

BATTLES OF HISTORY AND MEMORY. A FIRST GENERAL MAPPING OF CONCEPTIONS AND PROPOSALS FROM LATIN AMERICA AND EUROPE

**Batallas de la Historia y la memoria. Un primer mapeo
general de concepciones y propuestas de América Latina y
Europa**

Research article

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Abstract

In this article we find a general mapping of diverse conceptions and fundamental notions to think the wide spectrum of history, historicity, historical time among other essential elements for our contemporaneity. Current politics, eclipsed by struggles and conceptual battles and their abstraction, requires attentive analysis of the historical movements of the present. Taking memory and history through a political lens, then, forces us to dispute the construction of the social order installed at a given social time. The objective of this paper is, first, to discuss how it is possible to conceive of memory and the emergence of novelty, particularly by delving into the ideas of Horkheimer and Arendt –since in her work as well, through the notion of “natality”, memory becomes less an act of preservation and more an exercise of judgment, distinction, and action, which allows us to connect with the theme of political struggles over memory. This will enable us to situate the state of memory in terms of Europe. Subsequently, we aim to contrast this perspective and ground it in Latin America, where many countries have been victims of systematic human rights violations. These two scenarios are considered with the purpose of contrasting some particular conflicts and perspectives that are relevant to global dilemmas.

Keywords

Europe; Global Struggles; History; Latin America; Memory; Natality.

Resumen

En este artículo encontramos un mapeo general de diversas concepciones y nociones fundamentales para pensar el amplio espectro de la historia, la historicidad, el tiempo histórico entre otros elementos esenciales para nuestra contemporaneidad. La política actual, eclipsada por luchas y batallas conceptuales y su abstracción, requiere un análisis atento de los movimientos históricos del presente. Tomar la memoria y la historia a través de una lente política, entonces, nos obliga a disputar la construcción del orden social instalado en un determinado tiempo social. El objetivo de este trabajo es, en primer lugar, discutir cómo es posible concebir la memoria y la emergencia de la novedad, particularmente profundizando en las ideas de Horkheimer y Arendt –ya que también en su obra, a través de la noción de «natalidad», la memoria se convierte menos en un acto de preservación y más en un ejercicio de juicio, distinción y acción, lo que nos permite conectar con el tema de las luchas políticas por la memoria. Esto nos permitirá situar el estado de la memoria en términos de Europa. Posteriormente, nos proponemos contrastar esta perspectiva y aterrizarla en América Latina, donde muchos países han sido víctimas de violaciones sistemáticas de los derechos humanos. Estos dos escenarios son considerados con el propósito de contrastar algunos conflictos y perspectivas particulares que son relevantes para los dilemas globales.

Palabras clave

América Latina; Europa; Luchas Globales; Historia; Memoria; Natalidad.

Introduction

It is imperative to begin by noting that memory is not a natural, ahistorical, and asocial fact, much less an apolitical one. Generally, from the premises of a fetishized conceptuality, it might appear that remembering, that engaging in an act of memory, represents a personal and individual fact, relatively falsified by the biases, traumas, or affectivity of each subject. In this manner, collective memory would be nothing more than a subsequent addition that, whether in a conciliatory or conflictual way, would synthesize these individual memories. Furthermore, history would present itself as that discipline which, whether or not it begins with an effective critique of its sources, would preserve collective memory. That which we do not entirely remember would be rescued, purified, and secured by the historical discipline. Thus, to remember, it would suffice to read history books or trust in the prism of bourgeois subjectivity (Barria-Asenjo et al., 2023a).

However, historical discipline is far from constituting a neutral discourse. It would be more accurate to assert that the conflict inherent in the discipline of history is not merely a divergence of individual opinions and memories, but rather a social process of class conflict and overdetermined social structures. It involves recognizing in memory and in the discipline of history the expression, the relays, and the tactics of permanent social conflicts in which various collectivities—rather than individuals—attempt to inscribe their practices of hegemony, domination, and above all, emancipation. This is why, from this perspective, memory and the discipline of history invariably refer to ruptures, traumas, and discontinuities where the traces of irreducible political struggles become visible (Barria-Asenjo et al., 2023b; 2024).

Badiou (2007) has posited that the emergence of historical novelties, which he designates as “events” (*événement*) (p.179), not only reconfigures historical objectivity (the situations) but also individual mechanisms (the subjects). Only when the subject develops a practice of “fidelity” and unfolds the consequences of an event can they enter a new terrain, that of “truth”, wherein memory and various forms of “knowledge” are reconfigured (2007, pp. 331–

334). Thus, memory does not merely constitute the passive and reactionary preservation of the past but would instead represent the subset of fidelity to an event (Badiou, 2009, pp. 54–58). In contrast to historicist accumulation, where “breaks” (*rupture*) and shifts in “problematics” (*problématiques*) remain imperceptible –to employ the terminology of one of Badiou’s mentors, Althusser (1985, pp. 168, 170)–, Badiou encourages us to consider the historicity of breaks and, consequently, the rupture of memory: the manner in which certain events necessitate the subject’s commitment to question the established order and to rethink, remake, and rematerialize history and memory (Barria-Asenjo et al., 2023).

