Afterlives: An Introduction

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Afterlives are proliferating. Whether it is empire or destruction, Ebola or punk, revolution or waste – there seems to exist hardly anything these days that does not have an afterlife. If Google Scholar's inventory of academic knowledge production is anything to go by, we are faced with a veritable boom. Publications with "afterlife" in the title have doubled in number every five years since the beginning of the millennium. While the period between 2000 and 2005 saw 325 afterlife publications, in the last five years alone that number has risen to 1350.

But quite what sort of a phenomenon is an afterlife? As afterlives have

proliferated, so has their semantic field expanded. Look up afterlives on Google Scholar, and you will encounter much more than exegeses of human life after death. The afterlife has taken on new life as an expansive metaphor for "an instance of continued or renewed use, influence", as the Oxford English Dictionary has it. *The* afterlife has thus given way not only to *an* afterlife but to the possibility of multiple after*lives*. Released from the human life cycle, moreover, afterlives are pushing the boundaries of what and who counts as alive. But what conceptual purchase does this semantic expansion offer? This thematic thread seeks to submit to scrutiny a concept that more often than not remains an underexplored metaphor. What forms of temporal experience, we ask, does the notion of afterlife allow capturing? How can it push us to rethink the boundaries of vitality? And, not least, what might the contemporary proliferation of afterlives tell us about our anxieties concerning life and its ambiguous endings in the 21st century?

Afterlives carry out conceptual labour along two main axes in the contributions making up this thread. First, the term allows addressing experiences of time that defy neat framing in between beginnings and ends, births and deaths.

Afterlives suggest succession: a life must have ended for an afterlife to ensue.

Loss, damage and rupture are the formative ground from which afterlives arise. And yet afterlives gesture at the fact that life, somehow, goes on. What we are thus confronted with are what Avery Gordon has so felicitously written about as "endings that are not over"; endings with an "after" that retains a sense of vitality. Yet afterlives are not (or not necessarily) rebirths. They suggest a more complex temporality than that proposed by life cycle models plotting a succession of birth, growth and decay, so dear to both anthropologists and civilizational discourse.

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Rather than of rebirths, afterlives speak of remains. Defying linear temporality, afterlives imply forms of succession and causality that are not always direct and determinate. Instead of establishing connections by drawing a line between two points on a flat sheet, afterlives encourage us to look for the novel constellations that emerge [when that sheet of paper is crumpled]. If afterlives are about what remains, they are also about what returns. They point to what haunts that which might otherwise be celebrated as an unencumbered, fresh start.

Afterlives insist on continuity in the midst of rupture and on persistence in the face of loss. As such, they upset fantasies of blank slates and new beginnings.

Some of the terrain that we cover in this thread might look like that traditionally covered by memory studies. Compared to memory, however, afterlife proves a more capacious term when it comes to accounting for how the past extends into, interrupts, or impinges on the present. At the risk of overstating the contrast, one could argue that memory works through the modality of the *passé composé* – of a

past safely closed off from the present, available for intentional recall – while afterlives suggest a temporality of the past imperfect. The latter, [Ann Stoler](#) suggests, renders the remains of the past less "inert" objects than "vital" figurations.

But what kind of vitality are we talking about here? What kind of lives, in other words, are afterlives? These questions point at the second issue that contributions to this thread are grappling with. In his essay "[The Task of the Translator](#)," Walter Benjamin reflects on how works of art live on in their translations. Life, he asserts in the essay, is not defined by "organic corporeality" but by the fact that something "has a history of its own." Disentangling life from corporeality, Benjamin opens up a conceptual terrain where structures and infrastructures, objects and landscapes, ideas and ideologies come alive. The vitality at stake here takes multiple forms: it may manifest when material objects affect bodies, exerting a gravitational pull as [rubble](#) does in Argentina's Salta region or making us trip like the *Stolpersteine* Mandel and Lehr write about.

> *Afterlives may appear through frightful possession (Masquelier), or by opening up horizons of friendship that defy the lines of ethno-national identification (Petrović).*

Vitality may also lie in the moral demands that the past exerts on the living, whether that past is embodied in heroes and martyrs (Chaib, İlengiz, Moffat) or in the ruins left behind by industrial labour (Goodwin-Hawkins). As "untimely interferences" (Moffat), afterlives defy easy instrumentalization. Giving a spectral life to pasts concealed, repressed, and rejected (Masquelier, Saglam), they represent a vital site for negotiating, contesting and challenging the very ground of belonging and inclusion (Zengin).

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Asking about the vitality of afterlives also means thinking about the enchantment that lurks in disenchanted worlds and the animate power of things. Religious traditions of pondering life after death, worlds populated by spirits, and landscapes animated by magic forces all alert us to realms of existence and agency beyond the here-and-now. As a conceptual lens, afterlives force us to reckon with transcendent beings, intangible spirits and the otherworldly. This "agency of the no longer" (Masquelier) is one that intellectual disciplines steeped in methodological secularism do not always find easy to come to conceptual terms with.

Attending to the afterlives of revolutions and railway, friendship and forests, martyrs and madmen, the authors of this thread make no ontological pronouncements about the nature of afterlives' potency. Rather, they explore what social relations, practices and ideologies endow afterlives with force and inquire how that potency is experienced, contested and resisted. As such, they show how afterlives, as they draw absence, loss and demise into the present, raise

potentially troubling questions about social justice and retribution and engender fields of political contestation and historical reckoning.

Shaheen Bagh and the Force of Foundation

Chris Moffat
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February 2020. The pedestrian overpass is covered in banners. Crossing its elevated walkway, only flashes of the sky can be glimpsed through the hanging tarp, cloth and card, secured by a complicated web of string and ribbon. The banners wave in the wind, some erratically, others stubbornly, depending on their material. Even the green metal municipal road signs have been repurposed. One of them, signaling the direction to Faridabad, a major urban conglomeration south of Delhi, has been spray-painted. Its letters have been adapted to read

'Zindabad', and a banner fixes the word 'Inquilab' before it. The sign no longer registers a destination but a slogan of infinite movement: Inquilab Zindabad, *'Long Live the Revolution'.*

Below the overpass, there are no cars traversing GD Birla Marg, a typically congested arterial road. There are only crowds of people; thousands of pedestrians assembled on the pavement. [The atmosphere is electric, festive](#). It has the feeling of a mela, replete with face painters, souvenir sellers, food stalls, and circulating drum troupes. But this is no space of mere amusement; this is Shaheen Bagh, a protest camp initiated and led by local women, which began blocking traffic in this part of India's capital on 15 December 2019. It survived one of Delhi's harshest winters, as well as a climate of fear and intimidation that in late February 2020 – barely two weeks after my visit – resulted in targeted pogroms led by right-wing vigilantes at similar protest sites elsewhere in the city.

The global spread of Covid-19 forced the dismantling of the physical site on 24 March 2020, but the effects of this assembly continue to cascade across the terrain of Indian politics.

The sit-in at Shaheen Bagh began after Delhi Police forcefully entered a nearby university, Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI), attacking student protestors with batons and tear gas and vandalizing their library. The students of this historic, predominantly Muslim institution had gathered to oppose the government's recent attempts to radically redefine the terms of citizenship in India. Spearheaded by the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), these moves threaten the republic's secular status, underwritten in the 1950 constitution. Students at JMI, as well as at many other universities across the country, warned that a new 'Citizenship Amendment Act' (CAA), combined with plans for a National Register of Citizens (NRC), would work to disenfranchise

Muslim citizens and accelerate the Hindu nationalist project of transforming the country along majoritarian lines. The women of Shaheen Bagh, an economically deprived and primarily Muslim community in South Delhi, joined them in this protest. The power of their action rested in part in their proud and confident assertion of a political subject often obscured in the modern republic: the Indian Muslim woman *as citizen*; here, made emphatically visible.

Propelling this wave of dissent – which swelled across the country and carried with it a broad spectrum of Indian citizens – was the continuing force of an act of foundation: [the promulgation of the Indian constitution of 1950](#) and the freedoms and principles it sought to enshrine after independence from British rule in 1947. The men and women who created the conditions for this document to be written, who threw their energy and their lives into a protracted and at times violent anti-colonial struggle, were also made present in places like Shaheen Bagh. An untimely assembly of past heroes and martyrs reflected the wide range of meanings and possibilities invested in that word *azaadi,* 'freedom'.

Shaheen Bagh felt so alive in part because it was crowded with the dead. Almost all of the banners covering the overpass depicted watchful ancestors. Featured prominently was the Dalit leader and architect of the constitution BR Ambedkar (1891-1956), but also the towering independence activist Maulana Abu Kalam Azad (1888-1958), the martyred revolutionary youth Bhagat Singh (1907-1931), the inevitable 'Father of the Nation' MK Gandhi (1869-1948), and many more. A makeshift library in a bus stand honoured the 19th century social reformers and educators Savitribai Phule (1831-1897) and Fatima Sheikh (dates unknown). These figures surveyed the action with interest and provided their tacit affirmation. *This, too, is their fight.*

One of the banners decorating the overpass featured painted portraits of two men hanged by colonial authorities in 1925. Both were part of a clandestine revolutionary organization, the Hindustan Republican Association, which sought to challenge British rule in India through armed confrontation. The spirit of solidarity and self-sacrifice displayed by Ramprasad Bismil and Ashfaqullah Khan,

a devout Hindu and Muslim respectively, became an important symbol of unity and possibility in a 1920s India plagued with communal violence. At Shaheen Bagh, that spirit was again hailed. *Ashfaq-Bismil ki yaari, virasat hai hamari*, the banner read. 'The friendship of Ashfaq and Bismil is our inheritance.'

It was not simply a friendship that was affirmed in Shaheen Bagh, but also their commitment to a shared struggle. Bismil's fame derives from his 'kissing of the hangman's noose' with Ashfaq but also his work as a poet, particularly as the author of the famous Urdu verse *Sarfaroshi ki Tamanna, 'The Desire to Sacrifice [lit. Give One's Head]'*. This patriotic poem, which calls for the joyful shedding of blood when one's homeland is in trouble (*khoon se khelenge Holi gar vatan mushkil mein hai*), has been recited loudly by crowds at anti-CAA/NRC protests across the country.

The banner's appeal to *virasat*, to 'inheritance', offers a provocative vantage for understanding the work of anti-colonial histories in contemporary India. My own research into the twenty-first century afterlives of anti-colonial violence approaches 'inheritance' not as a logic of linear succession but as an *untimely interference* – a call to responsibility from those who are no longer present, whose corporeal existence has been extinguished.

> *Rather than understanding 'afterlives' simply as the willful conjuring of the dead by the living, to serve a politics in the present, the continuing potential associated with anti-colonial histories in post-colonial India requires us to take seriously the work of the dead as entities to whom something is owed.*

The dead might *themselves* conjure politics — calling the living to account, demanding action in a context where their struggles remain unfinished or victories once won have been sullied or reversed.

The enduring popularity of a figure like Bhagat Singh, the charismatic rebel hero hanged by colonial authorities in 1931 at the age of twenty-three, provides a rich case for thinking about how disruptive these revenants can be. Renowned as a

critic of Gandhi and agitating separately from the mainstream independence movement, the young revolutionary is not easily connected to the character or compromises of the postcolonial state. Executed at such a young age, his defiant image carries a sense of potential unfulfilled, of paths not taken. [Bhagat Singh is often greeted in the present not as an anachronism but as an *effective* and *demanding* interlocutor in a variety of contemporary struggles](). He is *effective* because his challenge to power is still seen to be relevant: the social and economic inequalities he spoke against in the 1920s persist today. He is *demanding* in that his courage and self-sacrifice continues to set the highest standard of political commitment, an enduring model for standing up to injustice and never compromising one's ideals, even when faced with death.

Bhagat Singh appears in twenty-first century India as a signal of unfinished business. The demand he places on the living is not an easy one to face. It throws into crisis the idea of 1947 as the *end* of one historical sequence (that of British rule in India) and the *beginning* of another (India as independent state). It suggests, as per the famous communist slogan of the late 1940s, that *yih azaadi jhooti hai*, 'this freedom is a lie'.

> *And yet the young revolutionary's appeal is not limited to the left: his militant opposition to established hierarchies and his capacity for self-sacrifice inspires felicitation across the political spectrum, including from the far right.*

Some seek to contain his disruptive presence, portraying Bhagat Singh simply as a brave patriot who should be saluted, but who ultimately belongs in the past. [But as my research has demonstrated](), many individuals and groups in contemporary India accept and affirm his call to responsibility, recognizing the martyr as a ghostly comrade in a fight that continues.

Bhagat Singh was highly visible at Shaheen Bagh. His image waved from the overpass and elsewhere, transmitting a call to action, a plea to never surrender. These protests were, however, animated less by a sense of a *revolution unfinished* then by anger over a *promise compromised* or *corrupted* – the promise of the

constitution, its grand ambitions, which have been attacked at various points throughout India's postcolonial history but within which people continue to locate hope and imagination. The landslide re-election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the 2019 Indian General Election has given new energy to longer-term efforts to dismantle the constitution's socialist and secular premises and redesign the country in a different image. But it is clear from the anti-CAA/NRC protests that that this work will be haunted by other worlds and other possibilities. Observing the spectral alliances being forged across India in recent months, seeing images of Ambedkar or Bhagat Singh raised over the barricades, it is tempting to invert Walter Benjamin's oft-cited observation that "*even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins."

Even the enemy, if he wins, will not be safe from the dead.

The revenant congregation at Shaheen Bagh was an unruly one, to be sure. This is a pantheon riven by internal disputes and rivalries – alternative visions of what the state should be, how the economy should work, who or what constitutes 'the people', what is meant by 'secularism', and so on. Santosh Sadanandan has written provocatively on the protest's 'contrasting intensities'. Foundational figures like Nehru or Gandhi stand in tension with martyred youth and frustrated revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh, who signal the shortcomings of that 1947-50 settlement and the need to contest enduring imperial logics. Nor is the *azaadi* celebrated in Delhi or Mumbai or Kolkata the *azaadi* demanded in Srinagar or Jammu. Indeed, another front for Modi's offensive against the constitution was opened in August 2019 with the repeal of Kashmir's special status. This contested territory, subject to state violence throughout its post-47 history, remains under strict curfew and communications blackout today. The people of Kashmir congregate with their own assembly of martyrs, responding to their particular demands of inheritance. But in Delhi, in this fleeting moment, the women of Shaheen Bagh conjured a precarious unity – a testament to the magnitude of the threat they face.

Their investment remains in that moment of independence – not as something 'resolved', a struggle 'complete', but as the hopeful beginnings of something better, the power of the future, the promise of a better world.

A shifting and opaque coalition running from Home Minister Amit Shah to Delhi police forces to roving squads of Hindu nationalist *goondas* has repeatedly attempted to crush this sense of possibility. In February, the BJP were routed in the Delhi Capital Territory elections, in spite of their attempts to whip up popular frustration around the roads and spaces blocked by anti-CAA/NRC protests. Mere weeks after this defeat, right-wing groups supporting the national government attempted to clear the roads themselves; amidst the violence, Muslim shops were burned, places of worship attacked and at least 52 people were killed. Leaders in the Aam Admi Party, who won the elections, had little to offer the victims but prayers. The protestors from Shaheen Bagh and elsewhere do not have allies in corridors of power. But they are emboldened by their alliances with the dead, who have occupied spaces with them and spurred them on in their struggle. Bilkis, an 82-years old stalwart of the sit-in, told a journalist from the *Telegraph* on 20 Feb, "[*Hamne angrezon ko bhagaya tha, tum kya cheez ho?*](#)" We chased the British away, what are you?

