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Review/Reseña

Lessie Jo Frazier. *Salt in the Sand: Memory, Violence, and the Nation-State in Chile, 1890 to the Present* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

A View from the North: A Historical Ethnography of Memory and State Violence in Chile

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The past four years have witnessed the publication of much outstanding and nuanced English-language scholarship on memory and political violence in Chile. Two volumes of Steve J. Stern's trilogy, *The Memory Box of Pinochet's Chile*, have appeared. In the first, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile* (2004), Stern provides his readers with the historical

context and conceptual frameworks they will need for future volumes; he also puts a human face on his story by introducing through oral testimony several unforgettable individuals and their often conflicting memories of life in Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship. In volume two, *Battling for Hearts and Minds* (2006), Stern elaborates more extensively on the history of memory struggles in Chile between 1973 and 1988, while volume three will examine the politics of memory in Chile's transition to democracy beginning in 1989. Michael J. Lazzara, too, focuses on the politics of memories of the Pinochet dictatorship in his work *Chile in Transition* (2006). Lazzara, though, is primarily concerned with the "poetics" of memory, examining the varied works of artists and survivor-witnesses whose texts and narratives have come to constitute a discursive battleground of memory during and after the dictatorship. Like Stern, Florencia Mallon, in *Courage Tastes of Blood* (2005), draws on the promise of oral history; unlike the investigations of Stern and Lazzara, however, the object of Mallon's intellectual quest is not primarily to explain the conflicting memories of life under Pinochet, but to highlight the historical struggle between the Mapuche, Chile's largest indigenous group, and the Chilean state over their land and identity. Mallon's dialogical method, including individual oral interviews, helps her and her collaborators reconstruct close to one hundred years of history and memory in the Mapuche community of Nicolás Ailío in what was for most of the nineteenth century the southern frontier of the Chilean nation-state. Lessie Jo Frazier, on the other hand, looks to the north, and *Salt in the Sand* represents her ambitious attempt to produce a historical ethnography of nation-state formation in Chile since 1890 by taking an off-center view of this process from the northern frontier—or to be more exact, from the northern Chilean province of Tarapacá.

For Frazier, as for all the authors mentioned, memory represents a critical analytic category; it is her primary lens through which to investigate the long history of nation-state formation in Chile. She sees memory as central in the contestations among distinct political projects "negotiating"

for state power, and in this regard Frazier's work reflects contemporary scholarship that understands nation-state formation as an ongoing hegemonic process. Indeed, remembering and forgetting, as Ernest Renan offered long ago, are crucial to the creation of a nation, and Frazier traces the course of over one hundred years of Chilean history to explain just how crucial they have been in the Chilean case. But Frazier is not interested in writing a comprehensive account of Chilean history, nor is she content with merely chronicling what gets remembered and how. She endeavors to explain the evolving morphology of memory in Chile and how it "produces emotion to bring people on board with particular projects in particular ways" (4). How and why the predominant form, or broad shape, of memory in Chile has changed over time, and how it continually works to produce political subjectivities become the questions uppermost in Frazier's mind. For Frazier, memory, like history, should not—and cannot—be relegated simply to recalling facts or tracing chronologically-linear causal sequences. For Frazier, memory becomes a form of social action that creates the "affective ties" vital to the success of any political project. Furthermore, Frazier leaves no doubt that she is a socially engaged scholar, one who through her oral history research and her role as participant-observer with human rights groups works to defy the contemporary notion still held by some in Chile that "state violence is regrettable but ultimately justifiable if the end result is a market-driven economy" (245).

State violence looms, with good reason, over Frazier's account of Chilean nation-state formation. Renan, again, observed that "historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations."¹ Frazier wants to demonstrate that state violence in Chile, rather than being an aberration in an otherwise relatively peaceful and stable historical course towards increasing democratization, has been closely implicated in that history. For this reason, her selection of the

¹ Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" trans. Martin Thom, in *Becoming National: A Reader*, ed. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 45.

northern Chilean province of Tarapacá could not have been wiser. Tarapacá, torn away from Peru in the War of the Pacific (1879–1883), became Chilean in an act of state violence; what better place, then, to begin her own inquiry? However, it is not just its violent origins that make this northern frontier an ideal point of departure for Frazier's study. The region, throughout its history, has been the center of intense political battles. As the author points out, the deserts of Tarapacá constituted the core of Chile's nitrate industry (thus providing the book's title), the cradle of Chile's first major labor organizations and organized general strikes, and the site of some of the most notorious outbursts of state violence in reaction to those strikes. For these reasons alone, Frazier claims that Tarapacá represents a unique and proper setting in which to gauge the role of violence in Chilean nation-state formation. When she peers even deeper into the region's history, and engages even more intimately with its ethnographic present, she finds that Tarapacá is a landscape of violent moments both emblematic and elided, a symbolic space for both elite power struggles in times of political crisis and organized labor's fight for justice, and, at times, the preferred detention center and dumping grounds (in the form of mass graves) for all those who, in one way or another, dared to challenge the oligarchy's and military's grip on state power.

