Memories, Mementos, and Memorialization of Young Unaccompanied Afghans Navigating within Europe

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This article considers memories, mementos, and memorialization in stories by unaccompanied young people and their journeys within Europe. It looks at their 'navigation' of remembering and forgetting and how this intertwines with movement and stillness. It is based on a study about Afghan males aged 15–24 years in Norway and Greece. Participants differed in terms of their backgrounds, migration projects, and their legal status. In their various circumstances, their narratives point to how memories unfold, are shared, must be negotiated, and sometimes, forgotten as they navigate towards a sense of safety and a sustainable future. They also point to how mementos may take different forms while on the move, as traces along the migration trail that have the potential to become part of the memories of others who come across them. Finally, their narratives point to practices of memorialization, and how they too are intimately connected to remembering and forgetting.

Keywords: Afghanistan, collective memories, journeys, narratives, unaccompanied minors

'To conclude, the question, 'How much past does a person need?' may be answered: 'Enough to make a future possible, flexible, and constructive'' (Gemignani 2011: 150).

Introduction

In considering the ways people remember and forget acts of genocide, Miller (2006: 320) asks the question: 'Can there be such a thing as too much memory'? After war, when memory is both a wound and an evocation, and forgetting can be an analgesic, anaesthetic, or an act of suppression, a balance needs to be struck

between three aspects of memory: remembering, remembering to forget, and forgetting to remember. Finding such a balance in an attuned way may mean that one's memories need to be put in order, mementos arranged in tolerably evocative ways, and memorialization learnt like music and practiced, alone or in the company of others. The challenge is to use the past to salvage a future and to not drown in a flood of rampant and disarrayed memories.

As holders of people and places and as testaments to life and death and the 'before and after' of war, displacement, and migration, memories have character and function that can decay or rebuild the life to come. This depends on how they govern or are governed by people who live on. People can become the stories that they tell and be enfolded by them. In time, the people themselves are remembered in story form, in episodes and vignettes, in lieu of their physical presence in the world, as they too move on. Memories therefore tie into movement and time; they are part of (e)motion. Physical movement shapes memories, affecting what is remembered, forgotten, and privileged by individuals and groups. Biographical and collective (mythico) histories emerge and change over time, with counter-histories and contradictory narratives being held within complex memoryscapes (Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013; Malkki 1995; Tošić and Palmberger 2016). The present and imagined future also govern how the past is remembered and narrated, impacting on the durability of mementos and practices of memorialization.

This article considers memories, mementos, and memorialization embedded in stories told by unaccompanied young Afghan males in Norway and Greece. By 'memories', we refer to how the autobiographical past is remembered. By 'mementos', we mean not just portable objects that recall other times, places, and people, but also the graffiti, writing, and drawing left in the places they have inhabited on the journey. And by 'memorialization', we imply religious, cultural, and familial practices that evoke a sense of community and history. As such, memories, mementos, and memorialization are intertwined threads that make a tapestry of living. Our participants' journeys were long and dangerous given the lack of regular migration channels, and the resulting migratory realities created by border controls and restrictive migration regimes. The impact of such journeys may be profound and long-lasting (BenEzer and Zetter 2015), leaving 'physical, emotional and psychological traces on its survivors, following them in countries of destination, and on their communities back 'home'' (Mainwaring and Brigden 2016: 247).

Afghanistan has been marked by war, conflict and displacement for over 40 years, beginning with the Soviet invasion in 1979, the ensuing civil war, under the Taliban regime, the US-led intervention in 2001, and the war between the Afghan government and various anti-government groups. In the 1990s, the Afghan refugee population peaked at more than six million. Now it stands at 2.6 million refugees; Pakistan and Iran host more than 85 per cent of the registered refugees (UNHCR 2021), as well as an estimated 3 million undocumented Afghans (UNHCR 2016). Since 2008, Afghans have been the largest group of unaccompanied asylum seeking minors arriving in Europe (Eurostat 2021). While some embark from Afghanistan, others start their journeys from neighbouring

countries. As Abbasi and Monsutti (2017: 1) observe, war and migration has marked the lives of generations of Afghans, although in different ways:

> Among Afghans, people who became adult in the 1980s and 1990s have been marked by the Soviet invasion and ensuing war. For many among the younger generations, the most significant experience was to have been socialized as refugees in Pakistan and Iran more than conflict and flight per se. They grew up with the feeling of being estranged from both their countries of origin and asylum, of being a wandering generation searching for its own place.