This understanding of memory –which we could extrapolate to the so-called “French epistemology” (Peña-Guzmán, 2020, pp. 68–76)– sharply contrasts with the German hermeneutic tradition. Although it was relevant to emphasize, as Dilthey did, the difference between explaining (*erklären*) and understanding (*verstehen*) –in the sense that the human and social sciences (*Geisteswissenschaft*), including history, are not identical to a positivist natural science that seeks to quantify existence, since they are devoted to interpreting human experiences (*Erlebnis*) (Dilthey, 1976, p. 89)– we can say that, in this approach, political conflicts are conspicuously absent. Even when Heidegger radicalizes hermeneutics by extending it to all human existence and not limiting this to a particular discipline or set of disciplines –to exist is already to pre-theoretically understand our being possibilities– human existence (*Dasein*) possesses a historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) grounded in its temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*), such that it always exists temporally and must appropriate its concrete conditions:

We shall call the development of understanding [*Verstehen*] interpretation [*Auslegung*]. In interpretation understanding appropriates what it has understood understandingly. In interpretation understanding does not become something different, but rather itself. Interpretation is existentially based in understanding, and not the other way around. Interpretation is not the acknowledgment of what has been understood, but rather the development of possibilities projected in understanding. (Heidegger, 2010, p.144)

Memory, then, would not be a faculty for recalling events but a mode of *Dasein* being-in-the-world where the past is not left behind but continues to shape our horizon of understanding. Gadamer (2004) takes up this idea and speaks of an “effectual history” (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) to emphasize how our understandings and interpretations are conditioned by the historical effects of tradition (pp. 311–318). Thus, memory would be a continuous dialogue with tradition. Nevertheless, the hermeneutic emphasis on tradition and continuity does not easily lend itself to a radical politics of rupture. While Heidegger’s ontology of historicity displaces the Cartesian subject, it does not articulate a theory of ideological domination or political transformation. Similarly, Gadamer’s model of understanding as a “fusion of horizons” (*Horizontverschmelzung*) tends to emphasize reconciliation rather than conflict (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 382–387). The past is retrieved to be integrated, not to be ruptured. Hence, while these thinkers offer a profound account of the temporality of existence, they remain distant from the kind of revolutionary reconfiguration of memory and subjectivity that Badiou and Althusser envision.

This tension between continuity and rupture, tradition and event, resonates with the critical concerns raised by thinkers such as Horkheimer and Adorno, who in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* foreground the role of historical reason in reproducing domination. For them, memory is both a site of resistance and a terrain captured by instrumental rationality. In their reading of fascism and mass culture, memory becomes standardized, emptied of critical content, and subordinated to the logic of repetition (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, pp. 8, 135). This aligns with the ethos of discontinuity: to remember is to resist the smooth narratives of progress that conceal suffering.

In this sense, the emphasis placed by Norbert Lechner (2015) in stating that memory is an intersubjective relationship becomes understandable: memory is always developed through communication with others and is always determined by a socio-temporal context. As such, memory will inevitably exist only in plural form, being a contested field where what is disputed is the meaning of the present in order to define the materials with which the future can be built.

Memory is simultaneously the construction of social time (Koselleck, 1979), which itself is a product of Modernity, in which modern society assumes the past as a product of human action while distancing itself from the contingency of both past and future. This distance is precisely what enables us to approach past and future as open temporalities that are malleable and available.

As both past and future emerge as open temporalities for subjects, the construction of memory and history will ultimately lead to questions about where we come from and where we are going. Therefore, what ultimately matters is the dispute over the meaning of social order.

The configuration of memory and future imaginaries is fundamentally conditioned by conceptions of political order. To dispute memory is, therefore, to recognize that subjects are constitutively constructed by their enemies (Monedero, 2024): we are, as political subjects, the result of the victories and defeats that have defined a certain socio-temporal landscape. Consequently, memory becomes the field of dispute wherein subjects seek to circumvent death by reappropriating the order's meaning, both inherited and emergent.

These theoretical insights find concrete elaboration in Latin American memory studies, particularly in the work of Eugenia Allier Montaño, Michael J. Lazzara, Elizabeth Jelin, Maristella Svampa and even Mauricio Berger.

