



From the Transnational to the Intimate: Multidirectional Memory, the Holocaust and Colonial Violence in Australia and Beyond

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Abstract

In Australia, public remembrance, particularly relating to national identity and colonial violence, has been contentious. In this article, we take Australia's recent bid to join the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) as an opportunity to identify national, local and multidirectional dynamics shaping public remembrance of the Holocaust and colonial violence in Australia. Joining IHRA signifies a belated national commitment to Holocaust remembrance, which has traditionally been fostered in Australia by survivor communities. Significantly, the Sydney Jewish Museum (SJM) has recently ventured beyond survivor memory, positioning Holocaust remembrance as a platform to identify ongoing human rights violations against Indigenous Australians and other marginalized groups. While this multidirectional framework promotes an inclusive practice of remembrance, we argue that it may inadvertently flatten complex histories into instances of "human rights violations" and decentre the foundational issue of settler colonial violence in Australia. To explore the personal and affective work of remembering settler violence from an Indigenous perspective, we turn to two multiscale artworks by Judy Watson that exemplify a mnemonic politics of location. *the names of places* contributes to a local and national public remembrance of settler violence by identifying and mapping colonial massacre sites. In *experimental beds*, Watson links her matrilineal family history of racial exclusion with that of Thomas Jefferson's slave, Sally Hemings. This transnational decolonial feminist work takes the gendered and racialized body and intimate sexual appropriation as a ground for a multidirectional colonial memory, thereby providing an alternative to the dominant Holocaust paradigm and its idiom of human rights.

Keywords Multidirectional memory · Holocaust memory · Human rights museums · Colonial violence · Feminist politics of location · Judy Watson

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Introduction

Within memory studies, much of the literature advocating a turn from national to transnational memory takes as its starting point European and North American memory cultures (Kennedy and Radstone 2013). Methods for studying the transnational dynamics of travelling and multidirectional memory are advocated in part as a means of severing the assumed link between national identity and collective memory and of exploring ways in which memories in our increasingly global present exceed the bounded territory of the nation and operate on multiple scales (De Cesari and Rigney 2014, p. 21). In this article, we analyse the dynamics at play between transnational, cosmopolitan, national and local memory cultures from the peripheral location of Australia, which is both remote from the metropolitan centres of the North Atlantic and has its own deeply rooted Indigenous culture. The fit between national identity and collective memory has never been seamless or coherent in Australia. Official attempts to tie national identity to the ANZAC legend, which is promoted through national monuments, official commemorations and a public holiday, have come under fire for excluding Indigenous people, migrants, women and many others in Australia and for grounding Australian identity in events offshore rather than in the specificity of events on the Australian continent, with its Indigenous heritage. We focus here, however, not on ANZAC commemoration, which has generated a significant scholarly literature (see, e.g. Seal 2004), but instead on public Holocaust remembrance. Specifically, we consider whether and under what conditions Holocaust memory facilitates the memory of shameful pasts and presents closer to home, including Australia's history of settler colonial violence.

Our focus on Holocaust memory as a starting point is driven by recent developments on a national and local level in Australia. While Australia is currently petitioning to join the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), Holocaust remembrance in Australia has traditionally been fostered by survivor communities. Through analyses of the tensions within and between these transnational, national and local developments, we aim to contribute to and refine understandings of how the Holocaust acts as a cosmopolitan memory, and specifically, to identify conditions under which Holocaust memory may prompt memory of other histories of violence and exclusion. For instance, in a move spearheaded by descendants of survivors, the Sydney Jewish Museum (SJM), in a new exhibition on "The Holocaust and Human Rights", positions Holocaust memory as a critical platform for assessing ongoing human rights struggles in Australia (Alba 2016). As Michael Rothberg has demonstrated, Holocaust memory need not screen out other memories in a crowded commemorative landscape; rather, it can facilitate the memory of other atrocities, a dynamic he labels "multidirectional memory" (2009 p. 3). By drawing attention to the victims of other human rights violations, Holocaust memory can help articulate other histories of suffering and expand notions of transnational justice (2009, p. 5). In using Holocaust memory as a catalyst for public debates on human rights violations in Australia, including against Indigenous peoples since British colonization, the human rights exhibition at the SJM exemplifies a practice of multidirectionality, initiating an inclusive politics of memory facilitated by a "productive interplay of disparate acts of remembrance" (2009, p. 309). There is a cost, however: the idiom of human rights, which the SJM exhibit uses to articulate violations against four groups—Australia's Indigenous people, the LGBTQI+ community, the disabled and refugees—tends to flatten complex histories. Significantly, by positioning settler colonial violence against Indigenous peoples as one of many "human rights violations," it decentres the foundational injustice on which the nation is founded.

Taking the SJM exhibition as a provocation, and in the spirit of advocating multidirectionality, we turn to the work of Indigenous artist Judy Watson to explore an Indigenous practice of remembering colonial violence and its ongoing legacies. In her digital project, *the names of places*, she probes community memory as a means of mapping sites at which settlers massacred Indigenous people. By mapping these specific sites, her multiscalar work builds a repository of local knowledge that contributes to a collective memory of foundational violence in settler colonial Australia. In her work *experimental beds*, stimulated by an artist's residency at the University of Virginia and based on visits to Thomas Jefferson's Monticello plantation, Watson draws on her own interracial family history and intimate knowledge of racism, to remember transnational, intersectional mechanisms of gendered and racialized oppression that deeply shape(d) both Australia and America. In an empathic multidirectional move, she links the experience of Jefferson's slave, Sally Hemings, with whom he fathered six children, to that of her own grandmother, Grace Isaacson. As the Indigenous wife of a white man living in twentieth century Australia, Isaacson, like Hemings and her children, experienced racial exclusion (Watson 2014). Watson's engagement with these pasts, we contend, exemplifies Rothberg's model of multidirectional memory, but brings to it a feminist transnational and decolonial perspective that takes as its starting point the embodied and intergenerational experiences of racism and colonial violence rather than the Holocaust. Unlike the Sydney Jewish Museum, which productively uses the Holocaust as a trope to highlight the suffering of marginalized others in Australia, Watson begins, like Adrienne Rich, "not with a continent or a country or a house, but with the geography closest in—the body" (1984, p. 212) to connect colonial histories separated by geographical distance but marked by racialized and gendered ideologies of exclusion.