So in such contexts, the narratives of young Afghans may be intertwined with experiences of movement and stillness, a sense of not being rooted deeply in a single homeland, and being instead on the periphery of belonging.

In examining the memories, mementos, and memorialization of young Afghans, we first look at memories of migration and exile in the Afghan context. Then, we outline the study and its methods. Third, we present literature on 'memories' and 'narratives' in contexts of migration. Finally, the intertwined layers of memories, mementos, and memorialization are presented through young Afghans' narratives of the journey to Europe. Their migration and memories entail navigation. We draw on the analytical lens of 'social navigation', as developed by Vigh (2009), to account for the ways people move and are moved as they search for a sense of safety and attempt to realize their aspirations for the future. The young people's narratives point to how memories unfold, are shared, must be negotiated, and sometimes, forgotten to manage such navigation. They also point to how mementos can take different forms on the move, as traces along the migration trail. Finally, they point to practices of memorialization and how these too are intimately connected to remembering and forgetting.

Memories of migration and exile in the Afghan context

Our work shows that suffering and beauty can co-exist within memories of movement. As summed up by Schuster and Shinwari (2020: 2),[1] 'Afghans have migrated within the region and further afield since before Afghanistan existed as a state.' Movement appears in many forms, with interconnected causes and differing outcomes, such as trade and labour migration (Marsden 2016; Monsutti 2005), nomadism (Dupree 1973), pilgrimage (Glazebrook and Abbasi-Shavazi 2007), rites of passage (Monsutti 2007b), and being 'a generation conceived and defined by mobility' (Abbasi 2019: 2). Given the unprecedented levels of migration from Afghanistan during the last four decades, memories of movement are often intertwined with the consequences of war, conflict, and insecurity.

Afghans who went to neighbouring countries following the Soviet invasion in 1979 were either referred to or self-identified as *mohājerin* (plural) (Safri 2011). This term was used for refugees fleeing religious oppression or persecution. It

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1   The quote is from the accepted version of the article published on City Research Online, and not the final published version.

denotes 'someone who has made a sacrifice for [. . .their] faith' and has strong connotations to *hijra*, Prophet Mohammad's flight from Mecca to Medina in 622 C.E. (Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont 1988: 146). Prior to the Soviet invasion, *mohājerin* was used for Central Asian Muslims who had sought refuge in Afghanistan given communist expansion (Shahrani 1995). However, the term's religious connotation did not persist indefinitely (Centlivres and Centlivres-Demont 1988; Saito 2009). Afghans constitute one of the largest protracted refugee groups worldwide, and Pakistan and Iran have taken responsibility for most (UNHCR 2021). However, the grounds on which Afghans have built their lives in these countries have narrowed, and more Afghans are being forced to return to Afghanistan or seek refuge and opportunities further afield (Human Rights Watch 2017; Majidi 2018; Safri 2011).

Given a long history of war, displacement, and migration, many Afghans are born or grow up in exile. They may feel a greater attachment to exilic countries and may possess greater knowledge about those environments than about their country of origin. At the same time, they navigate the Afghan family sphere and the given country's social sphere (Saito 2009). The environment in neighbouring countries for Afghanistan's many ethnic groups represents divergent socio-political contexts, with different ethnic, linguistic, and religious ties, in which Afghans have had to navigate opportunities and restrictions. Notions of belonging and identity construction among Afghans in Pakistan and Iran have been corroded by the lack of rights, security, and access to citizenship, as well as discrimination, abuse, and targeting (see, e.g. Human Rights Watch 2013, 2014, 2015).

