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DEATHSCAPES AFTERLIVES

(part 2)

Edited by Marina Gržinić

Preamble

Continuing the narrative initiated in Part 1 of the Deathscapes project, Part 2 unfolds within the pages of Art and Documentation, echoing the thematic trajectory outlined in the seminal volume "Mapping Deathscapes: Digital Geographies of Racial and Border Violence" (Suvendrini Perera and Joseph Pugliese, eds., Routledge, 2022).

PART 2 CONSISTS OF THE FOLLOWING CONTRIBUTIONS:

The short introduction by editor Marina Gržinić sets the stage for an exploration of the aftermaths of deathscapes within the context of the European Union. Gržinić's commentary underscores the significance of engaging with these narratives from an artistic, cultural, and philosophical standpoint, emphasizing the imperative of confronting the war in Ukraine and the status quo of Europe and the European Union.

A dialogue on occupied Kashmir is facilitated by the insightful perspectives of Iffat Fatima and Goldie Osuri. Their exchange serves as a powerful testament to the enduring legacies of colonialism and resistance, shedding light on the multifaceted dynamics of oppression and resilience.

Antonio Traverso's visually evocative essay transports us to the landscapes of Chile, offering a visceral discursive, and photographic exploration of memory, trauma, and political upheaval. Through a captivating interplay of images and words, Traverso invites us to bear witness to the scars etched upon the Chilean terrain, serving as a haunting reminder of the enduring consequences of state violence.

Marziya Mohammedali's reflections on photography and absence provide a poignant meditation on the complexities of capturing loss and longing through the camera's lens. Mohammedali challenges us to grapple with the elusive nature of memory and how images can both illuminate and obscure our understanding of the past.

Finally, Yirga Gelaw Woldeyes offers a poetical exploration of grief, resilience, and the human capacity for hope in adversity. Through Woldeyes' poignant poems, we are reminded of the enduring power of art to bear witness to the profound complexities of the human experience.

Introduction

Dr. Marina GRŽINIĆ
ZRC SAZU, Institute of Philosophy, Ljubljana, Slovenia

CAN WE SIMPLY STAND BY AND WATCH AS THE LANDSCAPES OF DEATH MULTIPLY BEFORE US?

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At the time of writing this introduction, the ongoing war in Ukraine has prompted both the left and right in the EU to readily embrace militarization, polarization, segregation, and deportation. In June 2022, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg announced at the first NATO summit since the invasion "the greatest overhaul of our collective deterrence and defense since the Cold War." Following the Russian invasion, Sweden and Finland, countries with a long history of neutrality, joined the NATO alliance. In April 2023, Finland became the 31st member of NATO, while Sweden joined NATO approximately a year later, in March 2024. The United States also deployed additional military assets to Poland and the Baltic states.

These changes, overshadowed by conflicts, did not begin with the conflict in Ukraine but were a preparation for the realization that we are witnessing a redefinition of entire social, ideological, and economic structures, a restructuring of politics, sovereignty, governance, and extremely violent racial necro-capitalism. This is important because the destruction we are witnessing in Ukraine, these newly carved deathscapes around us, actually call for parallels, and these are drawn precisely with the contributions in the first and second parts of the deathscapes afterlives.

These parallels were missing when the Balkan refuge route started. In 2015, amidst the influx of hundreds of thousands of migrants into Europe, the Balkan route emerged as one of the primary entry points into the EU. For migrants on this route, technology plays a crucial role; they rely on smartphone apps and Facebook groups to communicate about route closures and openings. Some EU countries along the route, such as Hungary, vehemently oppose accepting refugees. In 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel adopted an open-door policy towards refugees, epitomized by the slogan "We can do this."

The utilization of the Balkan route as a passage for migrants seeking asylum in Europe commenced in 2012, following the European Union's relaxation of visa restrictions on Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

However today the reality is that EU countries have adopted very restrictive approaches to refugees seeking protection and to migrant entry. The current restrictive political climate and escalating humanitarian crisis are approaching a breaking point, characterized by efforts to repel refugees, block them at the outskirts of the fortress Europe, and differentiate between those deemed acceptable and those deemed unacceptable.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has resulted in extensive destruction and a necropolitical (politics of death) catastrophe for both Ukraine and the EU. The conflict in Ukraine has led to human and ecological devastation in the European region, marked by bombings and environmental toxins causing widespread harm. Additionally, there has been a notable lack of commitment to protecting refugees from regions in the Global South, including Africa and Asia, accentuating the hypocrisy of neoliberal discourse on human rights. This shift underlines as well the challenge of making urgent political decisions to address and stop the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where civilians, mostly women and children, continue to die in the hundreds daily.

IFFAT FATIMA is an independent documentary filmmaker and researcher from Kashmir. She worked in collaboration with APDP for her recent film Khoon Diy Baarav (Blood Leaves its Trail), which explores issues of violence and memory in Kashmir.

DR. GOLDIE OSURI is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Warwick, UK. Her current research addresses the relationship between sovereignty (political authority) and colonialism and occupation in (post) colonial contexts.

Iffat FATIMA
Goldie OSURI

IFFAT FATIMA IN CONVERSATION WITH GOLDIE OSURI

FILM, POETRY AND STATE VIOLENCE.

Precious son, you are lost
all is sorrow
Noble son, you are lost
the sky is blood rimmed
The earth is torn asunder
My Yusuf, I call you
hear me
come

Mughal Mase (MM): Dear daughter… what else can I tell you…
I used to know verses and poems… my memory fails…

My hearts beloved
I await you
come

Have pity on me
I am in anguish
come

Why are you hiding
crescent of the new moon
I wait all day but you ignore me
My day is wasted
O, you Crescent of the New Moon…

MM: Enough… no more… my heart gets distressed… I feel tremulous…

Mughal Mase passed away on 26th October, 2009.

The above poetry and speech is by Mughal Mase from *Where Have you Hidden My New Moon Crescent*,[1] a short 2009 documentary film by Kashmiri filmmaker Iffat Fatima on enforced disappearances in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir.

The occasion for this conversation about film, poetry, and state violence with Iffat Fatima began as an idea in the debrief after the launch of the *Mapping Deathscapes: Digital Geographies of Racial and Border Violence*.[2] *Deathscapes*, the digital project,[3] and *Mapping Deathscapes* form a counter archive linking state violence across colonial contexts. They illuminate intersecting forms of violence and struggles, or what Angela Davis might call intersectional struggles, toward transformative justice.[4] Kashmir is one such context.

Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir is one of the world's most militarised zones, and has been under Indian control since October 1947. Since the 1990s, an armed struggle for self-determination witnessed brutal repression and collective punishment through intense militarisation. The techniques of Indian state violence, supported by an infrastructure of laws enabling impunity for state forces, include preventative detention, extra-judicial killings, torture, sexual abuse, rape and enforced disappearances. It is in this context that Iffat Fatima's documentary films *Where Have You Hidden My New Moon Crescent* (2009), *Khoon Diy Baarav* (2015)[5] or *Blood Leaves its Trail*, and *The Dear Disappeared* (2018)[6] form part of a counter-archive of witnessing state violence in Kashmir.

Goldie Osuri: Iffat, *Where Have You Hidden My New Moon Crescent*, a 25 minute film, has Mughal Mase speaking to you and us through the film of her son, Nazir Ahmed Teli who was disappeared by Indian Forces. Can you tell us first a little bit about Mughal Mase and the phenomenon of enforced disappearances in Kashmir?

Iffat Fatima: Mughal Mase lived in a small house in Habba Kadal, Srinagar, Kashmir. On September 1st, 1990, her only son Nazir Ahmed Teli, a teacher, was picked up by the Indian Security Forces and subjected to enforced disappearance. Ever since Mughal Mase has been part of the movement against enforced disappearances in Kashmir under the banner of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP).[7] APDP is a collective formed in 1994 to search for loved ones enforced disappeared by India's army and paramilitary force in Kashmir.

