

REVIEW

BOOK

Memory Activism and Digital Practices after Conflict.

Unwanted Memories.

FRIDMAN, Orli. Amsterdam University Press, 2022

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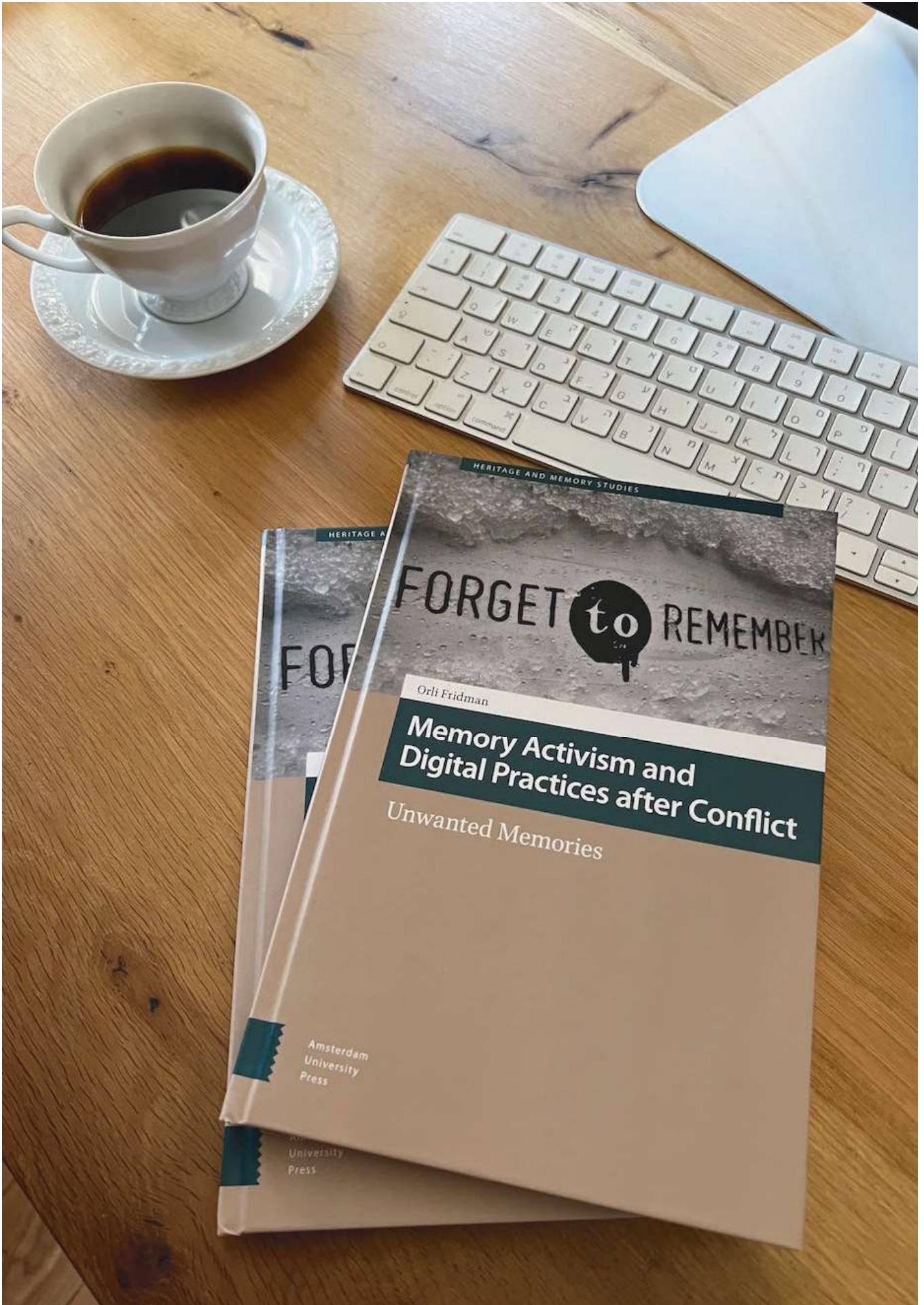
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The book on Memory Activism by Prof. Orli Fridman is an outstanding contribution to a «growing body of literature exploring the social construction of collective memory... the role of commemorative rituals and narratives... and their *impact on the political sphere*».¹ Relying on remarkable knowledge of the field and on extensive, in-depth research, this book is notable precisely because it is both a detailed case study of one of the most devastating conflicts at the end of the 20th century and an exemplary work in memory studies.

