European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies
Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe

No. 113 (2022): January-June, pp. 89-102
www.erlacs.org

Special Collection:
Heritage, Protests and Coloniality in Contemporary Latin America

Heritage from below in Latin America: Urban protests and the struggle for Human Rights

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Abstract:
After the end of Latin American dictatorships, scholars closely analyzed the relationship between violence, memory and democracy. But these societies have continued to grapple not only with the legacy of authoritarian governments but with centuries of colonial power, with the result that many of the assumptions of earlier scholars are now being revisited. Intersectional questions of race, indigeneity and gender continue to refashion our understanding of memory and injustice. These questions frame this introductory article, in which we argue that Latin American contemporary social mobilisation that has denounced recent and long-term violence is constituted through intervention and creation of heritage from below. We propose that the interdisciplinary field of Critical Heritage Studies, that has burgeoned recently in the region, offers a means to understand how space, scale, and society interact to create meanings and work through violent pasts. The works of this Special Collection extend traditional conceptions of urban heritage as the mere conservation of cities' landscape, towards the study of the relation between cultural geographies and the production of social mobilizations in Latin America. These geographies enable unique formulations of protest for activists, creating new capacities to contest recent and long-term human rights abuse. *Keywords*: Urban heritage, social movements, coloniality, memory, resistance, Latin America.

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WWW.ERLACS.ORG is published by CEDLA – Centre for Latin American Research and Documentation / Centro de Estudios y Documentación Latinoamericanos, Amsterdam; www.cedla.uva.nl; ISSN 0924-0608, eISSN 1879-4750.

Resumen: Herencia desde abajo en Latinoamérica: Protestas urbanas y la lucha por los Derechos Humanos

Tras el fin de las dictaduras latinoamericanas, las/os académicos de la región analizaron de cerca la relación entre violencia, memoria y democracia. Pero estas sociedades han seguido lidiando con el legado de los gobiernos autorita-rios y con siglos de abuso colonial, por lo que muchos de los supuestos de estos primeros estudios ahora están siendo examinados. Preguntas sobre la interseccionalidad racial, indígena y de género continúan reformulando nuestra comprensión sobre la relación entre la memoria y la injusticia. Estas preguntas guían este artículo introductorio, en el que sostenemos que la movilización social contemporánea en Latinoamérica que ha denunciado las violencias recientes y de larga data se constituyen a través de la intervención y la creación de patrimonio desde abajo. Proponemos que el campo interdisciplinario de Estudios Críticos del Patrimonio, que ha florecido recientemente en la región, ofrece un medio para comprender cómo el espacio, sus diferentes escalas y la sociedad interactúan para crear significados y elaborar sus pasados de violencia y opresión. Los trabajos de este número especial amplían las concepciones tradicionales del patrimonio urbano como la mera conservación del paisaje de las ciudades, hacia el estudio de la relación entre geografías culturales y la producción y performance de movilizaciones sociales en la región. Estas geografías constituyen de forma única las protestas y sus significados, creando nuevas capacidades para luchar en contra de las violencias recientes y coloniales. *Palabras clave*: Herencia urbana, movimientos sociales, colonialidad, memoria, resistencia, Latinoamérica.

Introduction

On 29 October 2019, in the middle of one of the many Chilean protests then occuring against inequality, neoliberalism, and Pinochet's constitution, demonstrators spontaneously hung a rope around the bust of Pedro de Valdivia – the Spanish conquistador and first governor of Chile – and started to pull, toppling it down after a few attempts. This expressive intervention took place in Temuco, a southern Chilean city that is also the capital of the Araucanía region, the centre of the conflict between the Chilean state and the Mapuche people, the largest Indigenous group in the country. Valdivia's statue plinth was etched with the sentence *Estado asesino* (Assassin state) and while his monument was falling people chanted Marichiweu ("ten times I will beat" in the Mapuche language) surrounded by traditional protest sounds and the waving of Mapuche flags. The manifestation with Valdivia's bust did not simply end with the dismantlement of his plinth though. Protestors dragged the figure several blocks through Caupolicán, one of the city's main avenues named after a Mapuche warrior and left it in the street as part of the debris that would light one of the barricades. A woman watching Valdivia's statue from her door and recording the events on her cell phone shouted, *¡Chao Pedro, que te vaya bien Pedro!* (Bye Pedro! I wish you a good time Pedro!).

