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# Body Memories as a Neglected Legacy of Human Rights Abuses: Exploring Their Significance for Transitional Justice

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## Abstract

Memories are a crucial part of transitional justice work. However, consistent with the fact that the field has significantly neglected bodies (except in the sense of what has been done to them), complex body memories that both reside in and spill over from individual bodies have received little attention. This interdisciplinary article aims to address this gap and thus to foreground the fact that bodies tell their own stories. What enhances their storytelling potential in this regard is their relationships and interactions with their wider social ecologies. Fundamentally, body memories have important social dimensions that make them highly relevant to transitional justice. Drawing on qualitative interviews with victims-/survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Colombia and Uganda, the article's core argument is that transitional justice processes should give more attention to body memories and to the potential they offer for developing the field in new embodied directions.

## Keywords

Body memories, conflict-related sexual violence, embodiment, social dimensions, transitional justice

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## Introduction

Drawing on her experiences of childhood sexual violence, Culberston (1995: 180) reflects on the irony that ‘while the violator can enter the body of the violated, the rest of us, in trying to grasp the experience, are shut out’. Through this powerful in/out juxtaposition, she thus draws attention to the phenomenon of body memories. Experimentally entering the body and becoming an integral part of it, body memories can thereby create a barrier between bodies. The ‘shutting out’ dynamic to which Culbertson refers, however, needs to be situated within the broader context of what Rothberg (2006: 162) calls ‘the multidirectionality of memory’. Focused on the significance of body memories for transitional justice, and underscoring that the privileging of fact-based narratives (particularly within a legal context) can detract from important embodied dimensions of storytelling, this article seeks precisely to demonstrate that bodies and their memories ‘open up’ new possibilities and avenues for exploration within the field.

What critically stands out from extant transitional justice scholarship as well as practice is the neglect of bodies (Clark, 2019), or what Gill-Leslie (2020: 103) refers to as the ‘scant attention to corporeality as a field’. Bodies primarily enter the purview of transitional justice only because of what has been done to them – when they are beaten, tortured, raped. They also raise important questions and challenges for transitional justice when they go missing (Crettol and La Rosa, 2006; Robins, 2011), when they die (Rojas-Perez, 2013) and when they ‘haunt’ the living (Fontein, 2010; Igreya et al., 2008). The purpose of this article is to explore what living bodies – and specifically body memories – can contribute to transitional justice and to show, both conceptually and empirically, that they present valuable opportunities to ‘listen to survivors differently and to engage creatively in nonconventional forms of documentation’ (Riaño-Alcalá and Baines, 2011: 433).

Discussions about transitional justice often place a strong emphasis on giving victims a voice (see, for example, De Greiff, 2020: 252; Evenson, 2017; United Nations Development Programme, n.d.). Yet, it is essential to recognize that bodies themselves tell their own stories. As Krieger (2005: 350) underlines, ‘Just as the proverbial “dead man’s bones” do in fact tell tales, via forensic pathology and historical anthropometry, so too do our living bodies tell stories about our lives...’. What enhances their storytelling potential in this regard is their relationships and interactions with their wider social ecologies. To cite Degen et al. (2010: 66), ‘the body digests, adapts and transforms in relation to the potentialities offered by its surrounding environment’. The social dimensions of body memories make them particularly relevant to transitional justice.

In a chapter about the role of body memory in transitional justice, Beck (2014: 186) asks the key question: ‘*How does the concept of body memory contribute to theorizing transitional justice?*’ (emphasis in the original). Body memories, she maintains, ‘transform not only patterns of cognition and speech, but also the habitual structures of the body, which are the basis for everyday action’ (Beck, 2014: 186). Taking this a step further, this article emphasizes the different ways that body memories affect the relationships between bodies and their environments, using this as a basis for developing its core argument that transitional justice processes should give more attention to such memories and to the potential they offer for developing the field in new embodied directions.

The idea for this interdisciplinary article developed out of an ongoing research project, funded by the European Research Council and led by the author, about resilience and conflict-related sexual violence. Interview data generated from team-based fieldwork in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH), Colombia and Uganda highlighted the thematic of memory in a variety of ways. Many interviewees talked about their desire to forget and what they do (such as keeping busy and having a focus) to try and forget, but also about the impossibility of forgetting (or ‘erasing’). In some cases, the interviewees’ own bodies and body memories were critically impeding forgetting. In the words of a Colombian participant who frequently talked about bleeding, the injuries that she sustained from beatings and the removal of her uterus due to a tumour, ‘So, as I say, it’s still going on and I am still suffering from the armed conflict. All the memories are still with me’ (researcher interview, Colombia, 29 March 2019). In drawing on the interview data, the article’s purpose is not to present the interviewees as perpetual victims trapped inside suffering bodies – exemplified by the idea of ‘traumatized victimhood’ (Rudling, 2019: 428). The point, rather, is to explore the ‘opening’ dimension of bodies and their memories, including as potential sites of transformation.

The article’s first section provides a brief overview of the underpinning empirical data. The second section introduces and explores the core concept of body memories, engaging particularly with the diverse work of Jeanine Marie Minge, Charlotte Delbo and Veena Das. As a way of firmly grounding the article’s arguments within extant literature, it also examines how some transitional justice scholars have endeavoured to address embodied gaps within the field. The third section uses the interview data to empirically look at body memories and demonstrate why they matter for transitional justice. To do so, it situates these memories within a wider social context, exploring how they affect individuals’ interactions with their surrounding ecologies. In this way, it highlights ‘the porous boundary between the body and environment’ (Senanayake and King, 2019: 719). The final section develops the argument that bodies and their memories point to new and under-explored embodied ways of dealing with the past.

## **Underpinning Bodies and Methodology**

This article draws on fieldwork conducted in the context of a 5-year mixed-methods study that is seeking to understand why some victims-/survivors<sup>1</sup> of conflict-related sexual violence demonstrate high levels of resilience – ‘a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity’ (Luthar et al., 2000: 543) – while others do not. It is using the data to develop what it calls a new ecological model of transitional justice (Clark, 2020a, 2020b), the term ‘ecological’ foregrounding the broader environmental and systemic factors that critically affect, both negatively and positively, how people deal with and manage adversity. The research is focused on three countries – namely BiH, Colombia and Uganda – that illustrate different types of conflict, different uses of conflict-related sexual violence and different socio-cultural and political contexts. This maximum diversity approach maximizes the possibilities for analysing and exploring what resilience – a concept that has significant contextual elements (Prior and Hagmann, 2014: 292) – ‘looks’ like in highly varied settings; and,

most importantly, for identifying common factors that facilitate or obstruct resilience despite these multiple contextual differences.