Orli Fridman is not new to the field of conflict and memory studies. Besides insights into two international conflicts, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the conflict following the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, she has, in over two decades, closely followed the complex unravelling of the aftermath of wars fought in the 1990s in Serbia, despite the official denial. Her research has resulted in a series of academic studies on the topics of assessing memory-building processes. Importantly, her academic research has been interwoven with her observation of and experience in peace activism.

The book, *Memory Activism and Digital Practices after Conflict*, provides the framework so as to grasp and present the complexity of the memory-building process. Given that the process lasts for decades, the author, in central chapters, analyses memory activism among two generations. The first generation was actually an active participant in the events themselves, events that in subsequent decades they would refer to and reflect on while building memories, which is why this generation was engaged in *memory activism*.

¹ Orli Fridman, *Memory Activism and Digital Practices after Conflict*. Amsterdam University Press, 2022. p. 23, (emphasis by DD)



Here the book is quite rightly focused primarily on the Women in Black anti-war movement, on whose tireless activism the whole peace movement of the first generation is grounded. The tenacious, on-going commitment of these feminist peace activists starting from the early 1990s is carefully documented and analysed: the relentlessness of pursuing unwanted memories, formatting calendars alternative to the state, publishing annual agendas accordingly, commemorative rituals, and so on.

The second generation is continuing the memory-building process as *the memory of activism*, adding new activities and organising joint activities with the Women in Black movement and others. In addition, Fridman perceptively comments and elaborates on millennials, who have harnessed the advantage of having the tools of the digital world at their disposal, creating thus the #hashtag #memoryactivism framework for online commemorations. When speaking of the upcoming generation(s), we can recognise the political significance, as well as the ease with which these generations enter the digital world to make use of the available tools, which, according to Fridman, are utilised as additional mnemonic practices.

Like a thread that runs throughout Orli Fridman's book is the important recognition of the significance of the political, following on from the acknowledgement of memory activism. Orli Fridman, while telling us the story of *Memory Activism* in Serbia, connecting the dots of the events, has created a mosaic of what the sad reality of our present actually is –as well as the gloomy outlook for our future. Unfolding the results of the meticulous, carefully articulated research described throughout the book, it becomes difficult, for anyone focused on understanding Serbia's recent past, and especially for anyone who has taken part in those events –even if marginally– to face this reality; it can almost be painful, not only to accept the succinct and undoubtedly credible presentation of our “history of the present”, but also to realise that the future can, at best, just rest on questions: «What place will commemorative solidarity have?... what role will memory activism scholars play?»² and, what is the future of this political community that lives in perpetual denial?

How do we measure time, from one date to the next, from one holiday to the other, which calendar do we follow in our everyday lives and which dates do we single out, and why? Orli Fridman has walked us through the calendars of Yugoslavia(s) and how the calendar that the Serbian state officially acknowledges today has been constructed so as to deny its responsibility for the wars of the 1990s. What becomes

² Orli Fridman, p. 202

obvious as we follow the timeline is that the calendar Serbia follows today is a calendar that obliterated, not only the history of Yugoslavia's real socialism, but also a testament as to how Serbia officially came to accept interpretations of the wars of the 1990s based solely on Serbian nationalism and ethnocentrism. This means that the calendar was built around the complete denial of war crimes, the genocide in Srebrenica, the shelling of Sarajevo, the destruction of Vukovar, etc. It was built around Serbia's apparent victimhood. The monuments erected and rituals introduced, often celebrating war criminals, are thus an adulteration of historically well-documented events.

Although the book is focused on memory activism, and consequently analyses the building blocks, such as calendars, commemorative rituals, mnemonic devices, it also offers an excellent insight into the political context of the 1990s in Yugoslavia, and the events immediately following the end of the wars – all these events that form the decisive framework for memory activism and show an in-depth understanding of the historically important contextualisation.

The context is also provided by a shared past of Yugoslavia's successor countries. Although respective strong ethnic and national sentiments are also prevalent in these countries, a space of counter memories is also created, a space of shared anti-war, peaceful and, predominantly feminist, activism.

Since the author has consulted numerous sources, the book has a rich bibliography, photographic illustrations of events and appendices of relevant documents.

To conclude, Orli Fridman's book on *Memory Activism* is an indispensable book, not only for the subfield of memory activism, but also for memory studies as a whole.