Valdivia's bust in Temuco was not the only statue to be attacked. Since that day, several colonial monuments have been at the centre of the protests in cities throughout Chile. Statues of colonisers and military heroes were intervened, damaged, or toppled by groups of dissenters. Many of these events were streamed and went viral, producing vigorous, cheerful and creative reactions

from online groups while the in-place protesters celebrated their actions. At the same time, these interventions aroused strong opposition from authorities and some members of the elite that catalogued these events as disorder and vandalism. Clearly, these events occurred not only to challenge collective memories of the past but also to build a different form of heritage, one that is created spontaneously and from below. During 2020 and 2021, several other protest movements were triggered across the Americas, in the United States of America, Perú, Colombia, Ecuador and Brazil. With them, many forms of economic and sociopolitical injustices were denounced, along with other monuments and memories being challenged or created. Like the dissent in Chile, this wave of protests also produced a strong reaction from authorities, who generally supported and mandated police repression. These social movements resulted in the injury of hundreds of people and the death of a significant number of protestors.

Latin America's recent protests have denounced persistent inequalities, frequent cases of corruption, and systemic police abuses. These issues cross borders, demonstrating new forms of violence that in many countries of the region also came to question the promises of the *Nunca más* (the Never Again). The *Nunca más* was not only the political commitment made by authorities in the context of political transitions from military dictatorships to democracy in Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Uruguay but also in countries that left behind difficult periods of internal armed conflict, such as Perú and Colombia. The goal of *Nunca más* had been to prevent the repetition of repression and human rights abuses perpetrated during those authoritarian and violent periods. With their new repertoires of actions and the resulting strong police presence and repression against demonstrators, recent protests have shaken the Latin American memory landscape. Not only concerning the most recent heritage of human rights built after the wave of dictatorships but also, as the Valdivia's monument fate in Temuco shows, the long-term heritage of coloniality of Latin America. Those who took to the streets and denounced these new and longstanding forms of violence were, at the same time, sharing in this new participatory form of heritage to decide what legacies of these events should be transmitted and materialised.

This is not the first time that Latin Americans have faced this difficult task. Yet, it is clear that this mobilised context represents a unique moment to reflect on the foundational pillars of Latin American heritage – more specifically, with reference to the many silences, omissions and oppressions that have come to characterise this space. These can be instantiated through questions such as: What are the main omissions in the construction of Latin American heritage? How do protests reformulate our memories and their representations in place and space? And how does the urban cityscape and heritage catalyse new forms of protests, practices, and memories?

Memory and human rights in Latin America

During the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, many countries of Latin America faced the end of long and violent military dictatorships, setting in place sociopolitical strategies to transition from these authoritarian regimes to democratic ones. Actions and narratives to remember the victims of these human rights crimes, and the struggles of those who died, were among the strategies fostered by civil society and human rights organisations. It was crucial that the scope of these actions and narratives embrace more than a mere memorialisation of those who were killed, tortured, or imprisoned by the military apparatus, reaching further to the remembrance of the political ideals that motivated them and inspired an entire generation. In Latin America, this historical period has been the focus of the interdisciplinary field of Memory Studies, which has analysed the effects of violence and repression in the present and the future of these societies, particularly those that lived through military dictatorships (Jelin, 2002; Traverso, 2007; Allier Montaño & Crenzel, 2015; Hite, 2012). Several authors, from various disciplines, have studied the memory of military dictatorships and their consequences, focusing on the memory of the violence perpetrated by the state. They give special attention to its direct victims and the reparation measures that both state institutions and society as a whole should take to rebuild the social fabric (Lira, 2010).

