

Re-remembering Australia: Public memorials sharing difficult knowledge

Alison Atkinson-Phillips
Newcastle University
alison.atkinson-phillips@uwa.edu.au

Copyright©2018 Alison Atkinson-Phillips. This text may be archived and redistributed both in electronic form and in hard copy, provided that the author and journal are properly cited and no fee is charged, in accordance with our Creative Commons Licence.

Abstract: This paper explores a new genre of public memorials: those which commemorate lived experiences of loss and trauma. This work contributes to the growing body of literature on memory work in settler-colonial and transitional justice settings. Transitional justice has become an internationally accepted framework for societies attempting to move from civil conflict to peaceful democracy. While Australia's (post)settler-colonial context does not fit this description, transitional justice mechanisms have been widely adopted as a means of coming to terms with the nation's past. I offer four short case studies through which I discuss memorials that acknowledge human rights abuses, and consider the kinds of cultural 'work' such memorials are expected to do in the present. Firstly, public memorials are used by marginalised counterpublics to claim a space in the national story. Secondly, they are used to create spaces where survivors of human rights abuses can have their loss acknowledged and be given space to grieve. Thirdly, they are used as acts of witnessing, to speak back into the dominant public sphere. Finally, and more recently, memorials have been created by governments as part of the widespread adoption of transitional justice mechanisms. Such memorials are seen as acts of symbolic reparations and used to respond to claims of past human rights abuse on the part of the state.

Keywords: memory; human rights; memorial.

The building of monuments and memorials is a Western memory tradition brought to Australia by settler-colonisers. In special symbolic places across the country, statues and cenotaphs celebrate the nation's 'great' leaders and mourn those who sacrificed themselves for the nation (or its predecessor empire) in overseas conflict. However, the

past 30 years has seen a cultural shift in the way we have come to think about what is worth remembering. Rather than celebrating great achievement, service or sacrifice, today's memorials commemorate loss and trauma experienced by ordinary and, in many cases, marginalised groups of citizens. Instead of marking and mourning death, memorials and other forms of memory work increasingly acknowledge experiences people have lived through and survived. This paper gives an overview of the emergence of this new type of memorial in Australia. It discusses the kinds of experiences that are commemorated in memorial form and considers the influence of human rights discourse and transitional justice mechanisms in opening up space for remembrance of previously marginalised histories. Transitional justice has become an internationally accepted framework for societies attempting to move from civil conflict to peaceful democracy. While Australia's (post)settler-colonial context does not fit this description, transitional justice mechanisms have been widely adopted as a means of coming to terms with the nation's past. Using four short case studies, in this paper I explore the kinds of cultural 'work' memorials to lived experience are expected to do in the present. First, public memorials are used to claim a space in the national story. Second, they are used to create spaces where survivors of human rights abuses can have their loss acknowledged and be given space to grieve. Third, they are used as acts of witnessing, to speak back into the public sphere. Finally, and more recently, memorials have been created by governments as symbolic reparations to respond to survivors of human rights abuse.

Memorials are a form of public memory work that is often associated with the nation. Perhaps because of this, memorial research is often grounded within a national frame. There have been three extensive research projects into Australian memorialisation in the past 30 years. Chilla Bulbeck's (1991) study of 'unusual' (non-war) monuments was conducted in the lead up to the 1988 Australian Bicentenary, and considered the ways commemoration of 'ordinary' people differs from that which celebrates prominent rulers, leaders and explorers. Kenneth Inglis' (2008) study of Australia's war memorials offers important insights into the development of themes of service and sacrifice through war memorialisation. These are themes which also emerge in Bulbeck's work on settler-colonial memorials. More recently, the Places of the Heart research project, 2004-2008, funded by the Australian Research Council and led by Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton, focused on civic memorials created in the post-World War II era. Ashton and Hamilton identified a small but significant group of memorials that commemorate 'violation' rather than death.

The material presented in this paper comes out of research that builds on Ashton and Hamilton's identification of 'violation' as a distinct category of memorialisation. Rethinking this category as 'non-death' or 'survivor' memorials, my research sought to understand the emergence of this new kind of commemoration. Since the 1980s, a number of memorials have been created internationally that acknowledge places of trauma and that tell the stories of survivors alongside those who died; however, analysis of such memorials rarely asks what difference this makes. For example, a study by Patrizia Viola (2012) compares three different memorial-museums, two of which have few or no survivors; at the third, Villa Grimaldi in Chile, the majority of torture victims survived the experience. It seemed likely to me that memory would be treated differently at sites where the primary objective is to commemorate the experience of people who are still living.