On 24 March, after one hundred nights and days, the Shaheen Bagh site was cleared by Delhi police – defeated, in this form at least, by the arrival of Covid-19 and the implementation of social distancing measures across India. Tributes to the possibilities – symbolic and material – opened by the protest began flooding social media under hashtags like #InquilabLivesOn. Priya Sen's short film, [Shaheen Bagh, Until Soon](#), demonstrates this sentiment powerfully. In India, as in countries from Brazil to Hungary to the Philippines, policing the pandemic has allowed for a neat escalation of authoritarian tendencies and partisan scapegoating. [Delhi police have exploited the lockdown to arrest prominent protestors](#). The NRC/CAA remains in place. It was revealing that, on 24 March, it was not simply the final bastion of older protestors that were removed from Shaheen Bagh; teams were also dispersed to destroy the banners and paint over

the murals, to obscure the slogans and exorcise the gaze of the watchful dead. This, apparently, could not wait.

Haunted: Spirits and the Agency of the No Longer in Niger

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In Niger one frequently hears that schools, specifically secondary schools, are haunted. Briefly put, this means that some schools are teeming with spirits, most of whom pose a threat to humans. The presence of spirits in these schools (and the threat they pose to female students, in particular) is a source of concern for parents and teachers, not to mention the girls themselves. The predicament was starkly captured in the testimony of a math teacher from Dogondoutchi, the small town where I have been doing fieldwork for over thirty years: "In our school, there is a date tree. There are seventy-one *aljanu* (spirits in Hausa) on that tree. They are presided by a female *aljani* (spirit in Hausa). Her name is Salamatou. [Spirits] go after humans because they are disturbed by them. When a town expands, *aljanu* have to move. Human activities bother them. They used to enjoy tranquillity in the bush, but now their trees are being cut."

By cutting trees to make way for schools, the teacher implied, people broke the covenant established long ago with spirits. Now they suffered the consequences. The narrative is a familiar one in parts of Niger where the unravelling of people's relationships with spirits turned what was once a blessing into a peril. *Aljanu* are known to dwell in caves, mounds, termite hills, ponds and bushy trees. As urban settlements, spurred by a demographic surge, encroached on the bush, many lost their homes. Some of them roam the roads that unfurl across the landscape, provoking accidents and prompting travellers to secure protective medicines before setting on trips. Others, averse to relinquish their status as *genius loci* (spirit of the place), linger over the very venues whose emergence contributed to their displacement. Initially they lay silent, undetected. Seeking an outlet for their grief, they eventually struck adolescent girls, who were made to suffer their suffering and demand justice for them.

In recent years the number of spiritual attacks in secondary schools has risen sharply. Possession in the classroom is often contagious. Moments after a girl is possessed, some of her classmates may be stricken too. These attacks are frequently blamed on the victims' lack of modesty: bare heads and revealing clothes supposedly attract lustful spirits. Capitalizing on the panic elicited by the spectacle of female students in the throes of possession, Muslim preachers, who attribute the phenomenon to moral decline, urge women and girls to cover themselves and learn the Qur'an.

Aside from momentarily disrupting the tempo of educational life, the possession of schoolgirls opens a critical space for articulating the past as unfinished business.

When exorcisms are held to rid victims of their tormentors, a history of violence and disaffection emerges that unsettles the conventional *event-aftermath* narrative (Hunt 2016). How the irruption of wrathful spirits in classrooms and schoolyards unsettles the "pastness" of the past, forcing people to question the self-sufficiency of the present, is what interests me. The concept of afterlife

highlights the inadequacy of conventional models of history for grasping local narratives of trance and iconoclasm, deforestation and nostalgia, haunting and education. By gesturing to "endings that are not over" (Gordon 2008:139), it offers a productive lens for escaping the predictability of straight temporality and entertaining the possibility that animacy extends beyond the human.

Haunting has frequently been used by social theorists as an allegorical device to capture the stubborn legacy of past epochs. Karl Marx wrote of past traditions weighing like a nightmare on the conscience of the living while Jacques Derrida discussed the spectre that disrupts our notion of linear time. In Niger, an overwhelmingly Muslim country, references to haunted places are not mere figures of speech. Haunting, for most Nigeriens, is a "natural" phenomenon. Haunted places are those places inhabited by spirits. Sometimes called the "hidden people," spirits are invisible yet potent creatures. They may go about their lives quite oblivious to humans. Or they may demand attention, causing trouble if their requests are ignored (though they also protect people when provided for). To describe a school as haunted is to acknowledge the presence of the past—a past that calls upon the present with commanding resolve. It entails a recognition that the place is infested with spirits who may, at any time, seek redress for past wrongs and will not cease until they receive satisfactions.

> *When the landscape is saturated with the rage of spirits grieving for lost homes, it becomes unheimlich, posing a danger to humans.*

Recall the date tree in the math teacher's school. By stressing how crowded with occupants the tree was, the teacher suggested that local spirits had sought refuge on the only tree left standing when the school was built. Picture seventy-one spirits perched side by side on the pinnate leaves of a date tree! The vision conveys a definite eeriness, the sense of an ever-present threat literally hanging over the children who daily spill from classrooms into the schoolyard.

Many Muslims do not question the existence of spirits. Well-known passages of the Qur'an make mention of *aljanu*, bodiless creatures made of smokeless fire,

who can take on a variety of appearances. For some people, the irruption of spirits on schoolgrounds is a bewildering experience, not easily reconciled with what they know to be true. A teacher from Niamey, Niger's capital, admitted to being terrified by the possibility of spirits invading his classroom yet feeling helpless in the face of the problem because he wasn't sure how to explain it to himself. He was not alone. Other people conceded they felt "epistemologically adrift" (Bubandt 2014:5) when discussing mass possessions. Spirits, Nils Bubandt (2017:G125) writes, "are never just 'there.'" Paradoxically, because they are "both manifest and disembodied, present and absent," they thrive in contexts of doubt (2017:G125). "These spirits' attacks in schools. It's an inexplicable phenomenon," a school principal in Dogondoutchi told me after confronting an incident of mass possession. She wondered how best to help students who, having witnessed their entranced classmates wreak havoc in the school, refused to set foot in the establishment. "I don't know about these things, I'm not from here," she added. Caught between local officials' insistence that the incident was due to mass hysteria (a common biomedical diagnosis) and the parents' concern for their children's safety, she wavered. For those who hover between endorsement and scepticism, spiritual attacks constitute something of an aporia—a nagging blind spot that undermines existential certainty as well as an "interminable experience" (Derrida 1993:16) for which there is no resolution.

In Niger spirits haunt even those who do not acknowledge their existence.

Spirits are not easily dislodged from the places they haunt. With the support of local authorities, headmasters may invite exorcists to rid schools of their lingering presence. One can never be sure the procedures are entirely successful, however. Obstinate, unyielding, deeply attached to places, spirits may withdraw momentarily only to return when least expected. A school principal turned on a taped recitation of Qur'anic verses in classrooms every evening to keep the spirits at bay. "The school where I teach has been haunted for many years," a French teacher confessed. "We make sure students avoid certain places on the school grounds. We don't want them to get hurt." In this school, my interlocutor

suggested, the past continued to resonate into the present in the form of a looming menace. Before possession attacks even took place, they were already anticipated as the recurring offshoots—the afterlives—of a violent, iconoclastic past.

In the past, elders recall, human settlements would neither take root nor thrive without spiritual support. If spirits depended on people for sustenance, human communities too owed their survival to the uncanny creatures. Recognition of this mutuality was sealed with the shedding of blood. In exchange for the blood of sacrifice, the spirits shielded people from various calamities, including drought, disease, and raiders. A community or clan's relationship to spirits was encoded in prohibitions. People did not consume (or destroy) the plants, animals, and objects associated with the spirits whose protection they enjoyed. Hence, since trees were known to harbour spirits, one did not chop down a tree before securing its occupant's approval. An ethic of conservation, rooted in people's connection to the "more-than-human world" (Abram 1997), shaped the management of natural resources. Far from constituting the neutral backdrop against which human activity unfolded, the landscape was "a lived environment" (Ingold 2000). Trees served as chronotopes, emplotting relations between people and spirits while charging space with the movement of time. They were not forbidden—in the Durkheimian sense. After all they were sources of fuel, timber, and medicine. Rather than treat them as sacred, we might see them as "vibrant matter" (Bennett 2010) to account for the fuzziness between dweller and dwelling in people's account of trees that "talk," "scare them," and "refuse to be cut." Vibrancy also gestures to the lingering effects of past histories. Talking trees and axes bouncing back in the logger's hand jolt people into awareness that, while spirits appear to have gone, their "seething presence" meddles with "taken-for-granted realities" (Gordon 2008:8).

The past century has witnessed waves of Islamic reform aimed at standardizing religious practices and purifying Islam from what Nigeriens call "animism" (spirit veneration). Muslim religious leaders destroyed spirit shrines, forbid sacrifices to the spirits, and discouraged reliance on *bokaye*, non-Muslim healers who treat

spirit-caused afflictions.Claiming spirits were evil creatures in the service of Satan, they enjoined Muslim to shun them so as to avoid straying from God. Thus, spirits were forgotten, at least officially, and trees, which anchored spirits to particular places, turned into "things" (Luxereau and Roussel 1997), ostensibly ceasing to part of the cosmological fabric. Under this revisionist assault, the landscape that once pulsated with invisible forces became an inert backdrop against which human agency, with God's support, could be deployed. People relied on Islam as a legal resource to warrant the clearing of land and the implementation of increasingly individualized forms of ownership (Cooper 2006). As some knowledges and ecologies diminished, new infrastructures emerged to keep pace with population growth.

Islamic iconoclasm transformed people's relationship to their environment, yet it did not erase entirely the past. Today the landscape is filled with ghostly forms of past mutualities standing as reminders of what has been lost (trees, wildlife, and so on). If the past is experienced as a haunting—something that is lost, yet impossible to forget—it is also because most spirits have not gone away. When they make their presence known, it is often to threaten, frighten, and punish in short, to remind humans of their suffering presence. Stories are told of past trauma embedded in the landscape, lingering as residual affect: a school guardian dying after chopping down a neem, a girl terrorized after sitting under a tree, a man wounded by his axe while cutting a branch. Together these narratives paint a picture of the landscape as a place "energized by the violence of the past" (Aretxaga 1997).

When schoolgirls are tormented by spirits who refuse to let go of the past, it is ultimately the future that is at risk.

In Niger, the world's least educated country, schools are seen as a critical driver of social mobility and girls are described as powerful agents upon whose shoulders Niger's development rests (Masquelier n.d.). By keeping girls away from school for days, even months, spirit-related afflictions frequently bring their

formal education to an end, thereby endangering the nation's future. In her work on imperial pasts, Ann Stoler (2008:196) draws on the concept of ruination to highlight the protracted quality of damages to bodies, landscapes, dependencies. Ruination, which grapples with the multiple, lingering temporalities of loss, helps us frame spiritual attacks through the register of duration, experience, and anticipation. While evoked as a single event, the spirits' expulsion from their homes is more adequately understood through its afterlife. Afterlives attend to the "agency of the no longer" (Fisher 2012:19) while gesturing to futures lost, experienced less as potentialities than as spectres—a site of what might have been. Here I have suggested that while the possession of adolescent schoolgirls brings into view the sheer *force* of the past, the harm spirits cause unfurls into the future, imperilling that which has yet to happen. As the "home" of spirits, some Nigerien schools are haunted as much by painful pasts as by imagined futures.

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Ghosts of Infrastructures Past

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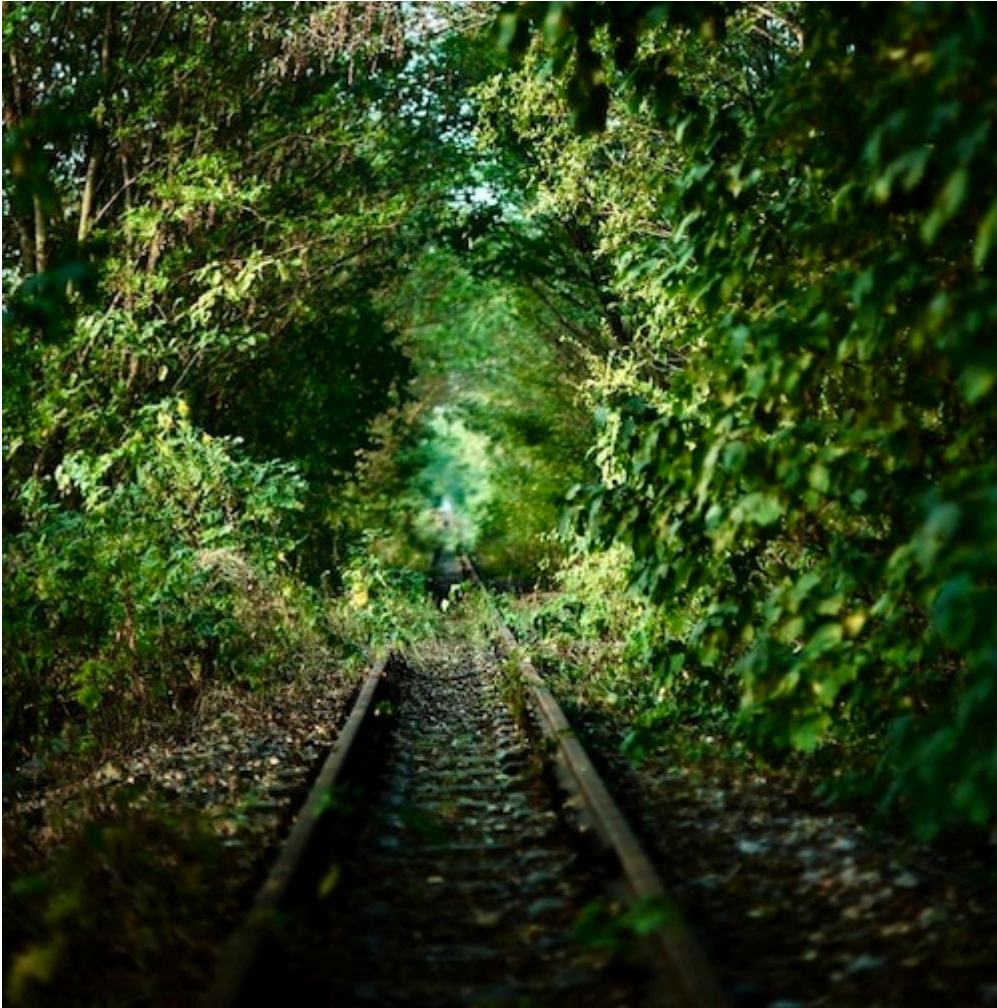
Some miles outside a small Welsh town, off the main road, a long, flat structure rises from the undergrowth. Ivy and weed smother brick. The shape is familiar, but I have walked the whole length before I realise what it is – or was. Out in rural isolation, an abandoned railway platform is unexpected. The rails, sleepers and stone ballast are long since lifted. Signs and station buildings have gone, too. I pull out my phone and tap up the map to guess at what the stop might have been called. The mobile signal is too faint. The screen blanks: "Unable to connect".