The Holocaust as a Cosmopolitan Memory Paradigm

The Holocaust is widely viewed as the first historical event that transcended its geographical rootedness to the point where it has had a profound impact on a transnational scale. Numerous scholars have argued that the salience of Holocaust memories during the decades following the Second World War helped raise awareness of other injustices and crimes against humanity (Huyssen 2000, p. 22; Beier-de Haan 2005, p. 234; Rothberg 2009, p. 6). Germany, Israel and other European countries share, according to Peter Novick (2015), an "organic connection" to the Holocaust because they were directly affected by its occurrence and have established territorialized commemorative cultures surrounding the event (pp. 48–49). By contrast, the spread of Holocaust memory through the media, film, literature and museums across and beyond these countries, especially in the 1990s, led to mediated forms of Holocaust commemoration (pp. 48–49). Levy and Sznajder (2002) contend that through these transnational processes of mediation, Holocaust memory has taken on a deterritorialized significance and has come to stand as a "moral touchstone" in an age of uncertainty (p. 93). In short, they regard Holocaust memory as a ground on which "to establish a framework for a wider shared morality, a way of identifying with 'distant others'" (Sundholm 2011, 1). As a universal "code for human rights abuses as such" (Levy and Sznajder 2010, p. 4), the imperative to remember the Holocaust has moved beyond countries that have "organic connections" to it and has become a "cosmopolitan" paradigm. Cosmopolitanism, as Levy and Sznajder explain it, refers to a dynamic in which "universal" values are adapted to local circumstances to produce something new (2002, p. 92). In contrast to transnationalism, which is concerned with the travel of memories across national borders, the concept of cosmopolitanism places the focus

on the centrifugal movement of the Holocaust memory paradigm and its ethical norms. Sharon Macdonald (2003) describes this process of embedding global norms in bounded locations, which may be local, regional or national, as the “glocalization of memory,” a process which we see at work in the Sydney Jewish Museum (p. 2).

Beyond the legal inscription of human rights principles, grounding human rights in local and national contexts depends on cultural representations which circulate memories of violence and genocide. Public institutions such as museums play a paramount role in circulating such memories (Landsberg 2004, p. 155; Levy and Sznajder 2011, p. 205). For museums employing the concept of human rights, engaging with domestic examples of human rights violations and struggles is necessary to ground the concept in a specific national context. As Levy and Sznajder (2011) point out, “the strength of human rights principles in a given national context is the product of the tenuous balance of particular (concrete) and universal (de-contextualized) memories” (p. 203). Taking the SJM as our case study, we propose that museums, and particularly those that engage with violent pasts through adopting a human rights lens, can promote grassroots human rights movements by confronting localized experiences of human rights abuse. As we show, the SJM translates the universal values drawn from Holocaust memory into the abstract language of human rights, which it applies to a local context by recognizing human rights violations and social injustices in Australia. Before we consider this case, however, we discuss the broader context of Holocaust remembrance in Australia, and particularly Australia’s recent bid to become a full member of the IHRA. This bid has brought the nation into a space previously dominated by community museums and as such provides an opportunity to explore tensions and synergies between Holocaust remembrance on local and national scales and how both local and national institutions interact with a cosmopolitan and transnational understanding of the Holocaust.

Australia and IHRA: Nationalizing Cosmopolitan Memory

The IHRA is based on the understanding that the Holocaust carries a universal meaning for all of humanity. This mandate is rooted in the Stockholm Declaration from 2000, according to which the Holocaust “fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilization” and due to its “unprecedented character [...] will always hold universal meaning” (IHRA n.d.). This assertion positions the Holocaust as the paradigmatic genocide in the history of humanity. Additionally, it justifies ongoing efforts to globalize Holocaust memory by persuading other countries to include it into their commemorative national culture (Takács 2016, p. 6). Following this call, on January 27, 2018 Malcolm Turnbull (2018), Australian Prime Minister at the time, marked International Holocaust Remembrance Day with a statement reiterating the universal value of Holocaust memory:

Though nearly four generations have passed since the liberation of Auschwitz on 27 January 1945, the significance of Holocaust remembrance to the cause of freedom and justice remains as relevant and compelling as ever. Around our world, we see divisions widening and conflicts deepening. [...] Here in Australia, we are proud of our diverse and harmonious society. But there is a need for all of us to remain vigilant against discrimination, fear and mistrust whenever it occurs. Last year, I was proud to affirm our nation’s adherence to these ideals during my visit to Yad Vashem World Holocaust Centre in Jerusalem. Australia’s recent acceptance as a Liaison country in the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance further strengthens this commitment. I look

forward to Australia becoming a full member in due course. With these thoughts in mind, I join with all people, both Jewish and non-Jewish, to reflect on the lessons of history, to honour the victims of the Holocaust and to reaffirm the enduring vow – *Never again* [emphasis in the original].

Notably, Turnbull's statement, and the Australian government's bid to become a member of a memory alliance spearheaded by the European Union, exemplifies Levy and Sznajder's notion of Holocaust memory as a cosmopolitan paradigm (2002). In seeking to join other nations in promoting Holocaust remembrance, Turnbull commits Australia to upholding the "universal" moral lessons of the Holocaust, as described above. Exactly what "never again" means in practice is, however, left disconcertingly vague.