The key role of violence and trauma has been adopted by countries such as Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina and Chile as central aspects in their strategies of symbolising the past. In this line, these countries were pioneers in implementing several practices that today are recognised as part of the Transitional justice tool kit and have since been implemented in many other Latin American countries. Transitional justice is a set of practices and concepts that address violence in transitional periods, and it includes mechanisms such as truth commissions, trials of perpetrators, financial and symbolic compensation to victims, and, most important for this volume, memorialisation processes (Hayner, 2001; Teitel, 2000). Transitional Justice mechanisms within the Latin American context have addressed the wrongdoings and legacies of authoritarian regimes and simultaneously have endeavoured to rebuild a democratic order (Lessa, 2013). Besides the need to implement different measures of justice, one of the essential claims of this paradigm was to avoid authoritarian and violent backlashes. Transitional measures taken by different countries to face the transitions towards a democratic order have set the bases for collective memory and most initiatives of memorialisation in the region.

However, time has rapidly wrought new changes, and new generations and communities have claimed a political space in Latin American memories. Therefore, the meaning and scope of the transitional strategies and their memorialisation initiatives have been expanded and challenged to include other forms of violence and past legacies that are not directly connected to the authoritarian dictatorships. These include issues such as coloniality, ethnic and

racial conflicts and violence (Anderson, 2019; Jara et al., 2018), the patriarchal system and gender violence (Theidon, 2012; Hiner et al., 2022). In these works, the study of memory has not only been connected with a complex – and often failed – mechanism of symbolic and material reparation at the individual and national level, but also, and most important for this work, the representation of these events in place and space.

The representation of violence has been the focus of important research that seeks to recognise and analyse memorials to the victims of state violence, along with the meanings and commemorative practices associated with them (Jelin & Langland, 2003; Hite, 2017). Likewise, several authors have studied memory spaces, whether that be the actual sites of memory themselves, or those found in museums and archives, as spaces reflecting the violence carried out by the state during dictatorships. Other authors, with a view to the present and future, focus on those places where violence can be prevented today, and from where it might be possible to promote a culture of respect for human rights (Bernasconi, Lira, & Ruiz, 2019; Gugliemucci & López, 2019; Hite & Badilla, 2019). More recently, the focus of this research has been directed towards the study of the narrative forms of intergenerational transmission of memories. They emphasise an understanding of how, and through what means, the second or third generations after the dictatorship relate to, and learn about, those critical events, and in many cases the trauma experienced by their families (Achugar, 2016; Jara, 2016). Others direct attention to understanding how this process of transmission occurs in neighbourhoods, schools, or social contexts (Cornejo et al., 2018; Reyes, Cruz, & Aguirre, 2016).

In this line, and in connection with the recent protest movements, some researchers have considered mobilisations as a key space for memory and memorialisation (Berger et al., 2021; Gutman & Wüstenberg, 2021; Gutman, 2017). On one hand, social movements have become the centre of projects that study new spaces and collectivities for the transmission of the past. On the other hand, they also accommodate study of the emergence of contemporary memories for the region, memories of these current mobilisations that consider recent repressive events, and the new demands these movements have spurred. These renewed forms of memory have intersected dictatorial, national, and colonial memories within the city, demonstrating the relevance of place and space in the construction of new forms of remembering (Badilla & Aguilera, 2021).

Towards landscapes of past violence

The connection between collective memory and space has been studied from different disciplines. Space provides the limits and rules for this social process to take shape, as groups will always remember in a particular place, providing stability regarding what can or cannot be remembered (Halbwachs, 1980). The space constitutes a concrete anchor of memory and of social identities that memory makes possible. This anchoring is especially important in times of

social transformation when communities need to be connected to their places and past histories (Huyssen, 2003). In this regard, the French historian Pierre Nora (1989) offers an analysis of different ways in which memory is embedded in space and is spatially shaped. This author shows us the crucial role that these spaces play in the construction of French national memory and identity from above, without paying special attention to the collective memory of other communities (ethnic, local or religious) through the state. This perspective has been especially relevant in the studies of memory and heritage, where the main unit of analysis has been the nation-state (Anderson, 2006; Zerubavel, 1995). However, more recently, several authors have recentred attention on the need to explore this phenomenon from below, recognising the importance of community or local ways of remembering (Starn & Davis, 1989; Del Pino & Jelin, 2003), as well as the coexistence of different forms and levels of memory within the nation-state (Rothberg 2009). The bottom-up perspective to understand processes of memorialisation and the effects they produce in specific places and spaces are particularly important when societies mobilise. These are also moments in which the space deeply contributes to what and how societies will remember these contentious events. The conditions of production and organisation of social space will always be connected to the construction of memory (Hoelscher & Alderman, 2004).