In the first part of the study, the author and two postdoctoral researchers collectively developed a research questionnaire aimed at quantifying participants' levels of resilience and identifying which independent variables (including number and types of trauma experienced, as well as current problems) most significantly affected resilience. Several different scales exist for measuring resilience, including the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) (Connor and Davidson, 2003) and the Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA) (Friborg et al., 2003; Hjemdal et al., 2001). The author ultimately chose the Adult Resilience Measure (ARM) (Resilience Research Centre, 2016) which, based on an ecological conceptualization of resilience, is consistent with the project's own theorization of the concept. Although the RSA also has important ecological elements, as highlighted by its five-factor structure – which includes social competence and family cohesion – the cross-cultural validity of the RSA remains largely unexplored (see, however, Jowkar et al., 2010). In contrast, the ARM is based on the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM), which was developed through significant cross-cultural research (Ungar and Liebenberg, 2011).

A total of 449 respondents across the three country case sites completed a study questionnaire between May and December 2018. The questionnaires were administered by the researchers (one based in each country) and by the various in-country non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are involved in the project. Respondents' answers to the 28 items in the ARM (including 'I talk to my family/partner about how I feel' and 'I feel I belong in my community') result in a total ARM score ranging from 28 to 140. ARM scores were used to divide respondents in each country into four ARM quartiles. Each researcher subsequently selected five interviewees from these quartiles, ensuring that the choices made respected demographic diversity (in particular gender, age and ethnic diversity) within the quartiles. In total, 63 interviews were completed (21 in each country)<sup>2</sup> between January and July 2019. All interviews were conducted in the relevant local language/s (the author undertook all of the interviews in BiH) and – with the interviewees' permission – they were recorded using fully encrypted digital voice recorders. The average length of an interview was 1 hour. Ethical approval was granted by the researchers' host institution, by the research funder and by relevant bodies within BiH, Colombia and Uganda.

Bonanno et al. (2014: 139) note that 'Interest in the human capacity for resilience in the face of aversive life events has grown exponentially . . . The last decade, in particular, has witnessed a surge of research and theory about psychologically resilient functioning'. The underpinning research on which this article draws, to reiterate, is not concerned with resilience simply in the narrow sense of psychological functioning, but, more broadly, in the ecological sense of a process that develops through the interactions between individuals and their environments – and the resources within those environments (Ungar, 2013: 256). Accordingly, the interview guide – which the three researchers collectively designed – encompassed a wide range of questions that explored different aspects of the interviewees' lives and wider social ecologies. The questions included the following: If you were to tell the story of your life, what title would you give it? What resources do you have that help you deal with the challenges that you face

(e.g. your own inner resources, services within your community, government institutions)? After everything that you have gone through, what are the factors that have made it difficult for you to rebuild/start to rebuild your life? All of the interviews were translated and transcribed verbatim, and were subsequently coded in NVivo using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). At an early stage, the Excel spreadsheet containing all of the questionnaire data was uploaded into NVivo, and the creation of cases that combine the quantitative and qualitative data has enabled mixed-methods queries that facilitate intersectional and cross-country analyses.

In various ways, the theme of the body emerged prominently from the interviews. Some of the Ugandan interviewees, for example, spoke about *twoo* (HIV). They also commonly mentioned bodily pain and general weaknesses, which had impacted on many other aspects of their lives, including their ability to support themselves and their families. Some of the Colombian interviewees talked about the injuries that they had sustained from violent beatings at the hands of guerrillas or paramilitaries. Some of the Bosnian interviewees spoke about physical health problems and the economic strain of paying for the medications they needed. What is also clear from the data, however, is that there is a significant nexus between bodies and memory. While the desire to forget/erase the past was a recurrent theme, part of the impossibility of forgetting lay within interviewees' own bodies. Writing about tattooing in Mayan civilization during the colonial period, Houston et al. (2006: 19) note that 'The agony of tattooing and other modifications of the body recorded itself deeply in memory...'. Similarly, abuses and pain inflicted on the body in situations of war and armed conflict can leave deep corporeal imprints in the form of body memories.

Notwithstanding the resilience focus of the underpinning research, it is important to be clear from the outset that this article is not positing a specific relationship between body memories and resilience. Because resilience is about the interactions between individuals and their environments (Ungar and Liebenberg, 2011: 127), however, body memories that affect how individuals engage with those environments potentially have implications for resilience.

## Unpacking Body Memories

Minge was raped on two occasions, the first time when she was 17 years old. The rawness and honesty with which she writes about her experiences foreground a body from which she has long felt fundamentally disconnected. Describing this body as 'stained' (Minge, 2007: 252), the most intimate part of it ceased to be a source of sexual pleasure and instead became a reminder of what she had gone through. In her words, 'The way I see my vagina is laced with anger, hatred, and pain. I extend this pain into my view of my sexualized self. I can only comprehend this place between my legs as strange and eerie. My vagina only brings me pain' (Minge, 2007: 258). This part of her body was entered, penetrated, without her consent, and she must now keep her distance from it, suppressing any desires that she feels. Her sexual self is threatening – 'I attach lust to pain, desire to ugliness' (Minge, 2007: 258) – and hence it must be kept at bay. No longer an integral element of her being, her vagina is somehow separate from her; 'I stand

outside my vagina to protect and shield my emotions. I stand outside, as others do' (Minge, 2007: 258).

The disconnectivity thematic that threads through Minge's work thereby exists alongside a connectivity thematic, through a powerful linking of bodies and memory. Notwithstanding her yearning to feel at one with her sexual body (Minge, 2007: 252), her body memories get in the way. She states simply: 'I store in my body the memory of rape. My body knows' (Minge, 2007: 266). Her memories themselves, thus, become penetrative, entering deep inside her body, notwithstanding her efforts to fight against them; 'memory wrestles with my muscles and sinew' (Minge and Zimmerman, 2009: 340). The penetration of these memories, in turn, shapes new sexual experiences. Writing about being with a woman for the first time, for example, Minge reflects: 'Her fingers are the penetrative flesh. They are not a man's penis. But the memory lingers. The memory becomes the penetration. Her fingers only remind me of the violence' (Minge and Zimmerman, 2009: 338–339).

