

### Interweaving Disciplinary Perspectives toward the Study of Latin-American Memories

**Veranstalter:** Interdisciplinary Latin-American Memory Research Network; Lehrstuhl für Geschichte Lateinamerikas, Lateinamerika-Institut, Freie Universität Berlin; Research Group „Grupo de investigación memoria en Colombia“, Departamento de Lenguajes y Estudios Socioculturales, Universidad de los Andes

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The massive human rights violations which occurred within the context of military dictatorships and armed conflicts in the second half of the 20th century in Latin America were marginalized for years and sometimes ignored in the political discourses.

The elaboration of memories was valued at first by relatives of victims and survivors, but in the last decades also governments seem to have developed an interest in coming to terms with the past. The mechanisms that link us to the past work as much at a national level, as at the regional, local and even family levels. These dynamics have a lot to say about everyday life and transgenerational transfer of knowledge. Furthermore, memory-related topics are not focused exclusively on the direct relationships between violence and trauma; the analytical categories entailed in memory studies have reached other questions and landscapes. Aesthetic expressions and mass media have become important agents in the construction of historical images and metaphors, thus becoming worthy of attention.

At this point in the discussion, a critical balance is needed in order to determine which questions are still valid and also to set new objectives within the field. In this respect, the second workshop „Interweaving Disciplinary Perspectives toward the Study of Latin-American Memories“ conducted in

the Freie Universität Berlin by the Interdisciplinary Latin-American Memory Research Network on September 8-9, 2014 had two objectives: The workshop was intended, in the first place, to reinforce the Network's commitment to Latin American memory-creation through the consolidation of an academic co-operation with the Universidad de los Andes, Bogota, which began in 2011. Secondly, it was designed to trace a new research path to follow. Although the group's focus was previously to analyze the Colombian case, it has now broadened its scope to include dialogue not just between disciplines, but also between Latin-American realities.

The first panel, „(Un-)Official Vehicles of Memories“ moderated by Hendrikje Grunow (Berlin), explored different kinds of media in which memory and history have been materialized in the last years. FABIOLA ARELLANO's (Munich) presentation addressed the role of the so-called „Museos de la Memoria“ in the discourses related to politics of memory. This relatively new museum genre in Latin America constitutes one of the more outstanding official projects for staging history. With a comparative review of two institutions in Chile and in Peru, she explored the possible motives behind the States' decision for founding museums to commemorate the past, as well as their potential for instrumentalization. MÓNICA CONTRERAS (Berlin) analyzed the role of soap operas as vehicles of construction of collective memory and historical consciousness in Colombia and in Chile. Soap operas are one of the most popular products in cultural consumption in Latin America and one of its primary cultural exports. Considering that the biographical backgrounds of soap opera producers have a direct relationship to the stories retold, Contreras' paper raised the question of whether TV channels had turned into new memory actors. If so, she asked if the spectators' „loose memories“ could potentially be turned into „emblematic memories“<sup>1</sup> and therefore contribute to the construction of a historical consciousness.

<sup>1</sup> See Steve J. Stern, *De la memoria suelta a la memoria emblemática: hacia el recordar y el olvidar como proceso histórico* (Chile 1973 – 1998), in: Mario Garcés et al. (eds.), *Memoria para un nuevo siglo. Chile, miradas a la segunda mitad del siglo XX*, Santiago 2000, pp. 11–33.

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TATJANA LOUIS (Bogota) examined the representation of the Colombian Conflict in textbooks, whose contents have great influence over the construction of a „historical truth“. Yet, Colombia doesn't have any official entity that controls textbooks' contents. According to her, one of the goals of the historical conception of the Colombian Conflict is not to establish an official narrative, but an inclusive and plural representation of the past. Louis' paper explored the degree to which this goal is actually reached in history textbooks. After analyzing two of them, she concluded that there was no attempt to present an open historical image with multiple perspectives. ANDREA CAGUA (Berlin) explored the memories constructed during the period of the Frente Nacional, a political coalition between the Conservative and Liberal parties in Colombia between 1958 and 1974, in relation to the prior bipartisan struggle known as La Violencia. The Frente Nacional's conception and transmission of a dominant history of La Violencia was based on the forgetting of this time in order to legitimate itself and its political goals. She suggested that there may have been other interests as well as contextual reasons that helped to erase the political motives of the belligerent past.

The second panel „Everyday and Transgenerational Memories“, moderated by Andrea Cagua (Berlin), gathered the discussion around a more private sphere where identities and memories are constructed while maintaining the dialogue in the public space. In her presentation, HENDRIKJE GRUNOW (Berlin) explored the historical consciousness that a family in Bogotá shaped around the so-called Bogotazo, an uprising which took place after the assassination of the Liberal presidential candidate in Colombia on April 9, 1948. She showed how the traditional perception of sequential time is a Eurocentric idea that doesn't necessarily fit when exploring intergenerational relations with a vicarious past in this kind of context. There is instead an appropriation of the parent's narratives that provide reference points against which to compare the past and current political situations of the descendants as a stable continuity. LENA VOIGTLÄNDER (Bonn) investigated how the (direct) descendants of

the guerrilla from El Salvador, that is the second generation born between 1980–1995, think about experiences which are close to them, but in which they didn't participate, namely, the civil war. This topic was explored through the encounter of these actors in the photographs of the exhibition „El Salvador: In the Eye of the Beholder“. The source of the exhibition was the photographic underground archive of the guerrilla, which depicts the life and war in El Salvador from 1968 to 1991. The study delved into the active production of meaning in the interweaving of memory and images. CAROLINA GARAY (Bonn) spoke about the reconstruction and transmission dynamics of memories within families that suffered the disappearance of a relative during the armed conflict in Peru (1980–2000) and later on experienced a complex reunification process. She argued for a dialogue of memories that gives new shapes and definitions to identities, silences, and forgetting, rather than a battle in which one tries to impose a vision of the past. Lastly, KATHARINA FARYS (Berlin) analyzed the semantic, political, and cultural changes of the Calakmul region for its inhabitants. This region, located in southern Mexico and one of the biggest natural tropical reserves of Latin America, is characterized by immigration waves from different backgrounds since the mid-twentieth century. The investigation focused on the new identities and perceptions that the people of Calakmul hold of themselves in relation to their environment and history; this included as well the construction and transformation of imaginaries and representations of their own past, present and future.