The connection between Heritage Studies and Memory Studies in this context can be viewed as an almost symbiotic relationship. While heritage cannot subsist without both collective and individual memory (Sather-Wagstaff, 2015, p. 191), heritage becomes a materialisation of memory (Viejo-Rose, 2015, p. 2). In doing so, both share significant elements, such as the integrality of the past. However, while memory focuses on the contemporary construction of the past, heritage instead uses the past as a reflection of the present, utilising the moral standards that we choose to take into tomorrow (Harrison, 2013, p. 4). When dealing with such concepts as values in a societal framework, it is unsurprising that conflict often arises. As such, dissonance remains an integral component of heritage (Graham, 2000; Smith, 2006). It is for this reason that we find heritage such an integral element in the exploration of the recent protests in Latin America. How painful and violent pasts are reflected through contemporary social movements is germane not only to understanding contemporary political/socioeconomic movements (Marschall, 2019, p. 1089), but also the intergenerational trauma experienced throughout many of these nations.

It is within this landscape that Critical Heritage Studies offers a unique ability to integrate the traumas of previous years with the realities of contemporary cultural and political movements. Critical Heritage Studies differentiates itself from that of the Heritage Studies born from Lowenthal's 1980s writings including his seminal book *The Past is a Foreign Country* (1985). Critical Heritage Studies instead specifically focuses on "cultural heritage as a political, cultural, and social phenomenon" (Gentry, 2019, p. 1149). It is from this perspective that we analyse the violence that has played a critical role in the history of

Latin America, whether from colonisation, military dictatorships, or any other numerous public and private spheres. These violent legacies surrounding issues such as race and indigeneity (Walker, 2018), sociopolitical status, rurality (Feldman, 2012), and gender (Sandord et al., 2020) continue to linger in both these nations' cultural heritage as well as their physical memoryscapes.

The cultural geography of urban spaces often represents a totemic space wherein the performance of protest (Badilla, 2020) may manifest. This urban landscape offers not only a place to confront contemporary human rights abuses (Mason, 2018), but also a space to use their difficult heritage (Macdonald, 2009) as a means of performative heritage. Urban spaces have frequently proven important cultural spaces throughout history. Often considered "memory-rich" public spaces, these places have frequently found themselves at the centre of political movements throughout history (Loughran, 2016, p. 198). These places often become a battleground wherein differing factions attempt to occupy. Social movements will then use these urban landscapes to meet, perform, petition, and proselytise, often using their occupation of public space as a form of protest in and of itself.

Viejo-Rose conceptualises usefully on the intertwining of heritage and scale. She describes the oscillating movement of heritage between scales, in constant motion between groups of different sizes and linkages, whether this includes national, familial, or tribal (Viejo-Rose, 2015, p. 2). This is especially pertinent when researching locations with a strong heritage of colonisation, such as Latin America. Colonisation provided many nations with instantaneous stratification, which engrained societal and cultural demarcations across generations. But in the case of Latin America, scale is all the more important due to its multiple, diverse groups which have coexisted over centuries. Moreover, the centuries in which the Spanish and Portuguese colonised the Americas were ones in which a strong feudal hierarchy, endorsement of slavery, and an absolute rule by the monarch and upper classes, were prominent features. Thus, scales in this region are not restricted to a binary lens of Indigenous or European descent, but also encompass class within and between these groups, along with other factors such as education and socioeconomic mobility.

Scale not only affects societal constructs, but also act as a means of understanding how these groups interact with place and space. Identical places and spaces which are symbolic of authoritative power provide significantly different memoryscapes for different social groups. For example, they may engender comfort in some through the supposed stabilising effects of the colonial power or through a military dictatorship over a leftist wave, while simultaneously eliciting deep pain in others for whom that power is synonymous with a traumatic past (Stern, 2006). The lenses afforded different groups by their distinct heritage may, thus, help explain how one group regarding a place as sacred and another as sinister can be attributed to the capacity for each scale to provide significantly diverging memoryscapes of the same location. This same attribute applies, not only to the *plazas* and squares of urban landscapes, but also to

iconic symbolic manifestations memorialising each side's heritage – from heroes and villains of the past to commemoration of dates and events in history.