In a very different context, the concept of body memory also emerges powerfully from the late Delbo's work on the Holocaust. Using the analogy of a snake shedding its skin, as a process traditionally associated with renewal and transformation (Gordeev, 2017: 113), Delbo (2001: 1) wrote: 'In Auschwitz I took leave of my skin – it had a bad smell, that skin – worn from all the blows it had received, and find myself in another, beautiful and clean . . .'. While it took some time for the 'new skin' to completely form and consolidate, ultimately, the shedding of her old skin did not significantly change anything – or change her. In her words, 'Rid of its old skin, it's still the same snake. I'm the same too, apparently' (Delbo, 2001: 1). In other words, bodies – and in particular skin – hold on to memory. This is made explicit in Delbo's (2001: 1) question: 'How does one rid oneself of something buried far within: memory and the skin of memory. It clings to me yet'.

Skin and memory can be positively associated. Skin, for example, contains 'tissue-resident memory cells (TRM cells)' that give 'premium protection and offer new strategies for vaccination' (Heath and Carbone, 2013: 982–983). The skin that Delbo (2001: 1) discussed, however, was a 'hardened' skin that 'allows nothing to filter out of what it retains . . .'. Rather than having a protective function, it thereby acted as a cutaneous reminder of Auschwitz and everything that was experienced there – thus illustrating John Dewey's argument that 'the epidermis is only in the most superficial way an indication of where an organism ends and its environment begins' (cited in Hoff, 2019: 324). For Delbo, therefore, she was not living *with* Auschwitz but, rather, *next to* it; 'Auschwitz is there, unalterable, precise, but enveloped in the skin of memory, an impermeable skin that isolates it from my present self' (Delbo, 2001: 2).

This last point highlights the fact that, like Minge, Delbo partly disconnected from her body – or more specifically from an experiential part of herself. It is not uncommon for people to somehow detach themselves from their bodies during traumatic experience (Ataria, 2015: 200). Illustrative of this 'dyadic splitting' (Mills and Turnbull, 2004: 265), Delbo spoke about herself as two people – the person she was in Auschwitz and her post-Auschwitz self. 'I live within a twofold being', she explained, a split that enabled her to 'revive' (Delbo, 2001: 3). Her 'Auschwitz double' was kept at bay, as if it did not exist, and the 'hardness' of the skin that enfolded the memory was tough. This also meant that,

to some extent, it could contain the memory (Kaplan, 2001: 323), to stop it from spilling out. At times, however, the skin gave way, 'revealing all it contains' (Delbo, 2001: 3), including the 'Auschwitz double'. In this situation, Delbo (2001: 3) reflected, 'It takes days for everything to get back to normal, for everything to get shoved back inside memory, and for the skin of memory to mend again'. Only once it had done so could she get back to herself, the part of her that was disconnected from everything that had happened, who could 'talk to you about Auschwitz without exhibiting or registering any anxiety or emotion' (Delbo, 2001: 3).

Underpinning Delbo's two selves was the core distinction that she drew between 'ordinary memory' and 'deep memory' (and, in parallel, between 'external memory' and 'sense memory'). The former, Langar (2004: xviii) notes, 'urges us to regard the Auschwitz ordeal as part of a chronology, a dismal event in the past that the very fact of survival helps to redeem. It frees us from the pain of remembering the unthinkable'. This is in contrast to 'deep memory', which 'reminds us that the Auschwitz past is not really past and never will be' (Langar, 2004: xviii). It lingers, remains in the skin. It is the 'memory of the senses' (Delbo, 2001: 3) and preserves sensations that Delbo did not want to feel. She thus disconnected from the 'deep memory' that was her Auschwitz self.

While Minge and Delbo have written about the vagina and skin respectively as embodied sites of memory, Das' work explores the body as a chosen site of memory, thus highlighting an agentic dimension of body memories. She notes that when she asked women to speak about their experiences of the 1947 Partition of India, 'I found a zone of silence around the event' (Das, 2006: 54). Part of the reason is that memories were perceived as dangerous; 'they were sometimes compared to poison that makes the inside of the woman dissolve as a solid is dissolved in a powerful liquid (*andar hi andar ghul ja rahi hai*)' (Das, 2006: 54).

The women's metaphorical act of drinking the poison was about keeping the memory in a closed space, just as Delbo's two selves were a way of keeping Auschwitz safely contained within a 'skin of memory' (Delbo, 2001: 3). The displacement of the women's memories 'from the surface to the depth of the body' (Das, 2006: 55) simultaneously effected a concomitant transformation of passivity into agency. According to Das (2006: 55),

In the fantasy of men, the inscription of nationalist slogans on the bodies of women (Victory to India, Long Live Pakistan), or proclaiming possession of their bodies (This thing, this loot – ye mal – is ours), would create a future memory by which all men of the other community would never be able to forget that the women as territory had already been claimed and occupied by other men.

Women, however, actively created body memories, through 'drinking', and, in so doing, they transformed their own bodies. They were no longer 'surfaces on which texts were to be written and read – icons of the new nations' (Das, 2006: 55) but corporeal repositories of memory and knowledge. This helped them to deal with their experiences. As Das (2006: 54–55) underlines, 'The sliding of the representations of the female body from everyday life into the body that had become the container of the poisonous



knowledge of the events of the Partition perhaps helped women to assimilate their experiences into their everyday life’.

The examples of Minge, Delbo and Das’ work evocatively illustrate, in different ways, the contours and complexities of body memories. They also demonstrate that these memories can significantly influence how people deal with the past. Fassin (2008: 316) consequently refers to ‘*embodiment of the past*’, to capture ‘the way in which individual trajectories and collective histories are transcribed into individual and collective bodies, in terms of affects and emotions, disease and comfort, mourning and pleasure’ (emphasis in the original). If the past, thus, is partly an embodied phenomenon, it is striking that the field of transitional justice – which is fundamentally about dealing with the past and with ‘human rights abuses emanating from past conflicts’ (Sooka, 2006: 313) – has, as previously noted, given relatively little attention to bodies. People’s factual memories matter for the purpose of testimony and truth-telling. In contrast, their body memories are rarely given the same level of importance or degree of expressional space.

