

Europe and provide compelling arguments about why the various feminisms that have developed throughout the region should be studied on their own terms.

Ann-Dorte Christensen and Marit Benthe Norheim, *A Shipload of Women's Memories: Narratives across Borders*, Aalborg University Press: Aalborg, 2017; 159 pp.: 9788771126006

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Memory work is a well-known method in literature and arts, particularly as (auto)biographical accounts of eminent people. However, in the last few decades, it is becoming a more prominent tool in social sciences giving an additional (intimate) perspective on local and global societal developments. In feminist theory, methodology and pedagogy, memory work has a significant place as it enables hidden and unheard voices and the experiences and lives of ordinary women to be taken into account as sources of scientific knowledge. In the feminist approach to memory work, it is not only that women's experiences become visible and valuable, but also valid as means of providing insights into the private sphere and intimate life that goes beyond traditional and mainstream historical and social science perspectives.

The book by Ann-Dorte Christensen and Marit Benthe Norheim, *A Shipload of Women's Memories: Narratives across Borders*, explores and further develops memory work by combining visual art and sociological and literary methods in collecting and recording the stories of women. The book comprises 18 real-life stories of women over the age of 70 who have lived and worked in a total of 27 different countries and across four continents, all of whom have migrated to, and live in, Denmark. The inspiration for collecting life stories came from the art project 'Life-boats' of the Norwegian visual artist Marit Benthe Norheim (who lives in Denmark). The project presents 'a three-part portrait of women in different universal stages and conditions, which sail with captains and crew and are constructed as canal boats' (p. 113). The three parts/ships of women's life cycles are: 'My ship is loaded with Longing – the young women', 'My ship is loaded with Life – the pregnant women' and 'My ship is loaded with Memories – the ageing women'.

The book presents the collection of life stories from the third ship loaded with memories of ageing women. Each life story is comprised of a narrative (as described by Ann-Dorte Christensen), a sketch (visualization of the woman's life) and a boat figurehead (materialization of the woman's account) – the last two made by the visual artist, Marit Benthe Norheim. All three interpretations represent comprehensive sociological and artistic materializations of the interviewed women's life trajectories.

As in all memory work, the interaction between researchers and researched brings challenges in maintaining intimacy, openness and empathy in situations in which many experiences (migration, war and violence) are not usually shared. However, the life stories collected in the book aim to present not only the present situation of some of the women, such as 79-year-old asylum seeker Basma from Syria (pp. 64–66), but also to build understanding and open-mindedness between cultures in order to prevent future

conflicts. Therefore, the book can serve as a learning tool for tolerance, inclusion and diversity in a world torn by violence, exclusion and differences.

Each narrative is told in the third person with only a few direct quotes from the women interviewed. In some stories, other sources (biographies, autobiographies, articles, etc.) are also used to shed light on women's life trajectories. This method is different from other memory work methods, such as oral history (Ritchie, 2011) or collective memory work (Haug et al., 1987) where interviews/written narratives are presented with minimal or no authorial or editorial interventions. The memories collected in this book are interpreted by the researcher and the artist together and, therefore, boundaries between disciplines such as history, sociology and art are transcended. It is not by chance that the inspiration for the book came from the literary work of Svetlana Aleksijevitj on women's memory from the war (p. 13), which is representative of a genre in which the intersections between history and literature are prominent. Focusing on stories of elderly women enabled a personal and intimate perspective on well-known facts about the seven different wars that these women encountered: Second World War, the Vietnam War, the Balkan Wars, two Somalian wars, and the ongoing conflicts in Palestine and Syria. Usually ignored, the voices of these women give profound insights into everyday life, migration and war experiences that are 'less about heroes and heroism, and more about human doings' (p. 13).

The book provides a diversity of voices of women who lived and worked in countries different from their country of origin. Therefore, the key concepts engaged with in the book are belonging, routes and roots. Belonging is understood as 'close interactions with family and friends and about everyday encounters in local communities and institutions' (p. 14). Thus, in this sense, belonging could be maintained and re-established outside the country of origin by building new social networks and homes and interacting with local people and traditions. Consequently, belonging could be expressed both as present and future striving and many women emphasize the importance for their children of being fully integrated. 'Through the concept of belonging we gain an insight into identity formation processes as well as the women's experiences of inclusion and exclusion in different communities' (p. 14). The concept of routes is connected to mobility both in geographical (physical) senses and also in terms of spirituality and searching for women's own place between their old and new lives. On the other hand, the concept of roots is connected to cultural and religious identities that are traditionally seen as unchangeable and stable and in contrast to mobility and migration. The figureheads are a symbol of interconnection between the routes and the roots. They travelled seas fixed on the boats' bow, being at the same time guides and protectors of those who travel.

A strength of the collection is that the authors are challenging a conservative view of roots as a limitation to freedom of movement and belonging. On the contrary, these life stories clearly show how, despite their differences, experiences of mobility enriched the lives of these women at several levels, as community leaders, artists, freedom fighters and mothers. Each of their identities is multi-layered. For example, Midori described herself as Danish 'on the outside', Japanese in her gut and in her heart a mixture of several places (p. 48).

The composition of the book is carefully planned. It consists of five chapters, of which the first represents the personal, theoretical and methodological positioning of the

authors. The second chapter consists of the 19 life stories that the authors collected. Out of these 19 life stories, the story of Bolette Isaksen was not authorized, therefore, is presented only through visual expression of her as a figurehead. There is also an open portrait without assigned realistic identity/life story. The open portrait constitutes 'no one and all, the one we are or will be, our mother or grandmother; a woman whom we admire from any culture, from wherever and to and from all ages – from everywhere or nowhere' (p. 62). It is open to the interventions from readers/viewers/travellers of the life-boats to give it a piece of their own identity.

In the third chapter, Ann-Dorte Christensen gives her analysis of the collective life stories. The fourth chapter illustrates in words and pictures the process of artistic and ship engineering in the creation of life-boats described by the artist Marit Benthe Norheim. Both the third and fourth chapters analyse the authors' positioning within the project and give them the opportunity to express their own views and learning experiences in relation to the project. The fifth chapter shows (in pictures) the 'maiden voyage' of the memory ships. In addition, the preface and the bibliography add valuable contextualizing information for the reader. The book is lavishly illustrated with impressive photographs of figureheads, the process of making the life-boats and their first journey.

As a genre, the book *A Shipload of Women's Memories: Narratives across Borders* could be described as a collection of literary stories in search of identity, constituting as they do, sociological analysis on migration and migrants, and a monograph on an artistic project. The methodology used also relates to storytelling and narrative enquiry. In addition, it can be placed within academic contexts of memory studies and an attempt to fill gaps in our knowledge of ageing women's experiences and construction of their cultural and gendered subjectivities.

A Shipload of Women's Memories: Narratives across Borders is a remarkable and outstanding book, well researched, well written and accessible beyond the narrow circle of academics. I would strongly recommend it not only to students of social sciences or gender studies, feminists and visual artists but to anyone interested in learning about our societies and the ways in which diversity and dialogue can connect us in resisting intolerance, violence and war.

References

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Paradoxically, in its move from socialism to global capitalism in 1991 Ukraine witnessed a general return to traditionalism, in which women were seen as maintaining linguistic