Those who have grown up in exile know that they have been raised in environments that are markedly different from that of their parents and peers who grew up in Afghanistan; both the homeland and conflict take on another character at a distance, with the experience of exile and status as 'Afghan', 'refugee', and 'undocumented' being structuring factors (Saito 2009). Furthermore, they may be confronted with contrasting representations of the homeland. Their parents' sentimental accounts and Afghanistan's natural beauty clearly contrast with media reports of war and devastation (Kamal 2010). Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2013: 632) found in her research on young Sahrawi refugees living away from their families and communities that memories may be of both the context of displacement ('home-camps') and origins ('home-land'). 'The place of origin is recalled by the basic senses [. . .] – the most powerful vector for retrieving long-lost memories of the past' (Monsutti 2010: 214). It is therefore important to explore how memories and 'home' are influenced by personal experiences of migration and exile (Eastmond 2016).

Jafari and Schuster (2019) note that there are still few Afghan scholars working on the topic of Afghan migration (see Abbasi 2019, for an auto-ethnography on Afghan migration); conversely, poetry and song composed by Afghans deal intimately with this topic and reach an Afghan audience. These forms of expression play an important role in framing and portraying experiences of migration and exile, as well as in maintaining cultural identity. Olszewska (2015a) examines the role of poetry in identity construction among young Afghans who lament the pain of exile despite being born or growing up in Iran. Poetry becomes 'a good outlet

for their *dard-e daruni*, their inner pain, and the *moshkelat-e mohajerat*, the difficulties of exile' (Olszewska 2007: 215). Their poetry discerns itself from that of earlier generations both regarding convention and style (Olszewska 2015a). It is characterized by innovation, exploration, and lyricism and explores the subjective. This has given it a more limited audience than, for instance, resistance poetry following the Soviet invasion. Through the function it serves, poetry becomes a way to negotiate contradictions, dualities, tensions, and questions of (non)belonging. It also then becomes a way of framing and articulating social identities and new forms of personhood (Olszewska 2015a).

Poetry also reveals gendered experiences of migration, as found in a review of 700 Landays, orally transmitted poems often composed by Pashtun women, showing the theme of 'waiting and watching' (Schuster and Shinwari 2020: 111). Just as Olszewska (2015a) points to different generational expressions, Schuster and Shinwari (2020: 121) found a difference between earlier and later Landays, here concerning the pre- and post-Soviet invasion, namely 'the absence of joy in the later ones'. Furthermore, a difference emerges between oral poetry in Persian and Pashto, the two official languages of Afghanistan; the former being predominantly melancholic while the latter included 'humour and mischief', which also ties into different traditions and contexts (Jafari and Schuster 2019: 185). More recent poems and songs address the theme of the migration journey, including warnings of the dangers, the challenges of being an asylum seeker and protest against violent and inhospitable treatment and environments (Jafari and Schuster 2019). Taken together, experiences of migration and exile, and expressions of ties to the homeland, show evolutionary momentum across time and shifting contexts. As these examples show, memories of movement are moving.

The study and its methods

This article draws on the first author's doctoral research on young Afghans' journeys to Europe (Lønning 2018). This was a multi-sited study across various locations in Norway, Greece, Italy, and Turkey. The empirical material is based on life history interviews, 7 months of ethnographic fieldwork, and other forms of data collected along the migration trail between 2012 and 2015. These latter were participatory (solicited photo diaries, written accounts, and diaries), spontaneous (drawings, maps and written accounts arising during interaction), and uninvited (unsolicited drawings and written accounts, also as captured in graffiti and photographs) (see Lønning 2019: 20–22, for a further discussion of these). According to participant's preferences, interviews were conducted in Norwegian, English, and Persian. The empirical material from the original study was reread and re-analysed for this article. All the written accounts used have been translated by a native speaker.