For instance, Eugenia Allier Montaño (2016) develops the notion of “memory struggles” to analyze how collective memory is configured through conflict, negotiation, and resistance (pp. 33–47). She emphasizes that memory is not a passive recollection of the past but an active intervention in the present that opens the possibility of future transformation. Her work aligns with Badiou's theory of the event in underlining memory's performative and creative dimensions, while maintaining sensitivity to local contexts and actors. Moreover, her approach addresses how memory becomes institutionalized, contested, and reinscribed in political projects, often entangled in processes of democratization and justice.

Michael J. Lazzara's contributions (2021) bring narrative and cultural production into dialogue with memory politics in post-dictatorial Chile. He foregrounds testimonial practices and cultural interventions as vehicles through which subjects negotiate the legacies of state violence and the neoliberal transition. For Lazzara, memory is not static but mediated, aestheticized, and narratively constructed. Importantly, he identifies the emergence of a "second generation" of memory producers whose perspectives are shaped not by direct experience of dictatorship but by inherited trauma and contemporary sociopolitical conditions.

Maristella Svampa (2019) further contributes by linking memory to socio-environmental struggles, especially in contexts marked by neo-extractivism and dispossession. For Svampa, memory is not only about past atrocities but about ongoing forms of violence. She proposes the concept of "territorial memory", which ties memory practices to land, body, and ecology. This perspective introduces new temporalities and spatialities into the discussion, expanding the political stakes of memory.

Mauricio Berger (2014) adds finally to this field by examining how memory is constructed from below in rural and peripheral communities. He critiques the institutionalization and commodification of memory policies that often erase subaltern voices and impose standardized narratives. Berger emphasizes the importance of affective, situated, and embodied practices that disrupt official memorial regimes.

Given all of the above, the objective of this paper is, first, to discuss how it is possible to conceive of memory and the emergence of novelty, particularly by delving into the ideas of Horkheimer and Arendt –since in her work as well, through the notion of "natality", memory becomes less an act of preservation and more an exercise of judgment, distinction, and action, which allows us to connect with the theme of political struggles over memory (Arendt, 1998, pp. 8–9, 247). This will enable us to situate the state of memory in terms of Europe. Subsequently, we aim to contrast this perspective and ground it in Latin America, where many countries have been victims of systematic human rights violations (consider, for example, the symptomatic cases of Fujimori's

dictatorship in Peru or Pinochet's in Chile, whose political and ideological heirs, continue to manipulate memory to portray their governments as the pinnacle of "democracy". In Latin America, as previously observed, there exist particularly significant conceptualizations of memory that emphasize precisely the political dimension of remembering. Accordingly, we have structured our work into two principal sections: the first entitled "Memory, Projection, and Revolution: An Attempt to Locate Europe" and the second entitled "The Nexus Between History and Memory in Latin America in Socio-Political Problems".

"Memory, Projection and Revolution: An Attempt to Locate Europe"

The New and the Old

If we want to understand the current situation on the European continent in terms of the human (and also social) phenomenon of memory—or the ability to remember—it is worth recalling the distinction between the *old* and the *new* with reference to Hannah Arendt. In probably no other essay as in *The Crisis in Education* does Arendt (1954) express the normative foundations that underlie the founding of today's United States in such a concise way. Arendt argues that the labeling of the US as the *New World* does not merely serve as a descriptive marker to distinguish it from the *Old World*, i.e. Europe. Rather, according to Arendt, the concept of the *New World* expresses the idea that "a new order can be founded, and what is more, founded with full consciousness of a historical continuum, for the phrase "New World" gains its meaning from the Old World, which, however admirable on other scores, was rejected because it could find no solution for poverty and oppression" (Arendt, 1954, p. 3). If one places the thoughts from Arendt's essay, in which Arendt is primarily concerned with the problems of the US American education system, which she subjects to a concrete comparison with the European one (p. 7 ff.), in a broader context of Arendt's theoretical framework, it becomes clear that the *new* (and thus also the revolutionary) that Arendt talks about in her essay, refers to the concept

that Arendt summarizes under the term *natality* (*Gebürtlichkeit*). By using this term, Arendt does not want to draw attention exclusively to the empirically ascertainable fact of being born—a circumstance that is to be regarded as formative for both human and animal forms of existence and is therefore not genuinely human—but rather to the genuinely human ability to be able to have a formative influence on the environment by means of one's own power for taking action (for Arendt an epitome of freedom). Natalty—metaphorically represented in human birth (Totsching, 2017, pp. 337–338)—stands for the genuinely human potential to bring something revolutionarily new into the old world—or in Arendt's words:

The miracle that repeatedly interrupts the course of the world and the course of human affairs and rescues it from the corruption that sits within it as a germ and determines its movement as a “law” is ultimately the fact of natalty, of being born, which is the ontological precondition for there being such a thing as action at all. (Arendt, 1981, p. 243, translated by the authors from the original German)

The *new*, which can create a *disruption of the existing*—and thus a *break with the old*—is thus always based on that mental disposition, it could be argued, which Horkheimer described as the *longing for the Wholly Other* (Verovšek, 2020, p. 216).

