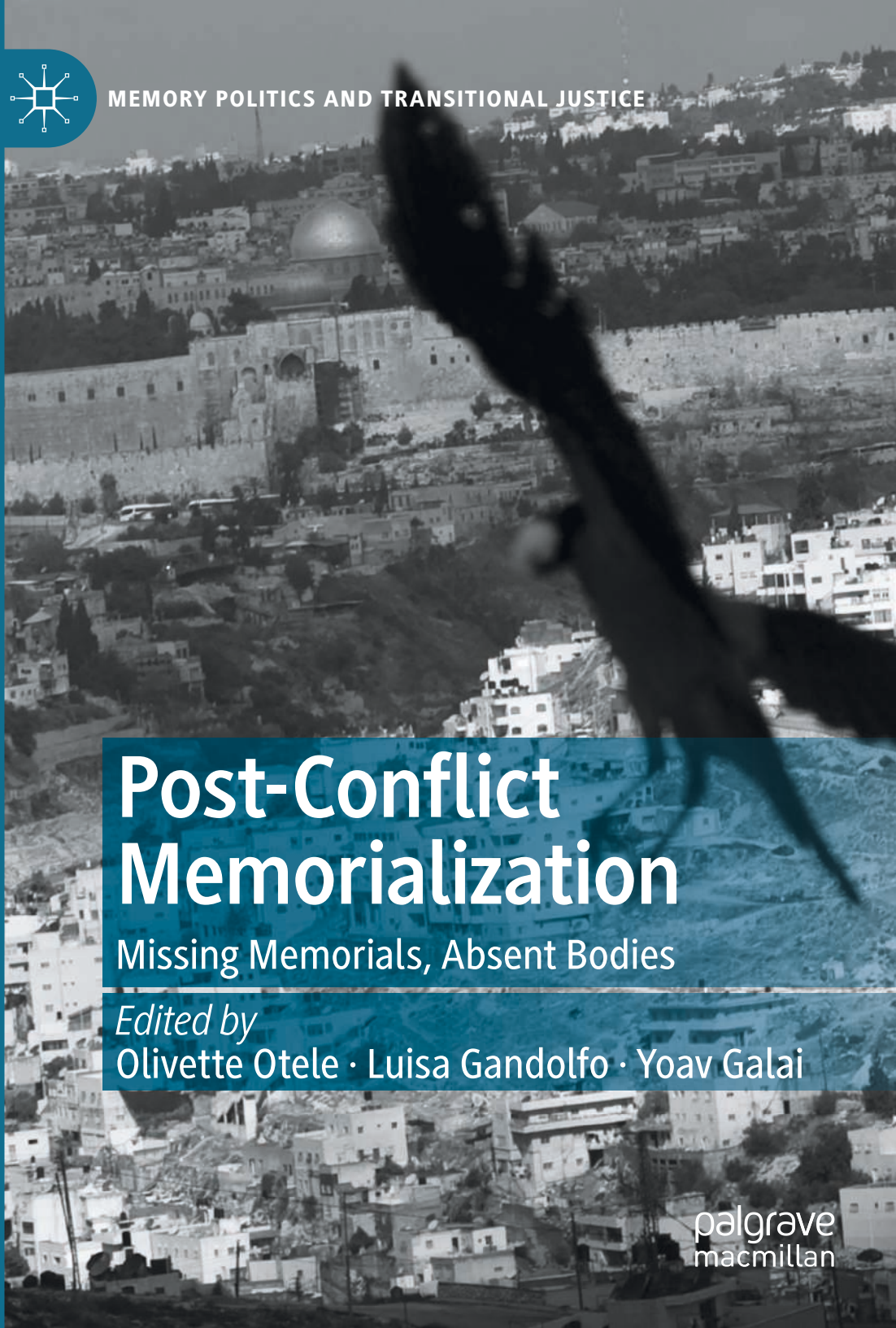
MEMORY POLITICS AND TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE
Post-Conflict Memorialization
Missing Memorials, Absent Bodies
Edited by
Olivette Otele · Luisa Gandolfo · Yoav Galai
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Memory Politics and Transitional Justice

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The interdisciplinary fields of Memory Studies and Transitional Justice have largely developed in parallel to one another despite both focusing on efforts of societies to confront and (re—)appropriate their past. While scholars working on memory have come mostly from historical, literary, sociological, or anthropological traditions, transitional justice has attracted primarily scholarship from political science and the law. This series bridges this divide: it promotes work that combines a deep understanding of the contexts that have allowed for injustice to occur with an analysis of how legacies of such injustice in political and historical memory influence contemporary projects of redress, acknowledgment, or new cycles of denial. The titles in the series are of interest not only to academics and students but also practitioners in the related fields.