The core participants included 27 unaccompanied Afghan males in Norway and Greece, aged 15–24 years. Of this group, 17 had been granted international protection in Norway, 6 had been refused asylum in Norway, and 4 were undocumented in Greece. The journey to Norway took a year on average for most

participants there, although the duration ranged from a couple of months to more than 4 years. They had arrived between 2008 and 2014. The four core participants in Greece were seeking ways to continue their migration. They were part of larger groups of young Afghans whom added to the research data and participated with photo diaries, allowed the researcher to 'hang out' with them and helped her navigate the environment. All participants cited have been given pseudonyms.

Memories and their telling

Memories and stories are woven together. However, there is no easy 'relationship between experience and its expressions' (Bruner 1986: 6). Life can be in technicolour and memories appear in black and white. And so, narratives can be distilled versions of living, neither faithful to experiences nor fully able to be free of them. In their narration, people position themselves by locating their place in the world and their relations to others (Eastmond 2007). This positioning is context specific. As such, 'narrative[s] of location [...are formed:] an account that tells a story about how we place ourselves in terms of social categories [. . .] at a specific point in time and space' (Anthias 2002: 498). Rather than simple reflections, these are specific renditions and interpretations of the past, the storying of which is inextricably linked to the present situation and the imagined future.

Narratives about displaced populations are embedded in relief work, media, policy debates, protection regimes, academic contributions, diaspora communities, and nation-building, among others (Sigona 2014). They take place within larger discursive fields in which they become part of dominant narratives or alternatively, explicitly, or implicitly challenge those that are dominant. But there is no single story to be found. The 'refugee voice' is as plural as 'refugee experiences' (Sigona 2014: 369). There may be a competition and dissonance between personal or private narratives and collective or official ones (Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013). There may also be opportunities for belonging and healing within these. Collective memories are important in articulating political identities. They draw boundaries and entail both remembering, forgetting, and imagining (Lacroix and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013). By locating memories beyond the individual, it places them in relation to others (within a group) but also across history (Gemignani 2011). Brough *et al.* (2013), in their study among resettled refugees from Myanmar, point to individual narratives being embedded within sociopolitical contexts and a network of historical roots, tying together personal and collective experiences. This cross threading of the micro, macro, and the relational allows these authors to move beyond diagnostic accounts of individualized and medicalized stories of suffering and trauma.

Moreover, narratives are not only about what is told, but also about what is privileged. Marlowe (2010) distinguishes between 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' stories, writing about the 'Lost Boys' of Sudan. While extraordinary stories are grounded in traumatic events that capture both the amazement and awe of listeners, and sensationalize experiences, making it the dominant story, ordinary stories are based on who people are and what they carry with them in terms of

values, culture, spirituality, and history. Ordinary stories are important because they strive 'to place greater emphasis upon understanding a person's life beyond the ascribed status of being a refugee' (Marlowe 2010: 184). They embrace the complexity of living and move beyond 'thin' stories that produce accepted narratives and subjects of suffering (Kohli 2014). Thin stories are made as a response to 'policy categories based on binary, static and linear understandings of migration processes and experiences' according to which some people are constructed as 'deserving' and others as 'undeserving', without considering their social realities across space and time (Crawley and Skleparis 2018: 59). Such stories depend on particular memories while leaving little room for others. Furthermore, memories themselves can take different forms and have different force, as experiences are reflected on at different times and cycles of life. Eastmond (2016) found in her research on an extended Bosnian refugee family, clear differences between how the children and adults remembered and dealt with war, flight, exile, and return. Individual and collective memories are therefore also affected by familial and historical ones. Given these considerations of the fluid nature of memory making and memory usage, we now consider our study.