"Castles, forts, ruins, abandoned mines, empty buildings, depleted fisheries," the

cultural theorist Barbara Kirchenblatt-Gimblett (1997:5) tallies the body count on a visit to Wales, where "waning economies litter the landscape". Death – of economies, and pasts, and with them futures – she concludes, "leaves a mess".

Yet, among littered landscapes, ghosts lurk; afterlives – like a railway to nowhere, the spectral traces of a past that has left, and is left unresolved.

Death and disconnection

In the 1960s, the Beeching Report declared as uneconomic some 6,000km of UK rail track. At the time, the nationalised railways were haemorrhaging cash, and car ownership seemed the affluently oil-fuelled future. Scrapping lines and mothballing stations was as logical as it proved short-sighted. And, as the promise of infrastructure – connections mapped onto timetables; goings-from and gettings-to – gave way to ivy and isolation, a platform at a place once worth stopping for became a mortuary in the middle of nowhere. Shapely, forlorn.

From much of Wales, travelling by train to the capital, Cardiff, means a dog-leg route to England and back. Rather than North-South internal connections, pruned of branch lines, Welsh rail routes head West-East: afterlives of an extractive economy that carried Welsh resources to English industry. The mines now lie closed; the last steelworks totters; agriculture depends on soon-to-be-withdrawn CAP subsidies. David Harvey (2010) likens capital to clouds on a weather map, shifting place and pattern like a centuries-spanning rain radar.

Clouds of capital, moving on, leave the litter of past purpose to haunt present disconnection.

Into the ruins come post-industrial 'spelunkers' (Clemens 2011), cameras at the ready to capture economic departure as aesthetic melancholy. (The frisson might be less generously described as "'dark tourism' for the middle classes" [Strangleman 2013: 24].) Lurking ghosts duly await the intrepid; in empty factories, "cloakrooms contain the pegs and hangers which accommodated

clothes; buttock-shapes remain embedded in more comfortable chairs" (Edensor 2005a: 841). Yet these are ghosts of the spatial kind, fixed and physical. In an essay theorising dead human bodies, Olga Cielemęcka (2015: 235) reflects that, "Remains … accompany us, the living, but at the same time we wish to delegate them to enclosed, ordered spaces, where they, as we believe, should belong." The trouble with industry and infrastructure's afterlives is that their hauntings do not hold neatly to their ruins. Spectres stray; the mess of economic death slips its bricks.

Welsh problems

Wales is often made legible to policy's interventionary lens (Lea 2008) through a narrative of 'Welsh problems'. On economic indicator maps and indices of multiple deprivation, Wales flares like a body bruised. In quite another context, Tess Lea (2014) writes of dwelling in spaces and places thick with policy – as saturated with the sense that something must be done, as steeped in the past failings of what was done.

In 2000, Wales first qualified for the highest band of EU regional development funding. The country's devolved government had just been inaugurated amidst promises of a Welsh parliament for Welsh problems. Visions for a new future mingled with relief that Wales had been offered financial help to get there. There was, a now senior civil servant told me, remembering back, "Great fanfare that this … was going to open up our communities … would get them out of poverty."

I did not reach the abandoned platform as an off-road explorer. I walked the railway to nowhere. The old track's memory line has been smoothed into a cycling trail. A mile out of town, I saw a laminated sign tacked to a gate; the type small, the colour faded; mould beginning to fur at the edges. "Project part-financed by the European Union. *Amcan 1 yn gweithio yng Ngheridigion*. Objective 1 working in Ceredigion." Underneath, a cartoon sticker struck a forbidding red line against dog shit. The words 'Objective 1' date the cycling trail project to the first tranche of EU funds into devolved Wales: the money that was going to open up our

communities, and get them out of poverty.

Tourism is often reached for as an economic suture in rural Wales. In the sort of workshop sessions that arm stakeholders with coloured pens and post-it notes and ask them what to do about development in places where deprivation drifts behind mildewed windows and shuttered shops, again and again rolling green landscapes are jotted into fluorescent dreams. Build a leisure amenity and the tourists will come.

The Objective 1 fanfare is now as forgotten as the rail-to-trail's unemptied dog waste bins. The civil servant I spoke with later recalled the end of that first seven-year EU funding period: "Our GDP per capital … hadn't really changed … On the one hand, this was a bit of an indictment of all the money … on the other … we still actually want to stay under the threshold, because then we'll qualify for another round of funding." Failure, Lea (2008) observes, is but grist for policy's ever grinding mill.

Resurrecting futures perfect

I have written elsewhere (Goodwin-Hawkins 2019) of how oddly easy it is to landscape defunct infrastructure into rurality – spaces made to freight commodities and facilitate connection yield to slower, simpler ways of life, so uncritically imagined. Abandoned railways bend obligingly to conversion because outdated transport technologies look and feel as quaint as a bright-painted steam engine. Old tracks traverse the countryside, turning to conveniently plotted rural trails. If rail is an archetype of industrial modernity, even smoke and piston - signalled progress can be decoupled, disconnected.

Yet, rail routes are difficult to spatially forget. They are deep-etched lines that decades of planning, mapping and land tenure order space round; plus, rural lines are rarely built over.

Without trains, without rails, lines remain durably present absences, holding stubbornly to past connection and hosting flickers of future promise.

Even cycleways serve to keep defunct infrastructure indelibly intact. Hopes of reconnection will whisper.

Afterlives are a "haunted present" (Muehlebach & Shoshan 2012:339), evoking loss, longing, and the hope of return. Writing on a closed tramline's promised reinstatement, Laura Kemmer (2019: 61) reflects that infrastructural afterlives "come to make their own promises; they have promissory properties; they convey an indication of future events; they are full of potential." Likewise, the railway to nowhere lingers in trace and talk, as "the infinite potential of a past … that might one day become a better future" (Kemmer 2019: 71).

The Welsh Government's latest commissioned report on railway reinstatement turns promise into the dull thud of technical specification: "A fully workable end to end railway alignment has been defined, such that line speeds and journey times can be reliably assessed, whilst also enabling the identification of the full range of technical and implementation challenges to be resolved" (Mott MacDonald 2018:29). While construction costs and passenger projections are crunched, the railway to nowhere hovers between past conditional and future perfect (Shoshan 2012).

Budgets baulk at Welsh problems. Screens blank.

Across the border in England, the UK government sinks billions into cutting London-Birmingham rail journeys by an estimated [ten minutes](#) . Defunct infrastructure cannot but haunt disconnected space.

Nowhere, kept there

Recent election results and other statistical surprises have led to the rediscovery of so-called 'left behind' places. The narrative – academic and journalistic – frames discontent through developmental stasis, pairing luridly shaded maps with quasi-ethnographic *quelle horreur*. And, while the economic language of 'lagging' regions morphs into political promises to 'level up', these are all words without

the weight of causality. To be left, to lag, to level under, is to be passively placed – activity, movement exists elsewhere. But … movement *produces* stasis. Success *engenders* failure. We are, [Simin Davoudi](#) insists, using the wrong language: places are not 'left behind', they are 'kept behind'. Disconnected.

Departed economies. Development projects and funding regimes and feasibility studies.

Afterlives are flickering forms in the mess economic death has left.

Afterlives are more than forms. The spectral side of policy's confident genre of fixes and futures, afterlives are the ghosts of pasts that were futures, kept back, never buried, haunting still the lines of dislocation in places once somewhere.

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Presumed Dead but Lived On

Erol Saglam
May, 2020

Treasures and Discreet Afterlives of Greek Heritage in Contemporary Turkey

Treasure hunts have long been a common practice, constituting one of the primary problems for heritage preservation in contemporary Turkey and elsewhere (see Bachhuber 2019, Hamilakis 2003). Hunters have dug, defaced, blasted, and blatantly destroyed historical artifacts across the country with the hopes of finding a treasure that they could cash in. Although they have mostly targeted ruins and graves, natural formations have not been spared if they were

thought to stand in between the hunters and the presumed trove. In late 2019, one such hunting party apparently solicited the official permit for their quest to find a "treasure", allegedly left behind by one of the Roman legions in northeast Turkey. Puzzlingly, though, where they worked on with industrial-size excavators was not an archaeological site with ruins of Roman-era barracks or, say, a castle. The hunters targeted a lake, called *Dipsiz Göl* [lit. Bottomless Lake], which they believed to be an artificial body of water concealing the Roman riches they searched for.

Although geologists indicated that the lake had been formed by glacial movements around 12.000 years ago, hunters were unanimously convinced that it was a man-made cover for the troves lying underneath. Despite the protests of conservationists, the hunting party went ahead with their quest to drain the entire lake and to excavate further down but, unsurprisingly, found nothing. Once the excavation ended, it became evident that the lake would probably never recover.

Although much can be said about the destructive implications of treasure hunts on archaeological remnants, I will focus on how "natural" (Çaylı 2015; Latour 2004) interfaces are targeted through treasure hunts and their potential causes. Drawing on an ethnographic research I conducted in in northeast Turkey, in 2012-2015, I explore everyday engagements with treasures to understand what imaginations and narratives of treasures may reveal about the afterlives of abjected cultural heritages:

> *Why do communities imagine treasures in seemingly natural spaces (e.g. lakes or mountains), to begin with? How is such information socially circulated despite lacking material evidence? And more importantly, which social processes fuel such imaginations of treasures across local landscapes?*

Attending to these questions, I explore the afterlives of cultural heritages following the socio-political ruptures in the early 20th century, when non-Turkish communities (primarily Greeks and Armenians in the case of the Black Sea littoral) were violently destroyed to forge a homogeneous Turkish national

identity. The communities I worked with in Trabzon, in northeast Turkey, are ardent Turkish nationalists and yet continue to speak, albeit discreetly, an archaic variety of Greek that was long presumed to be dead. *My take on afterlives, hence, departs from the amnesiac turn Turkey took in the early 20th century and focuses on its reverberations across topographical, "corporeal, mnemonic, and sensory engagements between people" (Cherry 2013, 3) and the places they dwell. Here, afterlives in a plural form (Cherry 2013) also pertain to the way cultural heritages persist and transfigure in relation to wider socio-political ruptures and displacements as well as how publics engage with these incessant transfigurations to issue forth new modalities of being, belonging, and remembering (Fassin 2015).* Through the case of the unexpected survival of Greek that my interlocutors held dear and yet kept private, my exploration of everyday engagements with treasures in contemporary Turkey pertains particularly to the ways non-Turkish languages have "lived on" and invites the reader to attend to their survival in different forms. I pursue how Greek heritage, despite politico-legal interventions to obliterate it, discreetly (Mahmud 2014) "lives on" across local topographies, enchants these intimate places, and marks the communal boundaries in today's Trabzon.

I take "engagements with treasures" as a range of practices that involve (i) narratives on buried/concealed troves probing their mythical/historical origins, whereabouts, content, and current (economic) value as well as how to access them; (ii) solicitation of "documents" indicating the location of troves, and more rarely (iii) the organization of hunting parties and, rarely, their unearthings. These narratives are not necessarily limited to verbal accounts but also include dreams, specters, and myths that often defy rational, coherent articulations. Rather than readily dismissing treasure hunts as destructive practices striving for material riches—given their strong appeal despite their overall fruitlessness, this piece suggests juxtaposing the social imaginations of treasures across seemingly natural interfaces with socio-historical genealogies of the landscapes to rethink their psychosocial interconnectedness (Saglam 2019). I would suggest also exploring how seemingly non-material traces in the form of imaginations,

magicalities, specters and hauntings (Frosh 2013; Gordon 2008), and dreams are implicated in social forgings of these narratives, which may help us rethink the possibility for non-discursive, affective, and "topographical" (Knight 2017, 29) remembrances and relations with the past.

As I started my ethnographic research in northeast Turkey in 2015, I primarily pursued the question of how rural communities scattered across this geographically secluded and elevated valley (henceforth, the Valley) reconciled their preservation of [a variety of Greek with archaic linguistic features, called Romeyka](#) (*Rumca* in Turkish) (see Saglam 2020) with their strong support for Turkish nationalism. Relying both on conventional ethnographic methods and oral history, I explored how this discreet presence of Greek reverberated across my interlocutors' identities as well as their relations to the past and places they dwelled in. Through the course of my research, I also noted that most of my interlocutors—often men due to customs regarding the relations between sexes—often talked about (Greek) treasures buried here and there across the Valley. While collecting data both on the (communal) privacy of Greek and the prevalence of narratives of treasures, I started thinking about the interrelationship between the two. I first detail how Romeyka "lives on" in the Valley despite all odds and how my interlocutors engaged with treasures to ask further questions about the afterlives of this idiosyncratic cultural heritage.

Historical data indicate that the settlements across the Valley emerged as Greek-speaking Christian villages in the late 15th century and gradually converted to Islam—without experiencing a language shift to Turkish (see Lowry 2009, Meeker 2004). Even though Trabzon had a vibrant Greek community till 1920s, Greek heritage was thought to have been uprooted from the region with the Greco-Turkish population exchange in 1923, obliging (Christian) Greek-speaking communities to leave Turkey for Greece. As the population exchange took religion as the only criterion, this idiosyncratic variety of Greek, which is linguistically more archaic than the Pontic variety spoken by Christian communities in the area until 1923 (see Sitaridou 2014), could survive among secluded (Muslim) communities in Trabzon up to today. Subsequently Turkish nationalism precluded

the use of any non-Turkish languages (especially the ones it is particularly antagonistic to, e.g. Greek and Armenian). Since then, Greek has long been presumed to be extinct in contemporary Turkey, except the dwindling communities in Istanbul and Imbros.

Discreetly living on despite these nationalist erasures across mountainous villages, Romeyka has been transmitted solely within families and has no writing system. The language is currently used for intimate familial, communal, agricultural and local matters. Since Valley communities are ardent Turkish nationalists, they passionately distance themselves from Greek heritage and refrain from using the language in public. Greek, hence, is secluded to intra-communal encounters with its public visibility carefully controlled through shifting to Turkish in the presence of outsiders or using misnomers to conceal (Herzfeld 1997) its connection to Modern Greek.

Discreetly permeating the social lives of the Valley communities, Greek nevertheless emerges an indispensable element of communal identity which has been kept alive through its banishment from public.

This seclusion of Greek to intra-communal encounters, however, does not mean that it has lost its socio-cultural significance, nor have the communities completely dispensed with the Greek heritage. Although my interlocutors almost unanimously claimed Turkic lineage (often from the Central Asia), they also circulated their family genealogies and Greek patronymics in private. Furthermore, defying the state policy to Turkify the geography which has assigned Turkish names to major geographical marks (Öktem 2008), men and women of all ages still use centuries-old Greek toponyms

for villages, neighborhoods, estates, mountains, pastures, woods, rivers and similar other topographical features, generating a detailed map of the Valley that only the local communities know of. Greek, in this sense, emerges as the intimate, familial, and communally private medium through which local men and women relate to and move across the Valley.

In addition to this social significance of Romeyka, communities had other intriguing ways to continue recognizing and engaging with the Greek heritage in the present. Most of my interlocutors, of different socio-economic status, mentioned a treasure left (by Greeks or others) behind/beneath seemingly natural features in rather familiar and intimate places around the Valley. Woods nearby one interlocutor's village were said to have overgrown a long-deserted house with treasures buried beneath, while a hilltop was rumored to be a castle with a number of chambers carved inside the mountain housing riches. Dreams were often integral elements of these accounts since the location and the content of troves were "revealed" through them. Sightings of *cins*—djinns, the supernatural beings in Islamic mythology—were, similarly, mentioned as a proof of the existence of a treasure nearby. Most of my interlocutors explained the overall fruitlessness of treasure hunts in reference to *cins*: the treasures were often said to be possessed [*cinli* or *sahipli*] by cins and took many deceptive forms to elude the hunters. To overcome these obstacles, I was told, many hunters have cooperated with Greeks (and sometimes Armenians), who would recite a prayer in Greek (or Armenian) to break the haunting curse.