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Editors
Olivette Otele
Colonial History
University of Bristol
Bristol, UK

Luisa Gandolfo
Department of Sociology
University of Aberdeen
Aberdeen, UK

Yoav Galai
Department of Politics, International Relations and Philosophy
Royal Holloway
University of London
Egham, UK

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Notes on Contributors

Manca Bajec is an artist and researcher whose multidisciplinary work is situated in the realm of sociopolitics. She has presented her work worldwide including at the Kaunas Biennial, ICA, Beside War Italy, WARM Sarajevo, the 9/11 Memorial Museum, Columbia University, New School, Goldsmiths, Royal College of Art and Syracuse. In 2019, she completed a practice-led Ph.D. at the Royal College of Art. She currently works as the Managing Editor of the *Journal of Visual Culture* while continuing to develop her practice and academic career. Her most recent work was developed as part of a British Council Residency in Ukraine and examined outer-space colonialism through a social science fiction audio play and installation. Manca frequently publishes her work, most recently in the Theatrum Mundi publication, *Uncommon Building: Collective Excavation of a Fictional Structure* and has an upcoming book chapter in an edited edition for the Memory Studies Series (Palgrave Macmillan) on the effects of Europeanisation in the Western Balkans. Manca was born in Slovenia, grew up in Kuwait and currently lives in London.

Omri Ben Yehuda is a scholar of comparative Jewish Literatures. His work focuses on Jewish literatures in German and Hebrew, Mizrahi and Israeli literature, Holocaust literature and postcolonial studies. He is a former Minerva Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for German Philology in the Free University of Berlin and he is currently co-editing a volume with Dotan Halevi on Gaza in Israeli history, literature and culture. His comparative essay on the Holocaust, the Nakba and Mizrahi Trauma was

published in *The Holocaust and the Nakba: A New Grammar of Trauma and History* (Columbia UP, 2019), while his essay on the Mizrahim and the 1967 War was published in *Jadmag* (*Jadaliyya*), and his postcolonial reading of Kafka's 'A Hunger Artist' was published in the *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 45 (2017).

Yoav Galai is a Lecturer in Global Political Communication at the Department of Politics, International Relations and Philosophy at Royal Holloway, University of London. Previously a photojournalist and an NGO project manager, Yoav's work explores narrative politics and visual politics. Yoav's forthcoming manuscript with De Gruyter interrogates transnational constellations of collective memory as a site of international politics.

Luisa Gandolfo is a Lecturer in Peace and Reconciliation in the Department of Sociology at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, and holds a Ph.D. in Arab and Islamic Studies from the University of Exeter. Luisa's research focuses on post-war reconciliation and memory in the Middle East and North Africa, with a particular focus on Libya, Palestine-Israel, and Tunisia, and she is the author of *Palestinians in Jordan: The Politics of Identity* (2012). In 2014–2015, she was a EURIAS Fellow at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in Wassenaar, where she worked on the project 'Comparative Discourses of Memory and Trauma in Palestinian and Israeli Art'.

Alexandra Kowalski teaches social theory, the political sociology of culture and heritage studies at CEU (Central European University) in Budapest and Vienna. Her research explores the modern history of power and culture, with particular focus on the state processes and mechanisms that constitute cultural wealth and symbolic value. Published in multiple collective volumes and journals such as *Comparative Studies in Society and History* and *The Sociological Review*, her work explores the scientific and bureaucratic production of French heritage in the post-war era, the history of UNESCO, the preservation policy formation in the nineteenth century. She has also worked and published on everyday culture, sexuality, critical social theory, TV and nationalism.