Longing and the Wholly Other

The *new*, which is to find its own practical realization by means of a revolution, can therefore only ever be fully understood in the light of an *old* that is perceived as deficient—since the memory of this old is often characterized by blatant forms of injustice (e.g. poverty on the former European continent) and thus implies a longing for a new social order to be realised in the future. This new—to put it in a nutshell—simultaneously represents an *other* that would like to see the currently prevailing social and political grievances abolished. To put it in Horkheimer's words, the longing for the *other*, which in most cases underlies the creation of the *new*, is fed by the hope that arises with regard to currently prevailing grievances and is specifically characterized by the fact that there is a moment that transcends these grievances, which eludes the immanence of the

given—however, and this is the crux of Horkheimer's argumentation, one can only refer to a feeling of *hope* in one's own practical actions, which is based on that transcendent moment, but not to a form of *reason* that attempts to derive that moment of transcendence (Nagl-Docekal, 2020, p. 664).

To put it in Horkheimer's own words:

For metaphysics, Kant's most clearly formulated criticism applies to all ideas that thought they could designate an Absolute that underlies and transcends appearance. The positive nature of such ideas, above all the existence of an omnipotent, all-good God, which both theology and some of the great Enlightenment philosophers professed, cannot be logically substantiated more precisely than the absolute spirit, general will or nothingness. However a positive or negative unconditional that transcends the world of appearance presents itself, it contradicts the insight that all reality recognized by the mind owes itself to the intellectual functions of the subject and is thus itself to be understood as a questionable moment of appearance. The greater the progress, the more endangered not ... only faith, but the true longing for something better. This is precisely why all thinking and feeling that is not purely positivist is increasingly becoming a phenomenon of the childhood period of humanity, which is a decisive factor in the conscious and unconscious pessimism of the present. (Horkheimer, 2017, p. 9, translated by the authors from the original German)

At this point, Horkheimer could also be read as follows: The elimination of metaphysical forms of authority—which were originally characterized by a faith that transcended the earthly conditions perceived as deficient—has led to that authority, i.e. God, now being substituted by the *wholly other*. In other words: An absolute, which is characterized by a secularized form of theology and would like to see rampant social injustices subjected to negation (Nagl-Docekal, 2020, p. 660).

The longing for the *other* that Horkheimer refers to—according to the thesis to be developed in the following—is to be regarded as indispensable for any form of emancipatory thinking (and thus also for any form of emancipatory practice). So when Thatcher spoke of the dictum that there is no alternative to the neoliberal-capitalist system, the *wholly other*, which is apostrophized within the framework of critical-theoretical discourses, stands for the hope that such an alternative exists (Séville, 2018).

To return to Arendt, the fact of natality, which manifests itself on a political level in the process of revolution, can be interpreted as a practiced realization of this longing for the *other*. Thus, Arendt writes regarding the revolutionary process:

You had the feeling that being free and starting something new were the same thing. And this mysterious human gift, the ability to start something new, obviously has something to do with the fact that each of us entered the world at birth as a newcomer. In other words: We can start something because we are beginnings and therefore beginners. Insofar as the ability to act and speak—and speaking is nothing more than another form of action—makes us political beings, and since acting has always meant setting something in motion that was not there before, birth, human birth as the equivalent of human mortality, is the ontological *sine qua non* of all politics. [...] In any case, the chain of revolutions [...] repeatedly shows us the eruptive new beginnings within the temporal and historical continuum. (Arendt, 2018, 37 ff., translated by the authors from the original German)

However, this longing for the *other*, which is to a certain extent an ideal precondition for the break with the old that is expressed in the principle of natality, is dependent on the basic assumption, to formulate it with reference to Zygmunt Bauman's earlier remarks, that every historical period in which people and societies find themselves is to be regarded as a situation with an open outcome (Bauman, 1976, p. 10). From the fact of this openness—which clearly distinguishes itself from teleological conceptions of historical progress—Bauman also deduces that the ability to imagine utopian visions of the future (which are preferable to the current state of society, which is perceived as deficient) is thus always dependent on the epistemic assumption of the contingency and changeability of the existing (p. 13). To clarify this with reference to the above considerations: The longing for the *other* that Horkheimer refers to—and which Bauman manifests in the anti-teleological and relativizing potential of utopian thinking—is capable of critically questioning the (supposed) lack of alternatives in the prevailing social framework. To be able to recognize the contingency of the prevailing historical and social conditions, it is necessary to realize one's own historical embeddedness, which Horkheimer once formulated in one of the founding texts of critical theory: *Traditional and Critical Theory*. More concretely, the fact that one's own research activity and thus the process of gaining scientific knowledge that one carries out oneself often contributes indirectly to the reproduction of social totality (Horkheimer, 2020, p. 15).