Convinced of detecting "signs" of such troves buried across their villages, neighborhoods, and estates, some interlocutors occasionally took me to these "signs" or showed their photos so that I—often due to the homonymic affinity between anthropology and archaeology—could help them decipher the location of

treasures left behind by past communities. In most cases, the "signs" I was shown presented no discernible figure—at least as far as I could see—and were more likely to be natural formations.

And yet, my informants were convinced that they were indeed man-made traces deliberately left there to guide the descendants of past communities to the buried riches.

The proximity of these "signs left behind by others" to their ancestral villages, which they claimed to have inhabited for centuries, was not of concern. Some even contemplated the existence of Greek troves within their own houses even though they publicly claimed that their Turkish family had inhabited that particular house since time immemorial.

How are we to understand this social imagination of treasures across the Valley across seemingly natural interfaces? How is the discreet preservation of Greek interrelated with the imagination of traces of past communities—especially Greeks—in intimate sites even though locals publicly disassociate from the Greek heritage? What does locals' imaginings of "signs", treasures, and specters across the landscapes, then, tell us about the afterlives of the cultural heritage that was destined to wither away?

Since narratives of treasures are widely circulated despite their almost unanimous fruitlessness, the importance of these narratives and hunts, I argue, may lie in the very ways they engage unaccounted, abjected memories in spectral, affective, magical, and topographical forms. Even though my interlocutors ardently deny the socio-historical presence of Greeks within the contours of the Valley (in line with their support for Turkish nationalism), narratives of and hunts for Greek treasures across their ancestral villages affirm the Greek heritage of the Valley and the communities inhabiting it. The narratives incessantly resuscitate the memory of Greeks (and others) across intimate spaces as if they

"have an ongoing presence" (Gordillo 2014, 36).

These engagements with treasures may be seen as spectral, corporeal, and topographical engagements with the banished cultural heritage.

Places that people dwell in, then, may preserve and animate abjected fragments of collective memory through a diverse range of implicit and often incoherent engagements that may at first seem senseless and rather destructive. As these fragments remain unaccounted and "incorporated", albeit in muted forms, into the local topographies, communities may very well be "acting out" (Freud 1995 [1914]), transforming the abjected memory into practices, narratives, imaginations through which they keep on engaging with it in different modalities. When the nationalist matrix stipulates the foregoing of Greek (heritage) for one to assume their position as a Turkish subject, for instance, communities had to maneuver across the politico-legal prerequisites of Turkish citizenship and the socio-cultural practices that made up the very kernel of communal identity. As the language was precluded from the very definition of Turkishness and was destined to die out, however, it did not simply wither away but may have very well been transfigured into different versions with different functions that are further amended through replications and reinterpretations. Today, Romeyka, as I indicated above, marks communal extents, carries family genealogies, and mediates community's relations to the places they dwell in as well as providing the community with a detailed mapping of the Valley.

Its afterlives, in this sense, not only strive to "live on" against all odds but instantiate different senses of place through engendering specters and "signs" across intimate sites.

Afterlives of cultural heritages, in this sense, are intricately linked to specters that "do not sit still" and "crack through pavements" (Tsing 2017, 8) across homely spaces to haunt our social lives, to evoke affects, and to take new forms. Tracing their transfigurations reveals how memories persist and live through

erasures, multiply into both spectral and topographical forms, and get re-worked to assume new meanings and relations. These reworkings seem to involve a diverse range of imaginations, desires, narratives, and practices that are brought to the public through the mediation of material and immaterial means. What remained historically unaccounted in the case of the communities living by *Dipsiz Göl*, for instance, may have very well been implicated in the generation and circulation of treasure-narratives. Although it seems both insensible and illogical to outsiders, the very plausibility of a trove beneath a lake or inside a hill, for many, may be appealing enough because of these very imaginations, myths, and specters evoked by cryptic residues across our social lives. Understanding how natural interfaces are narrated to hold treasures, in this sense, requires us to be attuned to the afterlives of heritages and memories.

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IMAGE SOURCES

Featured Image via Good Free Photo, unknown author, CCO

Dipsiz Göl before and after the "treasure hunt" (Source:online newspaper Sözcü Gazetesi)

Landscapes near Trabzon (Turkey): Images by Abdullah Muashi found on Flickr here and here (CC BY 2.0)

Text Fragment Image by Erol Saglam, in Trabzon

Screenshot of Definelyyou Forum taken by Erol Saglam

This post is part of the #Afterlives thread, for which we already published #Afterlives: Introduction, #Afterlives: Shaheen Bagh and the Force of Foundation, and Haunted: Spirits and the Agency of the No Longer in Niger

Lieux chargés: afterlives of Stolpersteine

Rachel Lehr
May, 2020

Europe's largest decentralised memorial is artist Gunter Demnig's [Stolpersteine](#) —'stumbling stones'— small brass plaques installed in the pavement in front of

the former homes of victims of Nazi persecution.[1] The plaques are controversial, and have been celebrated, imitated, and vandalised, triggering myriad afterlives.[2] These installations are counter-memorials, a genre of art and memory activism. They are alternative sites of commemoration, creating uncharted, improvised, unscripted modes of memory. Undermining popular versions of history, and even national narratives, counter-memorials emerge as political experiments clothed as dissenting street art [3] or vernacular events.

What makes some memorials spark a deeply emotional charge, or engender controversy?

What makes some memorials spark a deeply emotional charge, or engender controversy? How do charged sites affect the act of remembering? What does the process of engaging with memorialisation imply? The discussion below grapples with these questions, proposing a new concept, lieux chargés, as an explanatory tool. We explore how, when counter-memorials assume qualities of lieux chargés, they generate afterlives.

Ethnographic fieldwork with the artist in eight countries over the course of two years, took us to over 50 installations. We observed a range of improvised rituals, interviewing descendants and local participants. The concept of lieux chargés (loosely translated: 'salient sites') arose from analysing this research. Lieux chargés conjoins the term *objet chargé* and Pierre Nora's notion of *lieux de mémoire*, but crucially adds a dynamic dimension: the memorials in question are participatory over a longue durée.[4] We recognise the centrality of affective affordances, materiality and time in the conception of lieux chargés. Thus lieux chargés animate the afterlives of counter-memorials.

To date, more than 70,000 Stolpersteine have been embedded in pavements across 26 countries in Europe. On each individual stone the name, date of birth, death, and place of death, when known, are engraved in brass. In the local language, they each begin with 'Here lived…'[5]

The experience of stumbling across a stone with a name and date of deportation and death, on the very site where the horror was initiated, evokes an intensified sense of the historically charged nature of the site. In this way, Stolpersteine become a part of the material landscape. Carrier suggests that pedestrians who stumble across them are forced to make a moral decision, that is, either to ignore the stone and the name, or, to recognise it (Carrier 2016).

The stones neither protrude nor demand attention; rather, they are quiet, humble invitations to the observer. Typical of counter-memorials, these stones are unexpected encounters; as one observer noted, 'You may not intend to visit the memorial, yet this one will visit you!' (Høg Hansen 2008:173).

After the stones are installed, the afterlives emerge. People continuously engage with the altered landscape; for example, they follow marked routes to read and contemplate the stones in given neighbourhoods. In both Norway and Denmark we observed primary and high school students researching and visiting Stolpersteine as part of school curricula. Thus the afterlives of Stolpersteine are made manifest through participatory engagement over time.[6]

Stolpersteine beget more Stolpersteine. Originally Demnig created the plaques as a one-off guerilla installation. As the stones attracted attention, descendants of victims began commissioning them for their murdered relatives. Over the past 25 years the project has grown into a massive memory initiative, and stones are commissioned not only by descendants, but municipalities, church groups, schools, museums, and more.

This project has taken on its own iterative logic. The more stones there are, the more they are seen, discussed, and shared, generating further afterlives

This project has taken on its own iterative logic. The more stones there are, the more they are seen, discussed, and shared, generating further afterlives. An interlocutor noted, 'it's become like a status symbol–every town needs its Stolperstein.' To wit, there is a one-to-two year waiting list for new commissions.

Furthermore, identifying these memorials as lieux chargés enables a reckoning of the Stolpersteine proliferation as afterlives.

On the road ten months a year installing Stolpersteine, Demnig speaks of his art as his *'Lebenswerk'* —his life work—stating that 'everything that happens after I leave the stone is also art.' Thus does the afterlife of a Stolperstein become an essential dimension of the artwork itself. Demnig is a follower of [Joseph Beuys](#), who coined the term 'social sculpture' to embody art's potential to transform society. The afterlives of the Stolperstein social sculpture might include ceremonies of devotion, stone polishing, individuals stopping and reading, court battles, city bans, vandalism, and articles, books, and films. We observed dozens of ceremonies, replete with improvised rituals drawing from secular and sacred traditions. Hybridised Jewish-Christian prayers, traditional Jewish prayers for the dead, candles, and musical performances and participation (see below). Through his initiative, Demnig not only primes the canvas, waiting for improvised afterlives to emerge, but he is instigating a conversation across time and space.

Stolpersteine serve as material markers in landscapes, provoking myriad emotional reactions and interpretations. Both biographical and historical, they equally can be deeply personal, linking the present to the past. For example, many descendants have remarked that as their relatives perished in death camps, the Stolpersteine have symbolically replaced the absent gravestones. Nevertheless, the artist never intended Stolpersteine to stand for gravestones; rather, they mark a place where people once lived. Following the artist's vision, events and attention to the stones open the possibility of many 'lives' in the afterlives.

Following the artist's vision, events and attention to the stones open the possibility of many 'lives' in the afterlives.

The affective content of lieux chargés was evident at an installation in Berlin. An older woman passing by stopped and listened to the prayers, music, and speeches; she was visibly moved, and her eyes welled up as she spoke about the

past horrors visited on this site. Likewise in Copenhagen, two generations of Israeli descendants came to the installation of a stone of their grandfather and great-grandfather. One of them lovingly cradled his great- grandfather's ring that had found its way to the family after the war.

A central component of Stolperstein installations is music. We observed multiple forms performed at the installations, from the *Schindler's List* theme to Ave Maria to sea shanties. But only a Yiddish lullaby brought the assembled–including many elderly survivors–to tears. When the musicians were interviewed, they revealed that this was their aim, choosing music that would emotionally resonate with the people gathered. For Demnig too, the affective dimension is part of the social sculpture; he says he calls them stumbling stones, hoping people will 'stumble with their hearts and minds.'

Thus do materiality, the sensorium, and affective affordances mutually reinforce the emotional charge of such moments and places, made meaningful as past and present converge.

Thus do materiality, the sensorium, and affective affordances mutually reinforce the emotional charge of such moments and places, made meaningful as past and present converge. Taken together, the power of Stolpersteine expands exponentially, in a multiplier effect, as part of the internationalization of Holocaust memorialisation. Crucially, Stolpersteine paradoxically juxtapose a unique but identical material object. In other words, while reflecting the individualised specificity of the person memorialised, they are unified by their international conformity. These intersections render Stolpersteine so very charged, a quintessential expression of lieux chargés.

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Countless people spanning 7 countries took the time to be interviewed and share their uncensored emotions, reactions and personal histories, as did those who allowed us to participate in their own Stolperstein installation ceremonies.
The two Allegra Lab readers, Duane Jethro and Banu Karaca, provided thoughtful and useful improvements.

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[1] Stolperstein is singular, Stolpersteine plural.

[2] A longer, more in-depth discussion of lieux chargés and related topics can be found in Mandel and Lehr, 'Failing to Remember: Afterlives and Stolpersteine in the Nordic Region,' in Journal of Jewish Studies, forthcoming, 2020.

[3] For a discussion of a Holocaust street art counter-memorial, see Chapter 4, in Ruth Mandel, Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish challenges to citizenship and belonging in Germany.

[4] The objet chargé can be a salient object with a potential for fetishisation (Spyer 1998); it implies an "ability to capture the fascination of the viewer, and above all to disturb the surrounding space…' Jean-Michele Sanejouand

[5] The brass stones commemorate Jews, Roma, Sinti, homosexuals, dissidents, Jehovah's Witnesses and victims of euthanasia.

[6] [Stolpersteine in Budapest](#) ; [stolpersteine-berlin.de](#) ; [culturalgems](#) ; [Hjemme Borte](#)

Featured image by Ruth Mandel and Rachel Lehr.

Turkish Cemeteries for the "Unknown"

Asli Zengin
May, 2020

I first heard about the Cemetery for the Unknown from a friend, Ceyda, while returning from the funeral of her friend, Sibel. Sibel was a trans woman sex worker in her fifties who died abandoned by her family, a story that is common among trans women in Turkey. When blood families disavow their transgender kin, the deceased's friends and LGBTQ community usually step in and struggle to reclaim the funeral rights and the ownership of the deceased body (see Zengin, 2019). Following Sibel's funeral, I spent the entire day with Ceyda, a trans woman herself. She recounted another story, one where their efforts to reclaim the deceased body of another trans friend, Ayşe, had failed and the blood family did not let them organize a funeral. This other family had disavowed their trans daughter both in her life and in her death, and had requested that the state bury Ayşe in the cemetery for the anonymous, for the unknown (*kimsesizler mezarlığı*).Ayşe's family denied an afterlife to her, rendered her anonymous, and

cast her body out from socially recognizable scripts of mourning.

The cemetery for the unknown exposes a story of dispossession that denies the marginalized a social afterlife entrenched in a hegemonic spatial and temporal order.

The Turkish cemeteries for the unknown are graveyards where the state buries the bodies of those people who remain unidentified or unclaimed over a certain period of time. In practice, they are a burial site for social outcasts: homeless people, victims of honor crimes, disowned members of blood families, premature babies, and more recently, unaccompanied Syrian refugees. These cemeteries also contain the bodies of political detainees who were disappeared under police interrogations and state violence. Historically, the state has deemed many radical leftists and Kurdish guerrillas unidentified, denied families and communities these bodies, and buried them as anonymous corpses.

In this short piece, I focus on the cemetery for the anonymous to discuss the spatial ordering of death and afterlives at the thresholds of social and political life in Turkey. I suggest a term, *transgressive death*, to capture those social forms of transgression that emerge at the moment and in the aftermath of death in the margins of the social and the political. These margins may be ethnic, religious, sectarian, and economic in addition to gendered or sexed. A close focus on these transgressive deaths presents a "deathscape" (Maddrell and Sideway ,2010) of social and political margins in Turkey.

The cemetery for the unknown exposes a story of dispossession that denies the marginalized a social afterlife entrenched in a hegemonic spatial and temporal order. It marks the repeated eviction of the marginalized from social life at the moment and in the aftermath of death. At the cemetery for the anonymous, transgressive death and its afterlives translate into a mortal topography of margins.

Mortal Design of Social Belonging

As A.A. Sautkin notes, "the reintegration of the dead into the community of the living is an essential element of identification" (2016: 666). Practicing, claiming and naming a burial creates an architecture of memory and belonging that carves a place within the wider materiality of the world. "The cemetery," Sautkin continues to argue, "is a home for 'our' dead, who constitute a kind of a background community, it is a ritual space of remembrance (and hence the symbolic return of the dead into a circle of the living)" (2016: 662).