Johanna Mannergren Selimovic is an Associate Professor in Peace and Development Research in the School of Social Sciences at Södertörn University, and holds a Ph.D. in Peace and Development Research from University of Gothenburg, in Sweden. Her research is driven by a deep

curiosity about the makings of 'everyday peace' in deeply divided societies, specifically in relation to politics of memory, gender, and discourses and practices of transitional justice. Theoretically she engages with narrative theory and methodology. She grounds her work in close ethnographic studies, with fieldwork in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda and Jerusalem. She currently heads two research projects on the connections between memory politics and durable peace (www.peaceandmemory.net) and has published her work in journals such as *Political Psychology*, *Memory Studies*, *International Journal of Transitional Justice* and *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. She is also co-editor of the *Palgrave Encyclopedia of Peace and Conflict Studies*.

Olivette Otele is a Professor of Colonial History and Memory of Slavery at the University of Bristol, in the United Kingdom, and a Fellow and Vice President of the Royal Historical Society. She works on race, discrimination, citizenship, identities of minority ethnic groups in the Global North. She is the recipient of several major national and international research grants. She has authored numerous academic and non-academic publications and is a broadcaster and a social commentator (*BBC, Guardian, BBC History Publications, Radio France International*, among others). Her recent book, entitled *African Europeans: An Untold History* (Hurst-OUP), was published in 2020. Her publications include, *Does Discrimination Shape Identity? Identity Politics and Minorities in the English-Speaking World and in France: Rhetoric and Reality*, a special issue of the *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, edited by Olivette Otele and Rim Latrache (Routledge, 2011), and *Histoire de l'esclavage britannique: des origines de la traite transatlantique aux premisses de la colonisation* (Editions Michel Houdiard, 2008).

Sandra M. Rios Oyola is a Colombian sociologist interested in the study of human dignity, religious peacebuilding, emotions and memory. Sandra is currently an FNRS Postdoctoral Researcher at the Catholic University of Louvain, in Belgium, where she researches how transitional justice helps to restore victims' human dignity, with a focus on the case of Colombia's Truth Commission, Historical Memorialization and Reparations. Sandra's research is interdisciplinary, and it deals with issues of law and society, political science and sociology. She engages in locally based ethnographic observation, as well as digital ethnography, analysis of testimonies, law and policy. Sandra received her Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Aberdeen in 2014, thanks to a scholarship by the

Leverhulme Programme, Compromise after Conflict. She is the author of the book, *Religion and Social Memory amid Conflict: The Massacre of Bojayá in Colombia* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), and she is the co-editor, with Natascha Mueller-Hirth, of *Time and Temporality in the Study of Transitional Societies* (Routledge, 2018).

Kelsey J. Utne is a History Ph.D. candidate at Cornell University, where she specializes in the history of commemoration in late colonial and early postcolonial South Asia. Situated at the intersection of critical heritage studies and Achille Mbembé's necropolitics, her dissertation examines the politics of corpse disposal and the memorialization of death in North India during the anti-colonial resistance of the 1920s and 1930s. Her research has been supported by generous grants from Cornell University, the Social Science Research Council, the American Institute of Indian Studies, and the Fulbright Programme.

Eva Willems is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Department of Conflict and Development Studies at Ghent University in Belgium. Eva is interested in the intersection of transitional justice and citizenship (re)construction in (post-)conflict societies. Her Ph.D. research focused on the contestation and appropriation of mechanisms of reparation, exhumation and memorialization by survivors and ex-combatants in post-conflict Peru.

Andrea Zittlau is an Assistant Professor at the Department of North American Studies at the University of Rostock, in Germany. Her monograph, entitled *Curious Exotica* (2016), explores the display of indigenous people, bodies and objects in museum environments. She currently looks at art and poetry in the context of the Anthropocene and publishes on activist artists such as Franci Duran and Erica Mott, as well as on community outreach in prisons and other marginalized settings.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Absence and Trauma in Post-Conflict Memorialisation

Olivette Otele, Luisa Gandolfo, and Yoav Galai

In his poem, *B-Movie* (1981), Gil Scott-Heron reflected on the election of Ronald Reagan. He wrote, 'this country wants nostalgia. They want to go back as far as they can. Even if it's only as far as last week. Not to face now or tomorrow, but to face backwards' (ibid.). Reagan ran under the slogan 'Let's make America great again', which was later revived by Donald Trump, albeit truncated into the shorter 'MAGA'. As we are increasingly seeing, 'they' are still waiting for a greater future to be imported from the imagined past, and not only in America. When Reagan was elected, it was a time of crisis, with