Salt in the Sand features an eclectic organization that is very appropriate to Frazier's interest in interweaving past and present. The book's narrative moves forward chronologically by fits and starts, the "fits" consisting of specific conjunctures of state violence that Frazier problematizes and carries forward in time, hypothesizing how each event is remembered and mobilized—or in some cases silenced—for political purposes by various sectors in a future period, in other words, a dialectical approach. Chapter 4 represents a clear application of this method. Frazier devotes this chapter to an examination of one of the most notorious incidents of state violence in Chile's history, the 1907 massacre at the Escuela Santa María in Iquique. She first historicizes the event, then she propels the narrative forward in time and posits how the predominant

memory of the massacre has morphed over time, influenced by the political imperatives of each successive period in Chilean history. Frazier then rewinds her narrative and returns to earlier conjunctures of violence in subsequent chapters, such as the episodes of state violence perpetrated at detention camps in Pisagua (Tarapacá) throughout the twentieth century (chapter 5). The thrust of her analysis, however, hurtles the narrative towards the period of the post-Pinochet civilian governments of the *Concertación*, whose policy of reconciliation is dealt with in chapter 6. Frazier, trained in both history and anthropology, wishes to bring both disciplines to bear in her study, and she believes that this non-linear approach demonstrates that “human experience is more messy than can be described by simple causal links and clear chronology,” which she identifies as the stuff of history (10). As historian, she uses archival documentation and periodicals; as anthropologist, she interrogates the past memories and memory modes of each period by using oral history, her participant-observation with various human rights and survivor groups, and her “transdisciplinary toolkit” borrowed from Antonio Gramsci, Walter Benjamin, Sigmund Freud, Michel Foucault, Raymond Williams, and others. In this way, Frazier claims she imparts a “more truly human sense of the way in which events unfold” (Ibid).

Frazier detects changes in the broad shape of memory over time during the more than one hundred years of Chilean history that she examines. Moreover, she identifies particular predominant modes of remembering instances of state violence in each of her three periods: cathartic memory during the oligarchic state period (1890s–1930s); empathetic memory in the populist period (1930s –1973); and finally sympathetic memory, which waned into an amalgam of nostalgia and melancholy in the neoliberal period (1973–2005). Significantly, she points out that “other modes may also be present, but not necessarily” (12). Frazier discusses her temporal subdivisions in chapter 1, while in chapter 2 she elaborates her taxonomy of memory; these two chapters together comprise Part I of her book, subtitled “Templates.” Yet it is her analysis of

Chile's evolving modes of memory that is the most crucial element of her argument.

Borrowing from ideas of Gramsci and Benjamin that conceive of certain synthetic revolutionary moments—along with the memories of them—in time, she defines cathartic memory, predominant in the period 1890–1930, as a call for “direct, militant, and transformative action that claims past suffering in the anticipation of future struggle” (62). Labor organizations and other non-elite sectors, with memories of the 1907 massacre and violence at the Escuela Santa María fresh in mind, called for deep transformations in Chilean society aimed at producing a more just future. Frazier sees the subsequent rise of the labor movement and Luis Recabarren's organization of the Socialist Workers Party (POS) in 1912 as, in part, products of this type of memory that calls for social action. Acknowledging that varying modes of memory may coexist during any given period, she juxtaposes this working-class cathartic memory with the “memory-work” of the oligarchic state, which attempted to obscure divisive memories of state violence by inculcating in Chileans an “official” national memory that recalled the North as the site of military and patriotic glory, both during the War of the Pacific and during the Civil War of 1891. Furthermore, in the state's view, the North was a place where dangerous foreign elements—Peruvians still resident in Tarapacá as well as those in Arica and Tacna—continued to threaten territory that Chileans had won in a just and bloody war forced upon them by Bolivia and Peru. The construction of both *el roto chileno* as national protagonist (a monument to el roto stands in present day Arica), and the emergence of the xenophobic *ligas patrióticas* in Tarapacá (1911) and Arica and Tacna (1925–1926) dovetailed nicely with the state's attempts to divert attention away from the struggles of non-elite sectors and to reinforce what all “patriotic” Chileans held in common rather than that which threatened to drive them apart. In this way, Frazier argues that the state helped to elide other instances of violence, such as the massacres of workers at Oficina Ramírez (1891) and

La Coruña (1925), into the triumphalist narrative forged by the Chilean military and elite in this heroic period of oligarchic nation-state formation.