Yet the cemetery tells more than that. It is a social structure through which hegemonic forms of intimate and social membership are reproduced and solidified. In Turkey, the hetero-reproductive family, in its nuclear as well as extended manifestations, inscribes itself on the landscape of the cemetery. The cemetery design and architecture is cemented in and through blood lines. The cemetery is also tightly linked to the notions of home and dwelling, and hence, to belonging in land. Blood ties shape the cemetery grounds, dividing the landscape into minor clusters of familial genealogy and property.

We can approach this deathscape as a reaffirmation of membership in normative genealogies of social and intimate life and afterlife, and their associated regimes of property. Familial genealogy and property define the currency of belonging in a particular spatial and temporal order. In order to have a social afterlife one ought to belong to a family line, a land and a property regime. The cemetery for the unknown, however, embraces those who cannot belong or who are denied belonging in such social frameworks.

Blood ties shape the cemetery grounds, dividing the landscape into minor clusters of familial genealogy and property.

The three most popular cemeteries for the anonymous are located within the graveyards of Kilyos in Istanbul, Sincan in Ankara and Doğançay in Izmir. Cemeteries in other Turkish cities have also allocated specific sites to the burials

of the unknown. In August 2019, I spent some time visiting the largest one in Istanbul, the Kilyos Cemetery. Three lots are allocated to the cemetery for the anonymous in Kilyos. My first visit was to the newest lot which was located on top of the hill and has been open since 2009. The other lots have been around since 1999. The differences between the newer and the older lots were striking. The newest one is an arid, neglected and untended parcel of earth that is divided into equal sized rectangular sections bounded by concrete and covered in weed. Homogeneity is constitutive to this spatial organization. Each division has an assigned number on the side of the grave where I assume the deceased's head would rest. The highest number I could locate was 683. Here numerical representation functions as a technical tool either to manifest anonymity or to transform an already existing identification into an anonymous sign, into "non/status" (Sharpe, 2016). Inscription of the actual name is strongly tied to an acknowledged sense of one's place in relations of sociality and forms of social belonging. Without those bonds, the name loses its meaning as a public marker, as a locater in social topographies of life and afterlife, and the deceased is anonymized through the abstractive capacity of numbers.

In fact, later I discovered that there was an actual ID information behind most of these abstract numbers. The graveyard office keeps a ledger which has a record of entry for each number in the cemetery for the anonymous. If someday a claimant shows up for a body buried in this cemetery, they can resort to this ledger to sift through the numbers, find out about the deceased's identity, and spot the actual grave they look for. When I expressed my curiosity as to why names themselves were not printed on the graves, the officer responded, "if there is no one to claim the body, then there is no need for a name." The officer then made it clear that it was also a financial issue: unless there is someone to claim, there is no one to pay for a headstone. Municipalities offer free funeral and burial services but the remaining expenses are on the claimants. Headstone production specific to individuals is highly commercialized. Crafting a public marker of personal identity in deathscapes is a commodity that is available for purchase only in the private economy.

After my visit to the newest section of the cemetery for the unknown, I walked down the hill to reach the older lots. I was startled to find it so disorganized with hundreds of number plates sticking out of the ground, sparsely distributed or on top of each other. This disorganization, however, had an underlying logic of social stratification that brought certain dead bodies together. For instance, while touring in and around the lot I spotted other graves that belonged to deceased people with non-Turkish names. They did not suggest a particular place of origin or ethnicity but it was notable to see the "foreign" and the unknown buried in proximity to each other.

Another striking point was the adjacency of infant graves to the graves of the unknown. All had died before completing their first year in life. While the presence of headstones rendered these infants claimed, not abandoned, only a few had information that tied them to a family line. Their names were inscribed outside blood kinship networks, such as "Baby Ahmet", "Baby Nermin." One headstone was particularly striking with the inscription of "Baby Türk (*Turkish Baby*)," making the death of this infant sound almost like a nationalist sacrifice. Anonymity of adult death was accompanied by anononymity of infant death, assigning both a non-place in the hierarchies of social membership and belonging in Turkey.

Boundaries of religious belonging in Turkey also play a central role in the spatial organization of burials. In 2013, when an Istanbulite Christian family had to bury one of their members in the non-Muslim section of the Kilyos Cemetery, they found this section highly neglected. Later the abbot of the Protestant Church complained that cows were grazing and defecating in the lot, noting: "We did not feel like second-class citizens, we felt like animal faeces. We buried our brother among animal faeces. He did not deserve this! We work and pay our taxes for this country; we should have equal rights. If we are treated this way, then it means we have no value in the eyes of the state." (as cited in the [Agos](#)). In response to this complaint, the head of the Directorate of the Cemeteries in Istanbul made the following comment: "A large part in Kilyos has been allocated for Turkish citizens

of Christian sects, nonbelievers, and unclaimed people. People also bury amputated organs in this section. We will correct the relevant deficiencies." (as cited in the [Agos](#)).

> *The nation-state, as the sovereign, prevents the bodies of the insurgent dead from a socially meaningful afterlife.*

Judith Butler (2004) has long drawn our attention to those unequal and differential economies of mourning which proclaim some deaths as grievable while denying bereavement to others. One can describe the cemetery for the anonymous as one of the chief architectures in this economy of mourning, which can also turn into a weapon at the hands of nation-states. Hişyar Özsoy (2010) notes that biological killing does not satisfy the nation-state when it comes to people who rebel against its demands. The nation-state, as the sovereign, prevents the bodies of the insurgent dead from a socially meaningful afterlife.

In the 1990s, the Turkish state adopted a widespread war strategy of disappearing Kurdish people, and later dumping the dead guerilla bodies in garbage processing sites and landfills, preventing the community from practicing their burial. Since 2015, with the heightened conflict between the Kurdish guerilla forces and the Turkish state and the intensified siege conditions in several Kurdish towns, a similar tactic of warfare has resurfaced. Amongst other measures that target the dead bodies of Kurdish guerrillas, the state has buried some at the cemetery for the anonymous. [Veysi Karahanlı](#), a Kurdish guerilla who died during a clash with the Turkish army in 2011, is one of them. His family struggled through the Turkish bureaucracy for almost three months to have the Forensic Department run a DNA test and produce a report to invalidate his status as an anonymous person. Nine months after his death, Karahanlı's family members could eventually prove their blood ties to his body, received his bones, and transferred them to their hometown.

The cemeteries for the anonymous also attracted attention following the coup attempt against Erdoğan's government on July 15, 2016. In the aftermath, the

Directorate of Religious Affairs released a statement denying funeral rights and burial practices to sixteen soldiers who we were part of the coup. Ten of these dead soldiers were not claimed by anyone, and their bodies remained in the morgue until they were to be transported to the cemetery for the unknown. The mayor of Istanbul, however, had an entirely new cemetery, *Hainler Mezarlığı*—the Cemetery for Traitors— constructed for these soldiers (see Balkan 2019) to prevent them from receiving prayers by people visiting the cemetery for the unknown. He publicly stated that people should curse and humiliate the graves of coup-affiliated soldiers when visiting this new cemetery. Eventually, the Directorate of Religious Affairs intervened and the municipality of Istanbul had to remove a sign above the newly constructed cemetery proclaiming it "The Cemetery for the Traitors". However, the site continues to mark a mortal location for treason in popular imagination.

Rather than recognizing their dead bodies as an index of a person, they are reduced to an anonymous, material object in an attempt to destroy the possibilities of a socially meaningful afterlife.

Although Kurdish guerillas and Turkish soldiers are completely different subjects in the political landscape of Turkey, these necropolitical projects render them as the enemy within, "the terrorist" and ascribe similar meanings to their bodies, devaluing and anonymizing them through the lens of treason. Rather than recognizing their dead bodies as an index of a person, they are reduced to an anonymous, material object in an attempt to destroy the possibilities of a socially meaningful afterlife. Calling "the terrorist" by their name, underlining their specificity and representing them as real persons, would upset the carefully crafted national imagination

Conclusion

The cemetery for the unknown is a material manifestation of deathscapes and

afterlives of the social and political margins in Turkey. It is *an architecture of transgressive death*. The cemetery's structure and design delineate the ethnic, sexual, gendered and economic limits of belonging in regimes of family, kinship, religion, citizenship, and in practices of mourning and grief.

We find ourselves in a zone of transgressive death where trans people, victims of honor crimes, premature infants, Kurdish guerillas, unclaimed refugees, and homeless people are buried together. In this mortal topography, transgressive death finds its place through the work of anonymity. The bookkeeper of death registers their bodies, assigns numbers, and inscribes them as no one for the public eye.

But we know that death is not an ending; it is a beginning for multiple afterlives. Can these cemeteries actually contain and completely erase multiple afterlives for the anonymized? Or does the transgressiveness of these deaths also carry a potential that is capable of breaching and haunting the normative frames of death and afterlives? These questions take us beyond the confines of the cemetery landscape.

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All images by author, Aslı Zengin

The Afterlife of Impossible Friendships

Tanja Petrovic
May, 2020

"My best friend from the army was a unit officer responsible for food and supplies. His name was Đura and he was from Serbia. He was two meters tall and everyone was a bit overwhelmed by him. He was also married, had come to serve in the army late and had already had a small child." This is how Božidar, a retired transport engineer in his sixties started a story of his friend from the Yugoslav military (JNA) when we met in Zagreb over a coffee. He paused, took a deep breath, and continued: "Now, this is what happened with Đura. After one year of

service, I went home, and naturally – at the first opportunity I headed to Belgrade to find him. So Đura and I met. There were so many tears, we both cried. We revived our memories... you know, in the army we had shared everything. But then, in 1990, when the war started and Yugoslavia disintegrated, I called Đura. His wife answered the phone. She told me that Đura did not want to talk to me, that all of us Croats were... well... Ustaše, and that he would go to Knin to defend his (Serb) brothers. I tried to talk to him, to persuade him that I was also against many things happening in politics at that moment... To ask him whether he really believed that I could change after everything we had been through in the army... Look, I could not believe what he was saying. We had shared everything. I had met his wife and little kids, and I knew everything about his family. There was no politics there. His name was Đura, my name was Božidar... he was like a brother to me. But then the 1990s came... I was so disappointed. I do not know what happened to him later, whether he went to Knin or not. We have never been in contact again."

An all-men, total institution like the military, closely related to the notion of hegemonic masculinity, does not seem to be a space where deep, meaningful, and emotionally intense friendships could flourish. This seems even more true of the army in socialist Yugoslavia where all men who turned 18 or graduated from the university had to do mandatory service. Even though the JNA was a military institution where men from all Yugoslav ethnic groups served together and alliances and solidarities were based on moral and personal virtues and not on ethnic belonging, the violent disintegration of the country in the 1990s made such friendships largely impossible and imposed firm associations between the military, masculinity, violence and nationalism. The dominant depictions of men in the Yugoslav space after 1991 are shaped by either nationalist narratives that venerate heroic masculine figures, or by mainstream liberal, normative views on reconciliation that focus on men's marginal positions of opposing violence and war crimes: draft dodgers, conscientious objectors, peace activists, LGBT activists, and male victims of sexual violence. But such post-Yugoslav framing of men and masculinity leaves aside the experiences of millions of men who were in

between these two polarized positions – the men from all corners of the former Yugoslavia who performed army service together and found themselves on the opposite sides once the war began.

It provides no space for the stories like Božidar's or for the troubled male subjectivities that such stories unfold. These stories of male friendship do not only complicate the understanding of militarized masculinity, echoing [Foucault](#)'s (1981) warning that relations based on affection, solidarity, and friendship "at the same time keep [the military institution] going and shake it up." They also reveal army friendships' unexpected present-day agency – their capacity to question the seemingly fixed relationship between the past, present and future in the aftermath of socialist Yugoslavia and the violent ethnic conflicts through which it fell apart.

These "impossible friendships," inconceivable outside the barracks, and the gentle ties established in Yugoslav military uniform, were hardly transferrable to "normal," ordinary life.

Some of these friendships survived wars, destruction, and displacement in the 1990s. Some men [found their army buddies](#) several decades after their service, with the help of the internet and [social media](#). Many friendships, like Božidar's, did not last any longer than the Yugoslav state and its military. Numerous ties established in the army were never maintained after the service was over. Forged in the confined and limited space of the army base, far away from what used to be normal and everyday life for young Yugoslav men, army friendships were often based on similar character and cultural preferences much more than on shared geographic origin or ethnic background. However, sharing this limited space of the military, away from ordinary life, also made possible a different kind of friendship – those between men of very different backgrounds, as the one between the philosopher [Boris Buden and his army friend Jeton](#) from Kosovo. The two soldiers did not even share the same language, but they found a way to enjoy spending time together in free afternoons when they were allowed to leave the

barracks and go to downtown Belgrade.

These "impossible friendships," inconceivable outside the barracks, and the gentle ties established in Yugoslav military uniform, were hardly transferrable to "normal," ordinary life. The emotional ties between young men on the army base were woven by the slow passage of days, by plenty of time on long, lazy afternoons. And above all, their emotions for each other were shaped by an affective economy of care, a need for solidarity and mutual support among men exposed to the working of a total institution through everyday regimes of drill, discipline, and oppression. At the foundation of these army friendships lay a mutual recognition of men in universalist terms, as moral and virtuous humans, as "good men".

Several decades after the Yugoslav wars, social media are abundant with posts about reunions of men who used to be friends in the military. On March 4, 2019, one of the Serbian Internet news portals published an article about two friends from the Yugoslav army, a Serb, Branislav Ković from Bogatić, and a Croat, Ivica Krajina from Đakovo, who met again for the first time after 1984, when they had served together in the JNA in Pirot in southern Serbia. The article reports that Ivica and Branislav have often thought of each other during all these years, especially after the war started and the old country fell apart. "Of course, we also talked about divisions, war, and the dissolution of Yugoslavia," reported Branislav and Ivica on their reunion. "As mature and serious persons, we respect that each of us loves his country and nation. Such a degree of nationalism does not harm our friendship."

 The encounter of these two men would not have become media news if they had not been a Serb and a Croat. Such news confirms the completion of the process in which people's biographies were reduced to a single trait: their ethnic identity and the adjacent religious ones. They became Croats, Serbs, Albanians, Slovenians, Muslims, Catholics, Orthodox... They were killed, beaten, expelled, displaced, threatened, erased from official records, or put in concentration camps because of what they were. And they were killing, beating, expelling, threatening,

or burning houses of others because of what they were. In her recent book, Mila Dragojević provides an account of this process of becoming, zooming in on the formation of ethnically based communities of Croats and Serbs in wartime Croatia, 1991–1995. She defines these newly fixed frames of belonging as amoral communities, singling out as their important characteristic the fact that "the connection between ethnicity and political identity extends into everyday facets of life." In such communities, "instead of perceiving each other in terms of personal traits or community roles, people first consider ethnicities" (Dragojević 2019: 3). This logic of recognition and organization does not only flatten individual biographies, but also significantly closes political horizons: as Dragojević pointed out in an [interview](), amoral communities are "places where individuals don't feel free to express their personal views if those views don't align with one of those dominant views or narratives [of their perceived ethnic group]." In such places, "a person of a certain cultural identity automatically has certain political views and one doesn't give them any space to think otherwise."

Their afterlife in the post-Yugoslav reality, manifesting as a force to contradict, question, unsettle, and trouble what is given, normalized and taken for granted, unfolds from silence, suspension, hesitation, uncertainty and impossibility.