Some transitional justice scholars, however, have sought to address this gap. In so doing, they have shown, directly or indirectly and in different ways, why body memories matter. Writing about their research in Colombia, for example, Riaño-Alcalá and Baines discuss the body of a particular research participant and the serious injuries that she had sustained (to her arms, legs, hands and hips) after a gas cylinder containing explosives landed inside a church in the town of Bojayá. They note that ‘As she evoked the loss of 28 members of her extended family, she paused timidly to show several parts of her body where the traces of the wounds remain. The memory of the massacre is engraved on her body as a permanent trace’ (Riaño-Alcalá and Baines, 2011: 424). In a similar vein, Hollander and Gill draw attention to the corporeal legacies of the civil war between the Ugandan government and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda. ‘Years after an armed conflict comes to an end’, they underline, ‘the scars of the excessive violence remain engraved on bodies, depicted in people’s psyche and entrenched within the social fabric of society’ (Hollander and Gill, 2014: 217).

This reference to ‘the social fabric of society’ underscores the broader point that body memories extend beyond individual bodies, just as bodies themselves ‘do not stop at the edges of their skins and are not contained neatly and sharply within them’ (Sullivan, 2001: 1). Firstly, body memories can closely intersect with broader historical and structural factors, meaning that a narrow focus on bodily injuries and wounds alone can critically miss their wider contextual dimensions. In their work with victims-/survivors (‘protagonists’) of conflict-related sexual violence in Guatemala, for example, Crosby et al. (2016: 273) underline that ‘The experience of sexual violence left a permanent embodied mark that was ever present, thirty years later’. Illustrating this, the women repeatedly talked about health issues and felt that no one had given them any attention (Crosby et al., 2016: 273). What was also highly significant, however, was the ‘Protagonists’ use of a photograph of a woman carrying a heavy load’ – a load that symbolized not only the harm done to the women’s bodies, but also the harm resulting from extreme impoverishment and colonialism (Crosby et al., 2016: 276). The authors accordingly insist that ‘... what must be repaired is not only the harm to women’s individual bodies but also the structural harm and loss experienced by the collective body, that is, Mayan

women and the indigenous communities in which they live' (Crosby et al., 2016: 276). In the same way that the women's resistance to speaking about sexual violence underscored that this did 'not reflect the whole of their lives' (Crosby and Lykes, 2019: 89), so too their bodies were just one part of a more complex and multi-layered story.

Secondly, and relatedly, body memories can significantly shape post-war and transitional societies by affecting how those individuals who are a key focus of transitional justice – victims of human rights abuses – engage with the world around them. During fieldwork in Angola 3 years after the end of the country's protracted civil war (1975–2002), for example, Beck (2014: 191) observed how people 'had rearranged the spatial and temporal patterns of everyday activities, such as cultivating fields or trading in the market, so as to sidestep the actions of armed groups'. Structures of mind and body, however, are not independent from each other. Hence, when a person changes and adapts his or her habitual practices to the ever-present memories of violence deeply engraved in the body, the way that s/he thinks about and perceives the world – and interacts with it – is also likely to change. 'For that reason', Beck (2014: 192) underlines, 'the transformation of body memory affects social structures and institutions and might alter the value system and the moral order of a society'. This highlights the broader point that embodiment is necessarily a multi-level phenomenon, entailing 'the interplay between bodies, components of bodies, and the world(s) in which the bodies live' (Krieger, 2005: 351).

Humphrey further draws attention to the significance of body memories beyond the physical body in his discussion about violence. The potency of violence, he argues, 'lies in the existential crisis it threatens for individuals and in the bodily memory with which it leaves its victims' (Humphrey, 2002: 133). More specifically, 'Violence attacks the nexus of cultural substantiation by rupturing our connections with the world we inhabit' (Humphrey, 2002: 133). In other words, if body memories can effect a critical disconnect from part of the self, as highlighted in Minge and Delbo's work, this can translate into a concomitant disconnect from the wider social environment. Humphrey (2002: 133) further argues that 'The psychological processes of alienation from others, one's world and one's self are a methodology for emptying out the world, "cleansing" it'. Realization of core transitional justice goals such as peace and reconciliation, thus, requires a 'repopulation' in the sense of the restoration and repair of relationships and lost connectivities across multiple levels. In other words, there is a 'corporeal sonority' in body memories that 'unsettles the narratives of transitional justice' (Rush, 2014: vii).

The next section builds on these arguments. Shifting the emphasis from the conceptual to the empirical, it uses the qualitative data introduced in the first section and the direct words of victims-/survivors to drill down further into the concept of body memories and to explore its social dimensions. This is central to the article's overall aim of building a case for embodied ways of doing transitional justice.

## **Empirical Bodies and Body Memories**

In their work with terminal cancer patients, Reeve et al. (2010: 183) argue that 'Comparison of individual accounts revealed that narratives could be classified into two distinct narrative "forms": one of continuity, and one of fracture'. For most of the patients, 'the "shape" of their narrative revealed continuity: continuity of daily life,

albeit with transient periods made more difficult by disruptive events and associated distress' (Reeve et al., 2010: 183). In a small number of cases, however, what emerged was a strong sense of 'biographical fracture'. The previous continuity of everyday life could not be sustained, and 'interruption was associated with profound distress and the need for support from external agencies to restore continuity' (Reeve et al., 2010: 183).

In different ways, the themes of continuity and fracture were also present in the qualitative data from BiH, Colombia and Uganda. Two particular narratives emerged from the data surrounding these two ideas. In the first narrative, the relational dialectics between continuity and fracture were positive, while in the second they were negative. This first section begins by outlining these two narratives, as a way of exploring the lived and contextual dimensions of body memories – and thus locating them within a broader social frame.

