

MAPPING HISTORICAL DIALOGUE

Remembering for the Future

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Abstract

The Mapping Historical Dialogue Project (MHDP) was developed in 2014, as part of a larger initiative relating to historical dialogue and accountability housed at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights. In the months and years that followed, a group of scholars and practitioners from ten different countries and representing all continents served as researchers to the project. The four authors of this essay are amongst this core group. The Mapping Historical Dialogue is a global interactive geographical map that gathers information on projects of contested memory in (post-)violent conflict countries. The ongoing digital project builds on a crowdsourcing model, relying on incremental contributions to connect a diverse network of individuals who often do not have access or knowledge of one another's work. This paper gives an overview of the development of the mapping project and then outlines some of the diverse historical dialogue initiatives that speak to questions of memory, transitional justice, and human rights. The article offers insights into different regional contexts and countries, such

as colonization and aboriginal trauma in Australia, slavery in the United States, the legacy of the Civil War “disappeared” and the Franco dictatorship in Spain, including the example of the EUROM network led by the University of Barcelona, as well as examples of the human rights movement in the Southern Cone countries, Chile and Argentina.

Keywords

collaboration; dialogue; historical conflict; online mapping; reconciliation

About the Authors

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INTRODUCTION

The Mapping Historical Dialogue Project (MHDP) of the Institute for the Study of Human Rights (ISHR), Columbia University, went online in December 2015. This global interactive geographical map gathers information on projects of contested memory in (post-)violent conflict countries. In the first two years, more than 500 initiatives have been charted in 94 countries. This ongoing digital project builds on a crowdsourcing model, relying on incremental contributions to connect a diverse network of individuals who often do not have access or knowledge of one another's works. The project is open access, and its scholarship and resources are available to a wide community of users. The MHDP platform aims to respond to one of the challenges that historical dialogue faces: connecting a diverse and interdisciplinary network of advocates, practitioners, and scholars who are unaware of the others' work. Another aim is to make scholarship, resources, civil society projects, human rights organizations, and other information in the field of historical dialogue and transitional justice accessible to a global community of users on this digital platform. This paper gives an overview of the development of the mapping project, and then outlines some of the diverse dialogue projects identified by researchers. It ends with a timely reflection on the way histories of violence from a conflictive past continue to have an impact when they are left unresolved.

THE MAPPING PROJECT

As a concept, the Mapping Historical Dialogue Project (MHDP) was developed in 2014, as part of a larger initiative relating to historical dialogue and accountability housed at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights. In the months and years that followed, a group of scholars and practitioners, including the four authors of this essay, served as researchers to the project. Each entry is examined by an expert prior to being posted to confirm that it is relevant to the goals of the MHDP and to the broader aims of historical dialogue as a field within the area of conflict transformation. Upon approval, the entry appears on the map, and the information entered can be viewed by all.

The method used for participation is a crowdsourced model, in which experts—activists, scholars, and practitioners—report on projects with which they are familiar. The crowdsourcing model is only successful with robust information and broad participation, and the MHDP project relies both on contributors who upload information about a single particular project, as well as contributors who support the initiative more extensively by submitting information about numerous projects in a particular region which is related to their own area of expertise or fieldwork. As

one goal of the project is exchange and collaboration through the mapping process, the work also involved identifying individuals to serve as regional researchers in terms of verifying historical dialogue initiatives within their respective locations or research areas. This has become a global network of 17 scholars and practitioners, together with organizational partners, which has served as a vital sounding board for questions of methodology and outreach, mapping research and data collection, as well as exchange of information and discussion. This group of established and emerging scholars and practitioners is committed to expanding the map and encouraging others to register their projects. Each person brings a range of perspectives and networks. Significantly, this core group of researchers includes experts from ten different countries, representing all continents. Not only has this ensured a broader representation of project work on the map (although more needs to be done in this area), but the diversity of this group has also made it possible to expand beyond the sometimes US-Euro centric focus of much work in transitional justice and memory studies. On a more technical level, the group discusses visualization-related issues, how to leverage the information on the website for research and teaching purposes, and how to make the project more user-friendly. These discussions have taken place online, in conference calls, and, since 2014, in in-person meetings and panel discussions at the Historical Dialogues, Justice and Memory Network's annual conference. These opportunities to connect have created a platform for discussion, exchange, and networking.