My research has found that almost 80 public memorials have been built in Australia to commemorate experiences people have lived through, rather than died because of. All of these memorials have been created since 1985, and the number appears to be steadily increasing. I used three primary methods to source information about these memorials. The first of these was a survey of all Australian local government areas, requesting information about memorials that commemorated loss or trauma not primarily associated with death. The second method drew from secondary sources, looking at existing databases and online information about memorial projects using keyword searches. Alongside the Places of the Heart database, the Monument Australia volunteer research project (Monument Australia, 2016) has been an invaluable source. Finally, I also used word of mouth. This has often been fruitful in the early identification of new projects, as a number of new memorials were created while this study was underway (2013-2016). Having identified memorial sites around Australia, I have also conducted field research at over half the memorial sites, drawing on auto-ethnography, textual analysis of the memorial object and critical photography to get a sense of the kinds of places these are.

Australia's survivor memorials cover a relatively small range of topics, suggesting that the range of experiences Australians consider worthy of public memorialisation is quite narrow. Some 14, or just under a quarter, of Australia's memorials to lived experience acknowledge natural disaster experiences. The 2003 Canberra bushfires marked a change in the way natural disasters are memorialised, with a move away from remembrance of lives lost to a focus on the shared experience of living through catastrophe. Other survivor memorials acknowledge a range of lived experiences of loss and trauma, the majority of which are connected to human rights violations.

Memorial Topic	Description	Number of Memorials
Colonisation (Aboriginal perspective)	Since the arrival of Europeans in Australia, Aboriginal peoples have experienced loss of land and loss or disruption of culture. These memorials tell some of the history of settler-colonisation from an Aboriginal perspective rather than a 'settler' perspective, including struggles for self-determination or other forms of justice and recognition.	5
Forced Labour (South Sea Islanders in Queensland)	Between 1860 and 1904, South Sea Islanders (also known as Kanakas) were brought to north-east Australia as indentured labourers to work on northern sugar plantations. Many were not paid or lived in slave-like conditions. In 2013, the 150th anniversary of their first arrival precipitated a number of commemorative projects in Queensland.	3
Family Separation (Stolen Generations)	In 1996, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission found that Aboriginal children had been removed from their families and home communities as a result of assimilationist government policies, amounting to an act of genocide. Most Stolen Generations memorials are created at the site of an institution; however, their focus tends to be on the experience of separation, rather than institutionalisation.	24

Institutionalisation/Abuse of Children (Forgotten Australians)	In 2004, the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee found that Australia's state care system of the twentieth century was damaging to children and often led to cases of abuse and neglect. Only one memorial pre-dates this inquiry.	11
Migration (includes Child Migrants)	Migration is often a difficult experience, and migration memorials tell stories that include the separation of families as a result of indentured labour practises and refugee experiences. Just over half of these memorials (6) commemorate the experiences of unaccompanied minors sent to Australia from the U.K. and Malta, known as the Child Migrants.	14 (6)
War	Memorials that acknowledge experiences of war, rather than death in war. Includes civilian and POW experiences, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Walk, which acknowledges the broad experience of the Vietnam War.	4
Natural Disaster	Natural disasters are a regular occurrence in Australia. These memorials sometimes include recognition of lives lost in natural disasters (usually bushfire), but their focus is on the shared experience of those who survived.	14
Other	Homophobic rape attack; loss of home and community; torture; Irish famine; convict experience; forced adoption; cancer; and loss (unspecified).	8

Ashton and Hamilton (2008) found that since the 1960s there has been a significant trend for retrospective commemoration of events long since past. Many memorials to lived experience follow that trend. This is in many ways unsurprising, since there is often a long gap between the experience of trauma and public discussion of it. Similarly, stories of human rights violations and other injustices sometimes take a long time to be made public. This has been particularly the case in settler-colonial contexts, where there has been no definitive break with the past. The majority of the experiences of human rights violations commemorated in Australia's memorials relate to settler-colonial history. While a few deal directly with the experience of colonisation, others address its effects, such as the removal of Aboriginal children from their families and culture (the Stolen Generations); the institutionalisation and abuse of children; or the experiences of South Sea Islanders brought to Australia to work in sugar plantations, often in slave-like conditions. I would argue that experiences of postwar migration are also connected to Australia's settler-colonial history, since these stories are part of the (very) slow move away from the White Australia policy implemented at Federation in 1901 and the corresponding widening of definitions of 'whiteness.' The experience of British child migrants is part of that narrative, since those children were exported to Australia as 'good British stock' expected to help with nation building (Darian-Smith and Pascoe, 2013). These are all stories that have emerged in the public sphere in the latter years of the twentieth century, as the language of human rights has gained international currency.