Enforced disappearance is kidnapping, carried out by agents of the state or organized groups of individuals who act with state support, in which the victim "disappears." Authorities neither accept responsibility for the dead nor account for the whereabouts of the victim. All legal recourse remains ineffective. The objective of enforced disappearance is not simply the victim's capture and subsequent maltreatment. It creates a state of uncertainty and terror both for the family of the victim and for the society as a whole. Enforced disappearance paralyzes opposition activities by individuals as well as by society. Enforced disappearance constitutes a grave threat to the right to life and violates fundamental human rights. Enforced disappearance is widely practised as a tool of political oppression. It is recognised as a crime against humanity.

In Jammu and Kashmir, enforced disappearances started in 1989, after the armed uprising against the Indian state. The uprising was in support of the popular movement for self-determination in Kashmir. On September 10, 1990, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act had come into force in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir. The act enabled the armed forces to enter and search premises without a warrant, to arrest people, and to even kill if need be, anyone who might be deemed suspect of "disclaiming, questioning or disrupting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India." The armed forces had already begun disappearing people before the Act became part of an existing legal infrastructure.

Mughal Mase was a poet surrounded by tragedy and sorrow. I met her during the monthly

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Fig. 1. APDP protest, International Day of the Disappeared, August 30, 2008.

Fig. 2. Mughal Mase. Photo: Altaf Qadri, 1998.

sit-in protest organised by APDP. Mughal Mase was always present at these protests – sometimes hopeful, sometimes angry, sometimes desperate, and always in deep distress – her poetic sensibility, the ability to articulate her grief without rancour was a very special quality that drew me to her. She uses poetic language, metaphors, and landscapes to explain violence.

In April 2009, about six months before she passed away, I spent a day with her with my camera. I recorded a long conversation where she talked about herself and about the events that shaped her life – both personal as well as political. *Where Have You Hidden My New Crescent Moon* emerged organically from Mughal Mase's insightful recounting of the social and political events of her times and her deep longing for information about her only child Nazir Ahmed Teli who was disappeared by the Indian security apparatus in Srinagar in the 1990s. The film is a tribute to her unrequited quest for justice. She was in deep anguish but remained hopeful and resistant till the very end.

Goldie: In watching the film, I was really struck by the way that poetry is woven into the film. The poetic visuals of black and white snapshots following Mughal Mase begin the film. The film ends with her reciting the lines "noble son you are lost, the sky is blood-red, the earth is torn asunder,

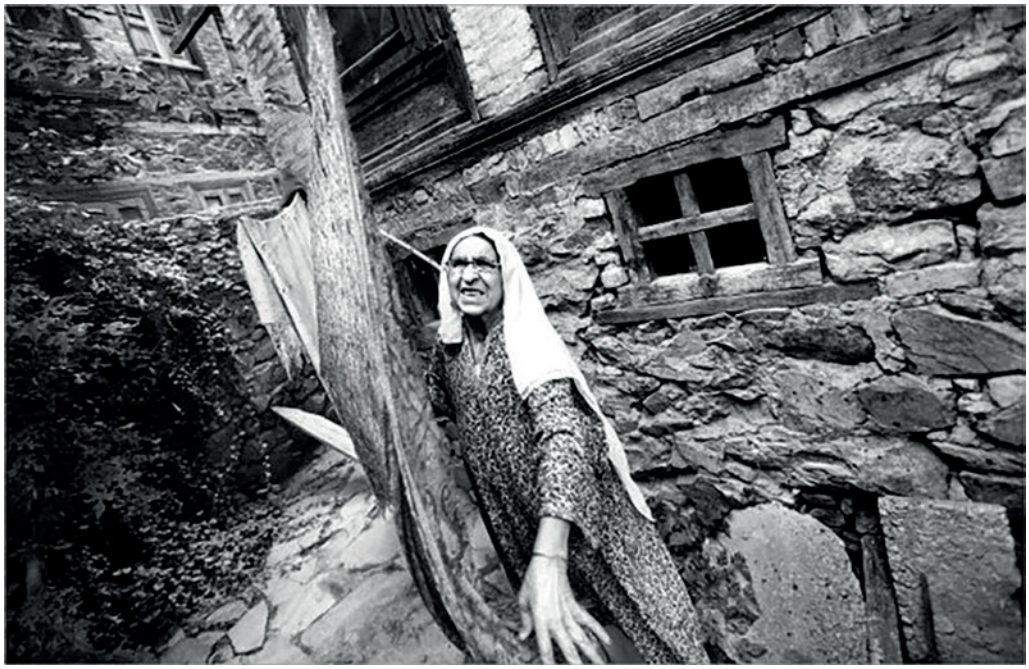

Fig. 3. Mughal Mase, at her house in Habba Kadal. Photo: Altaf Qadri, 1998.

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Fig. 4. Families of the enforced disappeared pinning photographs. A still from Where Have you Hidden My New Moon Crescent, 2009.

why are you hiding, crescent of the new moon, I wait all day, but you ignore me."

Can you say more about how you were able to convey the psychic and emotional states through the use of poetic resources by the women of the APDP collective and Mughal Mase? Would you be able to comment on the poem that Mughal Mase recites?

Iffat: I think what really became evident for me was the way women use language to express their deepest feelings or emotions – poetic and personalised. They keep improvising on folk songs and poetry to remember their lost ones during weddings or during mourning, or even while sowing or harvesting. It gives a sense of how pervasive and how deep rooted this resistance is. It has entered the very nervous system of the society and it gets expressed in various forms.

There is a sequence in the film from an APDP gathering – I remember being part of this gathering. The atmosphere charged/swelled with grief. The power and cruelty of the state in confrontation with the courage and sorrow of those whose loved ones remain unknown and disappeared. There was an upsurge of sorrow and courage reaching a crescendo with Parveena reciting the *Yusuf Nama*. it was evident that the recitation had the capacity to express the immediacy of grief and their deeply felt emotion, tears were rolling down.

Yusuf Nama or *Yusuf Zuleikha* is a poetic rendition of the Quranic story of Prophet Yusuf (biblical Joseph). It is a story of love and parting in the form of a Masnavi composed in the early 19th century by an outstanding Kashmiri poet Mahmud Gami, known for his lyrical and philosophic poetry, and for enriching the Kashmiri language by introducing Persian forms and compositions like the Ghazal and Masnavi. Masnavi is a poetic composition usually with anecdotes and stories with references from the Quran and Hadith. A literary masterpiece, Gami's *Yusuf Nama* is an

organic part of Kashmir's cultural fabric and is most popular amongst the women who recite it individually or collectively – to celebrate or to mourn. The end of the Masnavi is a haunting elegy as Zuleikha who intensely loved Yusuf mourns for her lover. The lyrics *Naad layo meani Yusuf o walo* (I call you my Yusuf come), lends a certain pathos and meaning to personal bereavement and grief of generations of people.

When you died
The sun hid its face
The world turned black
I call you my Yusuf come
my Yusuf
I call out
come
you are still young, don't go
my bridegroom do not yet go
your mother cries out, do not go
your sisters cry out, do not go

This deep sense of tragedy is palpable in the film as Mughal Mase sits and reflects on her life – on her son's disappearance. She is lonely and tortured by separation, realizing that she can only crave but never achieve – for that is the fate of those disappeared. She is distraught as she feels the futility of her existence, despair permeates her entire being. How does she comprehend and understand this tragedy that has struck her. Words cannot express what she feels. She finds comfort in the language and idiom of Gami's elegy, and is enveloped in a poetic embrace as she gives expression to the yearning inside her.