Projections and Longing

Whether it is a question of the concept of the old or the new as formulated by Arendt (whereby the *new* in this context, as already explained, is always to be seen as an ideal alternative to the old): the ability to create something revolutionary always presupposes—to use Freud's term—specific forms of projection. Freud emphasizes the following about the phenomenon of projection:

According to our well-founded assumption, the conflicting feelings—tender and hostile—towards the now deceased both want to assert themselves at the time of loss, as grief and as satisfaction. There must be a conflict between these two opposites, and since one of the opposing partners, the hostility, is unconscious—in whole or in greater part—the outcome of the conflict cannot consist in a subtraction of the two intensities from each other with conscious utilization of the surplus, for example, as one forgives a loved one for an offence suffered by her. Rather, the process takes place through a special psychic mechanism, which in psychoanalysis is known as projection. The hostility, of which one knows nothing and does not want to know anything, is thrown out of one's inner perception into the outer world, detached from one's own person and shifted onto the other. (Freud, 1940, p. 79)

Whether it is the conceptualization of utopian visions of the future or—of even greater relevance in this context—the *retrotopian* longing (Bauman, 2017, pp. 9–10) for a supposedly better past, which in turn represents a distorted form of memory: socially prevalent grievances can cause societies to fall prey to collective forms of projection, which in turn can be both constructive and destructive in nature. According to Freud, the phenomenon of projection should initially be seen as a psychological process that can already be found in early tribal societies—a circumstance that can be illustrated in particular by the mourning ceremonies prevalent in these tribal societies. Freud argues, the assumption that the dead can become malevolent demons illustrates that a possible hostility felt towards the dead on an unconscious level is subsequently externalized and projected onto the dead. Freud adds, however, that the externalization of this emotional conflict should itself be seen as an anthropological characteristic that runs through the entire course of human development (1940, pp. 9–10).

Where does Europe stand?

Looking at the current geopolitical situation on a global level, the question inevitably arises—in the light of the above considerations—as to what extent Europe needs to reinvent itself.

One need not only think of Putin's increasingly autocratic Russia, which culminated in the brutal war of aggression against Ukraine. Donald Trump's recent blunt threats to annex Greenland or the Panama Canal by military force if necessary (Keating, 2025) also show that we have arrived in the age of an authoritarian form of capitalism.

The question that inevitably arises in this context is how Europe should position itself amid this new geopolitical power structure. The whole problem becomes even more visible when you consider that many countries—including many EU countries—are currently also undergoing a revolution (in the best Arendtian sense). However, a revolution from the right – one just has to take a look at Austria, where Herbert Kickl will probably soon be the new chancellor, the situation in France or—to name just a few examples among many—the rise of the AfD in Germany. These developments clearly show that revolutions are not only dependent on specific forms of collective projection, but also that the question of whether they are progressive or regressive revolutions depends to a large extent on the form of projection on which these revolutions themselves are based.

This brings us to the relevant political-theoretical triad between *memory*, *projection* and *revolution* which is helpful to understand the peculiar historical configuration in which Europe currently finds itself. Thus, a key question is whether the grievances currently being identified, which are emerging on a global level, enable Europe to seek the solution within the *wholly other*, which is to be located in a future characterized by openness. Or whether the European states are projecting the solution into a supposedly better (unprecedented) past—in line with Zygmunt Bauman's concept of *retrotopia* (Bauman, 2017, pp.

9-10). Whether Europe submits to authoritarian capitalism in the 21st century or strives for a more progressive and just future depends to a large extent on the lessons Europe is willing to learn from the past.

The Nexus Between History and Memory in Latin America in Socio-political Problems

Socio-political problems and conflicts arising from the intersection of history and memory in Latin America have been highly diverse both in the past and present. To address this relationship, the following approach will be taken. First, the significance of memory as a contested space and a political issue will be discussed, briefly outlining the context in which memory studies emerged in Latin America, their trends and future directions, as well as some of their interrelations. This section concludes with an examination of oral history as a bridge between history and memory in Latin America, allowing the inclusion of voices that have been excluded, as well as the study of socio-environmental conflicts as special cases that illustrate the connection between multiple historical conflicts and the memory of environmental struggles as a possibility for democratic transformation.