Turnbull takes the opportunity afforded by Holocaust Remembrance Day to celebrate the Australian nation-state, affirming that it actively practices the moral values of tolerance, diversity and inclusion. Of course, there is some irony, if not hypocrisy, in celebrating Australia's commitment to inclusion and diversity while government policies pertaining to the treatment of Indigenous Australians and the offshore processing of asylum seekers have drawn censure from the UN and human rights NGOs (Rawatte 2018). Although in such instances, external pressure is placed on the Australian nation-state to address the injustices committed in its name, it is noteworthy that censure is not enforced through concrete actions. For example, Australia won a seat on the UNHCR in 2018 at the same time that it was chided for human rights violations (Doherty 2018). In fact, on the level of official state politics, Australia and other Western nation-states like the USA arguably use Holocaust memory to mask local injustices rather than, as Levy and Sznajder propose, to bring them to light (see Goldberg and Hazan 2015; Novick 1999). As such, political pledges to the universal and cosmopolitan value of the Holocaust can work to conceal rather than reveal state-enforced mechanisms of exclusion and violation. Through his endorsement of Australia's membership in the IHRA, Turnbull promotes a state-authorized approach to Holocaust commemoration that stands in stark contrast to the newly developed human rights exhibit at the SJM, which we discuss below.

While Turnbull positions Australia as a guarantor of values of diversity and inclusion, academic advisors to the IHRA, who are government-appointed, can be more critical of Australia's record. For instance, Steven Cooke (2018), a member of the Australian delegation to the IHRA, takes the opportunity afforded by Holocaust Remembrance Day to consider how joining the alliance might help to address the increasingly restive public disagreements, marked by a visible culture of protests and cultural activism, about the dating of Australia Day, a major date in Australia's national commemorative culture:

The designation of 27 January as International Holocaust Remembrance Day coincides with Australia Day on the 26 January – our national holiday – commemorating the arrival of the "First Fleet" in 1788. Disquiet over the choice of this day as our national day has grown in recent years, as 26 January 1788 also marks the start of the genocide of Indigenous peoples in Australia. So, in addition to Holocaust remembrance, we have some traumatic and troubling historic and ongoing issues relating to colonial genocide in Australia and so I think our involvement with the IHRA may provide some guidance here, with the experience of countries such as Canada helping to inform Australia's ongoing need for recognition of the genocide and reconciliation with Indigenous communities.

Rather than promoting a wholly positive self-image of Australia, Cooke envisions a different possibility emerging from Australia's membership of the IHRA, namely one that uses the

official establishment of a Holocaust-based commemorative culture to address local historical injustices and their legacies in the present. In so doing, Cooke suggests a productive, multidirectional synergy between the remembrance of the Holocaust as the genocide of European Jewry and the genocide of Australia's Indigenous people during colonization. In linking these memories, he activates the expectation generated by Holocaust remembrance—that nations should use the lessons of the Holocaust to critically assess the legacies of their own past. In contrast to Turnbull, he thus makes manifest the cosmopolitan potential of the Holocaust as a decontextualized symbol representing human rights abuse and suffering of any kind.

As the above examples indicate, Australia's bid to join IHRA raises pressing questions of politics, ethics and social justice. We might question why Holocaust remembrance has become a priority for the Australian nation now. It is worth noting that in seeking to join the IHRA, the national government is not introducing Holocaust memory to Australia; rather, it is seeking to position the nation as a player in a transnational alliance of predominantly Western countries. If successful, joining the IHRA will bring Australian national institutions, backed by government funding, into a space of Holocaust remembrance that has, since the 1990s, been advocated and developed by local community groups, and particularly by survivors and their families, thus raising possibilities for synergies and/or tensions between the local and the national. More pointedly, Australia's IHRA bid prompts us to ask troubling questions about the government's belated advocacy of Holocaust remembrance. As Novick (1999) has argued with regard to the USA, does a commitment to commemorating the Holocaust, by the government of a nation-state that does not have an "organic connection" to these events, divert attention from remembering atrocities closer to home, in which the nation (including the state and its citizens) was directly involved as perpetrators and beneficiaries? Does it, for instance, deflect attention from settler colonial violence against Indigenous peoples and the repercussions of that legacy in the present, or from criticisms of Australia's human rights record? In the following section, we consider the circumstances under which Holocaust memory, facilitated through the institution of the museum, can confront past and ongoing human rights violations.

The SJM: Localizing Transnational and Multidirectional Memory

Unlike the USA, which established the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), located in the nation's capital, through a federal act (United States Congress 1980), Australia did not develop a state-authorized institution of Holocaust memory. By contrast to the USA, Holocaust commemoration in Australia is rooted in commemorative initiatives implemented by the Jewish community, which has always operated independently from the Australian state. Australia has two major community-run Holocaust museums, the SJM and the Jewish Museum of Australia (JMA) in Melbourne, which must respond to community expectations, particularly those of survivors and their families, rather than safeguarding the reputation of the nation (Alba et al. 2014). Not only does Australia not have a nationally funded memorial museum; moreover, the SJM and the JMA are the most significant Holocaust memorial museums in Australia, as evidenced by the fact that in March 2017, the then Australian Prime Minister Turnbull himself inaugurated the new permanent exhibition at the SJM (Australian Jewish News, 2017). While the USA also has community-initiated Holocaust museums (Shefler, 2013), this comparison between the two countries strikingly demonstrates that local particularities shape the ways in which universal lessons of the Holocaust are received, engaged with, adapted or rejected. As Anna Tsing

reminds us, global connections that emerge from universal aspirations are always locally embedded; while local manifestations provide “*grip* to universal aspirations [emphasis in the original],” they are never equivalent with these aspirations (2005, p. 1). To explore some of the “productive frictions” (2005, p. 3) that emerge in localizing the universal aspiration of human rights, we take as our case study “The Holocaust and Human Rights” exhibit at the SJM. Before offering an in-depth analysis, we first consider the broader context out of which the SJM emerged.