O. Otele (✉)
University of Bristol, Bristol, UK
e-mail: cx19841@bristol.ac.uk

L. Gandolfo
University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, UK
e-mail: k.luisa.gandolfo@abdn.ac.uk

Y. Galai
Royal Holloway University of London, Egham, UK
e-mail: yoav.galai@rhul.ac.uk

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stagflation running amok and a sitting president that wavered in the face of a hostage crisis. Scott-Heron explained that 'they looked for people like John Wayne. But since John Wayne was no longer available, "they" settled for Ronald Reagan' (ibid.), a B-movie actor.

We are always in a time of crisis if we compare it to a mythical golden age of the silver screen, when, as Scott-Heron wryly commented, 'movies were in black and white and so was everything else' (ibid.). However, what 'they' are really after is a rose-tinted memory of a past that never was, a product that politicians, whether labelled 'populist' or not, are more than happy to supply. Scott-Heron concluded his poem with a dismal summary of the social backslide that is happening while 'they' are gazing at the past,

> And here's a look at the closing numbers: racism's up, human rights are down, peace is shaky, war items are hot - the House claims all ties. Jobs are down, money is scarce and common sense is at an all-time low with heavy trading. Movies were looking better than ever and now no one is looking because, we're starring in a "B" movie. And we would rather have John Wayne. (ibid.)

Alistair MacIntyre wrote that, 'there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources' (2007, 216). Paul Ricoeur referred to this process as 'phronetic', indicating a 'familiarity we have with the types of plot received from our culture' (1991, 28). Political projects seek legitimacy by means of phronesis, or by claiming to echo the familiar stock of the storied past.

However, the stories that are analysed here are not in stock and not in step with any of the political canons that govern the discourses that surround them. Often, they move upstream on the raging flow of the progressive linear narratives that polities are quick to apply after an event has occurred that they deem hurtful to their self-image (Edkins 2006). They are incompatible with the prevalent designs of history and memory and to tell them is to challenge collective memory in the preeminent modern collective—the nation state.

Nations legitimise their political claims and policies by referring to their pasts. Collective memory is, then, as Michael Rothberg explains, following Richard Terdiman (1993): 'the past made present' (2009, 3). Control over the national collective memory is of such importance that

Ernst Gellner (1983) revised Weber's famous definition of a state to suggest that the nation state has monopoly over the legitimate distribution of education. This monopoly, according to Ernst Renan (1990 [1882]), requires extensive maintenance, or a 'daily plebiscite'. Importantly, the design of the national collective memory necessitates the omission of the memory of the violent foundational acts through which the polity came to be. Renan (1990 [1882], 11) sees it as a given that 'unity is always effected by means of brutality'. The resulting narrative that must face the 'daily plebiscite' is then not as much a canonised account, but a project that requires constant work on a common narrative, which Chiara Bottici (2007) defined as 'political myth'.

On an individual level, this is congruent with what Gramsci (1992, 323) termed the 'spontaneous philosophy' of people, as 'the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which are collectively bundled together under the name of "folklore"' and we resist narratives that contradict our 'spontaneous philosophy'. James Wertsch explained that members of a society share a 'deep collective memory' that is disseminated via culture in the form of 'schematic narrative templates' (2002, 57). These general designs used to frame particular narratives reflect the common 'stock of stories'. When a story does not fit these templates, it is either forced into them or rejected. The idea of collective memory then, concerns a past made present, often in the service of political power that may omit or redact shameful episodes, while retrojecting political projects into it. It occurs on the level of societal narrative, as well as in the cultural designs that manifest themselves among individuals. In Halbwach's term, collective memory has 'social frameworks' (1992), but these are in a state of constant articulation, in which the borders of the polity are continually redrawn by discursive practices that delimit what is contained within it.