The importance of memory lies in the effort to understand and create different narratives in a geographical region such as Latin America, characterized by various historical forms of violence. Marisa González de Oleaga and Carolina Meloni, in their introduction to a dossier on the topographies of memory, argue that given Latin America's past, there is a collective need to remember in order to imagine the present and the future (González de Oleaga & Meloni González, 2019, p. 6). However, this collective need is something in dispute, as it is embroiled in struggles over different partisan interests, making memory a political matter. In this sense, it becomes crucial to construct memory critically and from diverse spaces and actors, rather than solely through official narratives (p. 6).

Eugenia Allier Montaño (2016) notes that, on a global scale, there are multiple reasons for the rise of memory studies. Some of these include globalization processes and the feeling of lost identity, the need to heal past wounds, the redefinition of public space through the inclusion of marginalized groups, responses to the authoritarian regimes of the 20th century, economic shifts in the post-war period, and later, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communist regimes. In Latin America, the rise of memory studies is primarily linked to the transition away from dictatorial regimes (pp. 36–37). According to Allier Montaño, two major conflicting narratives of memory exist: the memory of denunciation, which seeks to expose impunity and highlight ongoing wounds, and the memory of praise, which attempts to justify past actions (p. 38). Some examples she provides regarding the memory of denunciation include works by Luis Roninger, Leonardo Senkman, and María Antonia Sánchez in Paraguay; Samantha Quadrat in Brazil; Allier Montaño in Uruguay; Steve Stern and Candina Polomer in Chile; Emilio Crenzel in Argentina; Torres-Vivas and Julieta Rostica in Guatemala; Eduardo Reyes, Alberto Martín Álvarez, and Jorge Juárez Ávila in Central America; Jefferson Jaramillo in Colombia; and various scholars in Mexico who have studied the 1968 student movement (pp. 39–40).

An important reference for understanding memory studies in Latin America is the work of Michael J. Lazzara (2021), who maps its origins and trajectories into two waves. The first wave, in the 1980s, “took a special interest in the Freudian tone that post-dictatorial thought was adopting while emphasizing the work of mourning and the fate of the ‘defeated’ left” (p.33). Lazzara identifies the work of Idelber Avelar, Nelly Richard, Alberto Moreiras, Beatriz Sarlo, and Guillermo O'Donnell within this wave (pp. 33–34). The second wave emerged in the late 1990s, with the project *Collective Memory of Repression* (“Memorias de la Represión”), led by Elizabeth Jelin, Carlos Iván Degregori, Eric Hershberg, and Steve J. Stern. This initiative not only resulted in publications but also contributed to the establishment of academic programs (p.34). Lazzara highlights that this project played a crucial role in enabling intellectual dissidents to return to university spaces (p. 35). From there, memory studies expanded beyond the Southern Cone, revealing the need for new theoretical frameworks (p. 37). For Lazzara, the future of memory studies involves engaging with questions of politics, identity, and rights, but

also incorporating non-institutional political dimensions such as emotions (p. 51). Thus, memory studies are inherently political; they are not merely an exercise in deconstruction, nor should they focus solely on defeat and tragedy, but rather, they open up possibilities for action and transformation. As Lazzara states, “Memory must be more than a policy of condemning violence; it must serve as the very foundation for creatively thinking about political change in transitioning societies” (p. 52).

To envision the future of memory studies, Lazzara (2021) suggests shifting the focus away from Latin American capitals, broadening the range of subjective experiences, and linking dictatorships and civil conflicts to broader frameworks such as racism and colonialism so that they are not understood as isolated episodes of violence (p. 53) but as something that even inspires the way in which development is conceived (Borsani, 2024, p. 53).

The relationship between history and memory has given rise to various interconnections. Nubia Yanet Gómez, along with other researchers, argues that history is not limited to the accounts of major actors, institutions, or prominent figures (Gómez et al., 2019, p. 213). Instead, “history is a dynamic field that uses the study of the past as an excuse to interpret contemporary society, establishing a dialogical relationship between past and present” (p. 214).

Meanwhile, memory is seen as the matrix or raw material of history, forming a living connection with the past through sensory experiences. Through testimony, memory amplifies the voices of victims and marginalized individuals (Gómez, et al., 2019, p. 216), who in Latin America have historically included Indigenous peoples, women, popular sectors, peasants, artisans, victims of violence, LGBTQ+ individuals, children, migrants, and environmental activists.