Like Holocaust museums the world over, the SJM, which opened in 1995, is aimed at educating the Australian public about the rise of antisemitism in Europe and the events that constituted what became known as the Holocaust. The SJM, which emerged from and recounts the transnational experience of Holocaust survivors who migrated to Australia, exemplifies the ways in which memory travels (Erlil 2011) and remembrance is produced through a productive friction of local and transnational forces. It illustrates how the Jewish refugees who settled in Australia after the Second World War functioned as carriers of “communicative” Holocaust memory (Assmann 2006, p. 47), moving it with them “across and beyond” (Erlil 2011, p. 10) the borders of the social and political communities to which they originally belonged. Our reconstruction of the “routes” (2011, p. 11) this memory has taken and the specific roots it has put down in Australia with regard to the public history context showcases the ongoing significance of local and national contexts in the study of travelling memories. In the 1950s, Australia was predominantly Anglo-Celtic in cultural orientation and geographically distant from the horrors of the camps. For European post-war migrants, Australia—with its distinctive and unfamiliar landscape, climate, culture and language—was geographically, culturally and experientially remote. Survivors wanted to tell the story of the horror and tragedy that brought them from Europe, the now tainted cosmopolitan centre of Western civilization. They imagined the audience for their stories, first and foremost, as their fellow Australian citizens. While they acknowledged Australian hospitality, they wanted to educate Australians about not only their experiences during the Holocaust but also the challenges they faced in integrating into Australia (see, e.g. Bonyhady 2011). The museum, in its first iteration (1995–2012), sought to convey the “particular” lived experiences of survivors (Alba 2016, p. 246). Like many other survivors and intellectuals in the 1990s, the first curator of the SJM, Sylvia Rosenblum, stated that the Holocaust should not be compared to other atrocities (2016, p. 252). In so doing, she positions the SJM as an institution that reflects a particularly “Jewish injunction to remember—*zachor*—and the desire or need to bear witness [emphasis in the original]” to what happened to her generation (as quoted in Alba 2016, p. 252).

Of particular significance to the Sydney Jewish community, the museum served not only as a pedagogic site but also as a place of active Holocaust remembrance, deeply meaningful for survivors and their families. The website advises that the SJM “serves to honour the memory of those who lost their lives in World War Two and the Holocaust” (SJM n.d.-a). To facilitate commemoration, the SJM incorporates three significant memorial spaces, which are simultaneously transnational and community-oriented. The museum houses a Children’s Memorial, which “[c]ommemorates the lives of one and a half million children who perished during the Holocaust” with a specific focus “on children related to Australian survivors” (SJM n.d.-a). There is also a “Zachor” Digital Memorial, which remembers those who perished during the Holocaust but were never buried in a marked grave. Members of the public who lost a friend or family member are invited to send a name and a photograph, which will be added to the Memorial “to reflect the enormity of the loss” (SJM n.d.-a). On the top floor, in an alcove separate from the “Holocaust and Human Rights exhibit,” is the “Sanctum of Remembrance.”

A panel in this room, described as a Beit Haim (House of Life), a traditional name for a Jewish cemetery, remembers “all those who perished in the Holocaust” and represents “a commitment to active commemoration in the present.” The orientation to the local, always with an eye to transnational developments in Holocaust remembrance, is also evident in the SJM’s choice of exhibitions, which combine the paradigmatic framing narrative of European antisemitism and Jewish persecution with specific stories about the Jewish community and survivors in Australia, thereby “glocalizing” Holocaust memory.

The SJM’s permanent exhibitions, and particularly “Serving Australia,” demonstrate the productive friction that emerges when a cosmopolitan Holocaust paradigm is grounded in a particular location and cultural context. Exhibition topics include “Culture and Continuity: Journey through Judaism,” “Serving Australia: The Jewish Involvement in Australian Military History,” “The Holocaust” and “The Holocaust and Human Rights” (SJM n.d.-b). In Australia, the ANZAC legend, and the role of heroic white Australian servicemen (and belatedly, white women and Indigenous men), has been claimed as a formative collective memory for Australian national identity. The “Serving Australia” exhibit both reinforces the centrality of this collective memory and extends it by focusing on the contribution of Jews to the Australian Military. While this exhibition is the only one that explicitly, through its title, localizes the memory of Jewish experience in Australia, in fact, this approach is exemplified in other displays as well. Thus, although the exhibit on “The Holocaust,” which spans three levels of the museum, “traces the persecution and murder of European Jewry from 1933 to 1945,” it locates the experience of survivors by narrating “the new lives” they forged in Australia and detailing “their contribution to the rich, multicultural fabric of contemporary Australian life” (SJM n.d.-b). Additionally, the “Holocaust and Human Rights” exhibit, which “explores the contemporary and ongoing resonance” of the Holocaust, focuses exclusively on human rights struggles within Australia (SJM n.d.-b). In sum, the SJM territorializes Holocaust memory both by grounding it in the experiences of survivors in Australia and by positioning it as a provocation to consider Australia’s role in denying the human rights of various oppressed or stigmatized groups.

While the SJM in its first iteration was forged from the transnational experiences of Holocaust survivors, it did not consciously aim to promote a cosmopolitan understanding of the Holocaust (Alba 2016, p. 244). It has only been with the museum’s recent refurbishment and the opening of its new exhibition, “The Holocaust and Human Rights,” that it has explicitly articulated the “universal” lessons of the Holocaust—the moral and legal norms enshrined in the Nuremberg war crimes trials and the UN’s Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide—and linked them to present-day struggles in Australia (2016, p. 253). The recent changes were initiated and executed by the children of Holocaust survivors; they wanted not only to preserve the memories of their parents but also to make them relevant in the present (2016, p. 247). Against the wishes of their parents, who intended to cling to the particularity of their personal memories in the public display, the descendants decided to redevelop the exhibit in order “to find universal relevance in their parents’ particular experiences” (2016, p. 253). The display on war crimes trials, which concludes the Holocaust exhibit, links Holocaust memory and contemporary human rights struggles. For instance, a panel on the Nuremberg trials informs visitors that “the trials were a landmark event with profound and ongoing implications for international law. The Genocide Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, both ratified by the UN in 1948, bear witness to Nuremberg’s legacy.” It acknowledges that “[p]ost-war trials were also conducted in most European countries, the USA and other Western nations. Despite these efforts, justice for war

crimes remains an elusive and difficult task.” By deploying moral and legal norms developed in the aftermath of the Holocaust to articulate human rights violations in contemporary Australia, the SJM exemplifies the productivity of Holocaust memory in a multidirectional framework.