Often times these claims, and their commemoration, are not only rejected, but actively denied from taking public form, from presence. For example, Rabbi Uzi Meshulam spoke about the crime itself and the crime of the silencing of the crime. Demands for recognition do not mesh with 'deep collective memory' (Wertsch 2002, 57), fail the 'daily plebiscite' (Renan 1990 [1882], 19) and challenge the 'spontaneous philosophy' (Gramsci 1992, 323). In other words, a discursive firewall keeps these stories at bay and their adherents are greeted with silence, suspicion or even violence. In addition, demands for evidence are laid on the very victims by those who hold the archives, marking the absences by doubt.

The violent act that is omitted is twice silenced. First in the perpetration and second in every instance in which the discursive firewall operates to silence claims. Therefore, employing a narrative lens and rewriting the missing past, thereby replenishing the 'stock of stories' or 'solving' the historical puzzle is insufficient.

1.1 Memory and Trauma in Post-Conflict Communities

The notions of trauma and recovery are central to post-conflict settings. Rebuilding communities that have been affected by war, disunions, various forms of oppressions and deaths, is a challenge that often implies examining the sources of trauma, and finding individual mechanism for coping and community healing strategies. That also may involve civil society including entrepreneurs of memory, coming together to look into ways to write about difficult experiences and reconcile past and present. Trauma theories have been the source of a vast literature in Humanities over the last 30 years, while post-World War II understandings of trauma have moved from clinical definitions of disorders to a re-evaluation of trauma beyond mental illnesses. The conception of trauma is largely based on Freud and Lacan's analyses of the term. Sigmund Freud (1963) saw trauma as a source of pain, as neurosis was equated with illness, while Jacques Lacan largely acknowledged that trauma is common and recurrent to human experiences (2004). The notion of trauma that is examined in Humanities and this volume, combines both Freudian and Lacanian approaches.

Trauma sources in post-conflict settings are by definition based on discontent and pain. They are about situations that have led to a sense of mental dislocation; a feeling of loss and yearning for peace, or mourning in the case of post-conflict settings. Traumatic events have societal trajectories that have shaped cultural memory in post-conflict settings. Cathy Caruth (1995) acknowledged Freud's work in relation to the unconscious mind and the need to bring unsaid and sometimes unknown pain to the conscious mind. Literature, according to Caruth, could be one of the pathways to recovery. Caruth examined how the language of trauma (literature and oral history, among others) brought human histories to our attention and provided us with tools to understand human trajectories.

Locating healing in the realm of discourse means retrieving past experiences. It is about placing the key for individual and collective repair in domains that examine violence to understand what traumatic memories are. However, Ruth Kevers et al. have argued that collective violence has been conceptualised in a way that reproduces reductive paradigms, such as the 'individualizing, depoliticizing, universalizing, and pathologizing tendencies of the trauma discourse and its predominant PTSD construct' (2016, 623). Examining the work of Jedlowski (2001), Misztal (2003), Olick and Robbins (1998), they highlight the contexts in which rationality took centre stage, and produced valuable, but sometimes limited kinds of theories. Indeed, scholars such as Jedlowski and Misztal have challenged constructing trauma as an individual experience, thus linking the debate to the question of memory. Memory scholars from Maurice Halbwachs to Paul Ricoeur, Aleida Assmann, Jan Assmann, and Marianne Hirsch, have analysed the articulation between individual memory and collective memory. Traumatic memories are indeed shaped by collective and social interactions, silences and expectations. All these theories however, remain in the domain of PTSD-led approaches that favour external intervention for healing. Kevers et al. note that few scholars have looked into transcultural trauma, an approach that highlights the need for multidirectional and cultural avenues to trauma and repair. Nonetheless, even when the specificity of the social, cultural, and political contexts are taken into account, and even when 'indigenous strategies' (Kevers et al. 2016, 634) are advocated, one may still wonder if this linear approach to trauma, that centres on healing through a clear path, whereby the subject moves from past to present, can always be efficient.

Many post-conflict societies are characterised by internal divisions that can be ideological, religious, and geographical. An approach to trauma has to take into account the contexts of civil war and profound intra-community divisions, especially when the antagonism has led to deaths, and when the sites of conflicts and memory are sites of mourning. South Africa, Rwanda, and Northern Ireland are among such examples, while in this volume, our contributors also reflect on Palestine-Israel, Bosnia-Hercegovina, and Colombia, among others. Articulating trauma in a context of nation or community building can become a complex task that pushes victims and perpetrators in directions that they are not always ready to follow. Even the notion of victim and perpetrator becomes blurry in specific contexts, thus making any healing process difficult. Brandon Hamber and Richard A. Wilson demonstrate how mistaking individual

trauma for national trauma or how converging a nation-building project with individual experiences of trauma can have dire impacts on survivors. They noted that 'Nations do not have collective psyches that can be healed, nor do whole nations suffer post-traumatic stress disorder and to assert otherwise is to psychologize an abstract entity that exists primarily in the minds of nation-building politicians' (Hamber and Wilson 2002, 36).