MM: September… the 1st… Saturday…
1st September… he left for his duty, he had to get his salary… from there…
some hawk swooped and carried him away…
the night came… he did not come… I went crazy…
wandering… searching… here there…
streets… roads… stop here, look there…
it was night… where could I go…
morning came, I went to his school…
then to the police station…
to file a report…
from there to the radio station…
then to the TV centre…
I returned… then it is oblivion…
I am still searching for him… ceaselessly…
everywhere…

O, my faithful one
I seek you everywhere
But I cannot see you
I only want to have you before my eyes
But you keep yourself hidden in countless ways
Where has the spring sleep overtaken you

The river is fathomless
I find no bridge to cross
The river of love sweeps me along

MM: I am enveloped in anguish…
When I miss him I want to tear apart rocks and mountains…
He was only 18 when he got a job…
He was a teacher…
Several times during the night I would wake up… cuddle him… tuck him in…
Where is that body now… in dust… or where else…
Last night, I dreamt of him… I was feeding him with my own hands…

My pride… And my self dignity keeps me going…

It is a deep sorrow… I crave to see him at least once…
It is heartbreaking…
My God, just once… may I look at him and he look at me… and then I close my eyes forever…

Goldie: Mughal Mase's heartbreak continues to echo long after her passing away.

And APDP's work is significant in terms of accountability for state violence. Can you say more about your work in the context of state violence?

Iffat: I got introduced to the issue of Enforced Involuntary Disappearances (EID) in Sri Lanka where I lived and worked between the years 2000 and 2005. For about 5 years of my residence in Sri Lanka, I worked on a project titled *The Road to Peace*.[8] The objective of the project was to give voice and public exposure to what would normally go unrecorded in Sri Lanka at that point of time. Eventually, the project resulted in *The Archives: Road To Peace* film project (2002–2005), and a film *Lanka – The Other Side of War and Peace*.[9]

That film, while exploring issues of memory and political violence, traces the history of overlapping conflicts in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's history of violence is pervasive and protracted. The armed Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) insurrection of the 1970s and the 1980 was brutally suppressed by the Government. Communal riots aided and abetted by the Government, protracted civil war between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, are bloody episodes, wherein hundreds and thousands have been killed, tortured, disappeared and displaced.

While working on the *Road to Peace* project, I experienced the devastating impact of EID – a heinous crime on a large number of affected families who I met and interviewed.

After my return from Sri Lanka in 2006 I started working with the families of the victims of EID in Kashmir come together under the banner of the APDP. While working on the project I travelled widely all over the valley of Kashmir and closely followed a large number of people, mostly women – victims of violence, spent time with them, in solidarity, documenting their struggle, their endurance and their courage.

I intended to make a film. As I started interacting with the affected people I got drawn into their struggle – it became less about the film and more about their struggle which was unfolding before me on a day-to-day basis. I didn't have any particular concept or plan, but I was documenting the struggle. That engagement, documentation of the living struggle, that was critical. The camera became an agent for the families. They had a clear understanding that it is a powerful tool for taking their issues forward. When they would speak to the camera, it was as though it was a validation of their struggle. Kashmir is one of the most militarized zones in the world. It has the highest number of military forces, not just on the borders but in towns and cities where people are living. So when the military is so omnipresent, things are bound to happen. Both the camera and the film subjects are constantly confronting and overcoming obstacles – checkpoints, armed personnel stopping the camera and the subjects – and I was recording that. The camera experienced and became a participant in the film subjects' experience thus becoming a direct witness to what is being recounted and remembered.

I continued working with the families participating, witnessing, and documenting their struggle over the next decade or so. *Where Have You Hidden My New Moon Crescent* (2009) is the first of a series of films made for the project followed by *Khoon Diy Baarav* (2016) and *The Dear Disappeared* (2018).

Goldie: *Khoon Diy Baarav* traces the journey of APDP as a witness to state violence and the resistance of the women's collective of the APDP. Can you say more about this film?

Iffat: "Khoon Diy Baarav" is a phrase often, very often, used by the affected people to express resistance as well as their demand for justice. It's a complex saying; translating it effectively is almost impossible. Broadly it implies that blood that is spilled will not go waste, it will extract justice. In other words, blood that is shed through oppression and violence sediments in memory and will re-emerge in the form of resistance.

Fig. 5. Khoon Diy Baarav's (2015) Srinagar screening. Iffat Fatima with APDP collective members, Parveena Ahangar, and Haji Appa. Photo: Goldie Osuri.

Fig. 6. APDP makes calendars every year to ensure public memory of the enforced disappeared. Calendar cover: Iffat Fatima, 2017.

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Khoon Diy Baarav amplifies the voices of women by highlighting the forms of resistance that are less visible. The women in the film whose loved ones have been disappeared or killed are struggling with day to day living; at the same time they are making sure that their disappeared loved ones remains alive in a certain way in the public sphere. For decades every month, they have assembled in a public park to demand justice and information about the whereabouts of their loved ones. It's painful to do that, you'd rather forget and move on in your life. To be able to resist those pressures needs tremendous resilience.

From memory comes an empowered form of resistance. Resistance is the keyword in Kashmir where people are grappling with the impossibility of justice from the Indian state for the last sixty years, and there is little expectation of it in the near future. "The state makes our truth into lies and their own lies into truth," says Parveena Ahangar who has been leading the battle against enforced disappearances in Kashmir. The discovery of thousands of mass graves by the Jammu and Kashmir State Human Rights Commission in 2011 was a grim reminder of the reality of EID in Kashmir.[10] It is difficult to compute exact figures, human rights groups estimate that about 8,000 to 10,000 persons have been subjected to EID since 1989.

As they come out into the public space demanding justice and accountability, these women challenge mainstream perspectives, particularly on gender roles in Muslim societies. They have mobilized an entire community – artists, writers, poets, musicians, students, activists, filmmakers join them in their protest and remembering. It is these women and their sustained courage and struggle that inspires and informs much of my activism, intellectual inquiry and filmmaking. Otherwise I think the whole system is geared towards forgetfulness.

In 2010, there was a paradigm shift in the movement for self-determination in Kashmir wherein people reclaimed their struggle which was consumed by the gun. People were regularly coming out into the streets in thousands, and were being brutally crushed. As I saw young people being killed I felt that it was time to put it all together. I had hundreds of hours of material by then.

How to frame the material and put it together is quite a demanding process; I wanted to open out the experience of everyday life in a place which is highly militarized and controlled and evoke the imagination of the viewers to the travails of that life. I think an experiential engagement with the viewers is necessary if you as a filmmaker seek your viewers to challenge their own deeply held opinions or understanding through compassion and empathy.

The challenge I think for filmmakers and artists is to be able to transfer an experience. You can record narratives, but on screen they can be flat. How do you transfer and translate that experience? I think that is what one is always struggling and striving for but never seem to get quite right. The decisions and choices one makes is part of a process which is simultaneously intuitive, conscious and deliberate.

I completed *Khoon Diy Baarav* in June 2015, after working on it for about 9 years. During these years, travelling across the Indian-controlled Kashmir, I became a witness to the inevitable consequences of large-scale militarization – torture, rape, extra judicial killings, exhumations, arbitrary detention, and enforced disappearances. The film is a consequence of my bearing witness.

Goldie: Yes, the film bears witness. It is now part of an archive which gains even more significance at a time when human rights work has been criminalised. In 2019, the Indian government unilaterally revoked the semi-autonomous status of the state of Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir under a blanket communication lockdown by abrogating Article 370 of the Indian

constitution. The state was divided into two Union Territories (thus placing them directly under Central government rule), Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. Between 8 – 10,000 troops were sent in, in addition to the nearly 700,000 troops already occupying the state. The communication lockdown lasted for nearly six months. There were reports of torture on the streets and thousands of civil society leaders including lawyers and business people were arrested. In 2020, India's counter terror agencies raided APDP's office and Parveena Ahangar's home seizing human rights documentation. These raids occurred alongside raids on the offices and homes of those who run the Jammu and Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS). JKCCS is internationally renowned for their credible documentation of human rights violations. Khurram Parvez, Coordinator for JKCSS and an international human rights defender, was arrested in November 2021 and remains in detention at the time of writing.[11] APDP have not been able to hold their protests as they used to. The struggle for justice continues through the counter archive of Kashmiri memory as we enter an even more chilling phase in Kashmir's history.

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Notes

[1] Iffat Fatima, dir., *Where Have you Hidden My New Moon Crescent*, documentary, 25 min., 2009. The film is available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZK_J96O6gQ.