The “Holocaust and Human Rights” at the Sydney Jewish Museum

The “Holocaust and Human Rights Exhibition,” which opened in February 2018, is conceived as a “capstone to the Holocaust exhibition” (SJM n.d.-b). As Levy and Sznajder (2011) observe, the human rights regime relies on media like the museum to promote the cosmopolitan value of recognizing the victimized other (p. 205). The “Holocaust and Human Rights” exhibit contributes to these aims by using interactive media and new digital technologies to present “human rights achievements and challenges” and focus “on the key human rights issues facing Australia today” (SJM n.d.-a). The trope of “coming to the table” is used to structure and give meaning to the content and to invite visitors to actively engage in discussing the issues, as if they were sitting around a table. The exhibition features four contiguous digital displays in the shape of circular table tops (see Fig. 1). Each table, adjacent to and touching the next, addresses ongoing rights struggles experienced by a particular group: Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities, the LGBTQI+ community (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) and asylum seekers and refugees (SJM 2018, pp. 1–2). The proximity of the tables, each hosting its own conversation, produces some ironic juxtapositions. For instance, on the Indigenous table, the visitor hears former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd issuing an apology to the Stolen Generations while simultaneously, on the refugee table, reading about government policies restricting the rights of asylum seekers. This juxtaposition invites the visitor to reflect on the federal government’s current policies and on future apologies it may be compelled to issue to refugees. In this way, it furthers its aim of promoting “deep, reflective thought, even on topics that might prove irresolvable” (SJM n.d.-b).

The issue of how to facilitate human rights in a museum context has occasioned much reflection and debate. Bridget Conley-Zilcik (2014) convincingly argues that human rights



Fig. 1 The Holocaust and Human Rights Exhibit (Photograph: Sydney Jewish Museum. Used with Permission)

must be actively claimed and “used as a tool of ‘interruption’” rather than to promote “national redemption, ethical imperatives or norm building” (p. 75). To achieve this goal, human rights museums must challenge, rather than reinforce, existing power relations (Lee 2011, p. 184; Sandell 2016, p. 136). The introductory panel sets the tone for the exhibition and frames its use as a tool of disruption (SJM 2018, p. 1). The panel acknowledges that although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide “were positive declarations of principle,” they are non-binding and do not adequately restrict state sovereignty and exclude important groups of rights holders such as indigenous peoples. The exhibition illustrates the effects of such limits on minority groups in Australia today. For instance, the digital display stresses the long-standing discrimination faced by Indigenous Australians due to colonization and argues that the process of “decolonization continues to this day.” The slides and interviews cover a range of areas, including Stolen Generations, voting rights, land rights and lack of a treaty and constitutional recognition. The display directly addresses legacies of the past in the present, underscoring the government’s responsibility for neglecting structural issues that uphold this inequality. For example, it observes that the government failed to act on the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody published in 1991 and that Aboriginal deaths in custody are still unacceptably common. Through such content, the exhibition directly implicates the government in ongoing human rights transgressions. As the above example illustrates, the SJM positions the legal and normative legacy of the Holocaust—specifically, the idiom of human rights—as a conceptual frame that can be used to advocate for remembering other violations and promoting justice for other groups. In using the rubric of human rights to link Holocaust memory with the memory of other difficult pasts, the “Holocaust and Human Rights” exhibit exemplifies a practice of multidirectional memory.

Arguably, the SJM’s approach to detailing ongoing human rights struggles in Australia today is facilitated by its relative discretion as a community museum rather than an official national museum of Holocaust remembrance. Research shows that government-funded museums that employ the concept of human rights to frame their exhibition content tend to adopt a redemptive master narrative of human rights progress that trumps temporary domestic issues of human rights concern (Carter 2013, p. 332; Moses 2015, p. 43). For instance, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) promises to send the visitor on a “journey from darkness to light” and notes that “the unique architecture parallels a human rights journey” (CMHR n.d.). Visitors ascend through the galleries to the eighth level, culminating with the “Tower of Hope” for the global spread of human rights. The museum’s architectural design mirrors the presentation of content insofar as the journey begins on the ground level by addressing Canada’s shameful treatment of its Indigenous peoples and ends in the hope for a better future. The museum represents Canadians as exemplary defenders of human rights, who are and will continue to drive positive change in the world. This Canadian example demonstrates that in state-authorized museum contexts, the “politics of regret” (Olick 2007, p. 14) may function to support self-congratulatory rather than self-critical national narratives through appeal to the concept of human rights.

In contrast to state-authorized human rights museums, the SJM is not under pressure to paint an overly positive image of contemporary Australian politics. Unlike the Canadian example, “The Holocaust and Human Rights” exhibit at the SJM does not attempt to resolve the tension between past and ongoing human rights abuses through adopting a redemptive narrative. Instead, it is aimed at encouraging critical engagement and reflection (Alba 2016, p. 256). Human rights achievements and shortcomings are documented in a timeline, and the

exhibition reminds visitors that assuming “individual, communal and national responsibilities” is necessary to continue to fight for human rights (SJM 2018, p. 2). A master narrative of human rights progress is avoided, leaving the visitor with the impression that the situation remains difficult. The museum thus highlights what Tsing (2005) describes as a defining characteristic of the universal, namely that it is “an aspiration, an always unfinished achievement, rather than the confirmation of a pre-formed law” (p. 7). The SJM’s exhibit voices the aspiration that all humans will be able to claim their human rights one day; it also makes explicit that more needs to be done to make this aspiration a reality. Our point, in contrasting these examples, is not that community museums are “freer” in their representational choices, but that the forces shaping these choices, such as tensions between the generation of survivors and their children, stem from the needs and wishes of community stakeholders rather than the state.