Heritage Studies, and more specifically Critical Heritage Studies, is a relatively new academic discipline compared to many others in the humanities. Yet despite its incipient stage, Critical Heritage Studies has burgeoned in recent years as more and more academics begin to recognise the relevance of applying its theoretical bases and champion the study of Latin American tangible and intangible heritage. Latin American heritage researchers specifically are in the distinct position of advancing theorisations surrounding ideas of colonisation, indigeneity, and traumatic pasts. It is for this reason that an increasing amount of Latin American scholars are recognising the need for further advancement in the field and are embracing Critical Heritage Studies specifically (Marsal, 2012, p. 11). Despite the integrality of dissonance within the Heritage Studies context, little has been written about the intersection between social movements and heritage in Latin America. Harrison contemplates that heritage has the "potential to transform society" (2019, p. 19), and it is within this context that the framework of Heritage Activism was introduced. Heritage Activism, the two-pronged theory involving both protest for the safeguarding of heritage along with the use of patrimony in social movements was only recently theorised (Jones, 2020). Both prongs are often derived from feelings of exclusion or subjugation and considered a form of "heritage from below" (Robertson, 2008, p. 144). This bottom-up conceptualisation is integral to both the understanding of social mobilisations but also in considering participatory heritage (Roued-Cunnliffe, 2017) in general. Its impact in Latin America has not previously been considered.

While much has been written on Latin America's transition from military dictatorships, the use of heritage as a means of healing is not well-discussed (Giblin, 2014). While attempted healing is often attempted from a top-down structure, through the use of tools such as 'truth commissions', this healing can also be taken from a bottom-up perspective. Heritage from below (Robertson, 2008) can also play a key role in this healing process. Contemporary Latin American protests are an example of citizens utilising heritage from below throughout this healing process. Whether by taking advantage of affect in specific places and spaces or by incorporating their traumatic pasts into present-day demands. Latin American scholars are in a unique position to develop ground-breaking research into this area as they grapple with the multiple realities of indigeneity, post-coloniality, and recent dictatorial pasts.

Coloniality, social movements and urban space

This Special Collection examines issues of social movements, coloniality, urban heritage, and resistance to violence through the exploration of Contemporary Latin American protest. Articles consider violence and protest in urban space through the frameworks of Heritage Studies. As we have discussed, her-

itage provides a novel means to consider how colonial pasts influence the present, reframing and refracting our understanding of race, class, gender, and embodiment. Situating this coloniality within the urban spaces of contemporary Latin America challenges our lived experience of the built environment. It also challenges how we see discourses of protest, democracy and human rights emerging from those spaces. Together and individually, the articles in this volume advance the knowledge surrounding urban space and how the traumatic heritage of Latin American pasts intersect with these palimpsests of violence.

While many elements of coloniality are encompassed within this Special Collection, perhaps the clearest example is that found in Carolina Crespo's article where she explores uncomfortable heritage, indigeneity, and ways of seeing injustice in cultural heritage. Using the collections of La Plata Museum, Crespo explores images and films of Indigenous restitution, and reflects on the emotional and ethical responses required by viewers. Her article investigates the filming of the restitution of Indigenous objects, as a means to produce claims to empathy and sensitivity with regards to ongoing injustice against the Mapuche people in Argentina. She urges a reassessment of often-used categories of 'uncomfortable' or 'difficult heritage', including how such heritage is silenced. More fundamentally, she questions the appropriateness of curatorial practices regarding these images, even when framed by attempts to pursue justice and redress from activists in contemporary cities.

Other questions of coloniality such as power structures explored in both J. Renée Clark's and Maria Ota and Robert Mason's articles coalesce with the gendered violence explored in R. Guy Emerson's article through police abuse. Each of these articles explore how violence and resistance can not only be fuelled by military dictatorships, but often by the local police authorities. Emerson interrogates protests in response to gendered violence, by focusing on how monuments in historic centres enable conversations about state-based agents of violence. He questions the catalytic protests in Mexico City following the repeated implication of police in rapes and the broader catastrophe of femicide throughout Mexico. Ota and Mason demonstrate how protesting mothers can leverage Brazil's colonial legacy of elite control through the intersection of race, state-based violence, and the state's occupation of urban space. In the words of one woman, 'dictatorship never ended in the favelas'.