[2] See Suvendrini Perera and Joseph Pugliese, eds., *Mapping Deathscapes: Digital Geographies of Racial and Border Violence* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021).

[3] See *Deathscapes* project at https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20201103065140/http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/173410/20201103-1648/www.deathscapes.org/case-studies/index.html.

[4] Angela Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

[5] Iffat Fatima, dir., *Khoon Diy Baarav* [*Blood Leaves its Trail*], documentary, 90 min., 2015.

[6] Iffat Fatima, dir., *The Dear Disappeared*, documentary, 47 min., 2018. The film is available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6YWxopENqQ&t=750s.

[7] See Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) at https://apdpkashmir.com.

[8] See Pad.ma (Public Access Digital Media Archive) at https://pad.ma/grid/title/project=Road_to_Peace&project==Road_to_Peace.

[9] Iffat Fatima, dir., *Lanka – The Other Side of War and Peace*, documentary, 75 min., 2005. The film is available at https://hasp.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/dasta/article/view/19130/18645. See also Iffat Fatima, "Lanka – The Other Side of War and Peace: Recasting Reconciliation through Culture and the Arts," *Dastavezi* 4, no. 1 (2022): 74–86, https://doi.org/10.11588/dasta.2022.1.19130.

[10] See Muzamil Jaleel, "2156 Unidentified Bodies in 38 Graves in Kashmir: State Human Rights Panel Inquiry," *Indian Express*, August 21, 2011, https://indianexpress.com/article/news-archive/web/2156-unidentified-bodies-in-38-graves-in-kashmir-state-human-rights-panel-inquiry/.

[11] See FIDH, "India: Two Years of Arbitrary Detention of Kashmiri Human Rights Defender Khurram Parvez," November 21, 2023, https://www.fidh.org/en/region/asia/india/india-two-years-of-arbitrary-detention-of-kashmiri-human-rights.

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Dr ANTONIO TRAVERSO is a Senior Lecturer in Screen Studies at Curtin University, Boorloo/Perth, Australia

Antonio TRAVERSO

PERFORMATIVE MEMORY CULTURE IN CHILE: A VISUAL ESSAY ON OCCASION OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE COUP 1973–2023

The currency of critical reflection about performative memory practices in post-conflict contexts arises out of the fact that, in the words of Diana Popescu and Tanja Schult, we are currently "facing the imminent shift towards a post-witness era."[1] In referring to global Holocaust commemorative culture, Popescu and Schult announce "an essential turning point, the disappearance of eyewitnesses, and the emergence of generations with no personal experiences of the Holocaust but who are asked to hold on to its commitments."[2] Likewise, Laura Bertens points out that "as survivors of the war pass away [...] commemoration is taken over by generations who have no direct experience of the events."[3] To be sure, Popescu and Schult's caveat about a historical "shift towards a postwitness era" also applies, with relative urgency, to more recent conflicted histories of the 20th century, such as the Chilean post-dictatorship context. The year 2023 marked the 50th anniversary of the *coup d'etat* that violently overthrew the government of Dr Salvador Allende, a shock and-awe military attack on democracy brought about by an alliance between Chile's wealthy class and this nation's armed forces with the patronage of the United States and the Vatican, among other prominent supporters. Over three decades after the 1990 end of the civilian-military dictatorship led by General Pinochet, as the surviving victims and other direct witnesses grow older and begin to pass away, the next generations have continued, with visible force, the struggle for public recognition, truth, justice, and reparation through a relentless collective movement of post-dictatorship memory culture.[4]

In this visual essay, the notion of post-dictatorship in Chile, a nation deeply divided by a long history of structural dispossession and

state-perpetrated atrocities, names not a delimited historiography but an unfolding process of cultural memory within which existing and new expressions acquire or lose significance in relation to the ongoing commemoration, contestation, and production of a troubled past. Understood as a critical articulation of the politics of memory in Chile, the concept of post-dictatorship includes both personal and socio-historical dimensions, whose relevance persists insofar as the expressions of a collective memory about the experiences and events of the dictatorship continue to be produced, engaged with, and re-appropriated by new generations. Indeed, an organic intergenerational movement of post-dictatorship memory culture persists in confronting this nation's historical catastrophe. Cultural activists and creative practitioners have exposed state-sponsored atrocities and their perpetrators, while recovering survivors' memories of loss, suffering and resilience. Generations of witnesses, survivors, and supporters have continued to agitate the history and memory of the dictatorship period, challenging public amnesia and denial with legal, scholarly, social, political and artistic work, while interrogating the relationship between the nation and its quarrelled and taxing modern history. The unresolved crimes and unanswered questions, the hostile dismissals and indifference of so many, the deep losses and forced silence, and the surviving victims' lasting trauma and resilience are enduring features of public life that have resisted the passage of time despite the decades lapsed in an ongoing process of confrontation between political sides in which public memory is a highly contested rather than reconciliatory domain.

Chile's intergenerational movement of memory culture has contributed to disarticulate the official account of national reconciliation institutionalised by the Chilean state. At best a controversial notion, at worst a ruined one, reconciliation in Chile is entangled within a utopian discourse that dominated the process of transitional justice from its inception. The official narrative of *transición* prescribed a restorative version of national reconciliation as soon as the democratically elected government that replaced the dictatorship took office in early 1990. It did so through the creation by decree of official symbols and institutions of memorialisation and reconciliation, such as national apologies, memory museums, memorials to victims, and restricted truth commissions, reports, and reparations.

The discourse of reconciliation in Chile was also tarnished by the political elite's widespread endorsement of perpetrator impunity as a purported requirement within a narrative of restoring community and moving the nation forward. Chile's National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation documented in 1991 approximately 3,000 cases of citizens murdered or disappeared by the state during the dictatorship. Between 2004 and 2011 the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture documented over 38,000 cases of citizens imprisoned and tortured by the state during the dictatorship period. In some accounts the number of citizens tortured in Chile increases to 50,000.[5]

In spite of the truth commissions, successful legal processes against perpetrators have been few in Chile, although these include some high-profile cases, such as the 2004 arrest of General Manuel Contreras, former director of General Pinochet's intelligence agency, who died in custody in 2015, serving prison sentences for over 500 years. By 2015, approximately 70 perpetrators had been convicted, while about 350 further cases remained blocked by Pinochet's 1978 Amnesty Law protecting military personnel.[6] In recent years, further legal cases against perpetrators have slowly progressed, especially since the Chilean Supreme Court's removal of immunity to those charged with human rights violations, including the 2018 sentencing of eight retired Chilean military officers to 15-year prison terms for the murder of folk singer Víctor Jara in 1973. In addition to the former, retired army lieutenant Pedro Barrientos, who had migrated to the United States, was found liable for killing Víctor Jara by a Florida federal civil court jury in 2016, and, in 2023, at 74 years

Fig. 1. Estadio Nacional (National Stadium), Santiago, Chile, 11th of September 2017. Vigil on the 44th anniversary of the coup. Photo: Antonio Traverso, 2017.

Fig. 2. Estadio Nacional (National Stadium), Santiago, Chile, 11th of September 2017. Vigil on the 44th anniversary of the coup. Young mourners sit on original wooden benches where prisoners sat in 1973. Photo: Antonio Traverso, 2017.

Fig. 3. Santiago, Chile, estallido social, October 2019. Text: Dictadura 1973–2019 (Dictatorship 1973–2019). Photo: Jimmy Rojas Ramírez, 2019.