While we welcome the SJM’s multidirectional initiative as an important effort to extend Holocaust memory by engaging visitors in reflecting on past and continuing human rights abuses in Australia, there are some notable and inevitable limits to the model adopted. Specifically, the trope of “coming to the table” as well as the design of the table itself, while aiming to facilitate conversation, literally and metaphorically flattens and levels the four cases included in the exhibition. Each is represented through the idiom of human rights, which collapses diverse histories, experiences and social and political contexts into a common framework of “human rights violations.” For instance, the exhibition on the Rights of First Australians observes that “[t]he rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been violated since Australia was colonized in 1788. Frontier violence and ongoing state-sanctioned discrimination, including the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families for over a century, have scarred Indigenous communities.” While the exhibit acknowledges colonial violence, the statement that accompanies the image of “The Gwaeagal Shield, possibly obtained on Captain Cook’s first voyage, 1770” is decidedly neutral. The description of violence “between colonists and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples” and “battles and massacres” does not convey the incommensurate force used by colonizers. Additionally, the concept of genocide, so central to the Holocaust exhibition, is notably absent. The elemental significance and unresolved legacy of historical injustice that flows from colonial violence, genocide and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples in the foundation of Australia is simply not communicated when this history is represented merely as one of several examples of a “human rights violation.” Despite the admirable aim of facilitating remembrance of other histories of suffering and oppression, the SJM’s “Holocaust and Human Rights” exhibition, as we have argued, inadvertently decentres the foundational and deeply territorialized memory of settler colonial violence and its ongoing legacy in Australia.

How to develop a collective memory of Australia’s beginnings as a nation-state forcibly founded on already occupied Indigenous land is a source of ongoing contestation, as are the related issues of constitutional recognition of Indigenous people, treaty and sovereignty. Inevitably, controversies over the representation of Australia’s settler colonial history, which were particularly bitter during the “History Wars” of the 1990s, continue to play out in present-day commemorative politics. For instance, in the last several years, the campaign to change the date ([#changethedate](#)) on which Australia’s national holiday is celebrated, or even to eliminate Australia Day as an inappropriate celebration of the European settlement that displaced Indigenous people, has gained increasing public support. The public remembrance of the violence of settler colonialism and its effects on Indigenous people is at the heart of these public and online protests. To explore the personal and affective work of remembering settler

violence in a museum context, we turn to two multiscalar works by artist Judy Watson, a descendant of the Waanyi people of northwest Queensland. Although Watson does not explicitly engage with Holocaust memory, her work is deeply informed by the concept of genocide and is part of a broader effort to document and remember the extent and ferocity of frontier violence in the colonial settlement of Australia (Ryan, 2019).

Multiscalar Memories of Colonial Violence: Judy Watson’s Feminist Decolonial Vision

Watson’s artworks—*the names of places* and *experimental beds*—offer an Indigenous remembrance of frontier violence that is simultaneously located and transnational in outlook and reach. Her works exemplify Adrienne Rich’s (1984) call for a “politics of location” that begins with the intimate geography of the body and extends to scales of the national and transnational (see also Rothberg 2014). Writing in 1984, Rich advocated the need for feminists to “recognize[e] our location [...], the conditions we have taken for granted” (p. 219). Exemplifying this approach, she positioned herself as a white, Jewish, American woman and considered the privileges that white skin conferred on her in an era of segregation and its ongoing legacy in the USA. She embraced works by African American feminists and African women in South Africa as a source for feminist theories and strategies, exemplifying an implicitly transnational perspective (p. 227). Indigenous critic Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) also reflects on the relationship between body, place and identity, arguing that there is fundamental difference in Indigenous and non-Indigenous connection to place in Australia. She states that Indigenous people have a moral and spiritual connection to the land that is carried on through “descent, country, place and shared experience” and cannot be broken through forced removals and dislocations (2015, 14).

Taking a cue from these critics, we turn to Watson’s *the names of places* and *experimental beds* as works that enrich not only public remembrance but also theories of memory (Hochberger 2018). Specifically, we demonstrate that these works articulate a feminist decolonial approach to memory that is both located and transnational. In doing so, we respond to Susannah Radstone, who observes that in the current era of globalized, supposedly unbounded memory, a focus on the “locatedness” of travelling memories, and we might add on memory carriers like Watson, is in order (2011, p. 111). Like Rich, who takes care to locate her subject position in a specific time and place, Radstone notes that circulating memories are “only ever instantiated locally [emphasis in the original]” (p. 117). We trace the embodied locatedness of colonial memory, which provides the basis for transnational mnemonic connectivity, through Watson’s artworks, showing how they are rooted in her personal and intimate family history of intergenerational racial discrimination.

Watson’s multimedia work *the names of places* was initially exhibited as part of the 3rd National Indigenous Art Triennial, *Defying Empire*, held at the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) in 2017, and has since been exhibited widely (Wahlquist 2018). Using cartography, video, paint, oral history and other materials, this team project seeks to identify, investigate and remember publicly sites at which Aboriginal people were massacred by European settlers in colonial Australia. Watson’s family connection to settler colonial violence provides inspiration for the project, but she also recognizes this violence as having foundational national significance:

My great-great-grandmother Rosie survived a massacre on Lawn Hill. Every Aboriginal person is basically a survivor of massacres in their area, and so it’s just that sort of thing

of trying to peel back layers, of trying to push back the whitewash and look at what is actually there because no matter where we are from, if we live here, this is Aboriginal land, so that history is going to be the basis of everybody's story (Caddey 2016, p. 24).

In identifying the personal, the local and the national significance of colonial massacres against Indigenous people, Watson takes a simultaneously located and multiscalar approach to the remembrance of colonial violence.