One key characteristic of non-death memorials is that they acknowledge experiences that are shared. Memorial projects are sometimes driven by a few key 'memory activists' but to make it to completion they require the formation of a community of memory. This is a

phrase that has been used extensively by memory scholars without being carefully defined, although it has many similarities to Wulf Kansteiner's (2002) term "mnemonic communities." I prefer to talk about communities of memory rather than using the Halbwachian term "collective memory" to emphasise the point that not everyone within such a 'community' will have the same memory. I understand communities of memory as being formed by memory 'work' done through public practices including the circulation of shared texts, public art, activism, public history, heritage practices and in everyday conversations. These communities sometimes lead to or are sustained through formal groups and associations, but their members will move between a number of different communities. Michael Rothberg, drawing on the work of Avishai Margalit, uses the term "shared memory" in a similar way, to describe "memory that may have been initiated by individuals but that has been mediated through networks of communication, institutions of the state, and the social groupings of civil society" (2009, p.15). Rothberg also emphasises that "the borders of memory and identity are jagged" (2009, p.5).

Memorials to lived experience do four distinct but overlapping types of memory work. First, and unsurprisingly, the memorial form offers a sought-after signal to marginalised groups that their experiences are not only remembered but valued as part of the narrative of the nation. Second, memorials are used for mourning. They offer to the community of memory a space where their grief work can be carried out in a public setting. Again, this is an opportunity for public acknowledgement. Mourning memorials create sacred spaces for grief work, but also make use of less formal gathering spaces, such as barbeque areas, where stories can be shared.

The other two types of memory work are specific to memorials that commemorate experiences of injustice. The third type of memory work involves speaking into the public space as a form of "witness citizenship." This term is taken from the work of Macarena Gómez-Barris, who describes it as "forms of cultural, social, and political engagement that share an imagination about a traumatic past in order to activate and promote usually local collective solidarity" (Gómez-Barris, 2010, p. 31). Witness citizenship works to draw others into the community of memory. It is aimed at creating solidarity and is primarily undertaken by grassroots groups of memory activists. Finally, memorials are also used to do the work of symbolic reparation. This involves the acknowledgement of human rights abuses by the state. As Ereshnee Naidu (2004) has pointed out, while reparations in any form cannot and will not compensate for the human suffering, trauma and loss undergone by victims during conflict, memorials have become a means of reclaiming an oppressed history.

In the rest of this paper, I offer some brief examples of these four forms of memory work.

Claiming a place in the national story through the "Reasons to Remember" wall

A national study conducted by Paul Ashton and Paula Hamilton (2010) found that Australians have a high level of trust in the institution of museums. Memorials to lived experience are often placed within museum grounds, and this may be influenced by a

desire to make use of the museum's sense of authority. The "Reasons to Remember" wall at the Adelaide Migration Museum has become one way that migrant groups can draw on that institutional authority to claim legitimacy for their own story. The development of the wall had its genesis in a conversation in 1992, when the Baltic Council of South Australia approached the Migration Museum to ask permission to construct a memorial to honour those killed in their homelands while under Soviet occupation (Finnimore 2006). Rather than creating a standalone memorial, the Museum worked with the Baltic Council to develop a plaque. The "Reasons to Remember" wall now holds 12 plaques, each placed there at the request of a community group. Some, like the Baltic one, commemorate mass death. However, a number commemorate lived experiences of turmoil, often a catastrophic period of history, which led to the establishment of a diasporic community in South Australia. The wall has become a place where communities can come and remember together, as well as performing a role in asserting the group's identity in Australia.

Often requests for plaques have developed out of a relationship between the community groups and the Migration Museum after an exhibition in the Forum—a temporary exhibition space that community groups can use to tell their own stories within the museum (Szekeres, 2011). Both the Forum and the "Reasons to Remember" wall require a formalised community to have coalesced around a shared interest or identity. However, the temporary exhibitions allow communities to tell their politically complex stories with a level of nuance the plaques can only hint at. The permanency and publicness of the plaques require a carefully managed process of negotiation. Past curator of the Migration Museum, Christine Finnimore, has described the process:

[E]ach version of past events that is inscribed on a plaque has been carefully negotiated between the needs of the two owners—the community groups and the museum. What emerges is what each community wants to remember but also how the Museum allows them to say it. (Finnimore, 2006)

The fact that community groups are willing to work through this complex process points to the high level of importance they place on having a permanent place of remembrance.



"Reasons to Remember" wall of plaques, Adelaide Migration Museum, South Australia. Photo: Alison Atkinson-Phillips.



Donauschwabens plaque, part of “Reasons to Remember” wall, Adelaide Migration Museum, South Australia. Photo: Alison Atkinson-Phillips.