For Rossana Cassigoli Salamón (2010) there are several differences between history and memory, arguing that memory is associated with what is not necessarily written—it is almost immaterial and layered with emotions that exist within shared experience (p. 97). Memory is constructed through different fragments and types of moments (p. 97). Following Michel de Certeau, history, on the other hand, is more closely linked to writing; it appears to be a

produced entity that seeks a degree of uniformity through “historiographical operations” that accept or reject certain elements (pp. 99–100). For Cassigoli, while history also seeks to understand lived experiences, the key difference is that it does not focus on broad regularities but rather on individual singularities and the possibility of constructing alternative narratives, highlighting its creative rather than productive nature (p. 98).

Oral history serves as a crucial bridge between history and memory. This is evident in the book *Caminos de historia y memoria en América Latina* (2011), edited by Gerardo Necochea and Antonio Torres Montenegro, which illustrates how oral history contributes to the “democratization of historical production and themes” (p. 3). As Necochea emphasizes, it is not merely about making the invisible visible but about understanding the mechanisms of invisibility itself.

Thus, there are other categories, such as the *barrio* (neighborhood), that allow for an understanding not only of how space is experienced through different narratives and affective perspectives (Barela, 2011, pp. 5–13), but also of how various community projects are articulated (Daza Pérez et al., 2011, pp. 229–243). Regarding the construction of political memory, seemingly marginal figures, such as union leaders, embody the oppressions and negotiations to which workers are subjected (Camarena Ocampo, 2011, pp. 15–26). Likewise, through oral history and the reconstruction of collective testimonies, it is possible to understand the motivations that led both men (Goicovic Donoso, 2011, pp. 59–82) and women (Pensado Leglise, 2011, pp. 217–228) to join different forms of militancy and to recover testimonies of how various sources of violence, such as that of the dictatorial past, were endured (Kotler, 2011, pp. 97–115).

Among the vast array of socio-political problems and conflicts in Latin America, environmental conflicts and struggles hold particular significance for two reasons: they reveal the interconnectedness of conflicts across different spheres and offer alternative political formations through memory. According to authors like Ruggerio et al. (2022), environmental conflicts in Latin America reflect various tensions, including the clash between environmental awareness and neoliberal policies that treat nature as a resource for development (p.

12). These conflicts also expose inequalities in the distribution of benefits and negative consequences of resource exploitation (Pérez-Rincón, 2022, p. 74). Furthermore, environmental conflicts transcend local scales, interacting with global dynamics, not only in terms of resource interests but also through links with international environmental justice networks (p. 74).

In Argentina, there are socio-environmental conflicts related to forest protection, pollution from landfills and waste disposal sites, wetlands, uranium mining, forest fires, stream contamination, hydrocarbon extraction, and privatization. In Brazil, socio-environmental conflicts arise from deforestation, plastic waste pollution, floods, and historical droughts. In Mexico, in addition to cases similar to those mentioned above, there are environmental conflicts related to resistance against megaprojects and the murders of environmental defenders.

According to Maristella Svampa (2019), socio-environmental conflicts in Latin America must be contextualized within a phase of *neo-extractivism*, understood as a development model based on the overexploitation of natural territories, which is also linked to increased violence against environmental activists, criminal territorialities, state and paramilitary violence, as well as patriarchal violence (pp. 69–89).

In this scenario, from a memory perspective, the study of environmental struggles is crucial. According to Zapata Campos and Benítez González, socio-environmental conflict in Latin America is characterized by how communities, upon becoming aware of real or potential environmental damage, take action to defend themselves. However, in these conflicts, the authors point out, there is an “asymmetry between the disputing actors, considering economic factors as well as access to information and the media” (Zapata Campós & Benítez González, 2024, p. 358). For these authors, many socio-environmental conflicts occur within a context of extractivism that causes ecological damage, disrupts social coexistence, results in irreversible losses in biodiversity and pollution, and is linked to violence through dispossession. Additionally, it can be associated with authoritarian governmental stances and disproportionately affect the most vulnerable groups, such as women, reinforcing social patriarchy (p. 359).

According to Zapata Campos and Benítez González, memory contributes to a human rights approach in addressing violent conflicts; moreover, it can serve as a form of symbolic reparation for victims and as a means of transforming the future (p. 360). From their study of the Chilean case, the authors highlight several key aspects of the role that memory can play in socio-environmental conflicts, including: the importance of recognizing socio-environmental issues and healing damaged memories (pp. 368–370); framing socio-environmental conflicts within a “history of territorial colonization” in which capitalist expansion occurs at the expense of non-capitalist spaces—thus, merely exposing structural contradictions is insufficient without concrete actions from the affected territories (pp. 371–374); and viewing memory as a working tool that can be revisited rather than as a fixed entity that obscures conflicts and normalizes rights violations under the justification of development (pp. 377–378).