The theme of continuity was present in both of the aforementioned narratives in the sense of interviewees' determination and/or desire to get on with their life – or what Das (2006: 7) has called 'a descent into the ordinary'. More specifically, many of them spoke about the importance and necessity of moving forward. A male interviewee in BiH, for example, reflected: 'It is very important for a man to clear up with himself, err, a lot of things. To come to terms with what he survived and to go on living as if, well, I am not going to say to pretend that nothing happened, but [long pause] to forget some things, if possible'. He continued, 'Even though you cannot forget, you can simply not think about it. As they say, force yourself to move on, to go forward' (author interview, BiH, 11 February 2019). For her part, a Colombian interviewee underlined: '... as I've said before, a person has to try to ... to keep going. They've [referring to the perpetrators] trodden you down, but you have to burst into new life, like a flower or like a chrysalis, and try to keep going forwards' (researcher interview, Colombia, 13 March 2019).

Interviewees also spoke, in different ways, about breakage and rupture. Some expressed a strong sense of 'before' and 'after' in relation to their lives and/or themselves. A Ugandan interviewee said simply: 'But the way my life turned out, it got cut off' (researcher interview, Uganda, 20 March 2019). In a similar vein, a male Bosnian interviewee told the author: 'I was 26 when the war broke out. I was a sportsman, water sports, I mean ... I was a successful sportsman. And, suddenly, this was all bro- ... [short pause] You know, like, when, when I was supposed to, to live life – I mean, in those years when I was to get married, to have a family – it all stopped' (author interview, BiH, 10 April 2019). Relatedly, others talked, inter alia, about ruptured dreams, lost futures and broken childhoods. Highlighting this, a Colombian interviewee lamented: 'All of my dreams were completely destroyed [short pause]. Although I came from a poor background, like any child, I had ... had ... well, we all had [short pause] dreams, goals, longings. Like all kids [short pause]. And for me they were all torn to pieces' (researcher interview, Colombia, 29 January 2019).

Martin's (2016: 406) research in Sierra Leone emphasizes how the country's civil war (1991–2002) ruptured various aspects of everyday life; 'People no longer went to their farms or church, ate meals or drank *poyo* (palm wine) in the evenings. Social groups, even secret societies, became fractured and no longer met. Thus, the interconnected nature of daily life and the sociality that accompanied these activities stagnated'. Based on her fieldwork in five rural communities, she argues that 'many Sierra Leoneans were

able to find peace and justice by regaining a sense of normality and were able to do this through everyday practices and pre-existing communal structures' (Martin, 2016: 401). People's desire to get back to 'normal' was quintessentially about restoring the continuity of their pre-war lives and everyday practices – and thus a way of repairing rupture (Martin, 2016: 401). This positive relationship between continuity and rupture defined the first of the aforementioned narratives that emerged from the interview data. While transitional justice includes a significant reparative element (Balasco, 2017; Walker, 2016), interviewees in all three countries were – as much as possible – seeking to mend their ruptured lives precisely by living them. As a Colombian interviewee underscored,

I'd say that [short pause] I'm a WARRIOR, a fighter, because I came through all those things [short pause]. I survived and didn't allow myself to be victimised because I didn't want that. I mean, I overcame the hurt, I overcame being a victim and I'm now a regular woman trying to move on forwards, doing normal things and not dwelling on what happened to me. (Researcher interview, Colombia, 6 March 2019)

The first narrative, in other words, illustrates Beck's (2014: 191) argument that 'body memory adapts so as to secure the continuation of everyday life and subsistence activities'. Such adaptation, which has an obvious link to resilience, thus illuminates a positive dimension of body memories, extending beyond the common trope of persistent trauma and unhealed psychological wounds.

In the second narrative, in contrast, there was a significant tension between rupture and continuity. In short, rupture had become part of people's body memories in ways that critically impeded continuity and the resumption of everyday life. While interviewees consistently expressed a strong desire to forget or 'erase' everything that had happened, their body memories often got in the way. It was not only that dreams and flashbacks intruded into the present. In some cases, a temporal cross wiring of body memories had resulted in different corporeal experiences becoming conflated. Underlining, for example, the pain of the sexual abuses that she had suffered and the body's retention of this pain, a Colombian interviewee explained: 'A bout of flu can bring back memories of those events [short pause]. I mean, the flu, a headache, it doesn't have anything to do with those events, but your mind makes the link. Subconsciously, you're always thinking that you've got a headache because you were raped' (researcher interview, Colombia, 11 February 2019).

Frequently, body memories compromised the repair of rupture precisely because the bodies that housed those memories were themselves no longer the same. Alongside the general health issues that interviewees frequently spoke about, in some cases the body had been physically altered through, *inter alia*, injury, scarring or disease. A Bosnian participant, for example, talked about having shell fragments near her heart and described the pain as one of her most frequent problems (author interview, BiH, 19 February 2019). A Colombian interviewee spoke about sustaining rectal injuries that had left her with faecal incontinence (researcher interview, Colombia, 3 April 2019). A Ugandan interviewee, for his part, lamented that as a result of suffering sexual violence from government soldiers, he was no longer able to 'perform' as well sexually. In his words, 'What I find serious that affected my life is that when I returned and after I

started living with my wife, my strength in bed which I had in the past . . . I discovered it has gone down' (researcher interview, Uganda, 26 March 2019). Some interviewees, moreover, had an altered perception of their bodies because of what had happened to them. Exemplifying this, a Ugandan interviewee said simply: 'It is spoiled. Once water is spilt water, you cannot collect it' (researcher interview, Uganda, 15 April 2019). In such cases, thus, body memories had assumed a distinct physical form, meaning that they had more pronounced spill-over effects than, for example, Delbo's aforementioned 'skin of memory'.