One example of a collaboration to come out of relationships built virtually is a roundtable at the annual conference that the Historical Dialogues, Justice and Memory Network held in December 2016 at NIOD (Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies; in Dutch, *Instituut voor Oorlogs-, Holocaust- en Genocidestudies*), where some authors of this article were part of a broader group that presented their research and the work of MHDP. Another example is this article, in which we present some of the commonalities as well as differences of memory work in various regional contexts and reflect on our research in relation to the MHDP, providing an overview of some projects and initiatives mapped in Latin America's Southern Cone and Spain, followed by a discussion of EUROM, a European platform of memory organization, its work in memory activism, and how this work intersects with the MHDP. The subsequent discussion of historical dialogue initiatives in the settler-colonial context of Australia is followed by a discussion of the conflicted history of slavery and racism in the United States and grassroots initiatives that seek to address these matters. The geographical distances covered by these four areas of reflection point to the ways in which comparative analysis can enrich our understanding of historical dialogue as a field, in terms of its scope, its implementation, and its impact. In this sense, this study reflects the broader objectives of the MHDP itself, since there too, the comparative, inter-regional, and

cross-regional perspectives allow researchers and practitioners alike to consider the relationship between memory and place, redress and historical justice.

Before discussing the individual projects, it is important to consider the theoretical grounding of historical dialogue. The MHDP uses a capacious understanding of both “historical” and “dialogue” that allows a wide range of projects to be included within the map, and in a manner that closely resembles the function of storytelling. Elazar Barkan, one of the foremost scholars in this area—and an author of the MHDP project—has defined historical dialogue as “a nonlinear discourse with contributions from opposing sides, who are not necessarily actively engaging each other directly” (195). This broad understanding of storytelling is at the heart of the projects discussed in this article. Storytelling, in all its many iterations, provides a means to reconstruct the past and demystify the present. Claire Hackett and Bill Rolston maintain that “[s]torytelling is not apolitical. It needs the right political context in which to operate” (357). Furthermore, in her discussion of the relevant theory related to voice, Dipti Desai maintains that narratives about dominance and resistance situated within a socio-political context can lead to social change and therefore may be empowering. She adds that for those who are marginalized, telling and retelling about their experience is a political act (312-313). Rosanne Kennedy and Tikka Jan Wilson suggest that a narrative therapy model may be useful for a decolonized approach to stories of trauma, pointing out that the healing power of speaking about loss or trauma lies not necessarily in “speaking per se, but rather in challenging the particular historical relationship of speaking and listening” (129).

However, as Duncan Morrow argues, “[i]n the absence of victory, where one party may be more able to shape and control the flow of information, truth recovery will be a process of accusation as much as of vindication for both communities” (6). Those who need most to hear what the other has to say are, as a result, sometimes unwilling or unable to because of structural divisions within the society (Galtung). According to Morton Deutsch, exclusion—whether it is due to dehumanization of the other, physical separation of groups, or both—impedes the possibilities for empathy because we tend to be more open to feeling compassion and concern for those we perceive to be most like ourselves. In other words, we need to be able to identify with the storyteller in order to feel empathy for their situation. In historical dialogue, there are often multiple barriers to this. Suzanne Retzinger and Thomas J. Scheff suggest that if we are to interrupt cycles of violence, interventions must “acknowledge and change the emotional and relational world of adversaries” (75). In order to do this, the third party, be they mediators, facilitators, or counselors, have a dual responsibility not just to ensure that both or all sides are heard, but also that when these very personal narratives are shared, they are adequately and appropriately acknowledged by the other party.

These are just some of the challenges facing those engaged in historical dialogue. The MHDP does not attempt to resolve these issues, but instead endeavors to allow links and connections between projects and practices to emerge, connections that are illustrated in the following sections.

THE MAPPING PROCESS: INITIATIVES IN THE SOUTHERN CONE OF LATIN AMERICA AND SPAIN

Two of the most extensively mapped areas of the MHDP are Latin America and Spain. There are currently around 80 projects included on the map within those two regions, which mainly come out of civil society initiatives and the human rights movement. The development of this area of the mapping is largely due to the work of Ulrike Capdepón, a member of the original project team with research expertise in South America and Spain. Capdepón took on responsibility for mapping projects located in the Southern Cone countries and the remembrance of the dictatorships that characterized the region in the second half of the last century. This next section is devoted to initiatives with a regional focus on memory processes and historical dialogue related to the respective dictatorship experiences that shaped Spain and the Southern Cone of Latin America and in the last century.