According to Mauricio Berger in the 21st century, Latin America faces a wave of accumulation by dispossession, manifested in mega-mining projects, agribusiness, and large-scale energy ventures (2014, p. 194). However, environmental struggles have also formed networks of resistance from which collective memory can emerge, constructed through shared meanings (p. 194). As representative cases of resistance networks, Berger highlights in Mexico the *Asamblea Nacional de Afectados Ambientales* (ANNA), in Brazil the *Red Brasileña de Justicia Ambiental* (RBJA), and in Argentina the *Unión de Asambleas Ciudadanas* and *Redes de Pueblos Fumigados*. According to Berger (2014):

In these three experiences of network formation, common denominators include the self-organization of a diverse range of actors, the convergence of individuals, collectives, discourses, and institutions interwoven in multiple actions for the defense of rights—rather than the definition of a political program—through a shared understanding of the causes and perpetrators of the problems, alternative courses of action, and the notions of justice and political participation at stake. (p. 201)

In relation to memory, the study of these experiences makes it possible to visualize resistances, foster the exchange of knowledge among different actors, and encourage mutual support through mapping conflicts and injustices, creating maps of diseases and deaths, constructing collective identity, shaping

memory as collective action, and developing “trans-scalar narratives” that articulate different levels—from the local to the regional and global (Berger, 2014, pp. 198-200). More broadly, these processes link memory with creativity as resistance, opening new possibilities for action and transformation.

In a previous article, Mauricio Berger (2012) also emphasized the importance of these environmental struggle networks in creating alternative institutions through intelligence. They achieve this through an *instituent and destituent* exercise of power—denouncing the absence of institutions that should be responsible for addressing these issues, while simultaneously formulating democratic declarations, environmental policies with the participation of affected communities, and even laws and regulations (Berger, 2012, p. 118). Berger concludes:

It is not about thinking of creativity in terms of novel forms of political action compared to other traditional or old practices, but rather in relation to the destituent force against the established order at the level of the State and the market, and their encroachment on rights. The meaning of creativity here is distinctly experimental and tied to the constituent power that rights struggles, and environmental justice put into play. (Berger, 2012, p. 131)

Conclusions

In this article we find a general mapping of diverse conceptions and fundamental notions to think the wide spectrum of history, historicity, historical time among other essential elements for our contemporaneity. Current politics, eclipsed by struggles and conceptual battles and their abstraction, requires attentive analysis of the historical movements of the present (Barria-Asenjo, 2024).

It is the rupture and fissure of historical time, as well as its folds and porosities that must be analyzed in order to understand the historical process that configures, constructs and modifies the material, economic, psychological and social conditions of our century. That which summons history is nothing more than taking a political position and committing oneself to the socio-political struggles of our era (Barria-Asenjo et al., 2020; 2022; 2023c).

At this point in our conceptual journey, we can affirm that when we consider memory and history not as merely individual facts, but as always open social and political processes, the different currents and authors we analyze, despite their divergences and differences, can be interpreted as part of a continuum (Barria-Asenjo et al., 2023d).

The capacity to generate this new conceptual amalgam stems from the assumption that engaging with history and memory ultimately amounts to nothing other than struggling for the constitution of specific collective subjects that dispute the meaning of reality, taking charge of the traces inscribed within them and their meanings (Ricœur, 2004).

From here we must understand Fanon's (1963) statement when he affirms that the past must be used with the intention of opening the future, inviting action and founding new hopes. García Linera (2008) condenses the above in his understanding that the future will always appear as an unusual invention of a common will that escapes all previously prescribed routes: taking memory and history through a political lens, then, forces us to dispute the construction of the social order installed at a given social time. Because, we must remember, order is the limit between inclusion and exclusion (Lechner, 2015).

The pending task is to build analyses focused on the construction of concepts attentive to the present time and the gears of history that are in motion. The rapid displacement of the neoliberal mantle, as well as the rapid proliferation of conceptual struggles, leave politics and therefore history and memory in obscure places and trace a complex theoretical-conceptual labyrinth that must be traversed.

Declaration of authorship contribution

Nicol A. Barria-Asenjo. Investigadora principal, contribuyó a la redacción conceptual y metodológica, la estructuración y la edición final del artículo.

Javier Camargo-Castillo, Florian Maiwald, Gonzalo Salas, Jesús Ayala-Colqui Francisco Alejandro Vergara Muñoz, coinvestigadores, desarrollaron el aparato conceptual y las líneas de pensamiento que sustentan y recorren el artículo, apoyando también la edición final. El presente artículo es fruto de un trabajo colectivo en el cual todos los investigadores contribuyeron en igual medida a la cristalización de la investigación.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declares no conflict of interest with an institution or association of any kind. Likewise, the Universidad Católica Luis Amigó is not responsible for the handling of the copyright that the authors make in their articles; therefore, the veracity and completeness of the citations and references are responsibility of the authors.

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