Within the second narrative, however, the tension between continuity and rupture did not only reside in a changed physical body (or changed perception of it). In some cases, it arose from the weightiness of body memories and their consequent impact on an individual's ability to 'maintain continuity of daily living' (Reeve et al., 2010: 191). Body memories were such a fundamental part of the individual that they necessarily went everywhere with him or her. A Colombian interviewee, for example, talked about having 'a thorn in your heart and it's always there, always, always. That thorn is stuck there . . .' (researcher interview, Colombia, 5 March 2019). Further demonstrating the power of figurative language, a Bosnian interviewee explained that while you wake up every morning to start a new day, ' . . . you always carry it [the past] with you, like a bag, and sometimes you forget that it is on your back, you get used to the load. And sometimes, it is heavy and you put it down for a bit, and then, again, what is it? Simply, you go on [carrying the bag]' (author interview BiH, 22 February 2019). Culbertson (1995: 182) uses rich metaphors and similes in her work as a way of describing her childhood spent between a 'world of well-dressed, sophisticated pedophiles' and her own 'family world'. Looking back at this period, she reflects: 'I knew that sex is painful, and that the lines between pleasure and pain can be easily blurred, as in a watercolor' (Culbertson, 1995: 182). The lines between past and present can be similarly blurred, as illustrated by the Colombian interviewee's 'thorn' and the Bosnian interviewee's heavy 'bag', when body memories from the past become an integral part of the corporeal present.

Body memories also have an important future-related aspect, reflected in Das and Kleinman's (2004: 4) observation that 'the recovery of the everyday, resuming the task of living (and not only surviving), asks for a renewed capability to address the future'. Part of this 'renewed capability' lies in bodies themselves, and in this regard they are a valuable resource. A male Bosnian interviewee described how he had used his body – and in particular his hands – to get on with his life and build a future for himself and his family. In his words,

I worked in construction. I worked as a craftsman. That, that . . . While I did that, I felt good. I really felt good and this is where I overcame this Golgotha. I really felt well and this is where I overcame the Golgotha of Kazamat, Lora and Split [referring to the camps that he was detained in during the Bosnian war]. Because . . . [long pause] Through work, work and only work, a man could get himself out of this big depression, these big problems. (Author interview, BiH, 2 July 2019)

A Colombian interviewee had similarly relied on her embodied skills to address the future. After a period of displacement, she had returned to her village and learned to sew.

She made a living by making dresses for her friends and it had turned out well. She explained: ‘That’s how I regained my balance – sewing for my friends and doing courses. Everyone says, “wherever there’s sewing to be done, you’ll find M!” [laughs and sniffs]. And that’s how I started to move forward with life’ (researcher interview, Colombia, 11 February 2019). An example of what Marchand (2010: 14) calls ‘responsive adjustments’ – which have a resilience dimension – a Ugandan interviewee described how, after realizing that there was little money to be made from selling tomatoes, she focused instead on brewing alcohol. In her words, ‘I did two cycles of brewing, then returned to the roadside market. I bought silver fish from elsewhere, then sold it at the market. So, I find that this is the thing that helped me to start renewing my life’. She further stressed that ‘Whatever things I get, I get them from cultivating land with my own hands’ (researcher interview, Uganda, 29 May 2019).

Body memories, however, can compromise – objectively or subjectively – the body’s capacity as a resource. Most obviously, the physical expression of body memories through the corporeal body can affect what the body is able to ‘do’. Ugandan interviewees who had been infected with the HIV virus, in particular, lamented the fact that their bodies could no longer earn them a living in the way that they used to. To cite one interviewee, ‘The problem of sickness spoilt the renewal of my life because the way I used to work is no more. I do not have the capacity to work the way I used to. I have no {physical} strength, even to do things like digging’ (researcher interview, Uganda, 20 March 2019). Another Ugandan interviewee, similarly, stressed that body pains and the problems of a ‘sick body’ – which she attributed to her time in the bush with the LRA – ‘spoiled my life in a way that I cannot perform even small things that I need to help myself’, and in particular farming work (researcher interview, Uganda, 16 May 2019).

The interview data also further illuminate, to expand on a point made in the previous section, how body memories and altered body resources can affect how bodies interact with their wider environments – and with other bodies within those environments. In some cases, for example, interviewees’ body memories served as a constant reminder of dangers in the world, significantly affecting their ability to trust others. Speaking about her 3-year-old daughter, for example, a Colombian interviewee stressed:

I can’t trust people. I hover over her; I can’t lose sight of her; I’m always watching to see who she’s with. I mean, it’s something I still can’t cope with. Some things leave lasting marks on a person. Nowadays, I can talk more with people, get on with them, but I’m always left feeling like . . . like I’m on edge all the time. You see, it’s something that never leaves you . . . you’re always left with the feeling that the whole world wants to do you harm and . . . you have to be on your guard. It’s something I haven’t managed to overcome. (Researcher interview, Colombia, 11 February 2019)

A Bosnian interviewee, similarly, emphasized that the body memories of her experiences had affected how she engages with others. Stressing that she has very little trust, she revealed: ‘I avoid gatherings. I am afraid. I have a fear that this [referring to the sexual violence] might happen again. [long pause] And this [again referring to the sexual violence] has, perhaps, left the biggest footprint on me’ (author interview, BiH, 19 February 2019). A Ugandan interviewee articulated that because of what her body had

gone through and the memories stored in it, her head was no longer ‘light’ (healthy). ‘Tongue’ (verbal abuse) from some local people had exacerbated her sense of having a ‘spoiled head’ and she had thus withdrawn from others. Asking what title she would give her life story, she answered: ‘I feel that being me is so hard to the extent that I feel I should be alone. I do not like being with people. Most of the time I am thinking about what happened in the past . . .’ (researcher interview, Uganda, 19 February 2019).

Caldwell (2012: 256) notes that ‘Memory tends to be seen almost exclusively as a function of brain processes, and memories are generally accepted as being located in neural networks inside the brain’. In exploring some of the diverse ways in which memories are located in bodies, what this section has also sought to show is that body memories have important social dimensions, underscoring the inter-connections between minds, bodies and the wider environment (Marchand, 2010: 2). These inter-connections, in turn, help to contextualize the significance of body memories for transitional justice.

## **Body Memories and Embodied Transitional Justice**

Berg and Akrich (2004: 1) observe that “‘the body’ is at the centre of revived attention in the social sciences and humanities’. This final section begins by setting out four key reasons why the field of transitional justice should itself give more attention to bodies and their memories. The first reason is that body memories invite and encourage critical reflection apropos of core transitional justice goals. What, for example, does ‘justice’ mean when injustice has a deeply embodied form that continues to affect individual lives on a daily basis? Talking about intimacy issues, a Colombian interviewee disclosed: ‘It [referring to the sexual violence she had suffered] changes you so much in terms of how you feel about . . . about other people. You see, when you want to be with a person it’s because it feels right, it comes through their pores, their eyes, their smell, it calls to you. Now, everything is cold’ (researcher interview, Colombia, 4 February 2019). Relatedly, what does it mean to ‘deal’ with the legacies of past human rights abuses when body memories ‘are inscribed into the structures of the living body and enacted in everyday life’, such that ‘they cannot be “forgotten,” suppressed or re-interpreted’ (Beck, 2014: 194; see also Shapiro-Phim, 2020: 211)?

