writing, together with other narrative techniques such as self-translation. Spanish is relegated to a secondary language in those poems that use English as the main means of communication, which leads us to the question: Who is the audience for this book? Is *Un nuevo sol* a book addressed to a British or a LatinX audience? The answer is both. It is a book that targets the audience of the contributing authors' host country *and* the English-speaking Latin American audience although there are several cultural, historical or folkloric references that may go unnoticed by the British reader.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to see how magical realism, a narrative technique that was omnipresent during decades in Latin American literature, is marginal in this anthology. It does feature but it is not predominant. Instead, we find experimental innovations in several poems that have been spiced with Latin American cultural and geographical references. Still, none of the authors in this collection follow pre-established stereotypes of what British LatinX writing could be. For example, migration to the UK is not directly explored in any of the texts nor are there any references British immigration policies or even Brexit. In fact, the only references to migration are those regarding the Mexican-USA border which illustrate how wildly conflictive the Trump era was. However, dislocation is employed as the trope which substitutes for migration, through geographical and cultural referents, that also implies that British LatinX writing is a multifaceted and transnational practice.

As the first anthology by British LatinX writers, *Un Nuevo Sol* poses a challenge to the static idea of canon. It deconstructs the reality of being a British LatinX author in the 21<sup>st</sup> century now that globalisation has also infiltrated literature and, thus, literary borders have become highly conflictive. British LatinX writers are, to appropriate Vertovec's terminology, super-diverse. They question, at least in these texts, the very notion of literary traditions around specific languages or cultural backgrounds. First and second-generation British LatinX authors are claiming a space in the British literary canon, and they are doing so without renouncing their own identity. *Un Nuevo Sol* is the first collection of British LatinX writers published and, undoubtedly, will not be the last, which may lead to a solidification of a new literary scene which may be called, or defined as, British *latinidad*.

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