Mourning many kinds of loss

Memorials often draw on a Western (mostly Christian) funerary tradition and are associated with mourning or grieving processes. Grief has traditionally been understood as a response to death, but in the second half of the twentieth century it became more possible to think about grief as a response to other kinds of loss as well as to trauma. Although not all trauma comes directly from loss, it is widely accepted that emotional reactions to traumatic experiences can involve feelings of grief, and that certain kinds of losses can be the source of trauma. This expansion of the idea of grief has happened gradually and is relatively recent. In the late 1980s, Kenneth J. Doka’s *Disenfranchised Grief: New Directions, Challenges, and Strategies for Practice* (1989) gave a name to experiences of grief that fall outside traditional social norms—including situations where the loss is not the result of death. The concept of “disenfranchised grief” has been influential in giving legitimacy to those who feel a need to mourn non-death loss. For example, the Victorian Adoption Network for Information and Self Help (VANISH) referred to Doka in its submission to an Australian senate inquiry into forced adoptions. It argued that, “An adoption results in loss, of which grief is the anticipated outcome” (VANISH Inc. 2012).

The widespread social acceptance that grief does not necessarily come from death means that loss associated with lived experiences can be acknowledged in the same way as the loss of a loved one through death. In Kings Park in central Perth, Western Australia, the “Place of Reflection” is a shared mourning space developed by a coalition of five community groups after they had all applied, individually, to community funding body Lotterywest for assistance to create a memorial. The five groups are: the Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASeTTS); The Compassionate Friends; Healing Hearts Foundation; Soroptimist International of South Perth; and SIDS and Kids WA. They worked together for over a decade to bring the project to fruition. Speaking at the dedication ceremony in 2011, Perth radio presenter Graham Mabury described the shared experiences that brought the group together as, “the loss of family members, the realities of torture and the deprivation of human rights, the loss of country, the ongoing

journey towards Reconciliation” and termed it a “fellowship of sufferance” (Place of Reflection, 2011). The resultant space brings together these different kinds of loss—through death, separation, human rights abuse and other suffering—in a multi-layered space that demonstrates many of the characteristics of other mourning memorials.

Mourning memorials need to create a space in which grief work can take place. Such spaces need to be both public and intimate. In order to create such spaces, memorial designers use socially recognisable cues, including landscaping, visual symbols and the suggestion of ritual. Gardens, symbolic walks and water are all commonly used. Kings Park is a nature park spanning 400 hectares. The “Garden of Remembrance” is located at a high point surrounded by native vegetation and which looks out over the Swan River/Derbal Yerigan. A central pavilion, decorated by metal lacework, allows space for groups to gather and share their experiences. This can be booked for ceremonies. A path leads away from the central space through the bushland. It is interspersed with seating and words intended to be inspirational or comforting are embedded in the concrete: tranquility, compassion, friends. At two points, the path reaches a separate seating area. In these spots, a bench seat, again inscribed with text, allows mourners to spend time in private contemplation surrounded by nature and overlooking the river.



“Place of Reflection,” commemorative garden,
central space, Kings Park, Perth, Western Australia.

Photo: Alison Atkinson-Phillips.



“Place of Reflection,” commemorative garden,
seating, Kings Park, Perth, Western Australia. Photo:
Alison Atkinson-Phillips.

The “Garden of Remembrance” was created especially for people who did not already have a specific place to go in order to mourn. Where possible, and in keeping with a trend identified by a number of recent investigations into memorial practices (Doss, 2010; Ashton Hamilton and Searby, 2012), mourning memorials are situated as close as possible to the place where loss and trauma occurred. When memorials mark death, the return to such a site is bittersweet as it is the last place where the person they love was alive. For non-death memorials, the connection to the site is even more complex, especially when the loss or trauma being commemorated is not a one-off event, but an experience that took place over an extended period of time. For those who have lost their home in a bushfire, there are likely to be strong, positive memories at the site, as well as the pain of loss. However, in situations where the site of commemoration is an institution, the memorials may be both positive and negative. For example, the Colebrook Reconciliation Park, in the site of the Colebrook Home for Aboriginal Children, includes a mural showing children playing together. This suggests that for some ex-residents there are good memories associated with their childhood there. For others, the bad far outweighs the good, and for some survivors return to the site is not possible.