Beginning in the 1970s, the human rights movement raised global awareness about the political repression and violence during the military dictatorships in Chile and Argentina, years before a human rights-related memory movement placed pressure on the accountability of the Franco dictatorship in Spain. The highest number of initiatives mapped is located in Buenos Aires (sixteen projects), covering only a small part of the existing civil society initiatives. The Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS), formed in 1979 (www.cels.org.ar) and the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights (APDH) created as early as 1975 (www.apdh.org.ar), two of the historically most important human rights organizations confronted the repression of the last Argentine dictatorship (1976-1983). These two organizations are also part of the map. APDH, as one of the first human rights organizations, played an important role in the defense of human rights before and during the military dictatorship. Indeed, it was one of the principal organizations that collected denunciations of disappearance and human rights abuses, provided legal assistance for victims, and created campaigns for release of political prisoners. In Chile, one of the most important associations from early on was the Comité de Cooperación para la Paz en Chile (COPACHI) (www.vicariadelasolidaridad.cl), which denounced the human rights violations of the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990), and that was dissolved in 1975. Continuing the work of the COPACHI, the goal of the now-called Vicariate for Solidarity was to assist victims of the Pinochet

dictatorship through legal aid, as well as provision for medical and psychological assistance.

In Spain, there are currently more than 30 projects mapped so far, mostly related to the memory of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975). Most of the initiatives mapped to date focus explicitly on historical dialogue, including many outstanding topic-related associations and virtual resources. Furthermore, the MHDP maps research centers and projects that focus on twentieth-century Spanish history and memory spanning the Second Republic, the Civil War violence, and the repression of the Franco dictatorship until the transition process to democracy.

More than 15 years ago, as a result of pressure from civil society groups “from below,” a process of the so-called “recovery of memory” was initiated in Spanish society. The number of associations that sprang up since the start of the millennium to recover the memory of social and political groups and victims of political violence today is heterogeneous and widespread. The MHDP compiles just a few of the projects that arose from this local memory movement, reflecting recent developments in civil society engaged in historical dialogue. Some initiatives commemorate the Civil War through mass grave exhumations, while others have developed databases of the “disappeared.” Still other organizations are dedicated to the creation of memory sites or museums.

Among the research projects devoted to the study of the victims of the Francoist repression that were created in Spain at the regional level is the All (...) the Names (in Spanish, *Todos (...) los Nombres*) (www.todoslosnombres.org), a project initiated by the local union *Confederación General del Trabajo de Andalucía* (CGT.A) in Seville and founded in 2003. While the project focuses on memories and testimonies that give voice to the hitherto hidden history of repression, its centerpiece is a database and an online research tool that permits relatives to search for their “disappeared” and killed family members. A similar initiative that compiles and disseminates information and data about the victims is the academic research project Names and Voices (in Galician, *Nomes e Voces*) located at the History Department of the University of Santiago de Compostela, which studies the repression in the North Western province of Galicia during the Civil War and the Franco dictatorship. A specific database, moreover, compiling information and gathering data relevant to the victims and the repression suffered went online in 2009 (vitimas.nomesevoces.net). The project seeks to acknowledge victims while also encouraging historical dialogue in Galician society. Within the variety of existing local initiatives, Catalonia as a region, which spearheaded the memory of the Civil War and dictatorship-related violence and oppression, is striking. The reason behind this will be discussed in better detail in the following section.

One of the most relevant projects is the Generality's Democratic Memorial (in Catalan, *Memorial Democràtic*) (memorialdemocratic.gencat.cat/ca). Supported by the Catalan government, it prominently focuses on historical memory initiatives, thus supporting municipalities and civil society associations to create, maintain, and protect places of remembrance and promote educational projects and memorialization. As a governmental project, *Memorial Democràtic* is also dedicated to fostering historic research and has also initiated various memory projects in Catalonia. Among the municipalities, the local government of the Catalan capital, Barcelona, recently created a specific office for memorial programs. In particular, it is considering the removal or reinterpretation of some monuments commemorating events related to Franco dictatorship. All in all, as this short overview reflects, the MHDP is meant to become a helpful tool for researchers and practitioners, while also aiming to show the development of the existence of historical dialogue based on diverse cultures of memory in the different Spanish regions.