Remembering, remembering to forget, and forgetting to remember

All the participants carried memories of the journey towards Europe. In addition to their origin as Afghans, they were all unmarried males and had embarked on their journeys as minors. There were also differences between them. Several participants had lived in Pakistan and Iran prior to migrating to Europe and three were born in these countries. Their social backgrounds and positioning in terms of ethnic, linguistic, and religious aspects also differed. Participants self-identified with at least six different ethnicities, although most were Hazara followed by Pashtuns and Tajiks. Most spoke Dari (Afghan Persian), Pashto, Farsi (Iranian Persian), or Hazaragi (Persian dialect). However, a few spoke Turkic languages and started to learn Persian or Pashto to be able to communicate with other Afghans. While Persian speakers could communicate easily in Iran, as was also the case for Pashto speakers with co-linguists in Pakistan, others explained the impact of a lack of common language already upon leaving their communities. Very few knew any English. Whether they were literate in their own languages or in the Latin alphabet had also differed, which impacted on their ability to read road signs, for instance, during the journey. They were observing and non-observing Sunni and Shia Muslims, as well as non-religious. Moreover, their legal statuses ranged from Norwegian citizens to being undocumented in Greece. Homeowners and those finding shelter in abandoned buildings were also among them, to mention some factors. They were therefore differently positioned within various personal, socio-cultural, and legal processes and structures.

In remembering their journeys to Europe, participants spoke of how these were made up of differentially unfolding physical, spatial, temporal, experiential, relational, and emotional experiences. Their narratives included memories of stressful and traumatic experiences unfolding side-by-side with mundane, tiresome, and

enjoyable ones. Ghazwan sums up some of the multifaceted nature of his memories of being on the move for a year-and-a-half before arriving in Norway:

> The journey wasn't easy, but it was also fun sometimes, and sometimes it was sad. Sometimes we were happy. Sometimes you came to know people... [. . .] Some people, when they saw we are refugees, would shout bad words at us. Sometimes they threw stones. That was so sad, so difficult. However, it was not all bad. Sometimes it was good as well. Some days were very nice. You sit and talk, and people help you. But sometimes it was very difficult, and no one can do anything to help you. So, you just sit and cry or think.

Beyond a natural focus on the 'troubles' that such journeys entail, Schapendonk *et al.* (2015: 61) suggest that there should also be room to investigate 'embodied experiences of [. . .] 'tranquillities' and 'thrills' on the road'. Journeys are multiemotional processes involving multiple encounters (Campos-Delgado 2019). Such encounters, do 'not only [concern] other human beings; animals, landscapes, material objects, images or events also affect people emotionally' and their memories (Svašek 2010: 868).

The journey as memory

The young people often described their journeys to Europe in detail, especially those in Norway, even if it was long ago for some of them. However, there were differences in how participants began their stories. Providing a brief overview first, almost following a timeline, was not uncommon, as if they were testing the skin of a story, before deciding whether they could dive into the complex body of their experiences. In their narratives, the journey appeared to be entangled with memories of feeling both on top of and overwhelmed by their circumstances. The story itself was thus related to social navigation in moving environments among multiple actors and structures (Vigh 2009). Being in charge was often remembered as successful efforts to resist unwanted consequences in rapidly changing and insecure situations. In comparison, a lack of control often related to the unforgiving pressures of undocumented travel, violence, destitution, or other structural implications, exhaustion and feelings of failure. Participants remembered being active in their migration process. This entailed a continuous navigation of such elements as they tried to move towards a sense of safety and arriving in a place where an envisioned life might begin, 'through both the socially *immediate* and the socially *imagined*' (Vigh 2009: 425, emphasis in the original).

Their accounts of navigation entailed the physical journey but also extended beyond this. Arriving in a country like Norway was seen as the end of one type of journey and the start of another. Noor Mohammad recalls this through the immediate implications following arrival, the outcome of the asylum process, and how uncertainty extends through temporary protection status.

