

# MSA forward: Memory studies moving onward and upward

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## Abstract

This article serves as both an *état présent* of emerging scholarship in the interdisciplinary field of Memory Studies and a conference report following the first MSA Forward interactive workshop which preceded the second annual conference of the Memory Studies Association (MSA) in December 2017. MSA Forward is the postgraduate arm of the Memory Studies Association and offers a platform for exchanging ideas amongst a cohort of emerging scholars engaging with recent developments in Memory Studies and interacting with key academics in the field. The idea of engagement, with its political undertone, draws attention to the political valence and ethical sensitivity of emerging research as evidenced in this article, which contends that if Memory Studies is to be moving forwards as well as looking back, then it is important for emerging scholars as well as established academics to be at the forefront of the field.

## Keywords

interdisciplinary, emerging research, moving memories, forward-looking, dialogic memory

The purpose of this MSA Forward article is to provide an *état présent* (literally a present state or a current state of affairs), but of course the very nature of Memory Studies is that it is always moving forward, even when it is looking back. No more is this evident than in emerging research by graduate students working within the field of Memory Studies, tilling the ground in preparation for a fruitful harvest. MSA Forward, the postgraduate arm of the Memory Studies Association, offers a platform for exchanging ideas with a cohort of emerging scholars learning about recent developments in Memory Studies and interacting with key academics in the field. A day before the second annual conference of the Memory Studies Association in Copenhagen (14–16 December 2017), MSA Forward provided a forum for PhD students to explore the connection of their research to Memory Studies in the form of an interactive workshop. Through flash presentations, PhD students had the opportunity to discuss the specific ways their doctoral research connects with Memory Studies and to receive feedback (and feed-forward) from established scholars, including Jeffrey Olick, Ann Rigney, Stef Craps, and Sarah Gensburger, among other key figures.

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MSA Forward participants explored the role of Memory Studies in individual PhD projects, through engaging with the following questions: What connections does your PhD thesis establish with Memory Studies? In which ways do your case studies or primary texts engage with issues of remembrance and forgetting? Which methodologies do you use and why? Are the memory frameworks you employ transcultural, transnational, multidirectional, palimpsestic, or something else? A variety of responses and reactions to these initial questions emerged. The “(Trans)cultural Memories” panel began with an exploration of cultural memories of ancient Egypt (Jakob Schneider) alongside an enlightening presentation on traveling mnemonic schema in the classical underworld (Madeleine Scherer). The following papers looked at compensation for human rights violation in Colombia and Peru (Catalina Vallejo), and the mnemonic disorders of global capitalism through contemporary American fiction and performance art (Holly Brown). The parallel panel “Conflicting Memories and Memories of Conflict” saw an examination of the contradictory memories of Quakers during the Israel-Palestine conflict (Alexis Constantinou), dissonant memories in the post-Soviet space through newly established museums and political history (Maria Mikaelyan), and memory in transitional justice process in post-Suharto Indonesia (Katarzyna Marta Głąb). “Memories in and of America” covered a diverse array of topics ranging from slavery, violence, and the black body in pain in American memorial culture (Shona Thompson) to North America’s Japanese diasporic community (Naomi Ostwald Kawamura), and from Al-Andalus as cultural memory in post-9/11 Arab-American women’s narratives (Ali Kareem Tobick Al-Jayikh) to cultural memory in the construction of Russian Jewish North American Identities (Yulia Gordina). The parallel panel covered South America, exploring Cuban collective identity and cultural memory (Sjamme Van de Voort), media and memory work in Brazilian environmental crimes (Alice Carvalho de Melo), and the *nueva narrativa* in contemporary literatures from Argentina and Guatemala (Lela Weigt). “Memory, History, and Storytelling” provided a rich analysis of collective memory and the writing of history in the case of the Spanish Civil War (Rafael Pérez Baquero), dynamics of trauma and mourning in postcolonial African narratives (Adebayo Sakiru), a picture of the Great Patriotic War in Russian history textbooks for secondary schools (Dagmara Moskwa), and representations of digital dying and remembering in modern literature (Victoria-Luise Kampfmann). The parallel panel on “Mediatized Memory” covered mediatization of Bosnian war memory in popular culture (Stephanie de Smale), document declassification and political disputes in Argentina (Déborah Cinthia Balé), archiving the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum (Mhairi Brennan), and postmemory in Polish media discourse after 1989 (Jagoda Mytych). This wide range of topics testifies to the growing areas of research among emerging scholars within the unfenced field of interdisciplinary Memory Studies. Alongside these flash presentations, we hosted the first MSA Forward Career Café: PhD students were paired with more senior academics for a 30-minute conversation about possible professional futures, important career steps, and other issues which are pertinent to emerging scholars. Our Career Café served as a launchpad for the MSA Mentorship Program through which well-established researchers provide guidance to emerging scholars beginning to establish themselves (for more information, see [www.memorystudiesassociation.org](http://www.memorystudiesassociation.org)).