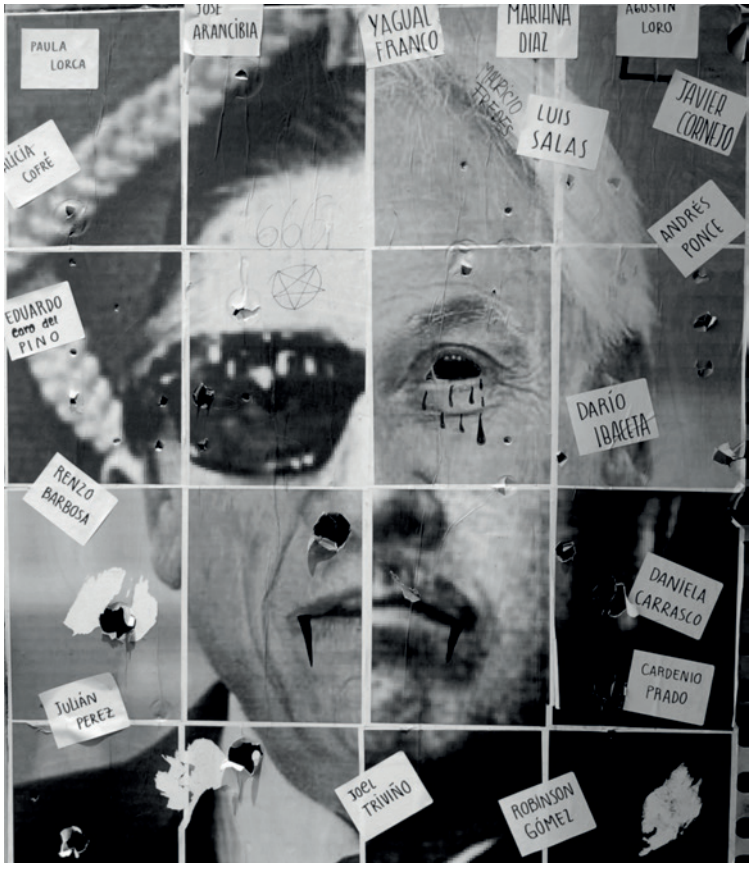

Fig. 4. Santiago, Chile, estallido social, January 2020. Wall poster with composite portrait of General Pinochet (left) and Chilean President Sebastián Piñera, with names of victims of police violence during the 2019–2020 people's revolt. Photo: Jorge Faúndez Cornejo, 2020.

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of age, was extradited to Chile to stand trial on charges of kidnapping, torture and murder. Also, there is the Australian High Court's ongoing extradition case, initiated in 2020, involving former intelligence agent Adriana Rivas, a Sydney resident since the late 1970s, who is due to face court on charges of aggravated kidnapping and torture in Chile. Yet the whereabouts of over a thousand citizens forcefully disappeared by the Chilean state during the dictatorship remain unknown. Similarly, the circumstances of many other victims of political murder and their assailants' identities remain undetermined.

I migrated to Australia from Chile in 1987 during the final years of the dictatorship. Since the end of the military regime in 1990, I have made experimental videos that interrogate the memory of the dictatorship experience, such as *Tales from the South*,[7] published visual essays that explore survivor testimonies and experiences of memorialisation,[8] as well as the poetics of memory,[9] and published scholarly essays about Chilean post-dictatorship fiction and documentary cinema.[10] During a visit to Chile in January 2020, I shot video of street visual and performance art produced in the context of a massive movement of civilian unrest against social inequality, named in Chile as *estallido social* (social blast), which spread throughout this nation between October 2019 and February 2020. Back in Australia later that year, I edited this video footage, along with countless still pictures by activist photographers I met whilst in Chile, into a constructivist essay film, *The Best Battle*.[11] The film, which documents and celebrates the culture of political street art and collective memory in Chile, takes the form of "a psychogeographical walk through the city, the camera darting across the streets, immersing the viewer in the history and energy of the events,"[12] as we see street walls and public spaces covered with demonstrators' graffiti, posters, poetry, manifestos, mural paintings, sculptures and installations. As I was editing *The Best Battle*, I became aware of the overt and consistent way in which many of the works of street art connected the memory of the dictatorship period to the conditions and struggles of the present moment. For this reason, I decided to include in my film earlier footage, which I had shot in 2017, of a spontaneous gathering of remembrance that takes place at *Estadio Nacional* (National Stadium), Chile's principal sports precinct, in Santiago, every 11th of September on the anniversary of the 1973 coup. Between September and November of 1973, the stadium was used as a concentration camp for the interrogation and torture of prisoners. Many of them died or were executed, while others were taken to unknown locations and remain disappeared to this day. Thus, the selection of still pictures presented in this visual essay, some of which illustrate aspects of *The Best Battle*, seeks to emphasise in the depicted street art this deliberate link between the past and the present that can be defined as performative.

Often cited across diverse disciplinary fields, the concept of performativity was initially coined by the philosopher of language J.L. Austin[13] to define speech acts or linguistic expressions that do not only describe the world but "do things," that is, perform actions that provoke changes in the world; and was later famously expanded by the feminist philosopher Judith Butler[14] to define the embodied, performative nature of gender. The concept of performativity has more recently been adapted in cultural and memory studies to interrogate the public expression of memories of troublesome histories, collective suffering and political struggle. In the latter context, the descriptor performative is applied to practices and artefacts of cultural memory in two main senses: firstly, as works and acts that disavow passive spectatorship by demanding "active remembering with the aim of transforming perception, behavior and identity"[15] and through which "members of the audience are [...] endowed with agency."[16] In this sense, "'remembering' is better seen as an active engagement with the past, as performative rather than reproductive."[17] Performative cultural memorialisation is above all, according to Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik, "work – creative work – doing or carrying out the

act" of remembering as "embodied performance."[18] The performative understanding of cultural practices of memorialisation is therefore opposed to the hegemonic monumentalist approach largely adopted by governments and institutions. Thus, performative memory practices and works focus "on the 'act' of memory, not its 'theatre.'"[19] By the same token, Bertens explains that "the monument may actively hinder the process of remembrance; in constructing monuments as 'containers' for memory, the danger arises of deferring the task of remembering to the inanimate object."[20] In this regard, Bertens stresses that "on a cultural scale the performativity of memory means that each representation of a memory (in for instance film, literature, museums, oral history, etc.) forms part of a dynamic and ongoing construction of that very memory."[21] So, a performative work of memorialisation, like those depicted in the photographs in this essay, "allows its audience to not only commemorate a represented event, but at the same time become aware of this very process of commemoration."[22]

The second sense in which the adjective performative is applied to practices and artefacts of cultural memory, as a means to interrogate the public expression of memories of conflicted histories, is as works and acts that purposefully seek to connect the past they memorialise to the present in which they perform it. Referring to the respective work of memory studies scholars James E. Young and Marianne Hirsch, Popescu and Schult highlight the fact that "artefacts are performative when they construct [...] vivid and embodied connections between the past and the present."[23] Likewise, in the volume *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*, Plate and Smelik seek to investigate "how cultural practices such as art, literature and media perform the past in the present" and "explore the ways in which art and popular culture constitute performative acts of memory generating an experience of the past in the present."[24] They add: "if memory is social and cultural, it is also performative, making the past present in ways that can be experienced, generating a knowledge of the relationship between past and present that is oftentimes troubling, other times comforting."[25] For Plate and Smelik, memory is "an embodied act grounded in the here and now."[26]

As pointed out above, Chile's process of transitional justice after the dictatorial regime has been entrapped within a prescriptive, state-sponsored restorative notion of national reconciliation, highly reliant on perpetrators' impunity and vigorously rejected by survivors and their supporters. Critics of the official reconciliation discourse in this nation have instead directed their attention to Chile's highly productive grass-roots memory culture, which includes independent journalism and social research, memory sites, literature, performance, music, and visual and screen arts. Contributors to the movement of memory culture have rejected the restorative narrative of the state's discourse and have resisted monumental versions of historical memory by confronting the painfully ambivalent, incomplete, and at times contradictory nuances of the traumatic legacy of the dictatorship. They grapple with the shifting, problematic, and interrelated dynamics of confrontation and reconciliation, ultimately contributing with their performative narrations and enactments to an agonistic process of transitional justice. Thus, as indicated earlier, the pictures of Chilean street art below, taken between 2017 and 2023, highlight a purposeful performative connection between the past and the present, a bond that is, in fact, "performed" as a continuum of repetition of structural oppression and re-emergence of collective remembrance and rebelliousness.