Frazier argues that the predominant mode of memory in the populist period was empathy, which she defines as memory that links past and present struggles to create cross-class alliances in order to transform the nation-state. Empathetic memory, “your history is part of mine,” became the key mode of political remembering for the Popular Front governments of the 1930s and 1940s and even more so for the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende (1970–1973). Like working class cathartic memory, empathetic memory in the populist period sought a more inclusive state and national identity; unlike cathartic memory, memory as empathy during this period in Chile tended to soften, or manage, the more radically transformative demands for justice of subaltern sectors of Chilean society—such as those advanced by labor movements in the early twentieth century—in order to make cross-sectional alliances possible. For example, memories of the massacre at Escuela Santa María became a critical rallying point in the Popular Unity movement; as Frazier notes, the Allende campaign even used the opening bars of Luis Advis’s “Cantata Santa María de Iquique” as theme music (137). Yet, the movement’s rhetoric set the Escuela Santa María massacre into a “linear metanarrative” building up to the present and the culmination (1970) of socialist nation-state formation under Allende. For Frazier, this represents an important phase in memory’s evolving morphology for, as noted earlier, she understands memory as social action central to the process of nation-state formation. In Frazier’s account, empathetic memory in the populist period achieved great success with the victory of Popular Unity’s national-popular project in 1970. Yet, the limits of this national project might be found in the risk that populist empathy, in her words, “takes on the narrative logic of the nation-state predicated on an expansionist view of history as progress that subsumes the past into a greater present” (67). Populist empathy becomes not only more temporally removed from instances of state violence, such as the massacres of Oficina Ramírez, La

Coruña, and Escuela Santa María, but it becomes a degree less emotionally raw, somewhat less capable of producing the affective ties required to make possible the far-reaching transformation of the nation-state because it subsumes the political aspirations of earlier peoples.

Memory becomes even more complex in the neoliberal period (1973–Present) when, according to Frazier, the predominant mode of memory evolved from sympathy during the Pinochet dictatorship to a mix of nostalgia and melancholy in the post-Pinochet years after 1990. She points out that a wide array of anti-authoritarian sectors of Chilean society—human rights organizations, survivor groups, such as the Association of Families and Friends of the Executed and Disappeared in Northern Chile, the Church, and other lay activists—worked to draw international sympathy to the contemporary suffering in their country. In the sympathetic memory mode, “your situation is like mine,” the Escuela Santa María massacre constituted an allegory for the overthrow of Popular Unity; even the “Cantata,” recorded by the exiled *Nueva Canción* group Quilapayún, found an international audience appalled by the brutality of the Pinochet dictatorship. For Frazier, however, “sympathetic memory...differs from empathetic memory in its lesser degree of connection between the past and present and in its more detached call to political action.” Sympathetic memory, as an independent form of social action, serves primarily as a “solicitation of solidarity based not on common struggle, but rather on human concern as simile” (69). For *pinochetistas*, on the other hand, the North, and especially Iquique, not only continued to represent the memories of past military glory, but became a showpiece in the economic restructuring of the neoliberal period, with the military lavishing the city with resources to attract tourists and shoppers since its designation as a duty free zone (*zona franca*) in 1976. Frazier notes that the city held a special fondness for Pinochet, who was stationed there during the Allende years and who would retreat there in the 1990s. She also points out that the military dictatorship conspicuously attempted to obscure memories of Iquique’s cathartic past by changing select street names; for

example, those honoring the likes of Elías Lafertte (a nitrate miner and leader of the Communist Party) were renamed after military officers and battles, such as the 11th of September (315, n.87).

