

Human Rights in Colombian Literature and Cultural Production: Embodied Enactments

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Narratives on human rights are often visible through national or international reports where literary and other cultural productions are not often considered. In this volume several scholars reflect on different artistic expressions that frequently challenge official discourses of human rights abuses. It includes an exploration of different art forms such as poetry, novels, performances, artistry assemblies, sculptures, documentaries, songs and art installations, as well as other discursive analysis that reflect on the rich and diverse scenario for dialogues on human rights in Colombia.

This publication is a compelling piece of denunciation and reflection of human rights in Colombia. Rather than only highlighting human rights abuses through numbers or figures, the examination of different artistic expressions provides a form of agency by creating an image and a story of those most affected. Indeed, throughout its fourteen chapters the book reminds us that although human rights are universal, different forms of violence create deep wounds on the individuals that experience, mourn, and suffer trauma and indifference.

One of the strengths of the book is the inclusion of a wide range of artistic accounts through different times. For instance, the review of historical literary pieces such as the novel *Sugamuxi* (1826) by Luis Vargas Tejada, the epic poem *Akimén Zake Ó La Conquista de Tunja* (1858) by Próspero Pereira Gamba, and Evelio Rosero's novel *La Carroza de Bolívar* [Bolívar's Carnival Float] (2012) emerged at a time when there was little or no discourse on human rights either by law or the state that exercised recurring violence towards its population. Here the predominant role of the Colombian state on human rights violations is later discussed when referring to the extermination campaign against the left-wing Patriotic Union (UP) between 1985 and 1994.

The memories that link different times and spaces are indeed exemplified on this volume. For instance, the sculpture *Untitled* (1990) by the Colombian visual artist Doris Salcedo denouncing the violence committed against banana workers in the Urabá region during the 1980s and 1990s, evoked the massacre against the striking plantation workers

in 1928 described by Gabriel García Márquez in *Cien años de soledad* [One Hundred Years of Solitude] (1967). Likewise, the violence exercised against the land and Indigenous communities through the rubber extractivist industry is examined in the film *El abrazo de la serpiente* [Embrace of the Serpent] (2015), which relates to current violences suffered by *cocaleros* (coca growers). Hence, this volume links human rights abuses and other parallel projects such as agroindustry, the extraction of natural resources, cattle ranching, land grabbings, and drug trafficking. The memory linked to the territory is also rendered by the analysis of Ceferina Banquez' *bullerengue* songs that refer to the violence, displacement, and trauma that she and her community suffered in Montes de María. These artistic expressions no longer exclusively concern urban human rights abuses but also what is usually referred to as "*la Colombia profunda*" ("the deep Colombia"), the rural and marginalized regions and people often excluded and forgotten.

Contemporary art manifestations portray the violence exerted towards women as exemplified in the analysis of Laura Restrepo's books *Los divinos* [The Divine Boys] (2020) and *La multitud errante* [A Tale of the Dispossessed] (2001), as well as Jineth Bedoya's documentary *Mariposas violeta* [Violet Butterflies] (2020). Other reviews, including ones about the music of Doctor Krápula, Andrea Echeverry, La Pestilencia, and others, provide some insight into other violences such as displacement, kidnapping, *limpieza social* (social cleansing or targeted killings), and the threats and assassination of activists, rally protesters, and human rights advocates.

Throughout the chapters, the symbolic and the aesthetic become articulated as values for developing a narrative of memory and remembering. The *Museo Casa de la Memoria* in Tumaco (Tumaco House of Memory) is one of those spaces for the representation of victimhood and memory, where the aesthetic meets the political, aiding to denounce and amplify the human rights discourse. This volume also explores the role of artistic productions in moving the audiences to become active, including the denunciation of extra-judicial

killings or *falsos positivos* in the play *Antígonas: tribunal de mujeres* (Antigones: Women's Tribunal), which interpellates the audience to act. Doris Salcedo's public interventions after the assassination of journalist and comedian Jaime Garzón (*The Mourning Jaime Garzón*, 1999) pointed in the same direction as the symbolic art expressions might transform into instruments to disrupt public spaces during collective processes of mourning.

As presented throughout the book, the different cultural productions on human rights do not just open spaces to denounce or sensitize audiences but also to challenge the victim-blaming mentality that permeates Colombian society. They also expose the rooted poverty, exclusion, and profound class and race divisions as prevailing issues. The use of different art expressions for the denunciation of human rights abuses is not something new or exclusive to Colombia; however, the different accounts presented in the book reflect a profound articulation of a population that recognizes the

changes that art might bring into a society. This collection exposes the issues and the perpetrators and also channels affect and healing processes of very profound individual and collective wounds.

This book pushes for a growing space for dialogue and representation on human rights in Colombia. Consequently, surgent art expressions might continue to become tools for memory and reflection on healing and reparation. The literature and cultural production related to human rights in Colombia continue to be a voice that extends through time and space. As the field of artistic expressions related to human rights abuses in Colombia continues to grow, alternative voices, including accounts by Afrocolombians, Indigenous peoples, *Campesinos*, LGBTQIA2S+, Romani, and other marginalized groups will enrich future works to advance new personal and collective creations. This volume presents a wide range of artistic expressions that constitute a valuable contribution to recognize and empower victims of human rights *abuses* in Colombia.