

## **Introduction to Latin American Women Nurturing Memories**

**Ana M. Fernández**

Mount Allison University

**Ludmila da Silva Catela**

Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, Argentina

**Luis Torres**

University of Calgary

Regrettably, our global society and international academic arena, already strained by the recent COVID-19 pandemic, are now dealing with the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War. As a gesture of resistance to this challenging reality, this dossier explores the contribution of women's voices to Latin American memories in recent times. The works in this collection take a sociohistorical perspective and explore women's experience as "memory entrepreneurs," a concept coined by Elizabeth Jelin.<sup>1</sup> A pioneer in the field of memory studies, Jelin has produced works primarily related to gender and family, social mobilization, memory, and human rights.<sup>2</sup> She has also incorporated a constructivist approach on the uses of the past in the present. Her notion of "memory entrepreneurs" brings into focus the ways in which people and

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Jelin is an Argentine sociologist and CONICET Senior Researcher. After completing her undergraduate studies at the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA), she completed her Ph.D. at the University of Texas at Austin (USA). In the mid-1970s, she joined and was a founding member of the Centro de Estudios de Estado y Sociedad (CEDES), a central space for critical and independent thought in the midst of the military dictatorship in Argentina. See her profile at the International Science Council, <https://council.science/profile/elizabeth-jelin/>.

groups carry out proposals and projects to claim the memories of past violence and turn their struggles into a public issue. Thus, Jelin's concept allows us to better comprehend how subjectivity develops in the process of individual and collective memorialization within sociocultural and economic frameworks.

"Latin American Women Nurturing Memories" aims to analyze women's narratives on memory, reinterpret their experiences, and advance proposals and solutions to improve women's rights and wellbeing, thereby transforming local settings and, in turn, impacting societies. This multicultural and multidisciplinary dossier includes six contributions: five articles and an interview with Elizabeth Jelin on "memory entrepreneurs" and the representation of women in the field of Latin American Studies. It is worth highlighting that this collective publication includes the participation of the Brazilian sociologist, feminist writer, and activist Moema Libera Viezzer, who reflects on her work related to the testimonial of the Bolivian activist Domitila Barrios de Chungara (1937-2012).

The dossier opens with Elizabeth Jelin's interview, in which she considers her own academic and personal experience, while also focusing on the contextualization, problematization, and conceptualization of "memory entrepreneurs." The interview, conducted by Ana M. Fernández and Ludmila da Silva Catela, provides the reader with Jelin's insights into this category, from her first publication(s)—in Spanish, *Los trabajos de la memoria* (2002), and in English, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory* (2003)—to the present, including her thoughts on the current dilemmas facing Latin American Studies and its social context. This interview is followed by Viezzer's article. In "Un recorrido sobre '*Si me permiten hablar...*' Testimonio de Domitila, una mujer de las minas de Bolivia," Viezzer reflects on her social work with the Bolivian activist Domitila Barrios de Chungara. She draws attention to the contribution of "*Si me permiten hablar...*" to testimonial literature and to how this life narrative has influenced the process of Latin American memorialization based on "memory entrepreneurs." Viezzer concentrates on the social context and the origins of her work with Domitila, bringing up their initial meeting at the first United Nations World Conference on Women (Mexico, 1975). She describes her methodology and how her approach relates to the philosophy of the critical pedagogue Paulo Freire. She also comments on the different editions of the testimony, from the first (1976) to the most recent (2020). The 2002 edition, which includes Barrios de Chungara's updated intervention, is also reviewed. Moreover, she reflects on how this transformative experience has impacted her personal life, the dialogical nature of her activism, and the validity of her testimony as a historical source.

