

Dissidences

Hispanic Journal of Theory and Criticism

Volume 4
Issue 8 *Reconciliation and its Discontents*

Article 1

November 2012

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Recommended Citation

Martín, Annabel and Aguado, Txetxu (2012) "Reconciliation and its Discontents," *Dissidences*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 8 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/dissidences/vol4/iss8/1>

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Keywords / Palabras clave

Reconciliation, Memory, Spain, Latin America, Politican Violence

DISSIDENCES

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Reconciliation and its Discontents

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If it is true that acknowledging history's miseries and violences with its many loads of pain and suffering does not imply their blind acceptance, perhaps we should approach history with an openness towards its revision and rewriting. When recounting the past and its maladies, that is to say, the coming to terms with the mass killings perpetrated by political regimes we should not yield to a concept of history as an impending force of destiny or as an unavoidable scheme of natural powers. The evil experienced under brutal repressive dictatorships, terrorist organizations, or pseudo democratic regimes in many countries must not elicit melancholia as its only outcome; instead these experiences try to disentangle oppressive power from its characterization as an impending doom. Acknowledging the true nature of the violence exercised upon all dissidents means to demand a moral, cultural, and political initiative, one that

will have an impact on the way our present time is conceptualized and understood. These initiatives will find a translation in a future that contemplates the understanding of the historical past as the intellectual engine for political and cultural change against the new catastrophes to come.

In this special issues of *Dissidences: Hispanic Journal of Theory and Criticism* entitled "Reconciliation and its Discontents," our purpose has been to facilitate avenues of reconciliation in societies politically and emotionally divided by a type of violence conducive to the killing and disappearance of thousands, hundred of thousands, or even millions. It is time to come closer to the victim both by recognizing his/her struggle and by paying attention to his/her demands for justice and truth. Recognition means the actualization of his/her struggle in our time; the search for justice and truth implies establishing the facts and punishing those responsible for the crimes committed against the humanity of the victim. Without taking these previous steps, no reconciliation could ever be achieved.

In this sense, how well do museums, lieux de mémoire, monuments, celebrations, demonstrations, or any other practice of remembering serve the goals of recognition, justice, and truth for the victims of the past? Is it necessary to legislate from the state to protect the victim? Should a democracy make the fair causes of the victim its own? In other words, how can we differentiate between reconciliation as a tool for further democratization from its instrumentalization as a mere celebratory event with little consequence for public life? A questioning and discontent with the actual policies of reconciliation will play a fundamental role in the making of a robust civil society that is not willing to easily forget its past and its victims.

With this purpose in mind we have collected a wide array of essays dealing and exploring the issue of reconciliation across borders and times, countries and historical moments. Our

approach is not national or regional, even though the studies focus on particular countries or nations. These borders could distort the issues involved in the acceptance or denial of a peaceful co-existence among antagonist groups ready to exterminate enemies by all legal and illegal available means. The tinted arguments supporting the distinction between friends and enemies, and the inevitable violence derived from this divide, could be perceived as nationally colored even though its outcome is universal no matter where one dares to look. The responses to facilitate reconciliation do not stop at the national border. The knowledge gained from one particular experience can serve to appease violent confrontations in another context.

Perhaps the time has come to substitute the notion of the national with the notion of the citizen, since the latter emphasizes the political link among equal and free members in a true democracy. Exclusion and extermination always target individuals even if they are victimized for belonging to national or ethnic groups. Nevertheless, the claim for justice and reparation is better articulated from the point of view of a citizen that reclaims the right of his/her difference.

In her essay entitled "Forgiveness and Reconciliation as Generational Questions, Argentina 1982-2011," Ana Ros questions Derrida's concept of forgiveness because it would make reconciliation impossible. This essay discusses how reconciliation is dependent upon and facilitated by the achievement of justice and generational change.

Betina Kaplan in her "Contesting Memories: A Brief Recount of the Struggles to Talk About the Violent Past in Argentina" challenges Idelber Avelar's statement that torture in Latin America is

a "universally recognized" truth. Truth should be established by means other than judicial sentences (as necessary as they are) and instead by engaging in political and moral debates concerning what is to be remembered and what should be forgotten. Kaplan is reluctant to use the word reconciliation since it was claimed by the military in Argentina when seeking approval for the services rendered to the nation.

Sebastián Díaz-Duhalde focuses on the war fought by the Triple Alliance of Argentina, the Empire of Brazil, and Uruguay against Paraguay in his essay "The Battlefields of Disagreement and Reconciliation. 21st Century Documentary Images on The War Against Paraguay (1864-1870)." Díaz-Duhalde follows Jacques Rancière's notion of consensus: a paradigm to understand what is possible and what is not, a paradigm that makes the static images of the past come alive in the present. He carefully analyzes José Luis García's documentary Cándido López: The Battlefields (2005) under this notion.

Manuela Badilla Rajevic in her essay, "Memory Museums in Chile: Connecting the Past with the Voices of the Present," studies how civilian organizations promote spaces of memory in order to demand justice and truth. The purpose is to transform former detention and torture centers into memorials, as in the case study she analyzes, Londres 38, a center used by the DINA, the Chilean police agency responsible for the disappearance of thousands of people.

Katherine Hite, in her "Inter-Generational Transmission of Grief in Paine, Chile," addresses the case study of Paine, a town where on October 16, 1973 several men were disappeared. The Paine Memorial was erected with a thousand pine logs representing the descendents of those no

longer present in the town. She describes how conflicting feelings of grief and fear emerged around the memorial on behalf of the descendants of the missing whose memory is still alive in younger generations.