> The journey was technically over when I arrived in Norway, but you still have a feeling of being unsafe. I had flashbacks of my journey going through the asylum

process. It became stuck in my mind that even though I've been here for a while, I've nothing now if the paperwork doesn't go through. If I'm not allowed to stay, then I'm that Noor Mohammad I was when I first arrived, who arrived in Norway all those years ago with no protection status, no education, with nothing. [...] I've dreams about the future and so much of it depends on being allowed to stay. If a rejection comes, then everything is finished. All the years I've been here, I've worked hard, I've studied hard, I've demonstrated that I'm dedicated but it all becomes meaningless without status. [...] You ask me about how it was when I first arrived. When I arrived in Norway, the journey wasn't finished.

Noor Mohammad thus pointed to the role played by the envisioned future, here intimately tied to the granting of an indefinite permission to stay in Norway. The envisioned future is a fundamental aspect affecting the present and the ability to move towards an ordinary life; however, that life is imagined. He also emphasized that the journey continues to 'live' on in the present, the intensity of which is affected by the current circumstances. While the journey may last beyond movement, memories of mobility and immobility may at once be imprinted, entangled, and blurred.

Imprinted, entangled, and blurred memories of movement

Participants' journeys unfolded, not as straight lines, nor even zigzags; rather they pulsed into multi-(re)directional trajectories and, sometimes, into circular journeys. A variety of references served as 'memory imprints' around which stories were built. Participants shared countless memories of people, vehicles, buildings, and landscapes encountered along the way. These memories are associated with 'coming to the senses' in all directions—touch, taste, sound, sight, and smell—and the body as a somatic memory holder, but also as a holder of scars and injuries that, in turn, acted as reminders and testaments to what happened. Memories of the journey seeped into participants' bones as explained by Abbas: 'Often, I was very hungry and very tired. I will never forget that'.

Memories from the journey also become entangled and blurred, as repeated experiences informed one another but could not always be pinned to an exact time or location. The participants' memories often concerned very physical aspects related to their modes of migration. They had numerous memories of waiting, violence, and multiple border crossings, with concerted efforts by security officials to hinder or redirect their movements. Some remembered crossing the same borders and landscapes multiple times. Timur spoke of this. He made three overland journeys across Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran before managing to cross to Turkey.

I was deported twice, once from here and once from here. [As he speaks, Timur points to the map he was given to trace his journey.] I don't remember exactly the first time, but they were right after each other. I spent about five weeks on the last trip, about two weeks on the second and about three weeks on the first one.

While the proximity and intensity of repeated movement across the same or similar terrains may make it difficult to differentiate and plot experiences on an exact timeline, certain episodes had become fixed in memory. Particular experiences stood out in participants' narrations that served as 'stories within stories' of the journey. Frightening apprehensions, violence and returns lived alongside memories of everyday little things, such as playing football or joking around with friends. These experiences also lived alongside victories during fraught and dangerous journeys, such as successful border crossings. While all these memories lived together, there were differences between how they came to be shared and handled.

Sharing and handling memories of the journey

The young people showed that memories could bring comfort. Yet closeness and distance to memories had to be calibrated, so that a balance could be found between needing to remember and remembering to forget. Stories were sometimes entered at a wide angle, and then zoomed in to microscopic details. For some, remembering aloud appeared to be a relational act that seemed to stop their memories from fading. Some participants expressed a wish to receive their interview transcripts or copies of their photo diaries made with disposable cameras, perhaps in themselves representing types of mementos to hold as a buffer against forgetting. Memories of difficult circumstances appeared in retrospect to also be a source of highlighting coping (Eastmond 2016). The photo diaries captured scenes from everyday life in Patra (Greece), where many Afghans lived in abandoned buildings while seeking onward migration by hiding in Italy-bound lorries from the port.

For some participants certain experiences seemed unspeakable, even if the memories were (re)lived. While few expressed difficulties in sharing their stories, some stated at the outset that they did not want to talk about certain memories or that there were things that they wanted to forget. As such, there may also be an 'active forgetting' that does not entail rubbing out a memory so much as containing it (Eastmond 2016: 30). Managing and arranging memories then also becomes a bridge towards a sense of safety. Moreover, silence and containment appeared for some participants to be about creating space for new selves and possible futures.