In “When Silenced Language Sings: Poetry, State Violence, and the Mapuche Memory-Making of Liliana Ancalao,” Seth Michelson analyzes Liliana Ancalao’s poetic art and activism. According to Michelson, the Mapuche poet Liliana Ancalao explores the intersection between language, identity, and memory, portraying a purposeful link. Michelson elaborates on Ancalao’s meditation on *Mapuzungun* as “the language of the Land” (“Memory of the Sacred Land,” Ancalao 2022, 29), a language that represents the vital conduit for the people of Puel Mapu to reconstruct Mapuche memory and to recover the pride of their society. Thus, Michelson views Ancalao’s poetry in *Mapuzungun* as a symbiotic process of reconstructing memory, which in turns recuperates cultural pride. The struggle to recover memory in Ancalao’s work reveals the fact that Mapuche people have been genocidally targeted and oppressed since the Conquest, and their suffering continues to this day. In Michelson’s words, Ancalao’s poetics functions as a means and a metonym for the Mapuche reclamation and (re)circulation of culture.

In “Embodied Memory, Spaces of Action,” Miguel Rojas Sotelo analyzes the work of Gloria Luz Gómez Cortés (coordinator of the Association of Detained Disappeared Relatives, ASFADDES)<sup>3</sup> and visual artist Doris Salcedo. The author explains how these two Colombian-born women have been working with collectives to bring light to the victims of the Colombian conflict. According to Rojas Sotelo, in Colombia, there is an increasing visibility of victim organizations and social leaders allowing micro-narratives of the conflict to challenge official records. He points out that in this context, Colombian women became not only repositories of pain, grief, and suffering but also “memory entrepreneurs.” Rojas Sotelo demonstrates that Gómez Cortés and Salcedo have been producing embodied objects and re-signifying spaces. He concludes that in this process, even under the worst conditions of violence, these two women activists inspired by other women’s experiences may preserve the “sacredness of life.”

In “Redes de memoria (femenina) contra el olvido y otras formas de resistencia en *Hoy y no mañana* (Josefina Morandé, 2018) y *Me duele la memoria* (Iara Heredia Lozar y Bastien Genoux, 2018)”, Carmen Herrero explores the two documentaries *Hoy y no mañana* and *Me duele la memoria*, which denounce the abuses and human rights violations carried out by the Pinochet regime. Herrero analyzes how affective bonds (Ahmed 2004) and patterns of social and gender inequalities that survive today are manifested in these documentaries. The author takes a feminist perspective, highlighting the patriarchal nature of discourse and the way its hegemonic

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<sup>3</sup> In Spanish, Asociación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos (ASFADDES) de Colombia, <https://asfaddes.org>.

structure is interrupted and denaturalized by personal narratives. Based on Jelin's concept of "memory entrepreneurs," Herrero examines the "pedagogical" dimension of these projects which—as proposals that reconstruct the memories of a diverse and plural generation of women—link these collective experiences to other current narratives and interventions from a feminist position in the defense of human rights.

In "La desobediencia en femenino: por la memoria, la verdad y la justicia," Verónica Estay Stange studies the modes of operation of the collective *Historias desobedientes. Familiares de genocidas por la memoria, la verdad y la justicia*, highlighting "female disobedience" as one of the objectives of this group. Drawing attention to subjectivity, and based on the concept of "memory entrepreneurs," she examines the structural principle linking disobedience with feminism and the transformation of the personal experience into a political discourse. She also explores the so-called "paternal function" and exposes the inscription of gender in the language (Violi 1986). Estay Stange underscores some characteristic features of the testimonial, literary, and artistic works produced by "disobedient" women (such as Analía Kalinec, Bibiana Reibaldi, María del Pilar Funes, and Alegría González Planás), contextualizing these testimonies according to other creations on "post-memory" (Hirsch 1996) and discourses produced by men.

This is an interdisciplinary collection of articles that considers Elizabeth Jelin's contributions to the intellectual debate on memory and the liberation of women from social, cultural, and familial inequalities. The articles expand on these ideas while focusing on the narrative of life in the testimony; on the struggles of the Mapuche people represented in the language of poetry; on the artistic actions and visual works of Colombian artists; on memory and resistance in film; and on female disobedience, as inscribed in testimonies of women authors directly affected by paternal complicity with human right abuses.

### Works Cited

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