In the third panel, „Fragments and Redesigns of Memory“, moderated by Mónica Contreras (Berlin), three papers contributed to the understanding of memories according to diverse aspects of memory studies in Latin American countries including Brazil, Chile and Colombia. ALESSANDRA MERLO (Bogota) presented her research concerning scenarios of visibility in Colombia, which deals with the management of images in recent Colombian history. She defined historical pictures as a current approach to the past, and calculated how the circulation of such pictures/media enables viewers to identify

with their own historical national memory. She argued that the construction of the past should be analyzed as an archeology of images (in the Foucauldian sense of archeology), thus enabling a better approach to the behavior of secular images (representation of times and systems of belief, including universal agreements) and acts of image (performative reading of image production and the circulation of images) that shape the national past. LEONARDO PASCUTI (Berlin) discussed the usages of Holocaust memories in Brazil, and analyzed the transdirectional potential of this specific memory field in recent Brazilian literature and cultural movements. Pascuti developed a discussion on how Holocaust memories influence the representation of local social struggles and the local adaptation of Holocaust memories. Discussing the role of historical discipline and the loss of historical consciousness, he suggested that transdirectional memories have been used as support for the representation of local demands for human rights while affecting the historical comprehension of these demands and the magnitude of the historical fact itself. Closing the panel, LEONOR ABUJATUM (Potsdam) presented a work concerning post-dictatorship literature in Chile. Considering literature as a simulation, an appropriation, a design and a condensation supported by different ways of life and scientific discourses, she used as case study the novel „Av. 10 de Julio Huamachuco“ (2007) by Nona Fernández, in which the apocalyptic, chaotic, and post-modernist aspects of Santiago in Chile are representations of the loss of the youth and innocence through the Chilean dictatorship, crystalized in a fragmentary novel committed to recover the remnants of the totalitarian system in the present. She suggested that these reflections from novelists about the past allow not only the identification of collective memories, its multiple perspectives and continuities, but also make possible identification and self-inclusion for the reader in the collective memory and memorials.

The heterogeneity of the presentations as well as the focus of the research projects constitute both, the potential and the challenge of the Interdisciplinary Latin-American Memory Research Network. After making a review

of the topics discussed, the second day of the conference took the shape of a workshop that was dedicated to identifying themes of common interest. With the help of a mind map, the importance of conceptualization, cross-disciplinarity, and the proper use of analytical methods were stressed. Finally, common goals were set and the following agenda was elaborated. A list of lectures was selected to serve as guideline for the work of the Interdisciplinary Latin-American Memory Research Network in the near future.

#### **Conference overview:**

##### *Introduction*

Stefan Rinke / Mónica Contreras Saiz (Freie Universität Berlin)

##### *Panel 1: “(Un-)Official Vehicles of Memories”*

Chair: Hendrikje Grunow (Freie Universität Berlin)

Fabiola Arellano (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich), „Museos de la Memoria“ as Vehicles of Official Commemoration of the Past. A Comparison between the Chilean and Peruvian Cases.

Mónica Contreras Saiz (Freie Universität Berlin), „We, TV Channels, Have the Responsibility to Shape Historical Memory.“ Soap Operas: Forming Historical Consciousness in Latin America? The Case of Chile and Colombia

Tatjana Louis (Universidad de los Andes, Bogota), The Colombian Conflict in History Textbooks

Andrea Cagua (Freie Universität Berlin), The Past in Dispute: The Construction of the Concept La Violencia During the Period of the Frente Nacional in Colombia, 1956-1974

##### *Panel 2: „Everyday and Transgenerational Memories”*

Chair: Andrea Cagua (Freie Universität Berlin)

Hendrikje Grunow (Freie Universität Berlin), „Long Live the Liberal Party“. Historical Consciousness and Transgenerational Memory of the Bogotazo

Lena Voigtländer (Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn), „Strangers

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Whose Faces I Know“. Photography and Postmemory in El Salvador

Carolina Garay (Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn), After the Armed Conflict In Peru: Reunifying Families, Unveiling Memories

Katharina Farys (Freie Universität Berlin), ¿Who Were We? Breaks In The Daily Life of Calakmul Biosphere Reserve's First Inhabitants, Mexico

*Panel 3: „Fragments and Redesigns of Memories“*

Chair: Mónica Contreras Saiz (Freie Universität Berlin)

Alessandra Merlo (Universidad de los Andes, Bogota), Scenarios of Visibility. Reflections Around the Management of Images in the Recent Colombian History

Leonardo Pascuti (Freie Universität Berlin), Displaced Memory: Uses of the Holocaust in the Brazilian Periphery

Leonor Abujatum (Universität Potsdam), The Present, the Absent and the Fragmentary. Postdictatorial Chilean Literature as a Crystallization of Life Knowledge

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