There are striking parallels between Rich's politics of location and the located and decolonial approach Watson develops in *the names of places*. Rich identified, as a basis for a located feminist politics, a need to understand "how a place on the map is also a place in history within which [...] I am created and trying to create" (1984, p. 212). She acknowledges not only the oppressions of her position but also her privileges as a white North American, a location that shaped her "ways of seeing" and as such, a location for which she takes responsibility (p. 220). For Rich, then, a politics of location was an important origin point for what we would today identify as a feminist decolonial approach—she aimed to acknowledge her own subject position and recognized that she enjoyed privileges from which African American women were excluded. Similarly, Watson's work asks viewers to recognize and take responsibility for their own location in the settler colonial nation, and the privileges (or not) that have flowed from foundational violence. For instance, Watson's related project, *the names of men*, scrolls the names of perpetrators of colonial violence over a section of a map of Australia. She intends both *the names of places* and *the names of men* to prompt "a welling up" of a difficult past that remains suppressed today (Dovey 2017). These projects ask the descendants of settlers and the broader Australian community to acknowledge our location and "to name the ground we're coming from" (Rich 1986, p. 219). Taking the intimate terrain of frontier violence in her own family as an inspiration for investigating massacre sites that have been willfully forgotten, Watson's approach exemplifies the potential of a "politics of location" as a ground for public remembrance in Australia.

A project that is aimed at stimulating public remembrance, *the names of places* has an online site that is part of the exhibition but can also be accessed anytime. When the viewer clicks on the name of a massacre site, the documentary and oral history evidence, including letters, court documents and transcribed memories, are presented and the source referenced. Watson (2016) advises that "[t]he names may come from research by historians or by hearsay where somebody has heard something about a place they know where something like this has occurred". Her approach of accepting both settler colonial documentary evidence and Indigenous oral history sources renders *the names of places* a collaborative project between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Through her work, she hopes that

[t]hese places, names, details of such events, can be retrieved and held as part of our collective consciousness. This would go back out into the public space where it can be researched further and possibly be the catalyst for instances of coming together to speak these stories out loud (Art Gallery of New South Wales n.d.).

Watson invites the public to contribute their own knowledge of massacres, including family memory and hearsay, to the website; these contributions will then be correlated with other sources such as documentary evidence. By inviting public participation and engagement, the project of mapping sites of violence is constituted as a commemorative project by the public for the public. Through the collection of stories and evidence, the mapping project contributes to the "truth-telling about our history" called for by Indigenous leaders in the Uluru Statement

From the Heart, which was presented at the Uluru First Nations Constitutional Convention in 2017 (Uluru First Nations National Convention, 2017).¹

The Intimate Transnational: Judy Watson's *Experimental Beds*

In *experimental beds*, Watson draws on the intimate and personal ties that link her to her female Aboriginal ancestors to move through the mnemonic scale of the personal beyond the national to the transnational. As an artist of mixed Scottish, English and Aboriginal heritage, she introduces the experience of women of color under colonialism and slavery as a paradigm for multidirectional memory. A carrier of memories that shaped her personal family history over generations, she travels to the other side of the world to connect with distant others who, like her own family, suffered from policies that positioned them as less-than-fully human. There, she engages with the fate of another woman of color, Hemings, who, like her Aboriginal grandmother Isaacson, was ostracized by white society, including by the family of the father of her six children, Jefferson. Although the relationship between Hemings and Jefferson was known to contemporaries, its significance was minimized by his white family members, particularly his grandchildren (Gordon-Reed 2008, p. 25). She links the contexts of Australian colonialism and American slavery through cultural “cross-referencing,” an approach that Rothberg (2009) describes as productive in unearthing of legacies of oppression (p. 7). While he analyses the interconnectedness of early Holocaust memory and the global process of decolonization (2009, p. 7), *experimental beds* speaks directly to the colonial experience of racial violence, sexual appropriation and social exclusion experienced by women of color. As such, we argue that it provides a feminist intersectional basis for a multidirectional memory of colonial violence.

Watson found inspiration for *experimental beds* in architectural drawings by Jefferson that she saw on display at the University of Virginia Fralin Museum of Art. These architectural drawings provided “the bones for a series of works” which explore Jefferson’s interconnected and complex relationships “with his white family and African American enslaved women and children, also considered to be part of his blood family” (Grahame 2012). Connecting Jefferson’s public identity as a visionary to his private life as a slave owner, she uses his architectural plans for the University of Virginia as a canvas to represent items that relate to his nearby plantation, Monticello. As she explains, the etchings feature “images of gourds growing in the gardens of Monticello, shards and objects from the archaeological finds around the slave cabins on Mulberry Row” (Watson n.d.). In etching *experimental beds* 3 (Fig. 2), the centrepiece is a rendering of elk antlers, collected by Lewis and Clark during an expedition, and now displayed in the entrance hall of Monticello (Grahame 2012).² The etchings depict objects such as nails from the nailery, pottery shards, the handle of a bucket and scissor-like hooks from slave women’s dresses, all found on site at Monticello, which reference the presence of slaves. For Watson, objects such as dress fasteners recall the sexual exploitation of enslaved women and symbolize “the vulnerability of the dresses worn by the women as barriers to the unwanted attention of the white men working on the plantations” (Watson 2014). Discussing some of the other images she created to represent these interracial

¹ For the Uluru Statement From the Heart (2017) and information about its journey around Australia, see <https://www.1voiceuluru.org/>.

² For additional images and information, see Judy Watson, *experimental beds* (2012), grahame galleries + editions, <http://www.grahamegalleries.com.au/index.php/judy-watson-experimental-beds-2012>

relationships that are characterized by perverse power imbalances, she observes: “Thin hair-like lines interconnect the shapes and memory of liaisons between white men and black women, the free and the enslaved, the DNA and the experimental beds where strange plants were collected and grow to see if they would flourish and regenerate” (Watson n.d.). Watson’s vision and aesthetic is grounded in and inspired by the specific materiality of the site of Monticello, which provides a basis for the transnational dynamic the artwork articulates.