Secondly, and linked to the previous point, the ‘social spillover’ of body memories means that they can be directly relevant to transitional justice objectives, in particular reconciliation. As Hollander and Gill (2014: 230) remark, ‘the body predicates, or at least influences, the quality of interaction a person has’; and these interactions, in turn, ‘defined in terms of social capital networks, determine the level of (re)integration in society’ (see also Montirosso and McGlone, 2020: 77). Body memories can significantly affect these interactions in ways that undermine reconciliation, as highlighted in the examples given in the previous section of interviewees socially withdrawing. Conversely, however, these memories can also, potentially, contribute to fostering reconciliation.

Particularly illustrative in this regard, a Colombian interviewee spoke several times about the hurt that she was feeling inside her as a result of her experiences during the armed conflict. When asked about her views on justice, she underlined that she wanted

the individuals responsible for heinous crimes to understand this hurt; ‘It’s about teaching these people that they are doing wrong, that the things they’re doing are bad, to make them think like a human being – that if you poke your finger into someone it hurts them and if I do such and such, it hurts’. Rather than advocating retributive justice and long prison sentences for the perpetrators, she effectively embraced a restorative view of justice that is arguably more compatible with reconciliation. ‘We need to look at how we’re going to treat them [the perpetrators], she underlined, adding: ‘When a human being does something [awful], then it’s because they’re hurting and they don’t have the tools to deal with their low self-esteem. That’s what we need to look at – we need to look at that human being, right from when they were tiny’ (researcher interview, Colombia, 6 March 2019). In Uganda, an interviewee who had suffered sexual violence from cattle rustlers from the Karamoja sub-region in eastern Uganda made it clear that while the memories of those abuses remained in her body, including in the form of the HIV virus, she did not want them to remain in her heart and to embitter it. In her words, ‘Even now, if any Karamojong [referring to people from the Karamoja] come to my home, I will not see that it was the Karamojong who committed atrocity on me. If there were food, I would give the person something to eat. It is important that you stop nursing bad thoughts in your heart’ (researcher interview, Uganda, 12 June 2019).

Thirdly, body memories can provide important ‘embodied’ information that can be highly valuable to transitional justice processes. In particular, just as they can affect how individuals engage and interact with their wider environments, factors within these ecologies can themselves critically impact on body memories and their expression. As one illustration, an interviewee in Uganda opined that her body was cursed because of everything that she had experienced during the war. In expressing this view, she stressed that having forced sex in the ‘bush’ was ‘not in harmony with Acholi culture’. The attitudes of other people in her surroundings, and in particular potential husbands, had further negatively enhanced her body memories. Even if she met a man who was interested in marrying her, she explained, ultimately he would not do so ‘because he would say to you: “This one, even if I marry her, they slept with her under some tree and so she would not be of any use.” This breaks my heart’ (researcher interview, Uganda, 1 February 2019). Speaking more broadly about negative social attitudes and stigma, a Bosnian interviewee reflected: ‘... why does someone now have to say: “There she is, the raped one”! You know ... Well, this is it, the shame, for someone will say to me: “Go away, that is the one who was raped.” This is what {they} say ... Well ... I hear it when they tell someone: “Hey, she was raped” ... The same as if she, well, did something, as if they are saying that she is a whore, that she wants sex, you know’ (author interview, BiH, 6 March 2019). In other words, body memories draw attention to wider social dynamics – and to the interactions between individuals and their environments – that could help to move transitional justice in new ecological directions.

Fourthly, while embodied memories attest to the crimes and abuses done to individual bodies, their expression potentially gives those who suffered the opportunity to assert a more layered and nuanced identity that extends beyond victimhood alone. As an illustration of this, Gill-Leslie’s work examines the significance of body memories and body mapping in the context of the Marikana Commission of Inquiry in South Africa.<sup>3</sup> Formally, the Commission accorded little space to body memories. The victims’ widows



were permitted to attend the hearings ‘as long as they kept quiet and “behaved” . . .’ (Gill-Leslie, 2020: 117). With the support of the Khulumani Support Group, however, the women produced their own body maps, which complexified the role that the Commission had assigned to them. They were not simply grieving widows. As Gill-Leslie (2020: 118) notes, ‘the women in the body map pictures absorb further roles as active agents: they become interrogators, full of angry questions, and reject their allotted assignment of taking their sorrow home while keeping quiet at the Commission’. Like the aforementioned women described in Das’ work, who embodied their memories by ‘drinking’ them, thereby resisting public and nationalist co-opting of their bodies, the widows who attended the Marikana Commission used their body memories to challenge their own marginalization within the proceedings.

There is a strong imperative, therefore, for transitional justice processes to create more space for the expression of body memories and the stories they tell. The crucial point in this regard is that memories should not be restricted to verbal articulation and the narration of chronological facts but should also, as Minge (2007: 270) underscores, be enabled to take ‘other communicative and creative forms’. This is particularly pertinent to transitional societies where, due to cultural norms or political factors, there are restrictions on what can and cannot be expressed through words.<sup>4</sup> In their research in Colombia, for example, Santamaría et al. (2020: 79) used ‘art-based methodologies’ – including body-mapping – in order ‘to talk with indigenous women regarding complex issues in a region [the Amazon] affected by structural violence, FARC [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia] dissidents, drug trafficking and illegal mining’. Relatedly, artistic body expressions of memory may constitute a more enduring legacy than the physical voice, particularly in highly precarious societies. Discussing the body maps produced by a group of women with HIV in post-apartheid Africa, Coombes (2011: 105) maintains that the maps ‘stand in for a testimony, a voice that might be forever lost to the listener (her child, her partner, her family and friends)’. Expressing a similar argument, a Colombian interviewee – explaining that she had not experienced any form of transitional justice – emphasized: ‘That’s why I say [short pause], you have to keep hold of as much as you can, but . . . [short pause] Like I say, ok, the memories we have inside us, that’s . . . that’s our own voice, it doesn’t belong to anyone else; it’s not written down’ (researcher interview, Colombia, 4 February 2019).