> Sometimes I sit in my room and think, for example about Afghanistan or Greece. I go out to the living room right away [which is shared with other minors and staff]. There I can joke around with the others. Because if I sit alone and just think and think, then... It doesn't help and maybe it makes you ill (Rozbeh).

> I don't look too much at the old pictures, because then all those experiences return, and I don't like that (Sher).

Both Rozbeh and Sher had been granted international protection in Norway. As pointed out by Rey (2016: 118), pictures can be treasured objects that are carefully preserved without 'having to deal with them on a daily basis, since the feelings they provoke are sometimes overwhelming'. The need to guard yourself against the

immediacy of memories brought on by mementos such as photographs, can contrast with practices of memorialization, pointing to how personal memories, collective memories, and memorialization may impact differently (Olwig 2016).

Many of the young people's experiences from the journey were intimately tied to memories of social relations. As Khan (2020: 159) observes in her study on Afghan taxi-drivers in England, modes of storytelling, the researcher's interpretation and translation of experience, and 'the retellings of memories ripple and create new textual and oral imaginings of migration'. Some participants in Norway spoke about the ways their memories overlapped with those of other Afghans, and of sharing memories of the journey among friends. In such situations, they said that explaining their experiences was unnecessary given a shared understanding of what it entailed, despite different trajectories and outcomes. This unspoken understanding, of living different shades of the journey and exile, called for explanation when sharing it with a different audience, such as care workers or the researcher. However, even if they had common experiences, they also each told the story on their own in an atomised way. Ghazwan, whose asylum claim fell under the Dublin Regulation, which stipulates which Member State is responsible for an applicant's claim and who did not know whether his case would be decided upon in Norway, recalled how his situation had been unknown to others in his surroundings.

> No one at the reception centre [for unaccompanied minors] knew that I was a "Dubliner". I didn't tell the other boys anything. If they hadn't received their own decisions, maybe they would worry that they too will become "Dubliners". I shared a room with another boy for a year and never told him.

Similarly, Zaki spoke about keeping his fear of forced removal to himself upon being refused asylum in Norway: 'I don't tell it to other Afghans because it makes them sad. I don't tell them, and they don't share with me'. For Zaki, being silent about some of his experiences appeared to support Eastmond's (2016) precept that the choices made about speaking were also about protecting oneself and others in a relational responsible way.

Integrating memories of the past with the present and the anticipated future

Some participants remembered that the impact of the journey had followed them into Norway. Along the way, there was a constant striving for survival while searching for a place where protection and an envisioned life seemed possible. Once they arrived, the implications of what had happened surfaced, as if the weight of memories had its own momentum that caught up with them when they stood still.

> While I was waiting for the [asylum] decision I became depressed. I felt like all the thoughts I carried with me on the journey came, from the whole way. When you are on the move, you don't think about anything. You don't think about how difficult it is, how scary it is. You just think. . .to arrive as fast as possible. But when you arrive,

all those thoughts come. When you've nothing to do, you're just sitting and waiting. I became very depressed and I also developed difficulties sleeping. When you are in one place, you become scared right away. But when you are underway, when you travel like that, those thoughts disappear. You endure it. The only thing on your mind is to arrive, and to arrive as fast as possible [to a destination], it doesn't matter how, I must just get there. To your goal. [. . .] For me it happened like that. When I arrived in Norway, when you arrive and become. . .still in one place or you get status and you're settled, then all those thoughts return. You become stressed and thinking all the time. *Then your body shows you what you have experienced. What has happened.* On that way, you can say that you're strong, you can say that you're crazy to endure it but after a while you feel those thoughts come (Lotfullah, authors' emphasis).