Fig. 5. Estadio Nacional (National Stadium), Santiago, Chile, 11th of September 2022. Vigil on the 49th anniversary of the coup. Performer clad in black clothes and hood hauls a long black cape with attached photo portraits of political detainees disappeared during the dictatorship. Photo: Fernanda Díaz Castrillón, 2022.

Fig. 6. Alameda Avenue, Santiago, Chile, 8th of March 2023. International Women's Day public rally: dancers wear portraits of women disappeared or murdered during the dictatorship. Photo: Fernanda Díaz Castrillón, 2023.

Notes

[1] Diana I. Popescu and Tanja Schult, "Performative Holocaust Commemoration in the 21st Century," *Holocaust Studies* 26, no. 2 (2020): 135, https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2019.1578452.

[2] Popescu and Schult, 140.

[3] Laura M.F. Bertens, "'Doing' Memory: Performativity and Cultural Memory in Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's *Alter Bahnhof Video Walk*," *Holocaust Studies* 26, no. 2 (2020): 181, https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2019.1578454.

[4] Some segments of this text were adapted by the author from the following publications: Antonio Traverso, "Nostalgia, Memory and Politics in Chilean Documentaries of Return," in *Dictatorships in the Hispanic World: Transatlantic and Transnational Perspectives*, eds. Patricia Swier and Julia Riordan-Goncalves (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013), 49–78; Antonio Traverso, "La Flaca Alejandra: Post-dictatorship Documentary and (No) Reconciliation in Chile," *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies* 31, no. 5 (2017): 95–106, https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2017.1345970; Antonio Traverso, "Post-Dictatorship Documentary in Chile: Conversations with Three Second-Generation Film Directors," *Humanities* 7, no. 1 (2018): 69–84, https://doi.org/10.3390/h7010008; Antonio Traverso, "Excavating La Moneda: Cinematic Memory and Post-Dictatorship Documentary in Chile," *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* 25, no. 4 (2019): 590–606, https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2018.1514168; Antonio Traverso, "Letters from the Islands: A Visual Essay," in *The Film Archipelago: Islands in Latin American Cinema*, eds. Antonio Gómez and Francisco Hernández Adrián (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 307–17.

[5] Francesca Lessa and Vincent Druliolle, eds., *The Memory of State Terrorism in the Southern Cone: Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2.

[6] Guadalupe Marengo, "Chile: Amnesty Law Keeps Pinochet's Legacy Alive," Amnesty International, September 11, 2015, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/09/chile-amnesty-law-keeps-pinochet-s-legacy-alive/.

[7] Antonio Traverso, dir., *Tales from the South*, experimental film, Australia/Chile, 21 min., 1997. Produced, written, directed, shot and edited by Antonio Traverso. Production support by the Australian Film Commission. Official Selection and experimental film award: NextFrame International Student Film Festival, Temple University, Philadelphia, USA, September 1997. See also Antonio Traverso, "Tales from the South: A Visual Essay," *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* 15, no. 1 (2009): 99–111, https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630802693208.

[8] Antonio Traverso and Enrique Azúa, "Villa Grimaldi: A Visual Essay," *Journal of Media Practice* 10, no. 2/3 (2009): 227–45, https://doi.org/10.1386/jmpr.10.2-3.227_3; Antonio Traverso and Enrique Azúa, "Paine Memorial: A Visual Essay," *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture* 19, no. 3/4 (2013): 403–9, https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2013.817634.

[9] Antonio Traverso, "Working Through Trauma in Post-Dictatorial Chilean Documentary: Lorena Giachino's Reinalda del Carmen," in *People, Place and Power: Regional and International Perspectives*, eds. Dawn Bennett, Jaya Earnest and Miyume Tanji (Perth: Black Swan Press, 2009), 262–90; Traverso, "Letters from the Islands."

[10] Antonio Traverso, "Contemporary Chilean Cinema and Traumatic Memory: Andrés Wood's *Machuca* and Raúl Ruiz's *Le domaine perdu*," *IM: Interactive Media* 4 (2008), https://researchportal.murdoch.edu.au/esploro/outputs/journalArticle/Contemporary-Chilean-cinema-and-traumatic-memory/991005545139407891; Traverso, "Working Through Trauma in Post-Dictatorial Chilean Documentary"; Antonio Traverso, "Dictatorship Memories: Working Through Trauma in Chilean Post-Dictatorship Documentary," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 24, no. 1 (2010): 179–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/10304310903444037; Traverso, "Nostalgia, Memory and Politics in Chilean Documentaries of Return"; Traverso, "La Flaca Alejandra"; Traverso, "Excavating La Moneda"; Traverso, "Post-Dictatorship Documentary in Chile"; Antonio Traverso, "Transiciones en la mirada documental en Chile: Del cine de denuncia tras el golpe de estado al video activista durante la dictadura (1973–1990)," in *Transiciones de lo real: Transformaciones políticas, estéticas y tecnológicas en el documental de Argentina, Chile y Uruguay*, ed. Paola Margulis (Buenos Aires: Librería Ediciones, 2020), 161–91; Antonio Traverso and Germán Liñero, "Chilean Political Documentary Video of the 1980s," in *New Documentaries in Latin America*, eds. Vinicius Navarro and Juan Carlos Rodriguez (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 167–84.

[11] Antonio Traverso, dir., *The Best Battle*, experimental documentary film, Australia/Chile, 52:16 min, 2021. Produced, written, directed and shot by Antonio Traverso. Edited by Joachim Strand. Production support by Curtin University. Official Selection: 21st Revelation Perth International Film Festival, July 1–11, 2021, Perth, Western Australia. Official Selection: FICSO2021, International Festival of Social Cinema (online), Buenos Aires, Argentina, October 6–10. Official Selection: Docs Without Borders Film Festival, Delaware, USA, January 9, 2022. Official Selection: 10th Resistencia Film Fest Tomé, Chile, June 2022.

[12] See Revelation Perth International Film Festival 2021 at https://www.revelationfilmfest.org/category/events/revelation-21/.

[13] John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

[14] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

[15] Popescu and Schult, "Performative Holocaust Commemoration in the 21st Century," 136.

[16] Popescu and Schult, 137.

[17] Erll and Rigney cited in Bertens, "'Doing' Memory," 185–6.

[18] Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik, "Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture: An Introduction," in *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture*, eds. Liedeke Plate and Anneke Smelik (London: Routledge, 2013), 2.

[19] Plate and Smelik, 3.

[20] Bertens, "'Doing' Memory," 182.

[21] Bertens, 186.

[22] Bertens, 187.

[23] Popescu and Schult, "Performative Holocaust Commemoration in the 21st Century," 141.

[24] Plate and Smelik, "Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture," 2.

[25] Plate and Smelik, 3.

[26] Plate and Smelik, 3.

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MARZIYA MOHAMMEDALI is affiliated with Edith Cowan University in Western Australia, Australia. She is a Ph.D. candidate at the School of Arts and Humanities at ECU.

Marziya MOHAMMEDALI

ABSENT PRESENCE, PRESENT ABSENCE

Within my practice as a protest photographer, one issue that repeatedly makes itself known is how to photograph the absent body. The photographer is charged with making known who is present, who is seen, but what of those who remain unseen as they are unable to be present: The incarcerated, the disappeared, the dead?

The symbolic representation of absences is an exercise in memory, posing a challenge for the photographer. How do we evoke the *presence of absence,* revealing identity in the spaces between, and after, death and life? We may turn to photographs themselves, to unveil these absences. Photographs and illustrations of the absent can be present as protest artefacts, the spectres of those who cannot be there. The images also form documentation of those absences, drawing attention to the unseen. This creates a borderland, after Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1987), where the body is made visible by its very absence, by its existence as a representation. This is a longstanding visual activist tradition, such as the use of family photographs of the disappeared in Argentinian (and other Latin American countries) protests, representing the disappeared and the dead, and in defiance of the destruction of historical records. These images are referred to as *problemática del recorder y del olvidar* (problematic of remembering and forgetting) and form important discourses of memory (Noble, 2009), as well as being symbolically carried by the living family, often women, of those absent. It is the mothers, *Las Madres*, who resist, and the grandmothers, *Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*, who carry their presences forward, ensuring that their children are not forgotten.