Empirically, it is possible to digitally trace on the MHDP how the emerging Spanish memory movement uses claims such as “truth,” “justice,” and “reparation” previously established by the Latin American human rights movement. Likewise, they also adopt terms such as “impunity” and *desaparecido* when referring to victims, in order to frame the Franco dictatorship within a human rights discourse. The geographical information displayed on the MHDP represented on the webpages of domestic memory associations in Spain demonstrates how they refer to experiences in other countries to reinforce their demands on a national level. For instance, the symbolic representations of the “disappeared” on the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (ARMH) webpage (memoriahistorica.org.es/) shows that they are using discursive and symbolic strategies and practices from Chilean and Argentinian human rights groups. While the ARMH was founded with the goal to locate and exhume victims buried in clandestine mass graves from the Spanish Civil War and the post-war repression, today this association is collaborating with the Equipo Argentino de Antropología Forense (EAAF), which supports their efforts in forensic work and DNA analysis (www.eaaf.org/). This is a process that can also be traced by qualitatively analyzing the human rights discourses and practices displayed on the web representation of projects mapped on the MHDP. For instance, an analysis can be conducted by examining the representation of the *desaparecidos* on the webpages.

PARTNERING WITH EUROM TO MAP MEMORY IN EUROPE

One of the main strengths of the MHDP is its expansive network of researchers and organizations that address conflict transformation and reconciliation with the past in conflict and post-conflict societies where the memory of mass violence continues to be a difficult social and political issue. In this vein, we would like to highlight the role of an affiliate organization that has been part of the mapping project's development since 2014: the European Observatory on Memories (EUROM).

EUROM is a transnational and multidisciplinary network of institutions and civil society organizations led by the University of Barcelona's Solidarity Foundation. It is committed to the research and promotion of remembrance policies and memorial initiatives from a plurality of critical approaches. EUROM aims to confront the diversity of memories that inform contemporary public policies, including but not limited to the consequences of Nazism, Fascism, and Stalinism; the Spanish Civil War; the twentieth-century dictatorships in Spain, Greece, and Portugal; the vindication of civil rights in Northern Ireland; the pro-democratic movements in Eastern Europe during the Cold War; the conflicts related to decolonization; and the ethnic conflicts in the Balkans. National histories are often more interconnected than one might initially think (Guixé i Coromines and Conesa); in this sense, EUROM advocates for the recognition of a multiplicity of memories as the first step in avoiding instances of memorial rivalries or competitions over victimhood, which are present in some countries. Measures to avoid these phenomena must take into account the analysis not only of existing remembrance initiatives but also of the silencing and omission of memories.

EUROM, with its varied network of partners and plural approach towards historical memory, has helped to expand the MHDP database. Two particularly significant initiatives that EUROM has contributed to the MHDP are the websites "Memoria BCN" (www.memoriabcn.cat) and the "MEFRO" cross-border project, both of which utilize digital maps in their user navigation tools.

"Memoria BCN" is a project lead by the association *Conèixer Història* (Discovering History), which is focused on studying and disseminating the history and collective memory of the city of Barcelona. It deals with different historical periods and topics that have been tracing the character of the city to date, from the colonial legacies to the traces of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). From the project, it is worth highlighting that the map and database with nearly 100 historical sites and memorial places of the 20th century is a result of two years' archival and bibliographical research. The city was systematically bombed during the Spanish Civil War, suffered severe repression under the Franco dictatorship, and struggled for democracy in the streets during the 1970s. The goal of the map is to locate,

catalogue, and disseminate information about the public spaces of Barcelona in which freedom and democracy were attacked, defended, and vindicated. “Memoria BCN” can easily be accessed through a multilingual website that shows the most significant sites of the city along with 11 suggested routes that can be followed by both locals and visitors. The user can access the information of each site through a factsheet or locate it geographically on a digital city map. The website also includes more than 250 current images and photographs from archives and a graphical chronology of historical events. This project aims to make history accessible to citizens through new media and help them remember the origins of today’s rule of law. In doing so, the project seeks to reinforce the democratic foundations of present Spanish society.

Another initiative spearheaded by EUROM with the help of the partners at the University of Perpignan is called European Memories of Borders (*Mémoires Européennes des Frontières*) (MEFRO). Originally, MEFRO had been conceived from some activities, organized from 2013 to 2015, which addressed historical memories surrounding the Pyrenees Border. From these roots, MEFRO has become the culmination of a larger effort to build a permanent network of interdisciplinary and transnational research that identifies European borders as places of analysis. In investigating cross-national and comparative experiences, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how social knowledge is transmitted and, moreover, the extent to which conceptual boundaries still restrict the construction of a shared European memory. With seven external partners throughout Europe, which can be explored on a digital map (projetmefro.wixsite.com/mefro/copie-de-partenaires), the MEFRO framework organizes seminars, international conferences, and artistic expositions that explore how borders influence national historical narratives and, in turn, the transmission of memories.