Hamber and Wilson took Truth Commissions as examples and demonstrated that even when they do consider voices, they are about public discourses. Those discourses are, one may add, about constructed, and constructing, public memory, and therefore about continuous debate. Using that public space to address the question of reparation, however, can be beneficial to a certain extent as the process brings to the surface a clearer delineation between the moral and physical realm and between the victim and the perpetrator. Yet, as Hamber and Wilson also note, reparations can have limits. They may help mourn, but they can never bring back the lost ones. In the case of families those who have gone missing or made to disappear, it signifies an acceptance the crimes and the end of hope. The two researchers underscore the economic dimension of reparations and the way they may alleviate the financial burden that accompanies loss in many instances of gendered post-conflict settings. They nonetheless bring forward the idea that the refusal for reparations and calls for punishments for the perpetrators should be acknowledged as 'rituals of closure' (Hamber and Wilson 2002, 49).

Graham Dawson, drawing on Susannah Radstone (2007), critiques this approach, arguing that trauma theorists, such as Caruth, have divided people into two categories: the 'normal' and the 'pathological' (2017, 64). The clear distinction ignores the fact that trauma is a 'continuum' and the so-called subject may not be aware that he/she has been traumatised. In this equation, two other difficulties emerge and they are linked to the power dynamic between the patient and the practitioner or the person who talks and the listener on the one hand, and on the other, to what is deemed relevant enough to be considered traumatic. In those instances, memory and time play a crucial role. Using the example of Northern Ireland, Dawson notes that Alan Young's 'architecture of traumatic time' (1995) troubles the idea that one moves from conflict to post-conflict, and therefore one can move from trauma to recovery in a linear way. Some settings are both conflict and post-conflict zones, and these render recovery and trauma particularly difficult to apprehend. Dawson questions

the idea of 'moving on' in those settings. He makes a case for greater attention to be paid to the history of emotions and its links to the 'inner world' whereby,

> The work of reparation is strengthened by the "introjection", or taking in, of such capacities where they are encountered in social life. This, as well as the perception of discrepancies between anticipations derived from the internal world and the complex realities of the external social world, enables "something new to happen" within both psychic and social reality. (2017, 97)

Recovery is therefore about going through processes of healing that are both collective and individual. Recovery is articulated while uncovering layers of the past, by telling and sharing one's story, as well as public and, sometimes, national acknowledgement of wrongdoings. These strategies often range from psychological and financial support, to legal forms of revenge seen in instances such as reparatory justice.

1.2 Absence, Remembrance, and Mourning

A significant contribution of this volume is the authors' reflections on absence and its impact on remembrance, memorialisation, and the negotiation of post-conflict trauma. As the authors contemplate absence in their research, the concept is revealed to be multi-faceted as it (re)emerges through silence, omission, erasure, and haunting, as well as through the physical and psychological aches that persist among the ever-mourning. During the original workshop held at the Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide (NIOD) in Amsterdam in 2016, fresh themes emerged, including the significance of the body and embodiment. Much like absence, the chapters that follow demonstrate that the body can be affective in a number of ways. Among the living, the body remembers, recounts, witnesses, and provides testimonies. Through the living body, the absent bodies are not forgotten, their fate perhaps unknown, but their names are commemorated and committed to funerary rituals, where possible, and the articulation of their biographies provides an opportunity for catharsis, or a temporary release, for those who remain. In other instances, the embodied experience of remembrance brings with it the recognition of erasure, and in Chapters 2 and 3, Johanna Mannergren

Selimovic, and Olivette Otele, respectively, explore the in-betweenness that marks the edges of absence.