The Deathscapes captured in this photo essay reflect on this tradition, carrying forward the images and symbols of lives lost, but also presenting them as a way of magnifying the presences that are bound by absence. These images were all created on Whadjuk Noongar Boodja, the specific land of the South West of colonised Australia, but they echo the deaths that have occurred in the borderlands of immigration detention and the Australian prison system. The images, symbols, and names that are ever-present in these photographs form a reminder of the exclusion of certain bodies, the non-visibilities that are inextricably linked by

narratives constructed around racialised identities – the Indigenous, the Refugee – that turn deadly at the intersections of the carceral system and the nation-state. The format of the composite visual evokes the tension of the protest scene, where the absent body is multiply presented across space. In carrying these representations forward, families and supporters display these absent bodies front and centre, more than a public show of grief but also as a demand for justice. As a photographer, I position the act of photography absence in this sphere as that of making memory and justice visible, recalling the charge made by Arundhati Roy (1999): "Above all, to watch. To try and understand. To never look away. And never, never to forget."

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YIRGA GELAW WOLDEYES is a Senior Lecturer, multidisciplinary researcher, and writer based at Curtin University's Centre for Human Rights Education, Australia.

Yirga Gelaw WOLDEYES

"TO GROW ROOTS AND SEEDS": POETIC REFLECTIONS ON PLACE AND BELONGING

Simone Weil said that "to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul."[1] My poems reflect on this struggle for belonging. To be a refugee or immigrant, to have those labels attached to oneself, is to live with a sense of permanent displacement or "otherness". The desire to belong means that refugees and immigrants seek multiple avenues to be rooted and secure. However, many of them are deeply colonial.

In "ቀስ ብለህ ተራመድ / *Walk Slowly*," we follow an immigrant black man who celebrates Australia Day with the old statues who dance at Boundary Road, attempting to participate in a ritual that might mark him as "belonging" to his new home. Old statutes represent the colonial history of Australia and Boundary Road represents the limit of its identity.

Historically, these roads were not meant to be crossed by Indigenous Australians after a certain time in the day. The roads served as borders between the insider and the outsider.

Today, statues that honour colonial officials who took part in the destruction of Indigenous life still stand in our public spaces, and Boundary Roads are still listed on our maps. Places hold memory, and they have the power to make us remember. They can reinvent us, teach us, and give us identity. They can also make us forget, as they become seemingly benign parts of the environment that we refuse to reflect on.

When old statutes dance while the rest of us, including immigrants, celebrate with them, the indigenous birds run away in search of a peaceful place. Murry Island, the home and resting place of Eddie Mabo, represents that relatively safe space. A wise owl, representing Indigenous wisdom and knowledge, gently advises the man to remember that participating in these celebrations does not mean he belongs. Till he is able to connect to the true spirit of the place, he is asked to walk slowly. This poem is a gentle reminder that participating in rituals based on Indigenous people's oppression and dislocation will never address an immigrant's own feeling of dislocation. It is also a comment on the fact that while Indigenous people have experienced a form of dislocation from their own lands and traditions, similar to refugees and immigrants, they are still on their land and that land has other names, stories and histories.

"ከጥንቱ ዛፍ ጥላ/ *Under the Oldest Tree*" extends this reflection, looking at how one can get all the institutional or state symbols of belonging but still remain a stranger to the place where one lives. It reflects my own experience of living in Australia for over fifteen years. My late grandmother advised me to connect to the *kole*, which in rural Ethiopia is understood as the spirit of a place. One must connect with the *kole* in order to belong, and that normally occurs through respect and connection to elders and history. Growing up, I witnessed people gathering under the largest, oldest tree in my town to seek advice from elders. One did not seek belonging or comfort in the state or institutions; one sought it through connection with the community, led by the guidance and wisdom of our *shmagales* (old people).

The poem goes on to note how, in Australia, it is possible to become "a citizen to the system but a stranger to the land". The system is set up so that refugees and immigrants are often only exposed to white Australia. Indeed, if immigrants want to succeed, they must conform to this colonial system, as is reflected in the lines "millennia of roots / under my feet / to belong, I walked over them". In my own lived experience and in my research, I have found that true belonging cannot be found, as the poem says, "in institutions, in papers, in books". It also cannot be found in a system that classifies anything non-white as "other". This poem reflects on an immigrant's earnest desire to belong, but not knowing how to achieve that when the system turns one away from Indigenous Australia, a place where the *kole* truly lives.

My final poem, "የናንተ ባርያ/ *Your Slave*," is a departure from this theme, but speaks to the need to document these ongoing quests for freedom and belonging through art. It is inspired by the life of Frederick Douglass, as presented in Isaac Julien's exhibition Lessons of the Hour at the Perth International Festival (*A Thousand Words*, 2022). Douglass was a famous American abolitionist and statesman who lived from 1817/18 – 1895. The poem opens with Douglass "lecturing the trees that grew up on black bodies", and goes onto the say that the slave master was himself a slave. Whenever we think of slavery or colonialism, we often look at the enslaved as victims of violence and lament the ways in which they are being dehumanised and oppressed. The standard lens with which we view them, even if sympathetic to their condition, is the lens of the oppressor. We see and identify them with their wounds and sufferings while we identify the oppressor with his force and strength. The oppressor is always seen as a human that commits violence. His acts are sometimes theorised as reflections of the human condition, digressions from moral conduct, or acts of despotic violence that are necessary to move civilisation forward. In this way, the slave master may be seen as violent and cruel, but not as a dehumanised being.

To be free from slavery or colonialism is to live like the master or the coloniser. The poem challenges this view by drawing the meaning of being human from values that have nothing to do with power or violence. To draw the meaning of humanity from force and physical strength is to destroy its beauty and spiritual meaning. It is to offer one's being for the creation of a materialist world that ultimately enslaves all of us.

This is because, as Aime Cesar maintains, "out of all the colonial expeditions that have been undertaken, out of all the colonial statutes that have been drawn up … there could not come a single human value."[2] The poem draws humanity from values that are being crushed by the oppressor: the spirit of ancestors or "ancient lights", the beauty of wildflowers and "wonderous insects", love of mothers to their babies, and the boundless freedom the air and the sea give to the eagle and the fish. This relates to Amie Cesar's suggestion that we must also understand how colonialism decivilized the civiliser: "First we must study how colonization works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism." [3]

When we see the slave master using the eyes of the slaves, he represents a beast enslaved by greed and cruelty; he is a monster that "flung

babies from their mother's breast". What possibly could redeem him is when and if "he sees himself through eyes that irrigate his plantation". The poem ends on the observation that the master is "a slave who digs on black bodies / to grow white cotton / for you". Here, I am inviting the reader to consider how their very lives are built on slavery and oppression. We will find what humanity means when we see the world and ourselves through the eyes of those who suffer.

Readers will note that the poems are written in two languages: Amharic and English. I have been a poet in my native language of Amharic since I was a child, and have only started translating the works recently. Something is always lost in the act of translation, so I always provide the Amharic originals. Art cannot speak to one's true lived experience if it requires the filter of translation, and so there needs to be a larger commitment in the arts to finding spaces for non-English speakers to offer their works to one another. Belonging and connection are often rooted in language, and so I offer my poems in both, hoping they can speak meaningfully to both Amharic and English speakers.