In "Signs of State Terrorism in Post-Authoritarian Santiago: Memories and Memorialization in Chile," Gonzalo Cáceres and Carolina Aguilera investigate how state terrorism extend fear and neutralized political opposition to dictatorship. They link the construction of memorials to the different policies of remembrance followed by former Chilean presidents Patricio Aylwin, Ricardo Lagos, and Michelle Bachelet.

Eugenio Di Stefano, in his "From Shopping Malls to Memory Museums: Reconciling the Recent Past in the Uruguayan Neoliberal State," argues that it is not so much the past Uruguayan neoliberal political agenda that is responsible for the erasure of memory but rather the efforts of the Left to disguise a conflict of social inequality (between capitalism and communism) as a conflict that opposes human rights to authoritarianism. He studies these shifts in relation to a series of urban interventions in Montevideo.

Among the projects that foster remembrance, Margarita Saona, in "Memory Sites: From Auratic Spaces to a Cyberspace of Peruvian Memorials," studies the use of Facebook in a project entitled *Un día en la memoria*, and pays attention to the exchange of spatial sites of memory—as in Pierre Nora's lieux de mémoire—for temporal ones. The interrelation among users is developed through the concept of a "poke:" "an insistent reminder that intrudes in the recipient's current instant as both a memento and a warning that links past and present."

Fritz Glockner, in "The Broken Years. The Case of the So-Called "Dirty War" in Mexico," uncovers the existence of an unrecognized dirty war in Mexico. Glockner argues that this is not surprising if one takes into account that Mexico was the first country in Latin America to implement the teachings from La Escuela de las Américas directed at the physical elimination of the so-called insurgency.

Catherine M. Cole in "The Blanket of Reconciliation in South Africa" addresses the issue of theatrical plays eager to achieve reconciliation at the expense of creating a "deadening" performance and response by the audience. She studies the narration Mother to Mother written by Sindiwe Magona and how the choices made in its adaptation to the theater comments on the problems of reconciliation.

Mauritis van Bever Donker, in "Welcome to Our Hillbrow: Learning to 'learn to live' in the Wake of Apartheid," analyzes how the writing of author Phaswane Mpe rethinks the conventional paradigm of apartheid. Welcome to Our Hillbrow designs a position that goes beyond seeing post-apartheid literature as a mere vehicle for mourning.

Shushan Avagyan, in her essay "Becoming Aurora: Translating the Story of Arshaluys Mardiganian," discusses the difficulties of translating genocide and trauma, in this particular case, from Armenian into English. She studies how the foreignness of the original is domesticated by erroneously conceived perceptions present in the translation. She compares

Arshaluys Mardiganian's novel Ravished Armenia with Atom Egoyan and Kutluğ Ataman's video installation Auroras/Testimony.

Sirene Harb, in her "Perspectives on Violence and Reconciliation: Arab-American Women's Writing about September 11," posits the task of reconciliation as one of dismissing stereotypes of individual and collective Arab identities. Within a context of violence and distrust towards Arabs, she finds it necessary to historicize terrorist attacks like 9/11 (which does not imply making it less objectionable) and to de-homogenize Arabness.

In Txetxu Aguado's "Memory and Reconciliation in Spanish Civil Society," reconciliation in contemporary Spain has not been fully achieved. The putting aside of the political tensions leading to the Spanish Civil War and the struggle to achieve a peaceful and democratic coexistence among different political sensibilities is still a work in progress. He argues in favor of a politics of remembrance whose aim will be to re-enact the memory of suffering and oppression previously discarded.

Annabel Martín's essay, "And When Time Stood Still: Building a Road for Peace, Reconciliation, and Forgiveness in Euskadi (The End of ETA Armed Conflict)," looks at the strategies Basque society is beginning to adopt on its new road towards societal reconciliation given the promise of a post-ETA context. Through a theorization of forgiveness and the types of transformations it demands on both the victims and those guilty of crimes, Martín describes the internal psychological transformations required of forgiveness. She posits that the passage from the you to the I (the recognition of the other in me) grounds a politics of reconciliation. Recent

examples of incarcerated ETA militants meeting with the family members of victims inspire her theorization.

Irene Silverblatt addresses how the commemoration and translation of Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger's poetry, a German-language poet who died in a Ukrainian SS labor camp in 1942 when she was 18 years old, brings to the fore the difficulties of accepting multi-ethnic and multi-lingual backgrounds and languages into the official historical tradition of today's Ukraine. In her "Confronting Nationalisms, Cosmopolitan Visions, and the Politics of Memory: Aesthetics of Reconciliation and Selma Meerbaum-Eisinger in Western Ukraine," theater performances, poetry festivals, and the translation of Selma's and Paul Celan's poetry—another unrecognized Ukrainian—help in the understanding and reconciliation of Ukrainians with their immediate past.

Irene Kacandes in her essay, "Family/War: A Cautionary Tale," posits through her notion of paramemoir, that memories are stored in interpersonal relationships. They become part of the life-history of those who did not experience them first hand, a remembrance that is passed down from parents to children. Reconciliation then means to bring together national history with the one's own private family stories, i. e., to make compatible History with memory.

Silvia Spitta studies the importance of the Virgin of Guadalupe both historically and as an icon for Mexican exiles and immigrants. In her "Healing an Open Wound: Tepeyaquism as Transnational Political and Cultural Activism," she compares the Virgin of Guadalupe with the Statue of Liberty and posits that reconciliation in the Mexican immigrant context implies making two national and individual models of identity compatible.