Overall, in the words of participant Adebayo Sakiru, “The MSA Forward event was an immensely stimulating and eye-opening experience.” Likewise, fellow participant Déborah Cinthia Balé commented on how the inaugural workshop of MSA Forward “set up the basis for future dialogue.” Indeed, the workshop engaged with what Aleida Assmann terms “dialogic memory.”<sup>1</sup> One of the respondents, Emilie Pine, was enthused by the workshop:

It is inspirational to see the work being done by graduate students across such a diverse range of topics within the broad field of Memory Studies. The papers I read and responded to really showed the potential for future research directions being led by students.

Similarly, Stef Craps remarked that “it was a delight to [...] engage with the exciting research being carried out by PhD students, who represent the future of the field.” This idea of engagement, with its political undertone, draws attention to the political valence and ethical sensitivity of emerging research. If Memory Studies is to be future-oriented and forward-looking as well as rooted in the past, then not only leading academics but also emerging scholars must be at the forefront of the field.

As co-founders of MSA Forward, we are grateful to all our participants and respondents for their engagement in the inaugural workshop, and for the organizers of the upcoming workshop to take place in Madrid, Zoé de Kerangat and Julie Lavielle. Our thanks go to the Memory Studies Association who supported our project from the very beginning. We look forward to seeing how the postgraduate arm of the Memory Studies Association continues to stretch and reach out beyond disciplinary boundaries, beginning with the next MSA Forward workshop in Madrid (25 June 2019). The focus of this second workshop will be on moving memories: how memories move to tears and to action, how social movements generate memory discourses, and how memories travel through time and place. Onward and upward!

List of participants in MSA Forward 2017:

Ali Kareem Tobick Al-Jayikh (University of Timisoara)  
 Holly Brown (Ghent University)  
 Alice Carvalho de Melo (Federal University of Rio de Janeiro)  
 Alexis Constantinou (University of South Wales)  
 Katarzyna Marta Głąb (SWPS)  
 Yulia Gordina (University of Saarland)  
 Victoria-Luise Kampfmann (Goethe University Frankfurt)  
 Naomi Kawamura (University of British Columbia)  
 Maria Mikaelyan (Polytechnic University of Milan)  
 Dagmara Moskwa (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań)  
 Rafael Pérez Baquero (University of Murcia)  
 Adebayo Sakiru (University of Witwatersrand)  
 Madeleine Scherer (University of Warwick)  
 Jakob Schneider (Free University of Berlin)  
 Shona Thompson (Lancaster University)  
 Catalina Vallejo (University of Virginia)  
 Sjamme Van de Voort (University of Nottingham)

List of respondents in MSA Forward 2017:

Stef Craps (Ghent University)  
 Rebecca Dolgoy (University of Ottawa)  
 Sarah Gensburger (CNRS—French National Center for Scientific Research)  
 Antje Gunsenheimer (University of Bonn)  
 Wulf Kansteiner (Aarhus University)  
 Pavan Malreddy (Goethe University Frankfurt)  
 Jocelyn S. Martin (Manila University)  
 Jeffrey Olick (University of Virginia)  
 Emilie Pine (University College Dublin)  
 Ann Rigney (Utrecht University)  
 Jan Rupp (Goethe University Frankfurt)

## Note

1. See Assmann (2010: 8–22, 2014: 199–214).

## References

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- Assmann A (2014) Dialogic memory. In: Mendes-Flohr P (ed.) *Dialogue as a Trans-Disciplinary Concept: Martin Buber's Philosophy of Dialogue and Its Contemporary Reception*. Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 199–214.

## Author biographies

Hanna Teichler holds an MA degree in English, French, and Portuguese philology from the Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe University (Frankfurt a.M.). After having worked as a research assistant at University Siegen (History Department), she was accepted as a PhD candidate in Frankfurt (New Literatures in English) under supervision of Prof. Dr Frank Schulze-Engler and Prof. Dr Astrid Erll. Her dissertation project (submitted in May 2018) examines possibilities of reconciliation in a postcolonial context and performative aspects of memory, identity, and history. She is a member of the Frankfurt Memory Studies Platform and GAPS. She is a co-founder of MSA Forward and on the Advisory Board of the Memory Studies Association.

Rebekah Vince is an Early Career Fellow at the Institute of Advanced Study, University of Warwick. In 2018, she completed her PhD in French Studies in the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of Warwick. In 2016, she was a visiting scholar at the Cultural Memory Studies Initiative, University of Ghent. She has published articles in *Journal of History and Cultures* (2015), *Africa and the West* (2017), and *Francosphères* (2018). Along with Dr Sami Everett (University of Cambridge), she is co-editor of a volume on Jewish-Muslim interactions in performance art across the Maghreb and France from 1920 to 2020, to be published by Liverpool University Press in 2020. Her research interests include transcultural memory studies, decolonized trauma theory, (Arab) Jewish studies, Francophonie, and debates on world literatures. She is a co-founder of MSA Forward and on the Advisory Board of the Memory Studies Association.