Several specific social movements are considered in the volume varying in both nationality and magnitude throughout Latin America. The largest and most recent social movement discussed is the Chilean O-18 movement beginning in 2019. The article by Clark focuses on the nexus between social movements, heritage, and digital media as a means to explore questions of environmental, historical, and social injustice. Social movements not only happen on the physical streets, but also throughout the virtual spaces of social media. Clark focuses on street art created during O-18 protests in Santiago de Chile, as well as their digital reproduction and dissemination. She argues that the rendering of street artists' work on social media platforms transforms the potential for

heritage to enable complex conversations. As she demonstrates, artworks appropriate and are appropriated in turn, realising new potential for history to fold into contemporary conversations. Clark's work builds on the notion of 'heritage activism' (Jones, Mozaffari & Jasper, 2020) and extends this to social movements and social media such as Instagram. Clark's work raises critical questions of social healing through digital performativity and heritage activism in urban space.

The analysis of colonial urban space as a place of protest is considered from several perspectives. Maria Ota and Robert Mason's article looks at groups formed by the mothers of victims of violence and asks how their use of civic space catalyses protest and awareness of ongoing historical injustice. Their article explores the favellas of Rio de Janeiro, through detailed ethnographic fieldwork and partnership with women's groups in the city and region. They argue that these women use urban space to invoke previous military dictatorship and human rights abuse. The article challenges understanding of the physical heritage of urban colonial spaces, and their capacity to initiate solidarities across and time and historical context. As Ota and Mason argue, such spaces create a language of enduring coloniality and urban geography that enables ongoing protest.

Emerson and Daniel Willis look at more traditional colonial tourist sites in their exploration of urban heritage. Emerson explores graffiti recently added to the iconic Monument to Independence in the historic centre of the Mexican capital. Using the premise of the 'monument as event', he asserts that the space is constantly reproduced in ways that connect temporality, activism, and patriarchy across time. His exploration of spatiality and temporality in the centre of Mexico City reinforces discussions about the role of heritage space in activating awareness of coloniality and (a lack of) consent throughout Latin America's urban spaces. Willis also interrogates the contested coding of public spaces, and focuses on heritage from below with regards to popular protest and cultural heritage. Willis looks particularly at Peru, as the country is branded as a gastronomic tourist centre amid widespread social protests based on ongoing historic injustice. His article focuses on one suburb in the national capital of Lima, which has been used repeatedly by anti-authoritarian protesters desperate to avoid a return to right-wing government. As he demonstrates, their protests consciously evoke earlier protests in the 1980s, when the country struggled to return to democratic rule. He asks how post-conflict memories have become embedded in Lima's public spaces through grassroots acts of commemoration. Rather than return to discussions of 'memory spaces', Willis argues that acts of protest and 'city texts' remake heritage and its role in supporting human rights.

This Special Collection posits Latin American nations as an ideal starting point for critical scholarly conversation surrounding difficult heritages, including how contemporary social movements interact with the spaces and scales of the urban landscapes. The rich academic foundation of memory studies found

in Latin American research provides fertile ground for the advancement of social movement inquiry through a Critical Heritage Studies lens. This perspective, and its focus on performative action, enables the exploration of grassroots movements and the embodied performativity of protest, in both the virtual and material space. Questions relating to indigeneity, gender, class, power dynamics, and sociopolitical stratifications are all explored along with their links to the cultural geography of the urban landscape. As Nora explored in 1989, collective memory becomes defined through both cultural activities and the material space. An important expression that now needs to be re-evaluated, considering the reflections that this Special Collection suggests, is the relevance of the virtual and visual space in these constructions of our difficult heritage. Even so, the social injustices experienced across Latin American societies remain linked to their history of authoritarianism, human rights violations, and coloniality, in addition to issues surrounding race and gender oppressions. As heritage from below is explored more deeply, the power imbalance resulting from coloniality is revealed as an enduring and integral part of social movements demands throughout Latin America. In this manner, the places and spaces of colonial heritage stand as totemic emblems that challenge societies' abilities to respond to their difficult past.

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