Like the “Garden of Remembrance,” many memorial designs incorporate a central gathering point. This offers a space where the community of memory can gather to share and acknowledge their own experiences. The bench seats at the “Garden of Remembrance” are another common feature. They allow a small group—members of a family or close companions—to visit a memory space together and spend some time sharing stories. Mourning memorials are often located close to other types of gathering spaces. For example, the Mount Annan “Stolen Generations Memorial” is close to a picnic area, allowing memorial participants the option of making the journey through the memorial pathway alone, and joining with a larger group at the end. Picnic or barbeque areas do not have the sense of sacralised space of the main memorial. In some ways, the comparison might be made between a funeral service and a wake, where the informal environment of the wake allows for a wider variety of sharing outside the formality of the memorial ritual.

Witness citizenship in Parramatta

Traditional memorials are created to remember the past. However, for many people, the past is unfinished business. Witness citizenship is the pedagogic task of sharing the difficult knowledge that the past continues to influence the present. The concept was developed by Macarena Gómez-Barris from her research into the Villa Grimaldi Peace Park in Santiago, Chile. The park is located at a torture site used during the Pinochet dictatorship; it is also the last known place where some of the regime's 'disappeared' were seen. The memory work that led to the creation of the site, and its ongoing use, has been the focus of much recent memory scholarship (see, for example, Klep, 2012; Hamber, Sevckenko and Naido, 2010; Violi, 2012). Gómez-Barris argues that the work of witness citizenship links local experiences to the nation, so that memory becomes about political engagement rather than individual contemplation. This is different from the kinds of memory work that claim a space within the national story by adopting already constructed, conservative narrative frames. Instead, witness citizenship challenges national memory with "the ongoing social, physical, and psychological wounds from the past" (Gómez-Barris, 2010, p. 31).

Transitional justice has become an internationally accepted framework for societies attempting to move from civil conflict or dictatorship to peaceful democracy. Although Australia's (post)settler-colonial context does not fit this description, parts of the transitional justice 'toolkit' have been adopted as a means of coming to terms with the nation's settler-colonial past. By adopting Gómez-Barris's term of witness citizenship to describe the cultural work Australian memorials aim for, I do not assume that the context is the same as for memory activists working in Chile, but aim to point to similarities between the work of memory activists who resist the call to 'move on' from their own pain to save others from discomfort. Maria Tumarkin claims that

When sites of death and loss are forgotten and all traces of the tragic events are erased ... The burden of memory is shifted onto the shoulders of survivors and victims' families. They, and not the society as a whole, are the ones who have to carry the full weight of knowledge and grief, while the rest are free to forget, free to absolve themselves of any link to the tragedies. (2005, p. 120)

In this sense, 'sharing' the story means also passing the burden of knowledge onto the wider community or expanding the community of memory. Memorials act as witness citizenship, then, when they are aimed at sharing the burden of knowledge.

Memorials as witness citizenship are highly contextual. Many of them are created by grassroots groups, and questions of finance, as well as access to and control over land, can constrain the ways memorial projects develop. The recently edited volume, *Memorials in Times of Transition* (Buckley-Zistel and Schafer, 2014) brings together a collection of international case studies that explore how internal conflicts and human rights abuses have been commemorated. The majority of these examples are memory sites that might be characterised as memorial-museums. At these sites, memory workers participate in ongoing dialogue and educational work. In contrast, most Australian

memorials to lived experience are standalone objects which rely on spatial, aesthetic and textual elements to support the memorial participant's engagement with the site and its story. Other types of interactions are limited to special events, such as anniversary days.

One Australian memory site of ongoing dialogue and political engagement is the Parramatta Girls Home, the focus of the Parramatta Female Factory Precinct (PFFP) Memory Project. This is an arts-based memory project based in the Sydney suburb of Parramatta. Some of the PFFP buildings date back to the early days of settler-colonisation and the site has been used since early colonial days to house women and children in institutional settings including the original Parramatta Female Factory, 1821-1847; Parramatta Invalid and Lunatic Asylum from 1847 (now Cumberland Hospital); the Roman Catholic Orphan School, 1844-1886, Parramatta Girls Industrial School/Home 1887-1974; Kamballa and Taldree (female and male) children's shelters 1975-1983; and finally the Norma Parker Detention Centre, 1980-2010. This continuing use makes the site valuable for those who argue that there is a link between settler-colonial and twentieth century practices of controlling poor and marginalised women and children.

The Parragirls group formed in the years following the Australian Senate inquiry that resulted in the Forgotten Australians report in 2004. Parramatta was a place of detention where teenage girls were sent after being charged with 'crimes' such as their own neglect or having been 'exposed to moral danger.' In effect, this meant they were charged with their own sexual abuse. The PFFP Memory Project is driven by two artists and memory activists, Bonney Djuric (a former inmate at Parramatta Girls Home and founder of the Parragirls group) and Lily Hibberd. This is not a traditional memorial, nor (yet) a memorial-museum. Hibberd writes that, "The mission of the PFFP Memory Project is to support the Parragirls to generate new forms of memory" (2014, p. 105). They do this primarily through art; one building on the site has been adopted as an art space, and art interventions are visible around the grounds.