ቀስ ብለህ ተራመድ / **Walk Slowly**

አሮጌ ሃውልቶች በከተማው ያሉ	when old statues in the city
ባውንደሪ መንገድ ዳንስ ይደንሳሉ።	dance at Boundary Road
ወደሰማይ ፎቆች እጃችን ነስንሰን	we stretch our hands to the skyscrapers
ሃሌ ሉያ ስንል እንኳን አደረሰን	we sing Hallelujah, happy holidays!
ካካቡራ ወፎች በአካባቢው ያሉ	fireworks drive kookaburras to Murray Island
ወደማሪ ወደብ ይበረግጋሉ።	
ትንሽ እልፍ ብሎ አንድ ጉጉት አለ	I approach an owl
ገላው በጨረቃ የተወለወለ	polished by the moon
ወደሱ ስጠጋ እኔን እንዲህ አለ፡-	it says to me
“ያንተን መልክ ቢመስልም የዚህ ምድር ቀለም	your look resembles the colour of this land
ትውፊትና ወጉ በደም ስርህ የለም፤	yet its lore does not run in your veins
ስሙን እስክታውቀው ይህን ጥቁር መንገድ	till you learn the name of this black road
በሰውነቱ ላይ ቀስ ብለህ ተራመድ።”	walk slowly on its body

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ከጥንቱ ዛፍ ጥላ / Under the Oldest Tree

አያቴ ስትመክረኝ፣
እንድትቀበልህ ይሄድህባት ቆሌ፣
ካገርህ ርቀህ ባዳ እንዳትሆን ሁሌ፣
ከአድባሩ ዛፍ ካሉት ያገር ሽማግሌ፣
ከእግራቸው ስር ወድቀህ -
ትከሉኝ በላቸው ከጥቁሩ መሬት ላይ፣
ስር ስደድ ወደታች ዘር አፍራ ወደላይ።

እንደተመከርኩት ከመጣሁ በኋላ፣
“ሽማግሌወቹ ከጥንቱ ዛፍ ጥላ፣
የሚሰበሰቡት ከቶ ወዴት ይሆን?”
እያልሁ ብጠይቅ -
“ሳትጠይቅ ለመኖር መቻልህን አመስግን”፣
ብሎ መለሰልኝ ነጩ ባለስልጣን።
እኔም ሆንኩትና -
የመሬቱ ባዳ የስራቱ ዜጋ፣
ወዳለፈው ታሪክ እጄን ብዘረጋ፣
ሁለት መቶ አመታት ነክቼ ተመለስኩ፣
መኖሪያ ተሰጠኝ ፈተናውን አለፍኩ።

የእልፍ አመታት ስሮች ከእግሬ ስር እያየሁ
ዜግነት ለማግኘት ዘልያቸው አለሁ።

አስራ አምስት አመታት አለፉ እንደዋዛ፣
ቆሌዋን ስፈልግ፣ ከየመጻህፍቱ፣ ከተቋማት ታዛ።
ያገር ሽማግሌች አውቃለሁ እንዳሉ፣
ከጥንቱ ዛፍ ጥላ የማይነጠሉ።
መጠየቅ እሻለሁ የፈተናውን አይነት፣
ለማግኘት እንድችል ካፈሩ ዜግነት።
የቱ ጋ ልቆፍር?
የእልፍ አመታት ስሮች ከተጋደሙበት?
ከቶ ምንድን ይሆን -
ከአፈራቸው መሃል የምተከልበት?
እንግድነት ቀርቶ -
ስር የምሰድበት
ፍሬ ‘ማፈራበት።

My grandmother told me,
‘do not remain a stranger
go to the elders
who sit under the oldest tree
fall before their feet
ask them to plant you in their soil
the *kole* will receive you
you will grow roots and seeds.’

so I asked where the elders meet
under the oldest tree
officials told me to be grateful
to live without asking
I became a citizen to the system
but a stranger to the land
I stretched my arms to the past
but only touched two centuries
took a test and earned a place
millennia of roots
under my feet
to belong, I walked over them.

fifteen years passed
I am still searching for the *kole*
not finding it in institutions
in papers
in books
I know there are elders
under the oldest tree
I am starting to ask
what test must I take
to become a citizen of the soil
where must I dig
to find millennia of roots
what must I do
to be worthy
to be planted in their soil
to not remain a stranger
to grow roots and seeds

የናንተ ባርያ / **Your Slave**

ካመለጥሁ በኋላ ከባርነት ቀንበር፣
ወደዚያ እርሻ ቦታ አይኖቸን ሳማትር፣
አያለሁ አጥንቶች ማሳው ላይ ያረፉ፣
ነጫጭ ጥጥ ሆነው -
ከሰውነቴ ጋር፣ አብረው የተሰፉ።
የጀርባየን ቆዳ ከአፈሩ ጋር አስሮ
የተጋደመውን የሸቦ ቋጠሮ፣
ከሰው አይን ደብቄ ብቻየን ቆሜአለሁ፣
ከጥቁር ገላ ላይ ለወፈሩ ዛፎች እንደዚህ እላለሁ፡-

እሱ ነው!
እሱ ነው፣ እኔ አይደለሁም ቀድሞ ባርያ የሆነው
አዎን፤ እሱ ነው።
ጥንታዊ ብርሐናትን፣ አላይ ብሎ የታወረው፣
ሲጋውን ብቻ አግዝፎ፣ የብረት ከምር ያረገው፤
አበቦችን እየቀጠፈ፣ ገላቸውን ፈጭቶ፣
ከልቦናው ግድግዳ ላይ፣ ቀለማቸውን ቀብቶ፣
ከጎን አድብቶ የቆመ፣ የነፍሳት ማጥመጃ ሰርቶ፤
እሱ ነው።

እሱ ነው፣ እኔ አይደለሁም ቀድሞ ባርያ የሆነው፣
አዎን፤ እሱ ነው።
ዘመኑን ሁሉ ለሰላምታ፣ እጁን ዘርግቶ ያልሰጠ፣
ባንድ እጁ ጥቁር መጽሃፍ፣ በቆዳ የተለበጠ፣
ባንድ እጁ ጥቁር አለንጋ፣ ዘወትር እንደጨበጠ፤
የሰንበት መስዋእት ብሎ፣
አካል ዛፍ ላይ አንጠልጥሎ፣ በአደባባይ ያሰጣ፣
ጥቁር ቆዳ የላጠ - ጥጥ ከውስጡ ሊያወጣ፤
እሱ ነው።

እሱ ነው፣ እኔ አይደለሁም ቀድሞ ባርያ የሆነው
አዎን፤ እሱ ነው።
ንስርን በሰማይ ከመብረር፣ ነጻ ለማድረግ የመጣ፣
አሳን ከባህር አውጥቶ፣ ኩባያ ውሃ ያጠጣ፣
እናትና ህጻናትን፣ በፍርሃት ማእበል ያራደ፣
ከእናቱ ጡት መንጭቆ፣ አራስ ህጻን የወሰደ፤
የእርሻው መስኖ በሆኑ አይኖች፣ ራሱን እስኪመለከት፣
የጥቁርን አካል ቆፍሮ፣ ለዘላለም ጥጥ እሚያመርት፣
ዛሬም ይሁን መጀመሪያ፣
እሱ ነው!
እሱ ነው የእናንተ ባርያ!
እሱ።

After I escaped bondage
I saw the plantation
scattered bones of cotton
woven into my skin
I hid the barbed knots
that tied my back to the soil
and lectured the trees
that grew on black bodies
I told them this:

it was not me
who was a slave first
It was him
he who cannot see the ancient lights
he who created himself
as a gigantic work of metal
he who took flowers from the field
painted the walls of his heart with colours
set a trap by the side
to catch wonderous insects

it was not me
who was a slave first
It was him
he who lived with clenched hands
one hand gripping a black leather book
the other a black leather whip
he brought his Sunday offerings
bodies hung up on trees
their skins scratched to extract cotton

it was not me
who was a slave first
It was him
he who wanted to save
the eagle from the sky
he who took the fish from the sea
to give it water in a cup
women and children trembled
as he flung babies from their mother's breast
his bondage will never leave him
till he sees himself
through eyes that irrigate his plantation
till he knows who he truly is.
A slave who digs on black bodies
to grow white cotton
for you

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Notes

[1] Weil quoted in Liisa H. Malkki, "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees." *Cultural Anthropology, 7*(1), (1992): 24.

[2] Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on colonialism*. Translated by Joan Pinkham. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 34.

[3] Aime Cesaire, 35.

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