Recalling recognition and solidarity based on moral and personal qualities, friendships made in the Yugoslav army contradict and question this ethnicized logic of structuring reality established through the Yugoslav wars and normalized in the decades that followed. But their afterlife in the post-Yugoslav reality, manifesting as a force to contradict, question, unsettle, and trouble what is given, normalized and taken for granted, does not lie in what is explicit, preserved, revived, maintained and said. Instead, it unfolds from silence, suspension, hesitation, uncertainty and impossibility.

In the late 1990s, after the wars in Croatia and Bosnia ended, and before the NATO intervention in Serbia and the violence in Kosovo, Mitko Panov, a Macedonian-Swiss director and a former JNA soldier who had completed his

service in Titov Veles in 1981 and left for the US to pursue a career of an artist, came back to his homeland with a particular goal: to find out "what had become of [his] army buddies, did they find themselves carrying weapons again? Did they have to use them against each other? Who prospered and who was caught in the tangles of the war?" Looking for the men with whom he had shared a year in the JNA uniform, Panov traveled through landscapes laid to waste, across newly established borders controlled by the international forces trying to prevent new outbreaks of conflict. This was a devastatingly painful journey, and it is painful to watch the [documentary](#) he made of it. Reaching addresses where his army buddies were supposed to live, he finds burned houses, ethnically cleansed towns and villages, and his friends missing, dead, displaced, economically struggling, with ruined health and ruined lives. In the course of his quest for his friends from the army, Panov abandons his original idea of finishing the film and journey with a reunion party for his army buddies, because it was impossible to recreate a moment in which the future still seemed possible and bright from the confined space of the barracks in Titov Veles.

This possibility of a different future is a driving force that makes these impossible, unreconstructable friendships still alive and important.

This possibility of a different future is a driving force that makes these impossible, unreconstructable friendships still alive and important. These friendships live on in the present as a lingering reminder of this future past (Koselleck 2004). They are revealed in Božidar's incapability to accept the fact that his friend rejected him only because they come from two ethnic groups; in a special place some of the former Yugoslav soldiers keep photos of an army friend whom they had never seen after their service was over; in a long lasting desire to reach out and contact the best friend from the army that never becomes realized; in the hesitant, but persistent questions Kadri, an Albanian from Kosovo, poses to Mitko Panov about the destiny of Dragan, a Bosnian Serb with whom they were very good friends back then in Titov Veles.

These impossible, discontinued friendships have the capacity to destabilize what seems to be an unquestionable narrative about the past and the present that has no alternative in the post-Yugoslav reality.

These impossible, discontinued friendships have the capacity to destabilize what seems to be an unquestionable narrative about the past and the present that has no alternative in the post-Yugoslav reality. They are capable of questioning, disrupting, and complicating selves, biographies, and the temporal frames in which they are situated. The existence of a man who was a friend, somewhere else in another former Yugoslav republic that is now an independent state, constantly reminds one of a world gone and made impossible through wars and violence in the 1990s and of different, but irrevocably vanished, possible futures.

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Magical afterlives in post-genocidal Turkey

Çiçek İlengiz
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One enters the city of Dersim, surrounded by the steep holy Munzur Mountains in central Anatolia, after showing one's ID at several security check points along the way. Some of these checkpoints exist since the Dersim Genocide (1937-38), testifying to the history of the Turkish state's secularized and racialized violence

targeting the Kurdish-Alevi community living in the region. Following the Munzur River, to which the local Alevi population attributes mythical stories and magical capacities, one arrives at the municipal cemetery of Dersim. Adorned with flags and symbols of different political organizations, the cemetery hosts numerous heavily politicized graves. Carrying symbols and poems the graves introduce us to the history of armed resistance against the Turkish state's coercive power. The municipal cemetery of Dersim operates as a liminal point of contact with this history of revolutionary Kurdish-Alevi resistance. The graves of martyrs it hosts function like gates opening into the different temporalities forged by different revolutionary movements.

But at the cemetery's entrance, one encounters the grave of a different figure. Here lies Şeywuşen (Hüseyin Tatar, 1930-1994), one of Dersim's famous holy-madmen (*budela*). In [Dersim belief cosmology](), which intertwines kinship relationships (holy-lineages) with magicality attributed to the landscape, *budela*s have been considered pure, naïve people of holy lineages who are able to travel between the visible (*zahir*) and the invisible (*batîn*) world. They are considered capable of actualizing wishes by appearing in dreams, predicting the future and the like. While most *budelas* have not been framed politically, Şeywuşen's madness has been widely narrated in relation to a history of state violence. Some attribute his madness to the Armenian Genocide (1914-15), some to the Dersim Genocide (1937-38) and yet others to the 1980 military coup. His holiness, by contrast, has been perceived as a source of therapeutic cure and a capacity of revealing the truth (*hakikat*). Şeywuşen, homeless during much of his lifetime, was murdered by a high school teacher while sleeping in his usual spot in Dersim's city center. Like the rest of his life story, the story of his murder is contested: some put forward the "mental instabilities" of the mathematics teacher while others argue that the Turkish Armed Forces were involved. Shortly after his tragic death in 1994, his grave became one of the popular sacred sites (*jiar/ziyaret*) of the region visited by people seeking a cure for illnesses and/or with pregnancy wishes.

The graves of martyrs it hosts function like gates opening into the different

Taking a quick tour through the cemetery, we will see how different graves and their poetry produce different conceptions of afterlife through the way in which they negate death and claim eternity. Engaging with the seeming paradox of a place reserved for the dead that produces "endings that are not over" we will participate in a parade of dead bodies that have not been left in peace. Observing attempts to keep the dead bodies alive and their haunting presence, we will end our tour having a longer pause at Şeywuşen's grave, a gate opening into a future enchanted by magicality that is deeply rooted into the history of violence.[1]

Walking in the Ghost Parade

As a site that links the absent and the past with the ones who are alive in the present, the municipal cemetery in Dersim expresses the complexity of the political contestation that the region has been experiencing. It is unique in that it hosts graves belonging to fallen members of all radical social movements that are engaged in the armed struggle in Turkey. In a landscape of warfare where members of radical political movements have been subject to enforced disappearance, to burial in mass graves or relegation to cemeteries for the unknown (see Zengin in this thread), these graves testify to contested dead bodies whose social afterlives have not been taken away by the Turkish state.

The aesthetics of the graves varies from not marking the death date at all (fig. I), to slogans (fig. II) and poems (fig. V) inscribed into the gravestones and engraved photographs of the dead (fig. I and III) on the gravestones. At some, a place near the grave is allocated for lighting candles and the trees nearby the graves are turned into wish-trees (fig. III) where visitors tie pieces of shapeless tissues. Some expressions on the graves explicitly reject death as an end point, such as the slogan of "Martyrs are immortal" [2] and the practice of not marking the death date (fig. I).

These graves testify to contested dead bodies whose social afterlives have not

been taken away by the Turkish state.

Others keep the martyr alive implicitly by making them a part of the movement's temporality, for instance through slogans like "They died but were not defeated" (fig. II) [3] or "We die as one, but come back as thousands" [4].

Common to these resting places of revolutionary martyrs, even if they belong to different political movements, is the attempt to express that the afterlives of dead bodies have political potency. Their grave is a site where the sense of continuity between the past and the present is established in order to forge the future prospect of the movement.

The sense of continuity created through slogans and practices generates an inclusive time frame of revolutionary victory, which has not happened yet but is projected onto the future. The victory also belongs to those who were martyred and contributed with their lives to its arrival/achievement. The martyr unifies with the "cause" and gets embodied in its temporality through dying. In this temporal frame, time flows towards the telos of revolution and the dead bodies of guerillas are kept alive thanks to their contribution to that telos. In other words, the afterlife of these dead bodies operates within the political legacy produced by the temporalities that are flowing towards the telos of revolution. In that sense, the grave of a martyr finds its place in a greater narrative and becomes a site to regenerate the revolutionary struggle's temporality. This process allows not only to make sense of death or establish a grief regime for those who are still alive but also renders the grave a politically potent place where the revolutionary narrative is kept alive. In that sense, dying for a cause that is greater than the individual makes the grave of a martyr a site where the loss of the past connects with the ones who are alive to cultivate the future prospect of the movement that the dead body belongs to.

A Site for Magical Afterlife: Şeywuşen's Grave

Completing the tour and returning to the entrance point, one encounters another

grave, turned almost black due to the smoke of the candles that have been lightened on all sides. The grave of Şeywuşen is accompanied with a poem which also negates his death, but it does so differently than is the case at the martyr graves. "Death is not where the world ends/ I understood that with you" [5]. The poem continues elaborating a continuity between Şeywuşen's life and afterlife with references to the Munzur river, mountains and the sun, which are attributed holiness in the region: "And you stand at the top of the mountains/ Wondering where the Sun is rising/ Surrendered by the broken statues of Gods/ You are the only one standing up/Sleeping like an innocent child/And Munzur is flowing next to your feet/You are touching the water and drawing things on it/Who knows what you are thinking?" [6] While the entire poem quoted above is inscribed on the statue Şeywuşen was granted after his tragic death in Dersim's city center, only the last four lines were inscribed on the gravestone: "You are smiling to our callused heart and frozen face/ Tell us Seyit Hüseyin, why in such a rush? / Are you going to that unknown city?" [7]

While the elements referring to the religious cosmology that Şeywuşen embodied and participated in – such as the sun and the holy Munzur river and mountains – were left out in the part inscribed onto the gravestone, Şeywuşen's grave is visited by female dominated crowds to get in contact with his holy capacities that were already known during his lifetime. The prophecies and miracles that made him popular started spreading widely after the coup of 1980, when the revolutionary leftist movements were brutally cracked down on and the Kurdish liberation movement along with the struggle for Alevi rights started flourishing. He became known for his abilities to predict upcoming dangers to protect people, to appear in dreams either to bring news or to offer protection against possible threats, and to reveal the truth in contested situations. His photographs started to be sold starting in the 1980s at wedding ceremonies and were displayed on the walls of private and public places next to photographs of revolutionary and/or politicized religious figures such as Che Guevara, Alevi revolutionary leader Ibrahim Kaypakkaya, the medieval Alevi poet Pir Sultan and the like.

Şeywuşen's definite entry into the Dersimi iconography is connected to his

capacity to reveal a silenced truth in public space. Sleeping on the streets, Şeywuşen woke up they day following the 1980 coup – when a curfew had been imposed – and could not see anyone on the streets. When he saw a group of soldiers he approached them and asked where they took everyone to massacre them again. People in Dersim interpreted this phrase as an attempt to establish continuity between the silenced experience of the Dersim Genocide and the state terror of the 1980 coup, which marks the second 38 (Dersim Genocide) in the collective memory of Dersimis. Flashing up a wounded memory at a moment of danger, Şeywuşen appeared as a character suggesting a creative engagement with collective loss to make sense of contemporary violence, and took his place next to revered oppositional figures.

His grave represents a site where engagement with loss takes a different shape; a therapeutic one. People living in Dersim or in the diaspora come to visit his grave, light candles, make wishes, pray and cry while exchanging narratives of his prophecies in between gossip and everyday conversations. They take a piece of soil from his grave to become healed, get pregnant or find a benevolent partner. This therapeutic relationship is nourished both by the power of the holy lineage that Şeywuşen comes from and the power of Dersim's landscape that has been accorded magical powers. Coming from the Kureşan lineage that is believed to be the continuation of the holy lineage of the Twelve Imams grants Şeywuşen not only the capacity to perform prophecies but also mobilize the holy capacity of natural sources. His grave is a site where his holy capacities generate the power to offer a therapeutic smile to ''callused heart and frozen face'' as the poem on his grave indicates. Among heavily politicized martyr graves, the grave of Şeywuşen remains a site where the history of state violence is expressed in implicit ways.

The stories that associate his madness with state violence are not expressed on the grave stone. Instead, the emphasis was put on the negation of his death through a poem entitled *You have not died*. The attempt to keep Şeywuşen alive with a narrative that does not place his loss in any pre-established political narrative allows cultivating a creative engagement with his loss. While at martyr graves revolutionary movements are kept alive by commemorating the loss of

individual militants, at the grave of Şeywuşen what is creatively brought back to today is the cosmology that was targeted during the Dersim Genocide.

Şeywuşen's grave constitutes a site where the loss of the Dersim Genocide has been transformed into a capacity for healing.

While visiting the graves of revolutionary martyrs we are taken into the temporality of diverse revolutionary movements flowing towards different historical endpoints. When we stop at the grave of Şeywuşen we are taken into a cosmology grounded in the magical attributes of Dersim's landscape, inhabited by members of holy lineages who organize everyday life with relative autonomy. It was this cosmology which the 1938 Dersim Genocide attempted to destroy, along with the lives of over ten thousand people and thousands more who were sent into exile. Situated in the savage slot starting from late Ottoman times, Dersim has been occupying both imperial and national imaginaries of the constitutive racial and religious Other. In that sense, the genocidal violence of 1938 indicates not only the peak of the fantasy of incorporation into the shared national time and space. It also connotes the brutal dispossession of the idea of relatively autonomous spaces within the Turkish state's racialized and secularized rule.

Şeywuşen's grave constitutes a site where the loss of the Dersim Genocide has been transformed into a capacity for healing. It operates as a site where one gets in touch with the wound of Dersim, heals oneself through this engagement and hopefully cultivates new generations. While negating death and including the afterlife into a temporality where past, present and future merge, unlike the martyr graves, the future prospect generated through this engagement is not faced towards a victorious future. Instead, it is faced towards an unreconciled past, which suggests open ending mourning instead of being healed by a victorious telos. Next to martyr graves that are generating narratives of enchantment with a revolutionary future prospect, the grave of Şeywuşen calls for a magical future prospect embedded in the wound of Dersim.

Notes:

[1][Photography as a research medium in cemetery research](#) complicates the question of temporality by capturing a moment that has already past and bringing the period of research into the present as material traces from the field. Leaving elaborations on the temporal connotations of the medium of photography and the afterlife of the fieldwork aside for this short post I would briefly like to place the images in time. The photographs used in this post were taken as part of my doctoral research between 2014 and 2018, a period of short and precarious ceasefire between the Kurdish liberation movement and the Turkish Armed Forces followed by brutal military clashes.

[2] Şehitler ölmez!

[3] ldüler yenilmediler!

[4] Bir ölür bin doğarız!

[5] Değil, ölüm dünyanın bittiği yer/Sende anladım bunu, sende çözdüm.

[6] Ve sen karşımda, dağlarımın yücesinde /Güneşin doğduğu yerde öyle bakmaktasın/ Etrafında yıkık Tanrı heykelleri/Aralarında bir tek sen ayaktasın/Uyumaktasın günahsız bir çocuk gibi/Ve Munzur akmakta ayaklarının önünde/Ellerinle suya dokunup bir şeyler çiziyorsun/Kim bilir Seyit Hüseyin neleri düşünüyorsun?

[7] Nasırlaşmış yüreğimize, buz tutmuş yüzümüze bakıp gülümsüyorsun/ söyle Seyit Hüseyin bu acele niye?/ Yoksa bilmediğimiz o şehre mi gidiyorsun?

All pictures, including the featured image, are by author, Çiçek İlengiz.