"ILWA" (I love worship adore/always) graffiti painted as part of the Parramatta Female Factory Precinct Memory Project, Parramatta, New South Wales. Photo: Alison Atkinson-Phillips.



Les Oubliettes (Forgotten Ones) by Bonney Djuric,
installed at Parramatta Female Factory Precinct,
Parramatta, New South Wales. Photo: Alison Atkinson-
Phillips.



Mural at Parramatta Female Factory Precinct,
painted by women of the Norma Parker
Detention Centre, Parramatta, New South
Wales. Photo: Alison Atkinson-Phillips.

The PFFP Memory Project works out of a single room in the precinct grounds. It has a precarious existence, relying on project funding. Although the site is listed on the state heritage register, there is ongoing uncertainty about its future. Hibberd and Djuric argue that the site is a “crucible, where ideas of female immorality, criminality and insanity melded” (2013, p. 68). This view has led to the site being registered as Australia’s first official “Site of Conscience.” The international sites of conscience movement uses places where past human rights abuses have occurred to educate people for a better future. The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience use the mantra of “never again” but with awareness of the political implications of highlighting past conflict (Ashton and Wilson, 2014).

Since gaining full access to the site just days before the project launch in 2013, the PFFP Memory Project group has managed to turn the two-storey building of what was Australia's first children's hospital into a gallery space, hosting exhibitions and allowing artists to interpret the now-empty spaces on the second floor. There is an existing mural on the site, painted by Aboriginal women in the 1980s, as well as graffiti scratched into surfaces around the site. Some of the work of the memory project has been to draw attention to these marks. As well as this, the site has been used for gatherings of ex-inmates (known as Parragirls), a conference and various community days. In May 2017 a special event will be held to mark the twentieth anniversary of the *Bringing Them Home* report, acknowledging the stories of Aboriginal people who spent their childhoods at Parramatta. Lily Hibberd's work is funded through an Australian Research Council grant for a project titled "Sentient Testimony: Trauma Aesthetics, Digital Media and Memories of Parramatta Girls Home" and additional funding has been sourced from the Australia Council for the Arts. However, the future use of the site is still uncertain.

As an outcome of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the NSW Department of Family and Community Services is undertaking a consultation process to develop a memorial for girls abused at the Parramatta Girls Home. Despite active and continuous memory work undertaken by the PFFP Memory Project since 2013, neither that group nor the Parragirls support network, which dates back to 2005, is mentioned in the consultation report (Elton Consulting, 2015). The findings of the initial Parramatta Girls Home consultation (Elton Consulting, 2015) echo much of the content of the PFFP Memory Project's and the Parragirls' websites. This suggests there is no disconnect between the groups of survivors involved in the grassroots and the government-led memory work; yet it raises the question of why the existing work at the site has not been formally taken into account.

Symbolic reparations in response to government inquiries

The past decade has seen the increasing adoption of standardised bureaucratic approaches to commemoration, as governments have begun to understand memorial creation as a practice of symbolic reparations within a transitional justice framework. From the mid 1990s to 2004, three interrelated public inquiries were held in Australia which brought to public awareness the history of institutionalisation of children in the twentieth century. The first was the inquiry by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC, now HRC) into the separation of Aboriginal children from their families, with findings published in 1997 as *Bringing Them Home*. The second and third were inquiries run by the Australian Senate which considered the history of child migration from the UK and Malta; and the institutional care of children. These later inquiries resulted in the 2001 report *Lost Innocents* (SCAR, 2001) and 2004 *Forgotten Australians* (SCAR, 2004). There are strong similarities between the approach used in each of these inquiries (and their reports) and the truth commissions that have been used in post-conflict societies around the world since the 1970s. The two Senate Inquiries resulted in recommendations that public memorials be created as a form of symbolic reparation for survivors. This is another practice of transitional justice. The soon-to-be-completed Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse has already spurred a number of memorial projects instigated by

individual institutions or state governments, such as the Parramatta memorial mentioned above.

The Western Australian memorial to Child Migrants, created in 2004, is one of several around the country created in response to the recommendations of *Lost Innocents*. The memorial takes the form of a figurative sculpture by Joan Walsh Smith and Charles Smith, depicting two young children, a boy and a girl, standing with their suitcases near the edge of the Fremantle wharf. The location is significant, because this is close to where many of the children arrived in Australia. The girl clutches her luggage, looking down, while the boy places a reassuring hand on her shoulder. A statement by former WA Community Development Minister Sheila McHale (2004) says the expression on the children's faces is of "awe and wonder." In contrast, a former child migrant explained to me that the sculpture represented her sense of being "lost and bewildered." She said when she first saw the memorial, "I cried because it was such a vivid reminder of when I first set foot in Australia."