Ultimately, mapping projects align with EUROM’s mission in that they disseminate information that provides an overarching and comparative view of European history. The MHDP expands on this approach both within European boundaries and also beyond, challenging users to consider how historical dialogue initiatives around the world can be considered as tools to analyze, draw lessons from, and develop further. The open access of these mapping projects is thus fundamental, since it allows a wide spectrum of stakeholders—whether scholars, students, or the general public—to familiarize themselves with remembrance initiatives that engender a broad range of approaches. Moreover, the mapping project, which provides instant online access and filtering tools, also allow individuals to tailor their searches to their individual interests and perspectives while facilitating the exploration of regions or subjects that they might never have considered before. Within the diversity of locations and contexts, what we see is the shared human need to tell our stories, to be heard, and to remember.

DEVELOPING CONNECTIONS

Just as EUROM has enabled the MHDP to expand its consideration of European projects that take up contested histories and issues related to historical memory, projects mapped in Australia likewise speak to questions of memory and historical justice in that context. Alison Atkinson-Phillips, an early career researcher and social justice practitioner, who was located in Australia at that time, became involved in the MHDP as a result of her desire to add a project she was deeply involved with to the map. That map, embedded within a simple blog site titled, *Not a Celebration* (www.notacelebration.blogspot.com), tracks the creation of what might be termed “survivor” memorials—those created to acknowledge experiences of loss and trauma that people have lived through. Of the 76 Australian memorials identified on the site, 13 acknowledge experiences of natural disaster, while the rest relate to human rights abuses and historical injustice of marginalized groups within Australia, including Aboriginal peoples, Australian South Sea Islanders, working-class women and children, and gay and lesbian people. A digital map embedded in the homepage of the blog shows the distribution of the memorials across Australia, with icons linking to a short overview, similar to the MHDP map. By linking to this and other similar projects, the MHDP has enabled local, regional, and national projects to be examined in a more global context. Not unlike EUROM, users interested in memorials and sites of memory can look to the Australian context and consider the impact of these projects in a specific context, as well as consider what practices and lessons might be applicable to other places.

Cross-regional influences work in other directions as well. For example, truth commissions, an important tool used in many societies dealing with past conflict, have been adopted in Australia and other settler-colonial countries. A number of high-profile Australian public inquiries over the past three decades have drawn on truth commission approaches, in particular the practice of privileging witness testimony, and have often made recommendations that make use of the language of transitional justice to recommend public acts of “symbolic reparation.” Government-funded public memorials have been created in response to such recommendations and can be seen as outcomes of historical dialogue—and perhaps instigators of dialogue in a broader sense as well. Other projects logged on the *Not a Celebration* map are grassroots memory initiatives that are part of an ongoing, intentional dialogue.

Parramatta Female Factory Precinct (PFFP) Memory Project (www.pffpmemory.org.au/) is an arts-based memory project based in an area of the Sydney suburb of Parramatta. The site has been used since early colonial days to house women and children in institutional settings. 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 marginalized women and children. 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. The Parragirls group was formed in the years following the Australian Senate inquiry that resulted in the *Forgotten Australians* report in 2004 (SCARC). Teenage girls were sent to Parramatta Girls Home in the mid-twentieth century, charged with “crimes” such as their own neglect or having been “exposed to moral danger.” To be specific, these so-called crimes are often meant to imply that the accused have been charged with their own sexual abuse.

This is not a traditional memorial nor a memorial-museum. Lily Hibberd writes, for example, that “[t]he mission of the PFFP Memory Project is to support the Parragirls to generate new forms of memory” (105). One building on the site has been adopted as an art space, and a number of art interventions are visible around the grounds. There is an existing mural on the site, painted by Aboriginal women in the 1980s, as well as graffiti scratched into floor and wall surfaces. Some of the work of the memory project has been to draw attention to these marks. Aside from this, the site has been used for gatherings of ex-inmates, a conference, and various community days. The PFFP is registered as Australia’s first official “Site of Conscience.” The international Sites of Conscience movement (www.sitesofconscience.org), meanwhile, uses places where past human rights abuses have occurred to educate people for a better future. This introduces another intersecting map in which the work of memory activism can be considered.