Tears and Dreams of a Martyr

Kinda Chaib
May, 2020

"When my father went, he knew he let me in safe hands. It means that instead of one hand, I have a million hands; instead of one hug, I have hearts filled with love and tenderness. That's why I ask you not to spoil me; guide me, don't let me and if you see me lose my way, take me back, in the name of the martyr's blood, don't let me down"

'Alî, a 10-year old boy in Tears and Dreams, 2009, Lebanon

'Alî is a fictional character, imagined by Fatme who wrote and directed the play

Tears and Dreams a decade ago. She wrote it in the aftermath of the 2006 Israeli war in Lebanon and it was produced by the Hizbullah's local women's committee. It was performed in Fatme's hometown village, in the Nabatiya region of South Lebanon. Fatme is a Hizbullah supporter; she works as a freelance journalist and producer for several television and radio channels (including, but not exclusively, Al-Manâr, the official channel of Hizbullah, al-Nûr its official radio and Al-Ahed, its official online media). The play puts children on the stage, supposedly orphans of martyred fathers, who tell their dreams, which they otherwise never enunciate publicly.

How can a theatre play make the martyrs present for their children and, broadly, for the community as a whole? Based on years of fieldwork experience in Hizbullah-dominated South Lebanon, I show that the play is a way of celebrating the dead but also a way to 'make community' by encouraging the living to assume untold commitments to the political collective. As a writer, Fatme – like others when they speak about a martyr – tries to "sculpt the image of the perfect testimony" (Baslez 2007: 10). What is that cultural product and what does it bring to the stage?

> *How can a theatre play make the martyrs present for their children and, broadly, for the community as a whole?*

"Tears and dreams"

Fatme mixes several techniques to bring the martyr onto the stage. There are two parts to her play, one on stage, with children acting, and one on screen, which shows a TV documentary about a martyr, Khâled, and his daughter Zahraa. The images are from the leftover footage of Khâled's official will, the parts where he may have mixed up his words, sneezed, or whatever else may have disrupted the recording of something as formal as one's will. Fatme shot that documentary a few months before the performance of the play. It was aired on Al-Manâr. Already in the aftermath of the 2006 war, she had told me she wanted to work on the

martyrs' families. That is when she first heard about Zahraa, a 10-year old girl whose father died during the war.

The parts on stage and on screen represent an integrated whole. In the play, the children tell their dreams and Fatme's voice-over explains the purpose, in a classic introduction to the concept of martyrdom. In the documentary, everything identifies the man on screen as a martyr: the religious phrases, the iconographic codes (Chaib 2010) and the subtitle "the martyr Khâled." By first writing and then telling his will to the camera, the living fighter explains his cause but, at the same time, he also projects himself in his own death. The play mixes self-narrative – the one by Khâled – and an unusual narrative about martyrs – the one by the martyr's children.

This docu-drama has different levels: Fatme's voice-over, the actors on stage, the TV documentary made from the recorded will of Khâled and interviews with Zahraa, his daughter. The documentary shows a fictional scene of intimacy between Zahraa and her dead father. The young girl acts as if she discovered the footage of her father's will for the first time. She wipes the tears from his face, his face being on the computer screen. As Fâtme told me, however, Zahraa had seen the footage of her father's will before the scene was shot.

The scene in which Khâled cries silently while recording his will was initially not supposed to be aired. When Fatme told me about this film for the first time, she said, "I shot two films, you'll see. One will make you cry, the other will make you laugh… There is a guy, here, a fighter… He never cried in front of anybody but after seeing the film he cried for three days, he didn't leave his house for three days." Fatme explicitly wanted to show the emotions, the links between a martyr and his loved ones, she wanted to make people feel the loss. The loss that Zahraa feels, just like every child who loses a father. She also wanted to show that these men were very aware that they would lose something, something really important

to them. More than life maybe. In the footage, Khâled cries while mentioning Zahraa, his favourite child and, as he cries, he explains to the cameraman that he cries for Fatima al-Zahraa, Muhammad's daughter and Husayn's mother. While crying for one's own death is not seen as legitimate, it is considered a good thing to cry for Husayn's family. So Khâled can legitimately cry for Zahraa according to the Shii dogma, using the ambiguity between the name of Husayn's mother and his own daughter's name. We can see this as a form of symbolic kinship, which daily connects the contemporary Shia community to Husayn's family.

The fighter's will: a polymorphic object and self-narrative

Let's go back to Khâled's will itself. The one aired on the theatre stage is not the one that was broadcasted by al-Manâr. Fatme had asked for permission to use the archives of the media of Hizbullah's military branch, the Islamic Resistance, for her documentary. These archives are not open for at least one reason: there, the dead fighters' wills are retained alongside the wills of the living fighters. If not systematic in the 1980s, writing a will is now mandatory for all fighters involved in the Islamic Resistance. And as the Islamic Resistance is a military faction, based on secrecy, they have to maintain confidentiality on who is involved in its military actions.

Therefore, Khâled's will has several lives and refers to more than one temporality. First, the fighter writes his text. Then he gets ready for reading it to the camera, knowing perfectly well that once he dies it will be released. Thus, the fighter takes part in the process of building the perfect testimony, for himself and for the group he speaks to. He gives advice to his family, his companions and more broadly to the whole Hizbullah society with all the legitimacy of the martyr who sacrificed his life for the others. He asks people to behave well, to act religiously in everyday life and to carry on the fight. In a way, when Khâled writes his will, he is already in the afterlife while still alive, and, conversely, when people watch him

speak, he is alive while dead [1].

Khâled's will has several lives and refers to more than one temporality

In the play, even if the children are the subjects, the martyrs remain the main characters. At the end, Khâled – now a martyr – speaks directly to the audience, from the afterlife. In his will the martyr asks the group to live an ideal life, and his status gives him the legitimacy to do so. By doing so, he puts himself, as the member of an elite – the martyrs – at the centre of the mobilization devices built by Hizbullah.

Khâled's legitimacy comes with his death as a martyr, but also from the vocabulary he uses. It is often close to the one the leaders of the party use (fight for the land, act religiously, etc). Nevertheless, his words may have more impact because, first, the audience perfectly knows the codes and, second, as a "normal" man, someone that could be a neighbour, a friend, a cousin, he is more familiar.

Here, the way Hizbullah changed the modus operandi of registering the fighters' wills is important. Before the 2006 war, they were more tightly regulated, shot in closed rooms, the fighter talking only to the camera. After 2006, the will is shot on a meadow, and al-Manâr shows images of the men walking, smiling or laughing. The purpose is to convey the image of fighters who are like everybody. Furthermore, by showing footage of Khâled's will, with him laughing and crying, Fatme creates an intimacy between the audience and the martyr. As a result of the legitimacy of his status and this staged proximity, his will does not fail to arouse emotional reactions in the audience.

A debt reaffirmed from the afterlife

If the martyr himself addresses his words to a wide audience, the children, too, explicitly talk to the public attending that day. A young boy on stage:

Don't tell me it's my turn to speak, I know I have to. I don't want to write because

what I want to say is buried in my heart. Don't be mad at me if I say God has to leave his father to a child. But me, it hurts me when I see a son holding his father's hand and I don't. It hurts me when I see a dad teaching his son how to swim and I don't. It hurts me when I see a son playing football with his dad and I don't. It hurts me because they do and I don't.

I have to become a yes, yes and yes, a million yes because, when my father went, he knew he let me in safe hands. It means that instead of one hand, I have a million hands; instead of one hug I have hearts filled with love and tenderness. That's why I ask you not to spoil me; guide me, don't let me and if you see me lose my way, take me back, in the name of the martyr's blood, don't let me down.

The boy does something similar to the martyr in his will. He enunciates the responsibility that is now the audience's, pointing out that the public is alive and free, because his father sacrificed himself. Since the fighter gave his life for the group's sake, the group now has to take responsibility for his child.

On stage, the children personify the martyrs. They testify to their fathers' commitment and demand loyalty from the public to that commitment. With her work, Fâtme gives a polymorphic testimony of martyrs and martyrdom. At the end of the play, on screen, Khâled is very much alive; on stage, when his daughter Zahraa appears, he is very much dead yet present, via the screen. Through his smile, the tears on his daughter's cheeks and her hesitating appearance, Khâled becomes the most powerful presence in the room.

In a way, Zahraa, as she embodies the loved ones left behind by the dead fighters, is her father on stage, a few years after his death: she appears to be the living presence of the martyr in the world the audience lives in.

In the aftermath of loss, the dead fighters become material for remembrance, which political parties can build on, making them very much present in the community's everyday life.

The emotional reaction of the audience is a clue. People cry, applaud and, when Zahraa appears on stage and her father's image is shown from behind the curtain, the message Fatme wants to transmit seems clear: children are the legacy of the martyrs. When Zahraa stops after her preliminary words ("Peace be upon you. I am Zahraa... I am Zahraa, the one my father cried for, I..."), the public reacts and supports her and who she represents in her father's words: Fatima al-Zahraa after who he named her.

Hizbullah continuously adapts its discourse to the regional situation in which it is involved. Currently, this is the war in Syria. While Jerusalem used to be represented in almost all the martyrs' portraits, now it is the mausoleum of Zaynab in Damascus that is omnipresent. Before that, as we have seen, the martyrs' wills had slightly changed. Hizbullah's self-narrative is constantly evolving, and the martyrs remain an essential part of it. Through artistic and documentary work like Fatme's theatre play, a public self is generated that the martyrs embody, and by extension their children, too. In the aftermath of loss, the dead fighters become material for remembrance, which political parties can build on, making them very much present in the community's everyday life.

[1] Here we can refer to Rabih Mroué and Ilyas Khuri's video performance *Three Posters* (2000) about the wills of fighters from the Lebanese Communist Party, who carried out 'suicide missions' in the 1980s. While the fact that the wills are by suicide bombers changes their purpose, the authors' reflection on the relationship between life and afterlife is very relevant. *Cf.* Ilyas Khuri, Rabih Mroué and Mona Abu Rayyan, "Three Posters: A Performance/Video" *TDR: The Drama Review,* 50, n°3 (2006): 182-191. https://www.muse.jhu.edu/article/201930

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Featured image by [Stefano Stacchini](#) on [Unsplash](#)

A Trajectory and the Curatorial Turn

Nancy Rose Hunt
May, 2020

Where did *afterlives* fever come from? These reflections suggest a trajectory. Today, amid a lively eruption of usages, *afterlife* has moved away from longstanding meanings in religious, archaeological, and art studies, as "life after death" or "in an afterlife." The new fondness for political *afterlives* has multiplied since the 2000s, when the *trauma* fashion began to recede. Critical events, catastrophes, empire, and ecological devastation have inspired the turn: that is, *to what followed,* in lives and forms of living, in performing, publishing, and representing, and in generating an archive of some sort.

Many who putter in afterlives think with the sensory or futures, terms that also saturate – or oversaturate? — the humanities today.

Afterlives is often a heuristic for new experiments with remembrances, visuality, and memory work. Many who putter in afterlives think with the sensory or

futures, terms that also saturate — or oversaturate? — the humanities today. Those using afterlives as a framing device often develop a conceit about what followed a disaster or catastrophe. Others are finding afterlives in images, objects, and dreamwork. The evocative term confronts others wherever it goes, like afterwards, aftermath, traces, remains, archive, and curation. What happens to time in such processes?

Ruination as counterpoint

Some afterlives stem from a fresh awareness of grim forms of ruination circulating around and out of empire, the Cold War, and decolonization. *Afterlives* has never been a strong Ann Stoler word, though she drew important critical attention to *ruination* as concept and historical process.

Her work has taken scholars beyond trauma and explored enduring effects of catastrophe.

With *duress*, Stoler steered colonial studies toward often slow, delayed forms of imperial destruction along environmental, material, and political lines into the present, with sensory registers and also dissent. Aiming at what "people are 'left with'" in the wake of a chemical or ecological disaster, two *afters* emerge: the "aftershocks of empire" as in corroded landscapes and through the "social afterlife of structures, sensibilities, and things." Social ruination impairs honor, health, fortune, and futures. In lives touched by toxicities, reappropriations emerge. Those affected may become strategic within politics of the present. Temporalities illuminate injury through duration, endurance, and convolutions of aphasia (Hunt 2019). Stoler's desolate examples come close to various *after*-words yet without strong attention to afterlives.

Grappling with history as politics

An important postwar European study marked a new departure in historical writing: Kristin Ross' *May '68 and Its Afterlives*. Ross, in 2002, was already skirting trauma. This rubric of many post-Holocaust histories did not belong everywhere, she claimed, at a time when trauma studies were overwhelmed the humanities.

Ross's book was the first historical work to place *afterlives* in its title. She defined afterlives as politics, a kind of grappling with history — with postwar French history. Jettisoning trauma as stultifying, she showed how this 1968 "event" had become saturated by representations ever since. May 1968 had also endured, countered amnesia, and asserted significances in the face of distortions.

Ross confronted social memory and forgetting, ever alert to the ways World War II had fueled a "memory industry" where psychopathological categories tended to occupy the plane of history. Some, notably subjects still seeking futures as collective politics, tended to be bypassed with such castings. Ross rather – already in 2002 – sought an "affective register" for May 1968 and its afterlives, since memory associations suggested not the traumatic but a wide mix of pleasure, excitement, and disappointments.

Plasticity and liveliness

I came to a similar conclusion (though without yet reading Ross) when grappling with a sequel for a Congolese history of stark devastation. How the next generations deal with loss and terrible injuries *matters*. Yet I sensed that a

trauma frame would congeal subjects into overwhelmed victims and survivors, effacing social action and practice.

A Nervous State tackles catastrophe. And afterlives becomes a way to interweave into a history ripe with war, rape, mutilation, and insurgency during King Leopold's Congo (1885-1908), the festive, rebellious, and dreamlike from this time of atrocity to decolonization, and even beyond. Many afterlives are tender, sensed in ironic perceptions and mutinous unrest. I developed the heuristic through attending to memories, horizons, liveliness, performance, and therapeutic insurgencies. Such motion surged during the Belgian Congo years (1908-60), despite widespread childlessness and sorrow

A theoretical plasticity kept the spectrum wide. Other concepts anchor afterlives, such as verve and agility in this once afflicted rubber region. Georges Canquilhem on *latitude* — capacities to move and be in motion — enables parsing the buoyant, the advantageous, and the thriving. Gaston Bachelard's sensory *reverie* suggests playful daydreaming amid evocative, poetic sounds. Reverie as conceit stirred attending to the grandchildren of those struck by that early colonial time of horrific injury. They moved in diverse colonial presents. Many daydreamed about decolonization. Distractions — fishing, modern dance music, sexual banter, song — generated their energetic afterliving in this late colonial "shrunken milieu." Dissent, dread, and subterfuge came to the fore amid sensory registers, notably fugitive downtime in refuge spaces near copious fish and riverain sounds.

How the next generations deal with loss and terrible injuries matters.

Rather than portraying Congolese as bereft or forlorn in an *aftermath* zone, the focus is on accidental encounters and *aleatory* afterlives, to use that philosophical word that takes history beyond necessity. Althusser called for opening history to uncertainty and the not-yet-imagined. Congolese from this once rapacious region, decades later, knew anger and revenge but were alert to wonder and the unexpected. Their partial autonomy before an ongoing coercive situation came from their skills at secrecy and deception. Dismaying, troubling collective

memories remained amix , but bent to the unexpected in and through afterlives.

Aftertime and scientific remains

Wenzel Geissler created a wonderful STS-inspired archaeology of science in postcolonial Africa, [*Traces of the Future*](#), with Guillaume Lachenal, John Manton, and Noémi Tousignant, gifted all. *Aftertime* is their word. They stressed "tracing" places and remains from after socialist, Cold War, and developmentalist Africa, times also of "heightened awareness of pastness."