The main memory modes in the period after 1990 have become nostalgia and melancholy and, according to Frazier, tend to complete the eclipse of the past. In Frazier's view, nostalgia, "celebrating a past clearly delimited from the present," increasingly predominates in this period (147). She cites the various celebrations sponsored by the *Hijos de Salitre* (Sons of Nitrate) as representative of this mode of remembering. These celebrations, conducted mostly by the descendants and families of white-collar workers, recall the past glories of the nitrate era in Tarapacá while obscuring the troubled times, the massacres of workers and the violence (149). She points out that the civilian governments of the *Concertación* in 1990s, too, through their official policy of reconciliation, attempted to narrate a nostalgic and radical break between past and present in order to turn the page of history. Frazier acknowledges the sincere and genuine concern of the civilian leaders of the *Concertación* over human rights, but she argues that reconciliation and its various forms, including government-built tombs such as "*Para Que Nunca Más*" mausoleum in Iquique, represent attempts to contain, or close up, gravesites (192). These attempts can be seen most clearly in Pisagua, where in 1990 the exhumation of the mummified remains from a mass grave threw even more intense light on the violence and human rights violations perpetrated during the dictatorship. This grisly discovery forced the newly-elected government of President Patricio Aylwin to establish the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation, and, later, during the administration of Ricardo Lagos (2000–2006), the Chilean state advanced plans to construct a monument in Pisagua to honor its victims of state violence. Incorporated into those plans, however, were attempts to subsume the gravesite memorial into a more overarching project to convert Pisagua into a worldwide, human rights "tourist" destination. Frazier learned through conversations with human rights activists that they were "horrified" at this

effort to recast Pisagua's history as nostalgia (217). Finally, melancholy, "mourning a past political possibility that holds no promise for the present," is also abundant in the neoliberal period. She elaborates that "mourning, as a technology of memory, straddles structures of remembering and forgetting; it contains the past through a ritualized remembering that stands in for (forgets) the powerful emotions of loss, so that that loss does not interrupt the everyday task of living" (194). This type of memory, according to Frazier, can be seen in the official policy of reconciliation, in which the postdictatorship governments, especially prior to Pinochet's arrest in 1998, have attempted to "turn the page of history" at the same time, indeed, that neoliberal ideologues in Chile and elsewhere were proclaiming the very "end of history."

Although in Frazier's view the predominant form of memory in Chile's neoliberal state may be melancholy-nostalgia, she is careful to point out that other modes of memory do co-exist, as they do during any given period. She is particularly interested in the persistence of cathartic memory, memory for action. She sees this in the way human rights activists contested the state's attempt to tame the past, as in the protest over the planned commercialization of the Pisagua memorial. She sees cathartic memory, and actually experienced it, during one of her first fieldwork experiences in Santiago, when she attended the 1990 funeral of two political activists murdered during the dictatorship and joined in with the members of the *Sebastián Acevedo Movement Against Torture* as they marched demanding justice. In short, as she states on pages 254–255, she sees "an ongoing mobilization of memory for action (the vestiges of cathartic memory) in spite of the predominant structure of feeling predicated on a radical break between the past and present with no future alternatives (operating dually as melancholy and nostalgia)."

Frazier, therefore, acknowledges the inherent problem in positing a predominant mode of memory for each of her three broad periods of Chilean history, namely, that counter-memories do exist. Her argument, thus, takes on an immense burden of proof: how does one empirically prove

the existence of a predominant form of memory? How does one account for all the possible counter-memories that may exist? How does one gauge their relative strength? Indeed, the subjective nature of her argument will put off some readers. Furthermore, by positing a predominant, monolithic “working-class cathartic memory” she runs the risk of neglecting potential divisions within the category itself. For example, many Chilean workers in Iquique, Arica, and Tacna (the latter two also part of Chile’s North) did not hesitate to commit violent acts against their Peruvian class brothers during the painful Tacna-Arica controversy (1880–1930). Thousands of Chilean workers moved to Arica to work on the docks or on the Arica-La Paz railroad, displacing an equal number of Peruvian or other foreign workers and, in the process, eschewing any concerted action for greater social justice. Frazier also acknowledges that “some scholars may be uncomfortable with a nonlinear narrative” (10), and to this I would add that some may be uncomfortable with her complex conceptual framework and her intricate argument, complete with the accustomed post-modern turns (linguistic and subjective) and de-centered cultural analysis. Despite these concerns, with *Salt in the Sand* Lessie Jo Frazier has produced a fine and thought-provoking study that creatively engages issues of memory, violence, and power in the process of nation-state formation on Chile’s often neglected northern frontier.

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