Another example of grassroots historical dialogue can be found at the Colebrook Reconciliation Park, built on the site of the Colebrook Home for Aboriginal Children on the outskirts of the South Australian state capital, Adelaide. It was the first place in Australia where a formal memorial acknowledged the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. The first plaque was added to the site in 1997, just days after *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry in the Separation of Aboriginal Children from their Families* (HREOC) was tabled in the Australian Parliament on May 26. Thereafter, the day is now commemorated annually as Sorry Day. In the twenty years since then, the site has become a multi-layered memory space, hosting one of the most iconic memorials, the “Grieving Mother.” It has also, over that time, provided a focus for the work of the Blackwood Reconciliation Group, a group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians that, in partnership with the Colebrook Tji Tji Tjuta (meaning all the special children), share the story of Colebrook with schools and community groups as a part of their commitment to historical truth-telling.

These two projects, mapped individually on the MHDP alongside the overall *Not a Celebration* map, have an ongoing life as dialogue. They are driven by memory

activists who are able to connect with other practitioners. This is another key outcome for the MHDP, for as well allowing organizations and researchers to source information and make connections, it allows those involved directly in historical dialogue to make connections and learn about what is happening elsewhere, not only within their own country and not only in relation to similar historical events. For example, if a new group starts to consider historical dialogue work related to institutional abuse, it may be useful for them to know about the work at Parramatta or Colebrook.

The open approach to defining historical dialogue taken by MHDP means that there exist some connections which, though not easily visible, exist nonetheless. This can be demonstrated by outlining the work of the grassroots community group, Bringing Them Home Western Australia (WA), a group Alison Atkinson-Phillips joined through her networks as a social justice activist, rather than as a memory scholar. Bringing Them Home WA advocates for and alongside members of the Australian Stolen Generations (the words “stolen generations” refers to the Aboriginal people separated from their families as a result of government assimilationist policies); however, they would not have self-identified their work as being historical dialogue. One of the group’s core activities is the promotion of the Perth Sorry Day event, when they invite schoolchildren across the city to a festival day where Stolen Generations survivors tell their stories as an act of truth-telling. More recently, the organization is working with Curtin University on a healing camps project that brings together ex-residents at two Aboriginal “mission” sites to explore how these may be rehabilitated in a culturally appropriate way. Commemoration is about establishing what a collective remembers of their shared past rather than what did or did not happen (Poole). According Downs, Foner, and Masur, “[h]istorical monuments are, among other things, an expression of power—an indication of who has the power to choose how history is remembered in public places” and by extension, who has control over the space. Aboriginal people in Australia, like other minority groups around the world, historically have not had their stories included in the official narratives. Current power struggles for more inclusive representations are resulting in a variety of new initiatives to remember even when there are no traces that remain in the memory landscape. Other similar examples are discussed in the next section of this paper.

MAPPING RESPONSES TO SLAVERY AND RACISM

Jill Strauss, who joined the MHDP just as the map was going online, has contributed to efforts to map projects in one of her areas of expertise, the history of slavery and the legacy of racism in the United States. Although slavery in the United States

became illegal more than 150 years ago, the country continues to struggle with the root causes of racism as an outcome of slavery and the injustice it produced (Leary) “result[ing] in lack of trust and cohesion; isolation and estrangement; laws that account for distrust, guilt and threats—real and perceived—of reprisal” (Vision, Mission). According to historian Ira Berlin, “the United States’ largest, most pervasive social problem is founded on the institution of slavery... any attempt to address the question of race in the present must also address slavery in the past. Slavery is ground zero of race relations” (3). The fraught discussions around the legacies of slavery and racism in the United States illustrate how contentious even the non-recent past can be when it comes to issues of memory and historical justice. Nonetheless, as Bryan Stevenson, founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) (eji.org/about-eji), notes, “[t]he way we recover is to create a relationship with the past.” Under Stevenson’s leadership, EJI is researching and commemorating sites where African Americans were lynched in the South after the abolition of slavery and the Reconstruction. In addition to commemorating where there are little or no traces of the past in a memory landscape, EJI has also built the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, the first national memorial to victims of lynching. The Memorial opened in April 2018 in Montgomery, Alabama.