Journeying in five African countries, they located scientific spaces, medical ruins, past dreams and ways of "being with the past", encountered but rarely bleak. They focused on intersecting timescales, as if they were contemporary archaeologists. *Aftertime* speaks to temporalities, past horizons, and material remains. They sought the dreamlike and fictive within scientific sites that once promised development. Their notion of "trace" went with an activity: tracing a density of remains, whether in abandoned grounds or "wastelands." Scientific remains sometimes generated affective encounters, revealing how Africans looked toward pasts and futures. Afterlives, a word here left implicit, seem to hover within this elastic approach to time and temporalities, caught up with understanding one epoch, Africa's post-1940, utopian, developmentalist era.

Ruination has little place in this experimental book. One senses a tenacity in moving vocabularies away from consequences and effects to process and method: tracing among material layers. Rejecting the historicist, the project demonstrates ways of gathering memories, archival bits, leftovers, pasts, and futures.

> *Scientific remains sometimes generated affective encounters, revealing how Africans looked toward pasts and futures.*

The book's appearance jars and intrigues. Richly illustrated and curated, at first conveying the feel of a coffee-table book, it has a complex, mixed-hewn layout to its assemblages of texts and images. It is a fine example of an intensely *sutured* (Hunt 2013) book, one that draws on stunning images by a European artist-photographer, but also everyday archival and visual snapshots, all complicating the sensation of this book-object. If the tome highlights several methodologies, one is the curatorial.

We are all curators now

An intense attention to layout captivates, since it steers readers' senses toward plasticity in time, place, and remains (Hunt 2018). Such sensibilities suggest the practices of German art historian and cultural theorist Aby M. Warburg (1866–1929) who likely inspired the atlas-like quality of *Traces of the Future* with its assembly techniques. Warburg created a visual memory atlas in the 1920s, layering images, experiences, and epochs. His methods of ordering images and stirring audiences has become fashionable among historians, artists, and curators. At the core of it all was Warburg's concept of *Nachleben – afterlife*, whether as survival or remain.

Warburg's idea was that meanings emerge within and from the intervals between images, and these come from a mix of times and places. He also conceptualized collective remembering, combining memory with elements from various durations and seeking to move beyond a historicist fixation with turning points in history. Warburg was averse to historicist time and reckonings, adverse to aiming at empiricist anchoring to precise locations and dates.

Tracing an image's movements detaches it from any sense of a correct milieu, a

method Warburg performed for classical images reappearing during the Renaissance. Visual afterlives offer ways of understanding something transhistorical, symbolic, or psychological – or, I would add, something political about history and the present. Warburgian methodology curates unusual layers of text and image – and today many are adding acoustics and sound. Associative thinking and unexpected image sequencing are methods drawing attention to repetitions and patterns and seeking new arrangements. *Nachleben* also implies a disturbed sequence: to sequence is to unsettle, alluding to possibilities and risks or a stirring of uneasiness.

Whether we are engaging memories, fields, archives, or post-catastrophe afterlives, we are all partaking today in the digital, the visual, and the sonic. And, we all are curating somehow.

Warburg's practices of unmooring provenance and recurrences, and of interjecting, have been generative in visual, memory, and digital studies. He followed his iconoclastic, anti-historicist professor, Karl Lamprecht, in seeking *not* historical precision, but philosophical and comparative combinations and transcultural studies of collective psychologies and images for what I call *patches of time* (epochs). Warburg's ideas, very influential in gallery and museum contexts today, have much potential for anthropologists, teachers, and historians. Whether we are engaging with memories, fields, archives, or post-catastrophe afterlives, we are all partaking today in the digital, the visual, and the sonic. And we all are curating somehow.

Nachleben, therefore, shifts the emphasis away from context and context-based afterlives. And Warburg's methods open up the curatorial as politics, history, and engagement, showing the merits of the aleatory and *time scrambled*.

Conclusion

Afterlives **go** with history, with one or more pasts and their reworkings or durations, as in remembrances, images, or spots of time. Memory often motivates both scholars and subjects. Some afterlives evoke and use images, things, or remains. Ruination, whether from slow or sudden devastation, may be turned askew through afterlives of diverse modalities: lived, experienced, visual, sonic, religious, daydreamed, or with that curatorial turn that scrambles memory and time. By considering archival bits as remains and afterlives, layout techniques may come to the fore, with scholars and artists using counterpoint or a touch of chaos to position, engage, and productively skew images and texts. Historians may return to temporal devices like epochs, trajectory, duration, and sequencing to ground their histories in politics.

If some afterlives lift spirits, others motivate politics, inhibit bleakness, or beckon an audience.

Yet such interpretive techniques may be combined with afterlives as various and knotty, as packets of partial, gnarled memories. If some afterlives lift spirits, others motivate politics, inhibit bleakness, or beckon an audience. All complicate ethnography and history with their unfinished characters.

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Most pictures by author, Nancy Rose Hunt.

The Vital Afterlife of Chernobyl Cemeteries

Matteo Benussi
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Every year, after Easter, hundreds of families from all over Ukraine gather in the Chernobyl Zone of Alienation. People converge toward the now-deserted area to perform rites called *hrobky*, whose main feature is a family meal on the graves where their kin are buried. These rites are not exclusive to the Chernobyl-affected regions of Ukraine, as analogous practices constitute part of the Easter ritual complex across the whole of Orthodox Christian Eastern Europe. However, the *hrobky* performed in the Chernobyl Zone are unique in light of the peculiar landscape of loss and remembrance in which they are carried out – and the special moral salience that those commemorative banquets have come to carry for the uprooted and scattered community of Chernobyl *pereselentsy*, or evacuees.

Seen from afar, the Zone of Alienation stands out for its extreme otherness: first and foremost, as a geography of emergency and hazard, and secondarily as a hub

for ruin porn and extreme tourism. However, those who were born here and their descendants relate to the Zone quite differently. The *pereselentsy* talk about this deserted landscape as their *ridnyi kray* or "native land/territory": a space defined by now feelings of displacement and longing, on the one hand, and the ethical obligations of remembrance and care, on the other. Performing the *hrobky* on the ancestral graves is perhaps paramount among these obligations.

Early in my fieldwork in the Chernobyl-affected regions, I noticed that the cemeteries attached to ghost towns and villages were among the best-preserved structures in the Zone after the power plant itself and related infrastructures. In the case of cemeteries, however, maintenance is provided not by state apparatuses but by members of formerly residential communities that have long been displaced. Most graves are tidy and well kept. Crosses sport colourful flower wreaths, often made of plastic. Weathered, faded or torn wreaths are few and far between: the overwhelming majority appear to be regularly replaced or dusted. My interlocutors confirmed that most cemeteries in the Zone are regularly attended to. Authorities have established dates on which access to the Zone, normally forbidden, is officially permitted in order for *pereselentsy* to come back and fulfil what they describe as the moral duty of cleaning and tidying burial spaces. The week after Easter is one of such special windows of possibility.

The *hrobky*

On the day of the *hrobky*, visitors' first priority is cleaning up the tombs. The burial grounds, located in leafy groves at a certain distance from the decaying, overgrown settlements, reproduce to a degree the social order of the long-gone abodes of the living, with burial sites usually grouped by kinship. Many family tomb clusters are fenced by metal railings. Each fenced patch includes a few graves, benches, and often a wooden table. Upon arrival, attendees immediately start removing overgrowth and debris, weeding the spaces between tombs, straightening lopsided crosses, mending broken benches, or painting rusty

railings.

> *What matters is not whether ritualists literally feed their ancestors, but that they deem it important to recognise them.*

The festive meal (*trapeza*) on the tombs of dead kin follows. This is the apex of the *hrobky*. Glasses are raised to the memory of the deceased (usually vodka for men, sweet wine for women), with toasts being offered at least three times during meals. The deceased "partake" in the feast: colourful decorated eggs, sweets, a slice of Easter focaccia bread, and a shot-glass of vodka are left on the grave, often on hand-made embroidered towels (*rushnyky*) bearing religious motives.

Do *hrobky*-goers "really believe" that the dead feed on their offerings? Put in those terms, such a question would be ill-posed. As Katherine Verdery put it, what matters is not whether ritualists (think that they) literally feed their ancestors, but that they deem it important to *recognise* them (1999: 46): "In places that *take ancestors seriously*, […] the relations of living and dead are maintained through commensality" (1999: 140). Taking the dead seriously, here, is a *moral* posture rather than an ontological one.

Frequently, the festive bread and eggs have been blessed during the Easter service. For those who so desire, a priest may bless family tombs by waving incense over them and singing Easter prayers: "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life…"

During and after the meal, the community gets together, friends and acquaintances catch up and exchange a few words, acquainted families exchange food and join toasts. Each funerary patch, fenced-in or not, is configured as a domestic place – *sviyi* ("one's own"). Such lots operate like and are sometimes referred to as an open *khata* ("house"): passers-by may be hailed, and those who linger for a brief chat may be asked to come in and sit down to be treated to home-made delicacies, wine, or vodka.

Once the *hrobky* proper are concluded, many attendees move out of the burial grounds. By car or on foot, people head to the abandoned streets of nearby ghost villages, embarking on a secular yet highly ritualised "pilgrimage" toward what remains of their "native places" (*ridni mistsya*), hollowed out after the Chernobyl disaster. Some move in groups, reminiscing about town and neighbourhood life, recalling "how it was before," or taking pictures of empty buildings, collapsed roofs, and silent windows. Some *pereselentsy* prefer to remain alone with their recollections. One of them, Auntie Lena, once brought me to the ruins of her childhood house after the *hrobky*, "to make me understand" what it was like to live in the wake of such a loss.

Despite the haunting return of painful memories, the *hrobky* are not solely defined by a mournful atmosphere: a distinct effervescence runs through the crowd. Under the solemn tree canopies, the air vibrates with the chatting of old friends, jokes, barely repressed laughter, the smell of holiday food, the bright colours of women's shawls. The joy of meeting *ridni lyudy* ("close relations, kin;" by extension, "people close to one's heart" including non-kin) and returning to the *ridnyi kray* is almost tangible. Cheerfulness, however, must be mitigated by a respectful behaviour toward the departed and toward the ruins themselves, silent witnesses of a great tragedy that has never really passed.

The morality of remembrance

The Easter funerary rites provide an opportunity to visit not only the dead, but also the elderly settlers (*samosely*) who still reside in the Zone of Alienation: several *hrobky*-goers take advantage of the trip to keep them company and supply them with goods. Gift-exchanges also take place among *hrobky*-goers: on one occasion, my interlocutor Dmytro, a middle-aged man who dabbled in versification, brought with him a cardboard box full of poetry books to donate to acquaintances and friends. Other gestures of generosity and care are directed towards those who are absent: Auntie Lena, for instance, once cleaned up the

lonely tomb of a child whose relatives had been unable to travel to the Zone.

Ritual, thus, fosters conviviality and kindness. An ethos of heightened solidarity emerges with particular intensity at the very core of the community's memory landscape, the burial grounds: showing that places that function "as mnemonic devices recalling shared history" may also act as "moral guides for current behaviours" (Kahn 1996: 195). To *remember* and to *care*, Michael Lambek has observed, are synonyms "in several senses of the word: to care for and to care about; but also to take care of someone; to take care, as in to be careful; to have cares, as to be full of care" (2007: 220). All of these nuances converge at the *hrobky*.

Hrobky-goers explicitly described the Easter rituals as a cornerstone of a memory architecture that is built from the bottom up, alongside the "official" memory of state rhetoric.

What makes the cemeteries in the Zone such powerful affective and moral magnets? At the *hrobky*, vernacular Orthodoxy, filial piety toward the departed ancestors (*predki*), and a commitment to the cherished native land (near-sacralised through poetry, literature, and art), combine with an imperative that has come to define the *pereselentsy*'s post-disaster lives: the imperative of remembrance (*pamyataty*). Many *hrobky*-goers explicitly described the Easter rituals as a cornerstone of a memory architecture that is built from the bottom up, alongside the "official" memory of state rhetoric. In the words of my interlocutor Ira:

[Chernobyl] was a tragedy, you know, a true calamity (*hore*). This is the story of an unbearable pain. We come here [to the *hrobky*] to keep the memory alive in our hearts; it's so painful (*bolyache*), such an unspeakable longing (*tuha*) and anguish (*tryvoha*). But it is important not to forget, to protect memory, to pass this memory on to the new generations. It's vital to explain, to tell, to remember.

According to Ira – who had brought her teenage son Sasha to the *hrobky* –

handing down memory to the new generations was of utmost importance. Such conviction is shared across the evacuee diaspora: many of my interlocutors stressed the considerable economic and logistical effort (and – to a lesser extent – the risks) involved in traveling to the Zone for the *hrobky*. But, "whether one wants it or not, it is our duty to go."

A heterotopic afterlife

While the evacuee diaspora has created several *lieux de mémoire* outside the Chernobyl Zone, such as community-sponsored museums and monuments, such sites do not supplant the cemeteries in the Zone as mnemonic devices, moral catalysts, objects of care, or settings for collective rituals. To capture, at least in part, what makes the Zone's burial grounds irreplaceable in the eyes of the evacuees, I frame these sites' post-catastrophic vitality in the terms of a *heterotopic afterlife*.

Michel Foucault famously defined heterotopias as places where the "sites that can be found within [a given] culture are simultaneously represented […] and inverted" (1984: 3). Such a definition can be applied to the Chernobyl Zone as such: Chernobyl upended the pre-disaster landscape, preserving the "native land's" physical layout while turning its familiar tapestry of villages and towns into a mournful ruinscape. Heterotopias, stated Foucault, often imply *heterochronies*, i.e., breaks with the established organisation of time that seem uncanny and familiar at once. The Zone's unique temporal qualities – its haunting stillness, its crumbling ghost towns, its weathered Soviet monuments, as well as the mnemonic encrustations of evacuees' past lives – are well captured by this concept.

> *Burial grounds revert the alienated space of the Zone by reevoking the inalienable landscape of the native land.*

According to Foucault, cemeteries constitute a specific type of heterotopia (1984: 5): burial grounds are "other" in respect to the ordinary social spaces of the

living, yet they carry the traces of past lives into the present. The cemeteries of the Chernobyl Zone can thus be conceived of as heterotopias nested within another heterotopia. Burial grounds revert the alienated space of the Zone by reevoking the inalienable landscape of the native land, with its web of kinship and neighbourly relations crystallised in cemeteries' layout. This reversal might not annul the uncanny mournfulness of the Zone, but it lends tangibility and vitality to the nostalgic geography of the *ridnyi kray*. Heterochronically, cemetery-based activities puncture the deserted stillness of the Zone with the pulsation of unbroken, cyclical human presence and care. This emerges with particular intensity during the highly ritualised moment of the *hrobky*, when the *pereselentsy* join in a well-rehearsed choreography that lends this scattered diaspora a feeling of togetherness as a moral community united by belonging to the same *kray*.

On burial grounds, the Zone of Alienation's geography of mourning and the memory-laden geography of the *ridnyi kray* coincide like nowhere else. The heterotopic vitality of cemeteries in the Zone is testament to the "native land's" post-disaster perdurance and inalienability. By infusing these sites with vitality through the *hrobky*, Chernobyl survivors ensure a form of afterlife for their native land long after the catastrophe.

All photographs are by the author.

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