

Memory and Collective Identity in Comparative Literature and Othes

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Memory has lately become a central concern in contemporary culture and politics of all societies in a global scale. This “memory boom”, originated in socio-historical, political, cultural, technological and market-oriented reasons, is articulated around a certain “memory industry”, which in turn generates identity discourses. Cultural products play a fundamental role in the formation and consolidation of these discourses.

On the one hand, the rehabilitation of the memory of wars, dictatorships, killings and genocides tries to rescue from oblivion a traumatic past. There is also a willingness of discursive democratization (represented by the promotion of testimonial literature), looking to break through that version of history written by the winning side. Also, the need to look towards the past as a means of understanding the present is often emphasized, to increase the new generations’ awareness of the need to avoid the repetition of the same atrocities. Therefore, new historiographic methodologies have vindicated the incorporation of new and different perspectives that had traditionally been excluded from the construction of discourses.

Nevertheless, the notion of discursive elaboration of memories, together with the fact that discourses about the past are always filtered by the interests and beliefs of the present, make it necessary for this new historiography to be constantly under scrutiny by a critical analysis. This would reveal possible “abuses of memory” (term coined by Todorov in the text with the same title) denounced by many authors, politicians, journalists and human rights activists. It is particularly interesting as well as complex to work on the relationship that can be established between the constant re-writing of the past and the construction of collective identities. As Halbwachs explains, collective memory puts together the past and the present, as well as the individual and the social group. It is in this sense that we are also interested in the different discursive strategies that several authors have developed to reconstruct their memories from a subjective vision of the present. This also allows us to establish a link between certain forms of narration and the different underlying ideological intentions. One of the characteristics that make memory studies difficult is the specificity of each political vindication, and also their fluctuating character in relation to present-day socio-political factors. However, at the same time, in a global world of linked identities and politics, “different discourses on historical memory are intertwined and overlap each other all throughout the world, trespassing frontiers and bouncing against each other, sometimes hiding and forgetting their own historical memory, sometimes reinforcing it”, as claimed by Huyssen in an interview for Metropolis magazine.

Taking as starting point, then, the fact that the restoration of the past is subject to the ideologies of the present; and also that memory studies are not only a tool for analysis, but also for the transformation of contemporary contexts, we want to vindicate a critical role that can distinguish between the “obligation of memory” (which introduces an ethical evaluation of its own look towards the past, as pointed out by Lozano Aguilar in *Decir, contar, pensar la guerra*), and the

possible political abuses that derive from these vindications. We also believe that a fundamental role of criticism is to suggest, as long as it is possible, new strategies to go beyond militaristic discourses. We propose therefore the following lines of research for this monographic issue:

- a. –Relations between cultural production, memory discourses and the construction of collective identities.
- b. –Studies on testimonial literature. Relations between individual and collective memory.
- c. –The fluctuant nature of identity: transformation of the perspective of memory according to the social-historical context.
- d. –Relations between narrative strategies and the ideology of memories.
- e. –Analysis of the political capitalization of cultural productions on memory.
- f. –Strategies to overcome memory discourses.
- g. –Memory discourses as trans-border political discourses.

Analysis, through cultural products, of the influence of different discourses on different geographical areas.

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