

Feminist Traces of Memory Studies in Latin America and the Caribbean

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Abstract:

The book *Memoria y Feminismos: Cuerpos, sentipensares y resistencias* is a collective effort of different authors to contribute to the debates on memory in Latin America and the Caribbean. The texts reflect on corporality and political practices of memory. Across thirteen articles the authors deploy the postulates of corpo-politics and feminist standpoint theory as a theoretical framework. The volume presents a critical approach and questions the role of Eurocentric academia while giving insights into localized and experience-oriented research.

Feministische Spuren der Erinnerungsforschung in Lateinamerika und der Karibik

German Abstract:

Das Buch *Memoria y Feminismos: Cuerpos, sentipensares y resistencias* leistet einen Beitrag zu den Debatten über Erinnerung in Lateinamerika und der Karibik. Es reflektiert Körperlichkeit und politische Praktiken der Erinnerung. In einer Reihe von dreizehn Artikeln werden die Postulate der Körperpolitik und der feministischen Standpunkttheorie als theoretischer Rahmen verwendet. Der Band präsentiert einen kritischen Ansatz und hinterfragt die Rolle der eurozentrischen Wissenschaft, während er gleichzeitig Einblicke in die lokalisierte und erfahrungsorientierte Forschung gibt.

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Feminist Traces of Memory Studies in Latin America and the Caribbean¹

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Fronseca Santos, Melody/ Georgina Rivas Hernández/ Tito Mitjans Alayón (eds.): *Memoria y feminismos: cuerpos, sentipensares y resistencias*. Buenos Aires: CLASCO/Siglo XXI, 2023. 429 pages, Open Access. ISBN: 978-987-813-461-1.

The book *Memoria y Feminismos: Cuerpos, sentipensares, y resistencias* (Feminisms: Bodies, *Sentipensares* and Resistance) emerged from a political and academic commitment to depict a critical epistemological approach from Latin America and the Caribbean. Readers are introduced to a wide range of approaches and tools for developing critical research and understanding memory as a humanized concept in close relation to feminist manifestations.

The volume is a groundbreaking analysis of memory and its practices as a mechanism for empowering political subjects. The foundation for this is the collective memory of a traumatic past, which operates as the common ground for the growth of Latin American and Caribbean memory studies. The interdisciplinary approach of the book explores new contributions from Latin American and Caribbean academia while vindicating the “differential awareness of historically marginalized populations such as women, sexual dissidents, indigenous, and Afro-descendant populations” (p. 12).

The regional context provides space to explore memory from a political perspective, which reclaims this concept as a means to reach truth and justice. Further, this allows for fruitful analysis and debates about the socio-cultural shapes of national historical narratives in El Salvador and Guatemala, archival research in Brazil, Cuba, and Chile, and collective action, for instance, in Argentina and Mexico.

¹ Editor’s Note: The quoted passages are translated from Spanish by the review author.

The book points to the notion of memory as a “space for dismantling the cis-heteropatriarchal system in all its dimensions” (p. 10). Thus, the authors take their academic and political guidance from the postulates of three perspectives. First, the Corpo-politics of knowledge: a decolonial construction that highlights how knowledge is an embedded element in bodies with a contextualization defined by a social environment and subjectivities. Second, it provides a critical feminist research approach: it fosters the inclusion of gender analysis within critical theory. Finally, it operates from a feminist standpoint theory, which advocates an analysis of social location and political struggles as an impulse to develop divergent knowledge (p. 20).

One of the main contributions of the authors is presenting memory in its humanized dimension in the service of the dignity of historically marginalized peoples. Consequently, the first step is to acknowledge the colonial practices of dispossession and the agency with which these subjects have reconstructed their narratives, symbols, and existence. The result is a set of thirteen articles using feminist epistemologies, each of them takes up different cases, places, and emphases in analyzing class, race, ethnic belonging, and gender, but also museology, and spaces of memory.

The volume is divided thematically into three sections. The first, “Violencias y luchas por y desde la memoria,” focuses on the emergence of the feminist movement and women’s strategies of resistance to violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Chile. In this part, the article by Marta Casaús Arzú stands out. Dealing with violence as a tool for social control against Mayan women in Guatemala, it explains how violence against female bodies operates, first, as a symbolic mechanism of domination and, second, as a tool to construct a hypermasculinization that supports the imaginaries of identity and power. These two elements are exacerbated in contexts of dissimilar ethnic belonging or where cultural differences are prominent. Casaús Arzú writes:

“The ethnic origin and the racial traces trigger hate, derision, humiliation, and rejection in the perpetrators, who exert double and triple violence: for being women, for being indigenous, and for supposedly being ‘subversives’ but the harm is not only physical but rather cultural and territorial [...]” (p. 39)

The second section, “Memoria, cuerpos y archivos: Rupturas desde las disidencias”, reflects on how preserving memory relates to dissident practices that can lead to archives embracing diversity (p. 22). Thus, Tito Mitjans Alayón presents an archive process he led in Mexico and

named “Memorias prietas disidentes en el sur de México.” The author portrays the challenges arising due to the deliberate erasure of black identity in Mexico through the discourse of *mestizaje*. Using first-person narration, Mitjans Alayón presents how coloniality gives space to a problem of representation that is summed up in the depictions of the ‘other’ from the perspectives of mainly white men. Alayón shares their experience of building up an archive in San Cristobal de las Casas as a transdisciplinary proposal called trans-archive. Contrasting the goals of this innovative archival proposal with the structures and contents of national archives in Mexico and Latin America, the author challenges the conceptualization and stereotyping of black bodies within the framework of capitalist and colonial narratives (p. 202).

The third and last section, “Epistemología y pedagogía de la memoria,” deals with the construction of different spaces dedicated to the reflection of memory and its critical approaches. The article by Windy M. Cosme Rosario is an illustrative example due to its focus on narration and representation within museum spaces. The author highlights the power of feminism to transform memory studies in the region into “a space for the Problematization of the narratives of ‘the unique history’, the memorialist praxis of the nation-state in Chile, and the obsession with white and masculine knowledge” (p. 392).

The three sections contribute insightfully to the reflection on corporality and political practice, giving space for the consideration of the collective dimension of memory. The book challenges the role of nation-oriented narratives and expands the framework of memory studies inviting researchers to incorporate a multilayered dimension of memory that transcends debates about the past and rather, reemerges in everyday life.

Finally, although the intended audience might be Latin American and Caribbean activists and scholars, the volume will be of interest to a much wider audience as it offers a broad approach to the subject from a critical and transformative angle. It clearly fosters the question of how memory is intertwined with the vindication of knowledge, the preservation of the past, and its transformation into inclusive futures that acknowledge the social margins and dissident individual and collective experiences. The book grants such a rich perspective on contemporary socio-political dynamics in Latin America and the Caribbean that its extrapolation to other contexts is not only possible but necessary.