The memorial is near the entry to the WA Maritime Museum, which also hosts the WA Welcome Wall, a series of glass and metal panels that cover the entry courtyard. They attempt to give an overview of the history of Australian migration through telling a few personal stories and giving some historical background. Any migrant can pay to have their name added to the wall. However, similar to the listing of names on a war memorial, which removes distinctions of rank or length of service, this individualising of the migration experience serves to mask inequalities. Convicts, free settlers, displaced persons, assisted migrants and skilled workers are all given equal space. The Child Migrants Memorial, set slightly apart, raises the profile of the child migrants within all the other groups of migrants arriving in Australia. The institutional authority of the museum lends weight to the state's acknowledgement of the loss and trauma involved in this particular migration experience.

The term 'reparation' holds within it the idea of repair. In the context of human rights abuse, it suggests the idea of 'healing' or 'making whole' individuals and nations. One of the risks, however, is that this association encourages memorial designers to aim for a sense of 'closure' that does not allow acknowledgement of ongoing suffering. A child migrants' committee was involved in the memorial selection process, and submitted a number of suggestions for appropriate plaques that included poetry by former migrants themselves. However, a more prosaic form of words was eventually agreed. Two plaques lie side by side, one of which contains the dedication of the memorial while the other gives details of the artists. The text on the acknowledgement plaque reads:

This memorial is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and Western Australian Governments and is dedicated to the British and Maltese boys and girls who left their homelands to brave an unknown future in Western Australia. Hardships were endured, benefits were derived. These child migrants provided valuable contributions to Australian society in diverse ways as parents, workers and citizens. Australia is better for their coming.

Although the memorial acknowledges the child migrants' experience, the plaque works to place it firmly in the past, rather than presenting it as an experience that continues to have impacts and implications in the present.



Charles Smith and Joan Walsh-Smith,
Commemorative sculpture to the
Child Migrants, 2004, Fremantle,
Western Australia. Photo: Alison
Atkinson-Phillips.

Conclusion

Memorials that commemorate lived experience are a new form of commemoration that has developed in Australia over the past 30 years. These memorials differ from traditional memorials in their focus on shared experiences, rather than the commemoration of death. Many memorials to lived experience commemorate human rights violations, and their growing popularity is connected to the rise of human rights discourse and the adoption of transitional justice approaches to addressing past wrongs. This paper has explored four Australian examples of memorials to lived experience. The “Reasons to Remember” wall of plaques at the Adelaide Migration Museum incorporates a variety of different stories of shared trauma. The Museum lends its cultural authority to community groups, allowing their stories to be incorporated into the story of Australia. The Kings Park “Garden of Remembrance” similarly demonstrates that lived experiences of trauma are increasingly treated with the same seriousness as death. This mourning space demonstrates the importance communities of memory place on having public acknowledgement of their grief and public places in which to do their grieving. The PFFP Memory Project is an example of what can happen when communities of memory move from creating spaces to share their personal stories, to addressing the political context in which their suffering occurred. As an act of witness citizenship, the PFFP Memory Project aims to expand the community of memory that understands and shares the burden of the history of Australia’s institutionalisation of women and children. Finally, the international

proliferation of transitional justice approaches to historical injustice has led to the Australian government funding memorials as a means of redress for past human rights abuses. The highly bureaucratic processes by which they are created constrain the way the story can be told. Nonetheless, they are often welcomed by survivors, who are able to use them to claim legitimacy for their own stories. In each of these examples, individuals and groups have had to engage with existing community and government processes in order to have input into the creation of these memorials. They have also had to both work with and subvert existing identity narratives to have their stories told.

Memorials do many things. They enable marginalised people to have their stories publicly acknowledged, and they create spaces where disenfranchised mourners can have their grief legitimised. They create spaces where communities of memory can gather and they help to reclaim spaces of pain. Nevertheless, memorials cannot mend the brokenness of the past. One memorial cannot do everything; sometimes, that means one event or experience needs to be commemorated in more than one way. Although national or state memorials are often appreciated by survivors as a way of acknowledging their experience, they rarely provide an appropriate mourning function. That kind of work seems to be best done at the site of the loss or trauma, and often involves a process of reclamation. Memory work creates and strengthens communities of memory, leading to productive conversations about what will best serve their needs.