Opening the volume, Mannergren Selimovic takes us to Sarajevo, where she contemplates the union of silence and absence in the everyday of survivors of the siege of the city (1992–1996). The 'everyday silent memory work' that takes place through subtle acts of omission is both physical and linguistic, and Mannergren Selimovic directs our attention to the embodied, emplaced, and spoken dimensions of memory work. The present absences experienced by the survivors of the conflict congregate under the sensation of 'a sense of', which Bertelsen and Murphie's social body negotiates (2010, 140). For the participants in Mannergren Selimovic's study, the public spaces of their neighbourhoods retained the tension of the conflict, while the sites of loss continued to be regarded with a reverence that prevented the bereaved from walking on a stretch of pavement ('I don't feel good. My body stops me from going there'). The subsequent recollections about mealtimes, scarred buildings, and the reluctance to talk about the war—except through subtle references—generates a feeling of memorialisation on the margins, the memories rarely openly articulated, yet never forgotten. Through her chapter, Mannergren Selimovic demonstrates the liminality of spatial and embodied memory work in the post-war city, and her argument, that the power of silence lies in its capacity to divert contentious conversations or (re)traumatising recollections, locates silence, omission, and absence on the cusp of healing.

Before healing can occur, recognition of trauma must take place. While the survivors of the siege of Sarajevo carry their experience, and articulate it in ways that traverse possible retraumatisation, the visitors to sites where past violence, and its legacy, remains untold (or partially revealed) enter a different in-betweenness. In Olivette Otele's powerful account of moving through Penrhyn Castle in North Wales, and Andrea Zittlau's reflections (Chapter 4) on the Selk'nam exhibits at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York, the idea of the 'condensation of time' suggests not just a temporal compression, but a narrative one, too (Dekel and Vinitzky-Seroussi 2017, 337). The result, however, is not just ease of access to a vast scope of history, but rather the question of *whose* history? While Penrhyn Castle is a heritage site, and the AMNH a museum, both connect with Irit Dekel and Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi's perception of the museum as a site of 'distinct moments that bring together particular clusters of meaning […] around national memory and private lives'

(2017, 337; 338). Despite the intimacy suggested by the private lives on display, the omitted narratives create less a condensed history, and more one of historical and cultural amnesia, as Otele demonstrates. The result brings an added edge to the atmosphere of the site; for Dekel and Vinitzky-Seroussi, this is the 'uncanny experience' brought about by temporal breakdowns (2017, 338). Otele deconstructs the unsettling sensation further, in her reflection on black performative presence and black visitors at sites of trauma and mourning. In this 'ambiguous setting', Otele poses important questions, including 'to what extent have dominant metanarratives related to the history of transatlantic slavery obscured Afro-descendants' presence in these reluctant sites of memory?' Central to this analysis is the embodied presence of the black visitor, as well as, Otele tells us, their absence.

This observation draws attention to the effect of historical amnesia and the nature of the memory/ies presented at heritage sites and in museums. Following Astrid Erll's understanding of memory, that it is a 'process that connects neurons, people, times, spaces, experiences and histories' (2017, 6), then the sites that omit experiences and histories are, ultimately, failing to facilitate the connections that produce an inclusive (and historically accurate) narrative of remembrance. Establishing this connection is, in the context of the Selk'nam exhibits at the ANHM, complicated further by the location of the shoes that form the display. As Zittlau explains, locating the shoes in a natural history museum removes the Selk'nam from human history, and thereafter, obscures the cause of their demise, as '[t]he shoes mark absence, but disguise the making of absence as a natural cause also, because that particular museum falls into the genre of natural history, which is presumably detached from human influences'. The dissonance created by the choice of location prompts a double-detachment, as the artefacts are removed, first, from their point of origin, in Tierra del Fuego, an archipelago shared by Chile and Argentina. Second, their location in natural history dehumanises the absent bodies who once owned the shoes, and diminishes the link to colonial violence, and the meaningful conversation that should follow.

Beyond heritage sites, the authors question how to mourn when a body is missing, and the ways that absence can play a role in mourning and remembrance, amidst silence and disappearance. There is, moreover, an additional facet of memory, wherein the act of recall connects to the physical pain of remembrance. In Gearoid Millar's consideration of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Sierra Leone, the

prospect of retelling their experiences was expressed through analogies of pain. For one, the TRC is likened to 'pouring hot water over your head'; for another, physical and emotional wounds are experienced with fresh intensity, 'when he heard on the radio, the voice of the man who chopped his hands, it all returned to him. […] the memories of the war came back to the old Pa, hot and painful, and he hated that man anew' (Millar 2015, 243). Where loss has been experienced, the absence can become an enduring ache.