Commemorations of lynchings and sites of lynchings are examples of civil society initiatives that have taken root in order to promote a larger, national engagement with United States’ history and legacy of slavery and racism. The MHDP includes many of these projects and initiatives that critically address the history and memory of slavery. These civil society efforts include: truth and reconciliation endeavors (Ferguson Truth-Telling Project / Kellogg Foundation’s Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Enterprise); demands for reparations; universities researching their slave holding pasts (including Ivy League institutions like Princeton and Georgetown); and efforts to document, save, and memorialize slave burial grounds and extant slave quarters on former plantations (The Slave Dwelling Project). In addition, there are projects underway that seek to memorialize slavery in places where it existed, even though in some cases there are no longer any pieces of physical evidence of the past. These creative projects take on the added challenge of “historical representation” when there is nothing to reference. For instance, Requiem for Rice is a “tribute to those enslaved, exploited, and brutalized on Low Country South Carolina and Georgia rice plantations who remain unburied, unmourned & unmarked” (Green, Fields-Black, and Dash). Whether well-documented or not, as Saidiya Hartman notes, “how best to remember the dead and represent the past is an issue fraught with difficulty, if not outright contention” (758).

One initiative, Coming to the Table (CTTT) (comingtothetable.org), takes a person-to-person approach, engaging in dialogue about a shared history of slavery and racism for understanding in the present, in order to act for a different future.

CTTT is a national racial reconciliation organization based at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Furthermore, it is inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision that "the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood." Founded in 2006, the organization has grown to over 4,000 members in its first decade. CTTT uses dialogue processes with descendants of enslaved people and enslavers and allies to find "meaning and healing in the process of creating justice and promoting accountability" (Umbreit 254).

One of the limitations of the dialogue process is, as Cynthia Cohen points out, that there can be a "mismatch between people's need to tell their stories and express their suffering and [the other's] capacity to listen" (270). CTTT is a voluntary organization and members participate at the level and ways they feel comfortable. Of those who actively engage in the dialogues, held by the regional groups around the country and every two years at the national conference, many are "linked" descendants (African Americans and European Americans with shared ancestry). According to member Felicia Furman, CTTT "places a high value on these links because personal connections can create a compelling and intense desire for healing and reconciliation," and a greater willingness to listen. "What is needed are 'others' with the ability to ask, to express curiosity for a painful past, as well as to have compassion and empathy" (Jelin 65). Validation, acknowledgment, and recognition are all words used to describe the feeling experienced by people who believe that they are being listened to respectfully and compassionately. This can transform an individual's feelings of hurt, pain, isolation, and disenfranchisement to feelings of relatedness and a desire for others to have a similar opportunity (Hamber; Lindner; Kayser).

As this article is being written, a series of conflicts have erupted in the United States that demonstrate clearly what can happen when historical conflict is left unresolved. After a number of clashes involving the removal of memorials to the Confederacy, the United States finds itself in the midst of a national "collective introspection" (Coates 54). This conflicted heritage has been playing out through the metaphor of Confederate memorials venerating white supremacy, as well as the Lost Cause of the Confederacy. Events of the past, present, and future are interconnected in terms of "causality, significance, and consequence" (Wagner-Pacifici 7). As the United States reckons with its irreparable past and how best to respond to the hate and violence in the present, we are reminded of Bryan Stevenson's words: "[t]he way we recover is to create a relationship with the past."

CONCLUSION

The MHDP seeks to document activities that address historical dialogue and reconciliation efforts in the broadest sense. However, the project's reliance on the interest and enthusiasm of individual researchers, particularly those who know English, are mostly volunteers, and have access to the internet, also means that the map, like memory studies more generally, has gaps and silences. This is evident, for example, across northern Africa and Asia. Nevertheless, as the field of historical dialogue and reconciliation continues to grow, there are ever-increasing programs and projects that address contested memory around the world. This article offers only a sample of the kinds of projects mapped, including the places where such work occurs. It also features the diverse group of scholars who contribute to the map, and who are therefore one of the project's strengths. Continually updating the map with these initiatives, even with the limitations described above, offers a collection of institutional and grassroots efforts to deal with inherited conflict in culturally appropriate ways. In this manner, these same efforts uncover the silences and create opportunities to right at least some of the wrongs inflicted historically and in the present. The efforts of the MHDP and its contributors continue and, in so doing, support the broader goals of historical dialogue, namely to contribute to the long-term goals of conflict transformation and to create new paths that enable a society to move away from conflict.

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