



## Women Mobilizing Memory

edited by Ayşe Gül Altınay, María José Contreras, Marianne Hirsch, Jean Howard, Banu Karaca, and Alisa Solomon, New York, Columbia University Press, 2019, 544 pp., \$35.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-231-19185-2

**Marijke Huisman (she/her/hers)**

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politics or international relations undermines our ability to make sense of complex social problems. This is a must-read text for scholars, students, and policy practitioners who seek a deep understanding of the dynamics inherent to the struggle for gender justice in authoritarian countries and beyond.

## Notes on contributor

*Summer Forester* is an Assistant Professor of Political Science and Middle East Studies at Carleton College, and was formerly a Fulbright fellow in Jordan. Her research focuses on global feminist mobilization as well as militarism and gender justice in the Middle East.

Summer Forester (she/her/hers)  
Carleton College, Northfield, MN, USA  
 sforester@carleton.edu

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From its emergence in the 1980s, memory studies foregrounded the nation, national memory, and identity. In the twenty-first century, the field took a global or transnational turn and scholars became more interested in such topics as the mobility of memory practices, comparisons between remembrances of the same event in different places, and the function of commemorating the Holocaust (and other cases) as a means to further cosmopolitanism and human rights instead of nationalism. The editors of this volume belong to the latter tradition in scholarship but observe an opposite trend in public culture: states and societies around the world mobilize and monumentalize recent episodes of violence – such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks – for nationalist and divisive purposes. Building on feminist engagements, the volume aims to stimulate the field's critical potential to contest official histories and explore how memory work on past inequities can further “progressive change” (2).

“The study of memory has been slow to integrate the analysis of gender and sexuality as markers of social difference” (2), Marianne Hirsch observes in her introduction. The volume, by contrast, takes gender as a cue to stimulate the critical potential of memory studies – in terms of post-national or transnational

conceptions of memory and in a normative sense. Progressive change is feminist, according to the collaboration of scholars, artists, and activists from the United States (US), Latin America, and Europe including Turkey who initiated this volume. The group does not agree on the meaning of “feminism,” but Hirsch’s introduction and the individual contributions suggest that feminism, here, equals horizontal, collective, transnational grassroots activism that blurs boundaries between scholarship and the arts in order to create spaces for silenced memories and alternative, non-hegemonic histories. The word “women” in the book’s title must therefore be read loosely, as a “stand in for an expanded range of progressive political subjects and actors” (2).

The volume consists of 26 contributions on feminist, critical, or progressive memory practices that are divided into five parts. Part 1, “Disrupting Sites,” explores changing relations between place and memory. Katherine Hite and Marita Sturken, for example, focus on the Estadio Nacional de Chile in Santiago, built in 1938 and used as a detention center for thousands of prisoners of the dictatorial Pinochet regime in the fall of 1973. In order to make room for World Cup soccer matches, the site changed back into a stadium in November 1973 and continued to function as such. In the twenty-first century, after Pinochet’s arrest in London in 1998, the democratic government of Chile dealt with the dictatorial past in the state-sponsored Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos (2010). Hite and Sturken, however, focus on the grassroots movement around the stadium that was initiated by a group of female former prisoners. The movement made the stadium into a national monument in 2003, but Hite and Sturken emphasize the differences between the two memory practices. Whereas the state-sponsored Museo contains or “musealizes” the past as past, the stadium movement connects (memories of) that past to critical debates about human rights issues in contemporary Chile and the country’s future. As such, the stadium case reflects the volume’s preference for grassroots movements that combine memory work and women’s activism toward progressive change.

Part 2, “Performing Protest,” highlights a range of protests on the three continents covered in this volume – from the Black Lives Matter movement in the US to #NiUnaMenos, a social media action against gender violence in Argentina, and the demonstrations of the Saturday Mothers/People in Turkey who, like the Argentine movement Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, have been commemorating “disappeared people” every Saturday since 1995 in a public square in Istanbul. Set in the same city is a moving and interesting contribution by anthropologist Dilara Çalişkan on the death of her friend Alev, a trans woman and sex worker who was killed in 2012. Based on her own memories and experiences within the trans movement and interviews with trans women, Çalişkan discusses the “necropolitics” that erased Alev’s self-chosen identity after death, first by the Turkish state that “inherited” the body once her parents refused to claim it, then by the funeral service staff and the imam who all treated Alev’s dead body like a man’s and filled out the official forms accordingly. Alev’s friends, on the other hand, took her death and funeral as a catalyst to resist. They challenged gender conventions and destabilized the official


archive – for instance, by commemorating Alev as a woman and raising money for a tombstone with her chosen name.