In Simon Robins' work on the families of those who disappeared during the Nepalese Civil War (1996–2006), the bodies of the absent continued to have an impact on those of the living, as the survivors continued to experience chronic pain and anxiety, which began with the disappearances (2014, 10). For Robins, the duration of the pain's persistence enables the body to become 'a physical memorial to the missing, inscribed with the trauma of the past and making absence visible' (ibid.). As the contributions of Andrea Zittlau (Chapter 4), Manca Bajec (Chapter 7), and Mannergren Selimovic demonstrate, absence can function paradoxically, by being invisible, yet tangible. As each author looks at the material representation of the absent body (or bodies), through empty chairs that line the streets of Sarajevo (Mannergren Selimovic), balloons tagged with the names of victims of the Omarska camp in Bosnia-Hercegovina (Bajec), or Selk'nam shoes that are separated from their owners (Zittlau), they draw attention to the act of framing the spaces left behind. In doing so, the material objects that stand in the stead of the disappeared present, for a moment, a visual acknowledgement of not only the void left by the individual, but also a reminder (and sometimes an acknowledgement) of the root of the loss.

So far, these chapters have provided a profound focus on the narratives and rituals that try (and at times, fail) to make sense of, absent bodies. For the bereaved, the absence of the bodies can reinforce the violent event of the past, and in Chapters 9 and 10, by Eva Willems and Sandra M. Rios Oyola, respectively, the living stand less as memorials, and more as channels through which oppression and disempowerment unfold. In Willem's research on the absence of remains and the remains of absence in the Peruvian Highlands following the Peruvian Civil War (1980–2000), the dead bodies hold 'an emancipatory potential for their relatives in the present and future'. Central to this premise is the act of burying and reburying, though as Willems cautions, added risks remain, as the narratives concerning the found bodies can be contested, and

non-recognition (or misrecognition) can equally precipitate harm and/or oppression. To this can be added two further aspects: the potential for retraumatisation while reburying and negotiating contested narratives, and second, the possibility for burial to become a site of control.

In her reflection on burials and funerary rites during the conflict in Colombia and Guatemala, Rios Oyola argues that, 'the absence or prohibition of funerary rituals can be used as a tool for humiliation of the deceased and of those who survived her'. While the use of the absent body can be invoked to exact pain on the living, so too, does Rios Oyola demonstrate the ways that absent bodies disempower survivors, as 'they feel that they are not able to carry their duties toward their deceased relatives'. The emotional turmoil explored by Willems and Rios Oyola recalls Robins' discussion of the pain of loss, yet more significantly, they address the urgent need to understand the diverse experiences of trauma among survivors of the disappeared. For scholars working on mass graves, the reluctance of survivors to exhume the graves has been received with 'shock and even bafflement' (Rosenblatt 2015, 86). While Adam Rosenblatt is clear that forensic teams follow the lead of the communities involved, their lingering consternation perhaps can be solved by looking at the complex power dynamics that surround post-conflict mourning and memorialisation, which are discussed in the chapters in this volume.

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CHAPTER 2

Articulating Presence of Absence: Everyday Memory and the Performance of Silence in Sarajevo

Johanna Mannergren Selimovic

2.1 Introduction

On 6 April 2012, Bosnian theatre director Haris Pašović placed 11,541 red plastic chairs in rows along Sarajevo's main street to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the 1992–96 siege of the city. There was one chair for each person killed and the seemingly endless line of chairs that snaked through the city centre acknowledged the loss of individuals and lifeworlds through war and violence, a loss that for a moment was made visible and tangible. The art installation, called *Sarajevo Red Line*, brought to the fore how the war caused both collective and individual loss for the city and its inhabitants. The installation was a far cry from the noisy and politicised remembrance practices that in post-war Bosnia-Herzegovina is often used to bolster (ethno)nationalist sentiments and

J. Mannergren Selimovic (✉)
Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden
e-mail: johanna.mannergren.selimovic@sh.se

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