References

- ASHTON, P., & HAMILTON, P. 2008. Places of the Heart: Memorials, Public History and the State in Australia since 1960. *Public History Review*, 15, 1-29.
- . 2010. *History at the Crossroads: Australians and the Past*, Sydney: Halstead Press.
- ASHTON, P., HAMILTON, P., & SEARBY, R. 2012. *Places of the Heart: Memorials in Australia*, Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing.
- ASHTON, P., & WILSON, J. Z. 2014. Sites of Conscience: Remembering Disappearance, Execution, Imprisonment, Murder, Slavery and Torture. In: ASHTON, P. & WILSON, J. Z. (eds.) *Silent System*, ix-xiv. Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing.
- BUCKLEY-ZISTEL, S., & SCHAFER, S. (eds.) 2014. *Memorials in Times of Transition*, Cambridge, Antwerp and Portland: Intersentia.
- BULBECK, C. 1991. Remembering Ourselves. *Meanjin*, 50, 406-414.
- DARIAN-SMITH, K., & PASCOE, C. (eds.) 2013. *Children, Childhood and Cultural Heritage*, London and New York: Routledge.
- DOKA, K. J. 1989. *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing Hidden Sorrow*, Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- DOSS, E. 2010. *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.
- ELTON CONSULTING. 2015. *Parramatta Girls Home memorial: consultation summary report*. <http://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/file/0007/331576/Parramatta-girls-home-memorial-consultation-summary-report.pdf>.

- FINNIMORE, C. 2006. Grief, Protest and Public History: The Memorial Wall in the Migration Museum, Adelaide. *Museums Australia National Conference: Exploring Dynamics: Citics, Cultural Spaces, Communitites*. Brisbane.
- GÒMEZ-BARRIS, M. 2010. Witness Citizenship: The Place of Villa Grimaldi in Chilean Memory. *Sociological Forum*, 25, 27-46.
- HAMBER, B., ŠEVČENKO, L., & NAIDU, E. 2010. Utopian Dreams or Practical Possibilities? The Challenges of Evaluating the Impact of Memorialization in Societies in Transition. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 4, 397-420.
- HIBBERD, L. 2014. Making Future Memory. In: ASHTON, P. & WILSON, J.Z. (eds) *Silent System: Forgotten Australians and the Institutionalisation of Women and Children*, 103-115. Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing.
- HIBBERD, L., & DJURIC, B. 2013. Art after Oblivion: The Parramatta Female Factory Precinct Memory Project. *Artlink*, 33, 68-71.
- HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMISSION. 1997. *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. Sydney.
- INGLIS, K. S. 2008. *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- KANSTEINER, W. 2002. Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies. *History and Theory*, 41, 179-197.
- KLEP, K. 2012. Tracing Collective Memory: Chilean Truth Commissions and Memorial Sites. *Memory Studies*, 5, 259-269.
- MCHALE, S. 2004. Memorial for Former Child Migrants. Media statement, <https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/Gallop/2004/12/Memorial-for-former-child-migrants.aspx>.
- MONUMENT AUSTRALIA. 2016. Monument Australia, electronic database. <http://monumentaaustralia.org.au>.
- NAIDU, E. 2004. *Symbolic Reparations: A Fractured Opportunity*. Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.
- PLACE OF REFLECTION. 2011. Official Launch, video recording, Perth.
- ROTHBERG, M. 2009. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCE COMMITTEE. 2001. *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record. Report on Child Migration*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- . 2004. *Forgotten Australians: A Report on Australians who Experienced Institutional or Out-of-Home Care as Children*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- SZEKERES, V. 2011. The Past is a Dangerous Place: The Museum as a Safe Haven. In: LEHRER, E., MILTON, C. E. & PATTERSON, M. E. (eds.) *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places*, 41-54. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- TUMARKIN, M. 2005. *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- VIOLI, P. 2012. Trauma Site Museums and Politics of Memory: Tuol Sleng, Villa Grimaldi and the Bologna Ustica Museum. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 29, 36-75.
- VANISH INC. 2012., Senate enquiry into forced adoptions, submission no.160 to the Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices., Parliament of Australia, Canberra. <http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary>

[business/committees/senate/community affairs/completed inquiries/2010-13/
commcontribformerforcedadoption/submissions.](#)

Alison Atkinson-Phillips is a research associate with the Oral History Collective at Newcastle University (UK). In 2017 she completed her PhD thesis, titled “Reasons to Remember: public memorials to lived experiences of loss in Australia, 1985-2015,” through the Australian Centre for Public History, University of Technology, Sydney, and was awarded a postdoctoral transition fellowship at UTS in the same year. Alison was until recently an honorary research fellow at the University of Western Australian and is an affiliated researcher for the Mapping Historical Dialogues research project, <http://historicaldialogues.org/mhdp/>.