



Memory, War, and Dictatorship in Recent Spanish Fiction by Women, by Sarah Leggott

Jane Hanley

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highly useful for those researchers involved in the growing field of sound and listening studies as well as Latin American and Caribbean decolonial studies more generally.

Jeffrey Browitt

University of Technology, Sydney

Email: jeffrey.browitt@uts.edu.au

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Memory, War, and Dictatorship in Recent Spanish Fiction by Women, by Sarah Leggott, Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 2015, 168 pp., \$70.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-61148-666-7

This book analyses five contemporary Spanish novels by women in terms of the cultural significance of memory in post-dictatorship Spain, with a particular focus on the representation of gendered and intergenerational experiences. In the first chapter, Leggott agilely summarises the active debate about the Spanish Civil War and Franco's dictatorship, describing their consequences for subsequent generations and their influence on the production and reception of stories. Her summary emphasises the fear of recurrence of violent division as the basis for the consensus around silence during the transition to democracy. Fear, she argues, created an artificial equivalence between the two sides, while reinforcing the alternative narrative of a future-oriented present. Both equivalence and future focus are symptoms of the incapacity to reconcile with the past. Leggott notes the importance of the post-dictatorship generation in energising recent memory debates despite ongoing pressure from conservatives to forget and move on. This period also saw commercial exploitation of public interest, and saturation of war stories supporting the mythification and consequent evacuation of meaning from history. Novels and films revised and represented this past, some narrating personal experiences and others engaging with historical silences and contributing to memory in a broader sense. Leggott employs Hirsch's concept of postmemory and a range of current trauma theory to question dilution or inheritance of both trauma and culpability. She emphasises a focus on women because amnesia about their experience is worse and some traumas are gender-specific.

Dulce Chacón's *La voz dormida*, Leggott suggests, is widely studied because it fits well with the memory debates and the author herself has engaged with them. Chacón's novel also includes Leggott's key themes of intergenerational transmission of trauma and ideology. Transmission in *La voz dormida* ties to the repression of women's supposed emotional weakness and disciplining of their bodies. Within the text, ideology appears to indeed be heritable, since stories persist in private spaces, resulting in subversion and resistance during the dictatorship. Female solidarity and alternative maternities exemplify ways of sharing trauma and different sites of resistance and transgression. On the other hand, memory can become a duty and burden for the next generation, and Leggott also critiques Chacón's narrative resolution as falsely relegating trauma to the past. She highlights the way the realist style, recalling some Holocaust writing, can desensitise readers to events described, suggesting that hauntedness and lingering are more effective. Nevertheless, Chacón's use of testimonies and historical documents, with their authorising effect, has the secondary benefit of expanding the audience for those

stories. Use of such stories may be an appropriation, especially if domesticating or neutralising trauma, but Leggott suggests those who document the past should also absorb it into themselves.

Via Rosa Regàs's *Luna lunera*, Leggott again addresses intergenerational relationships and their disruption, especially loss of a mother, and social ruptures resulting from the war and subsequent repression of Republican and Catalan identities, with repercussions for subsequent generations including Regàs herself. The punishment of Republican children as a site of trauma is one such rupture. Here, Leggott links *Luna lunera* to broader social questions without framing it as autobiography or psychological purging. Regàs draws on aspects of parents' and grandparents' lives, since writing active memory is a part of her project that frames the exploration of a family and nation divided. However, she is also interested in broader themes such as the impossibility of annihilating history even with maternal eradication, since absences are felt. Regàs also implies a critique of the church and the division of public and private space facilitating violence. Violence links to the Nationalist redemptive mission, creating children as internal exiles and objects of disciplinary purification. Simultaneously, female relationships and spaces again offer opportunities for solidarity and survival as well as alternative sources of knowledge and resistance. Knowledge, however, remains fragmentary, contradictory, and full of secrets, in which stories of the past have been modified to suit the needs of different protagonists, just as in missions to recover national memory. The reconstruction of the past via non-hegemonic sources, including female voices, helps break silences.

Josefina Aldecoa's *La fuerza del destino*, from her trilogy of lives crossing all the generational differences and transgenerational transmissions before, during and after the dictatorship permits Leggott to explore memory for those who have been marginalised or rendered invisible, such as mothers and older women. Leggott suggests that scholarship on Aldecoa highlights educational history and autobiographical elements, while more focus on the maternal and older women could help address the absence of mothers in history, especially speaking in their own voices. There is no compensation for exile and return experiences that suppose an enormous loss of self and of professional and sexual identity.

Through Carme Riera's *La mitad del alma*, Leggott returns to the intersection between fiction and documentary sources. This novel too addresses the ways in which reconstruction is not equivalent to recovery nor historical truth, highlighting the importance but ultimate instability of memory. Leggott also underlines the uncertainty of self that results from an unstable past, and the ways reality is haunted by the lost and unknown. Ultimately, uncertainty and partial knowledge must be accepted. Haunting is the inescapable return of traumas we did not allow ourselves to feel. Acceptance allows deliberate forgetting rather than the repression of trauma as a way to experience memory. Riera's work also allows Leggott to discuss trends towards integration of diverse histories and the complexity of lived experience, departing from historical binaries. In discovering aspects of her mother's life, the protagonist also encounters ways in which individuals could disrupt Francoist femininities.

In her chapter on *El corazón helado*, Leggott explores Almudena Grandes's roles as both social critic and author engaging with historical memory movements. Grandes's literary project is the war and its sequelae. This novel, Leggott suggests, shows how the past disrupts the present, especially the impact of exile. *El corazón helado*'s dual narrative, around a grandchild of a Nationalist intercut with non-chronological episodes from the past, evokes the fragmentary nature of historical discovery. Spain's struggle to reconcile the past incorporates a multi-generational trauma of exile, and potential or actual

return, resulting in state of contingency. Second and third generations experience doubling of culture and partial belongings, while also clashing with first generation exiles over their identity. Exile becomes the condition of their lives. Inside Spain, Republicans were denied their grief and memorials, while Nationalists obsessively commemorated theirs. Republicans who stayed suffered an internal uprooting, while those who left later confronted returning to their own land made foreign, neither welcomed nor acknowledged. The third generation does not escape, as healing is not automatic over time. While some younger people's denial is another form of complicity, those who engage with history also face the problem of shame or inherited guilt. With characters from both sides of the war shaping subsequent generations, Leggott argues that Grandes's novel undercuts dualism in favour of a complex particularity.

The brief conclusion summarises contemporary Spanish literature's treatment of generational transmission of trauma and in relation to gendered experience, including maternity and maternal loss, and exile through death and through repression. Some novels obscure the complexity and partiality of historical recovery. Leggott argues that effective postmemorial novels critically engage with the problems of storytelling and how memory is passed on through many different mechanisms. Overall, this book offers a readable summary of the complex unfolding of the memory debates in Spain and their significance for the cultural imaginary, taking individual texts linking personal authorial experience and vision to broader social issues. It should be valuable both to scholars of contemporary Spanish literature and to those interested in trauma and memory issues in European culture more generally.

Jane Hanley

Macquarie University

Email: jane.hanley@mq.edu.au

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