This presentation of material evidence of colonial racism and oppression is an important dimension of Watson’s work (Kennedy 2011). The history of slavery, much like the history of colonial massacres in Australia, has left material traces in the local geography that Watson showcases through her art in an attempt to disrupt a state-enforced mnemonic politics of forgetting. *experimental beds*, which builds on material evidence found at the site of Monticello and its garden beds and planting practices, exemplifies a feminist practice that begins with “the material, with matter” and that metaphorically “smell[s] of the earth” (Rich 1986, pp. 213–214). We contend that the presentation of materials that reference histories of violence such as the hooks from dresses that enslaved women wore contributes to a commemorative process that is evidentiary in nature and therefore helps to “get rid of the whitewash” (Watson 2014). As in her massacre mapping project, Watson’s approach goes against the grain of official accounts by engaging with the particularity of local histories that have been marginalized. It thereby promotes a productive form of multidirectional solidarity

Fig. 2 Judy Watson’s etching *experimental beds 3* (2012) (Image courtesy of the artist and grahame galleries + editions)



that is grounded in the subjective perspective and embodied experience of an Aboriginal woman.

The reference to *experimental beds* takes on a double meaning in her Watson's etchings. She derived the title of her work from the experimental garden beds that Jefferson maintained at Monticello to test the adaptability of plants from around the world to the climate in Virginia. As Watson explains, the notion of *experimental beds* also describes

Jefferson's pursuit across the cultural divide "between the sheets" with enslaved woman Sally Hemings. This union between a white man and a black woman resulting in children of mixed descent is reflected in my own family in Australia where the matrilineal line is Aboriginal Australian and the patrilineal line is white European males (Watson 2014).

Through invoking her personal family history on the matrilineal line, which in significant ways mirrors the experience of Hemings and her children who were excluded from the rest of the white family, Watson draws out multidirectional memory links between the two histories of racial suppression. She positions her maternal grandmother, Grace Isaacson, as "the Sally Hemings in this story with the exception that my white grandfather married her" (Watson 2014). The "empathy" she felt towards her grandmother, whose marriage to her grandfather was deeply disdained by some of the white family members on the paternal side, led her to Hemings' story in Virginia, as she explains:

[a]s an Aboriginal person, I feel an empathy for Sally Hemings and her family and a remote understanding for Jefferson and his family separated by prejudice from acknowledging their enslaved family members. I feel the blood from these relationships reaching out to us in a universal will to survive. We are here now; we are right next to you (Watson 2014).

Watson explains that she connects with Hemings because she was always acutely "aware of the other side of racism and who it was directed at" which instigated her to take on the role of a "champion" for her grandmother (Watson 2014). This personal connection of racial and gendered exclusion fosters transnational visions of social justice enabled by the multidirectional travels of memory, through which, in an act of extended empathy, Watson actively commemorates Hemings. In so doing, we contend that Watson helps to remember publicly the dark American past of slavery and racism and thereby facilitates the emergence of a transnational solidarity grounded in the intersectional oppressions experienced by women of color living in racist societies (Rothberg 2009, p. 5).

Conclusion

Australia's locatedness on the periphery of Western memory cultures offers a unique case study for exploring how a cosmopolitan memory of the Holocaust travels and is localized in a nation distant from the events. We have identified the differing ways in which the federal government of Australia, on the one hand, and a community museum, on the other, approach the possibilities offered by Holocaust remembrance. Whereas former Prime Minister Turnbull takes the opportunity afforded by the IHRA to celebrate unequivocally Australia as a nation of openness, freedom and diversity, by contrast, the SJM leverages Holocaust memory to launch probing inquiries into Australia's human rights record in the past and the present. We speculate that these differences—

one that uses the Holocaust as a screen memory and the other that uses it as a platform for multidirectional memory—relate in part to the differing constituencies that are represented by these bodies. We demonstrate that the new “Holocaust and Human Rights” exhibit at the SJM is the product of a memory transfer between the generation of Holocaust survivors and their children who, in the context of the SJM, wish to ground the universal lessons of Holocaust memory in a contemporary Australian context (Alba 2016). We propose that the SJM’s openly political stance—advocating for groups who continue to suffer from the violations of their rights—is facilitated by its institutional framework. Its independence from state-funded structures enables it to act as a tool of disruption by drawing attention to the ongoing human rights struggle that marginalized groups, including Indigenous peoples, face in Australia.

In this article, we applied and extended the conceptual notion of multidirectional memory in two distinct ways. Firstly, our work identifies a multidirectional use of memory in both our case studies on the SJM and in Judy Watson’s work. Secondly, we practice a multidirectional approach by creating a dialogue between these discrete contexts. Specifically, we approached the SJM’s representation of the denial of the rights of Indigenous Australians as a provocation and an invitation to explore Indigenous remembrance of colonial violence. To that end, we introduced into this framework the work of Indigenous artist Judy Watson.

We contend that through her work on Jefferson’s *experimental beds*, Watson uses the colonial memory paradigm as a starting point to connect histories of sexualized racial oppression and exclusion of women of color across a transnational context through notions of the intimate and the private. Her approach, grounded in family history and personal documents, gives a voice to the communities whose histories and experiences have been silenced throughout centuries of slavery and colonialism and continue to be adversely affected by governmental state policies. Watson’s multidirectional approach thus provides an important extension of Rothberg’s study of the dialogical relationship between Holocaust memory and the process of decolonization, which he refers to as a “minoritarian tradition of ‘decolonized’ Holocaust memory” (2009, p. 22). The multidirectional links that Watson forges through her artwork lead us to identify the need, in memory studies, for a greater focus on Indigenous and other subaltern voices to increase knowledge of how colonial experiences have given rise to their own multidirectional memory paradigms. Goldberg (2015) argues that during the Second World War, Jews were branded as the “other” but since have been included into the notion of a Western “us” (p. 17). This, however, does not apply to formerly colonized and enslaved subjects whose embodied experiences are uniquely tied to how they have been and continue to be othered through their racial background. Watson’s work is an expression of this very fact, as she explores what it meant to be a woman of color living in eighteenth century America and twentieth century Australia. Furthermore, through invoking herself, she points out the intergenerational affects this reality has on the descendants of women like her grandmother and Hemings.

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