Questions concerning the role of the arts in combating the erasure of past violence and creating new histories for change are central to the transnational feminist working group behind this volume. Since their first live meeting in Santiago, Chile, in 2013, the Women Mobilizing Memory group have organized several art exhibitions and theatrical performances. Reflections on cases of memory art are presented in Parts 3 and 4, “Interfering Images” and “Staging Resistance” respectively. One of the more intriguing pieces is a series of five blank pages submitted by five art students from Mardin Artuklu University who were asked to testify on their experiences of Turkish violence in Kurdish cities in 2015. Sometimes there are no means to communicate particular atrocities, or not yet. Still, the volume ends on a positive note. Part 5, “Rewriting Lives,” consists of articles on how women’s cultural activism helps to overcome violent histories. María Soledad Falabella Luco, for example, discusses how Mapuche women poets create and disseminate a language to talk about Chilean identity and history in a more inclusive way.

The individual contributions often focus on a single nation, but the volume as a whole is truly transnational, covering interesting memory practices from around the globe. Moreover, it shows that some memory practices of women are extremely mobile. Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, for instance, seem to have created a model that is re-used and adapted by protest groups in other contexts, for different purposes. The broad range of discussed cases also mobilize for causes that could be labeled as progressive or cosmopolitan, but the volume is less convincing in its promise to boost the critical potential of memory studies through an integration of memory and gender. While the book does highlight memory practices by “women,” it remains unclear to me why those practices are the best or the preferred entry points to stimulate the field’s critical potential. In this respect, the absence of memory practices by conservative “women” is striking. Such cases do exist – think, for example, of the many references to second-wave feminism and acquired women’s rights in debates about migration, Islam, and the limits of multiculturalism in Europe – and they problematize the volume’s assumptions about gender, feminism, and progressivism. Nevertheless, this volume’s focus on progressive memory practices from around the world can inspire scholars, artists, and activists to combine engagement and critical reflection on how to deal with problematic pasts and the memories of those pasts.

### Notes on contributor

*Marijke Huisman* is Assistant Professor of Public History, Education & Civic Engagement at Utrecht University. Her research focuses on relationships between public and academic forms of doing history, in particular on (auto)biographical representations of the past.

Marijke Huisman (she/her/hers)  
Utrecht University, The Netherlands  
 m.h.huisman@uu.nl

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**International Human Rights Law and Structural Discrimination: The Example of Violence against Women**, by Elisabeth Veronika Henn, Heidelberg, Springer, 2019, 240 pp., €93.59 (hardback), ISBN 978-3-662-58676-1

*International Human Rights Law and Structural Discrimination* is an innovative contribution to international human rights literature focusing on the unique yet largely unexplored notion of structural discrimination. Henn describes structural discrimination as a social phenomenon whereby “rights and opportunities, available to one group, are constantly less or not available to another group because of legal and social rules, attitudes and behaviour of institutions and other societal structures” (37). Women, people of color, Roma, and people with disabilities are among the groups likely to encounter structural discrimination. As a cross-cutting phenomenon deeply embedded in various sectors and spheres of life, structural discrimination leads to what Henn calls the “entanglement of various forms of discrimination” (2) that goes beyond mere individual violations. Addressing structural discrimination thus requires, and provides an opportunity for, the wider societal context, pre-existing inequalities, and root causes of discriminatory practices to be examined and transformed. International courts and actors increasingly have been turning to analysis of structural discrimination as a means to “broaden the perspective” (203) and thereby enhance the effectiveness of human rights protection against discrimination. However, it is unclear whether, and if so to what extent, states are legally required by international and regional human rights frameworks to address structural discrimination when fulfilling their obligations under these frameworks. Henn’s volume is centered on answering this fundamental question.

Henn chooses the prohibition of discrimination against women in general, and of violence against women (VAW) in particular, as a lens through which to conduct this inquiry. Not only is the choice topical, with feminist scholarship and activism honing in on those subliminal forms of inequality affecting women’s daily lives, but it also lends itself well to the analysis at hand. Historical, social, and economic structures of gender inequality and stereotypes, entrenching assumptions of weak and passive femininity, are “the precondition for, and causes of” VAW (5). As such, this phenomenon is emblematic of the potential