Gendered Nostalgia: Grassroots heritage tourism and (de)industrialization in the coal region of Chile.

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Abstract

Pilpilco and Lota are two former coal-mining towns in southern Chile that suffered the consequences of deindustrialization after the closure of the mines in 1973 and 1997, respectively. Both were part of the coal region in Chile and recognized as the birthplace of industry and capitalism in the country, maintaining a crucial national presence as an industrial and economic enclave for almost 150 years. The civic-military dictatorship that took power from 1973 to 1989 strongly impacted the region known as the "red zone" because of its links with the communist and socialist parties. Furthermore, the neoliberal restructuring that the regime implemented in the country reconfigured the economic and political landscape and the social and labor dynamics. Thus, following the military coup in 1973, the government ended the coal extraction in Pilpilco, displaced its residents, and transferred the land to a private forestry industry that erased all the city's traces. Lota fell into increasing decay culminating in the closure of the mine shortly after the dictatorship ended. Today, Pilpilco lives mostly in the memories of its workers and families, many of whom still live in the area. Lota remains one of the country's most deprived cities with the highest unemployment rate and an increasing state of ruination.

However, both Pilpilco and Lota's inhabitants continue to hold pride in the cities' significant role in social justice struggles during the twentieth century. They have organized heritage tourism grassroots organizations to preserve the memory and places that matter to them and influence decision-making in their local areas. While Pilpilcanos work to recreate and memorialize their history through subtle spatial and performative strategies, Lota's residents envision heritage tourism as an alternative sustainable development to the state's failed rehabilitation plans. Daughters and ex-miners' wives lead both organizations, have created a network of solidarity between both, and are using heritage as an activist tool for recognition, citizenship, and material improvements.

Drawing from oral histories, walking interviews, and ethnographic observations, in this paper, I examine how Lotinas and Pilpilcanas mobilize memory-work and nostalgia as a driving force to organize and challenge official historical narratives, planning modes, and heritage tourism practices that exclude them. Starting with Smith and Campbell's (2017) notion of progressive nostalgia, I argue that nostalgia, far from being a negative emotion of engaging with the past and framing heritage

sites, provides residents with a critical tool for recognition, community building, and envisioning an alternative for developing their environments. Inspired by Latin American feminist theories, I add to this argument the idea of "gendered nostalgia" to stress the importance of intersectional approaches to analyze affects and emotions in heritage tourism. This is particularly relevant in industrial heritage sites, where rigid gender hierarchies have a long history yet have been disrupted and reconfigured in the context of deindustrialization, and where women's experiences often remain silenced.

Academic inquiries into nostalgia and heritage tourism have mostly examined the Global North's experiences, where heritage framings in deindustrialized contexts are frequently linked with gentrification and tourism investment (Berger and High 2019). Scholars have also investigated the potential of nostalgic emotions in industrial heritage, particularly in Europe, Britain, Canada, and the United States. However, how nostalgia drives heritage tourism to challenge broader social exclusions, inequalities, and oblivion in marginalized contexts remains understudied, especially in southern settings. This paper extends the discussion involving nostalgia, industrial heritage, and tourism as a progressive and gendered emotion that can be used as a political and cultural tool by marginalized communities to create new spaces for inclusion and rights in contexts where such rights are limited.