Additionally, there is significant untapped potential in ‘embodying’ some of the key goals of transitional justice. This, in turn, might help to close important top-down/ bottom-up gaps, by enhancing the resonance of transitional justice processes at the local level. ‘Peace’, for example, can be a highly abstract concept, particularly when it does not closely align with grassroots understandings (Wallis, 2012), or when the formal signing of a peace agreement makes little difference to people’s quotidian lives (Tamang, 2011). Hollander and Gill (2014: 232) therefore talk about ‘embodied peace’, which they conceptualize as ‘a phenomenological approach to the analysis of peace as defined by one’s own body and the socioeconomic context within which it is located’. From this perspective, bodies and their memories crucially help to ground the concept of peace, while also providing insights – through their inherent connectivity – into broader social ecological factors (from institutions, social attitudes and group dynamics) that necessarily shape the contours and needs of embodied peace. In Berghs’ work with

disabled people in post-conflict Sierra Leone, for example, embodied peace was partly about reintegration into the community. The particular challenges posed by disability, however, underscored the fact that any interventions aimed at reintegration would need to 'work on several different layers of understanding respectful of an African ontology and epistemology but also of the modern realities and real needs of life post-conflict' (Berghs, 2011: 1415). The broader point is that body memories powerfully underline the limitations of transitional justice processes if the latter 'ignore the lived experience of those drawn into their influence' (Gill-Leslie, 2020: 121).

Closely linked to embodied peace is the concept of embodied reparations. In the previous section, it was argued that body memories – and in particular their physical manifestation – can undermine the body as a resource. Embodied reparations, however, are about far more than 'repairing' the physical body, although the provision of medical care is, of course, important. Montirosso and McGlone have discussed embodied reparation in the specific context of the relationship between mothers and infants, focusing on how this relationship can fluctuate between what they call bodily attunements and misattunements. As they explain, 'Critically, it is necessary to recognize that the maintenance of a constant bodily attunement between two partners is rather improbable, but also if it were so it would prevent any possibility of bodily misattunement, thus leading the infant to never experience a reparatory step' (Montirosso and McGlone, 2020: 82). If embodied reparation, according to this definition, thus refers to the bodily attunement between mother and child, it can also be understood, more broadly, as entailing a 're-attunement' between individuals and their environments. This is necessarily a two-way process. It is not only about how people relate to their social ecologies, but also about how those ecologies relate to them through the medium of socio-cultural ideas about particular bodies – including 'raped bodies' and bodies that are physically wounded or disabled (thereby highlighting the aforementioned issue of stigma). In other words, people's social environments themselves have a significant role to play in creating and facilitating space for the expression of body memories.

As part of this process, body memories need the space to *become* something else – or at least to co-exist alongside something else. In the aforementioned example of the Marikana Commission, the women whom Gill-Leslie (2020) writes about were not just widows. They used their body memories to assume an additional identity as resisters. Minge describes how she has transformed the bodily memory of penetration. 'His memory does not hold the power it once did', she writes. 'Now, he is the memory I can deconstruct to refigure the way I understand my own body, the aching core of sexual agency that thrives between my legs' (Minge and Zimmerman, 2009: 345). In a very different context, De Welde's (2003: 254–255) work examines how a group of women who participated in a self-defence course learned to resist 'dominant narrative about women and femininity more specifically'. In so doing, they altered their victimization by incorporating within it 'a "defender" narrative, one that suggests power and control' (De Welde, 2003: 255). Their bodies and body memories ceased to define who they were. Instead, 'Agentically selecting slices of contrasting narratives, these women forged new self-narratives that incorporated previously unappreciated images of strong feminine bodies; a physical agency emerged' (De Welde, 2003: 271). What these examples thereby underscore is that embodied reparations are ultimately about finding ways to

enhance the transformative dimensions of body memories – and, thus, their contribution to the transformative goals of transitional justice itself. Giving her life story the title ‘The Caterpillar’, a Colombian interviewee explained:

... to become what I am today, I had to be a caterpillar. Just think, the caterpillar goes through so many changes and those changes must hurt. That causes ... just simply breaking out of the chrysalis, what happens before that, it hurts, it causes pain. In order to become the beautiful butterfly, it has to go through a painful preparation. Right? So, that’s what I had to go through. (Researcher interview, Colombia, 5 March 2019)

## Conclusion

Memory work necessarily raises important questions about what should be remembered and for what purpose. Drawing on fieldwork with victims-/survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in BiH, Colombia and Uganda, this article has addressed a significant gap within transitional justice theory and practice by focusing specifically on body memories and demonstrating – through a particular emphasis on their wider social dimensions – why they matter for the field. In so doing, it has sought to make the case for more embodied ways of dealing with the past. It began with a quote from Culbertson (1995), in which she juxtaposed the concepts of entering (penetration) and shutting out. Body memories can have a shutting out dynamic, but the concepts of embodied peace and embodied reparations – discussed in the final section – suggest how this might be transformed. The broader point is that body memories should not be shut out from transitional justice, but should be given the space to ‘penetrate’ and thus to open up new avenues for exploration. Just as ‘Stories help to open up the world, not to cloak it’ (Ingold, 1993: 171), so too do body memories


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## Notes

1. During the fieldwork, interviewees were specifically asked whether they viewed themselves as victims, as survivors, as both victims and survivors or as neither. This article uses the terminology ‘victims-/survivors’, to encompass the different ways that the interviewees spoke about themselves.

2. For different reasons, each of the three researchers ultimately undertook one additional interview.
3. The Commission was established to investigate the deaths of 34 striking mine workers at the Marikana mine on 16 August 2012. The miners were killed by live ammunition fired by the South African Police Service.
4. It is noteworthy, for example, that many of the Ugandan interviewees referred to the sexual violence they had experienced using euphemistic or indirect language, including 'forced sleep', 'that thing', 'sitting' and 'bad deeds'.

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