Several participants' experiences suggest that it may be particularly challenging to take in and hold both the past and the present while trying to salvage a future. Their memories evoked the ways the need to arrive had pushed their abilities to take in the risks and impact of the journey—these were packed away, bundled together, until they grew into pantechnicons that arrived behind them after they reached Norway. This bundling of feelings also appeared as necessary in order to focus on what they had to face every day. Such a focus appeared to simultaneously act as a way of containing and portioning out memories. Memories then also become a way of separating experience from sensemaking. A few participants, like Lotfullah above, spoke about developing difficulties sleeping and having nightmares. Furthermore, some said that they had only really started to understand or possibly acknowledge the extent of their own exposures to danger following their arrival in Norway. Exerting their will to survive was necessary during the journey and became in many ways normalised—they witnessed the migration of others and used their will to navigate their own movement onward.

   The present weighed heavily on how the past was seen and the future imagined. When the present overtook everything, memories were harder to find or possibly share. This particularly concerned participants immersed in very challenging situations. For them, the present was everywhere, and their hopes and dreams for the future were either what sustained or transfixed them. The narratives of participants in Greece were more centred around the immediacy of their situations and of seeking onward migration. For participants in Norway refused asylum, the present had generally been taken over by their fears about the future. Some young people expressed finding comfort and a sense of peace, or even a release, through connecting their experiences to those of others or expressing them through various mediums, which along the migration trail sometimes resulted in mementos for others to find, dwell on, or add to, but also in practices of memorialization.

Collective memories, mementos on the move, and memorialization

Micro and macro stories emerged as the young people talked. Some shifted between the personal, the familial, and the societal, encompassing both the contemporary and historical memories. As such, they connected their personal stories to

'history'—and to a bigger story. The story about the self, then also becomes the story about others. These stories were deeply rooted in a particular setting: Afghanistan, Afghans in Pakistan and Iran, and return to a so-called 'homeland'. They further concerned difficult and dangerous journeys, undocumentedness, being subjected to violence, the situation of ethnic and religious minorities, a lack of protection and opportunities, determination, and aspirations and dreams for the future. These stories, therefore, are tied into larger stories across space and time of war, displacement, migration, persecution, marginalization, exile, and hope, which beyond an individual or familial desire, can tie into socio-political struggles for change (Brough *et al*. 2013). As Meraj explained looking back at his experience of deportation:

> I saw a good picture when I was deported, a picture of Einstein on the wall at the UN office at the Afghan border. This guy was an immigrant. That was very deep, it had a very good effect on me. I studied him a bit, Einstein. He was in Germany, went to Switzerland, and for some years he was stateless. He came to Scandinavia, he went everywhere. It inspired me a lot. His life inspires me.

To some degree, portraying themselves as part of a bigger picture led the young people to feel more assured. It was also useful in trying to make sense of their predicaments by pointing to larger historical, political, and social processes and events—global, regional, and local. As shown by others, '[i]t helps locate personal stories within wider contexts of experience, which are shared with other, related people' (Gemignani 2011: 148). While such references were generally explicit among participants who expressed an interest in the historical and current affairs, others also made links between the micro and the macro and pointed to how collective memories may intertwine with personal narratives.

Historical references and connections to others across space and time also became evident through poetry. The poem *Oneness of Mankind* (*bani ādam* in Persian), written by Saadi in the thirteenth century, was left behind on a piece of paper at an organization assisting minors on the move in Greece.

> Human beings are members of a whole, in creation of one essence and soul. If one member is afflicted with pain, other members uneasy will remain.

Although not included in the rendition, the poem continues: 'If you have no sympathy for human pain, the name of human you cannot retain'.[2] To the young person who wrote this out, the poem might have been a claim to a common humanity in light of what had caused his migration, the conditions of the journey or his current situation. It also speaks to a cultural repertoire. Poetry itself may both be an expression of personal and collective suffering and composing poetry 'can be therapy, it can be testimony, and it can be a resource' (Olszewska 2015b: 100).

Poetry was one articulation that appeared across the young people's expressions, both their own poetry and the poems of others, as the above. Given how

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2   The translation used here is by M. Aryanpoor.

these poems were often left along the migration trail, for others to find, they also represented mementos as place markers, as an '*I was here*'. In that sense, these mementos were not objects they carried. Rather, they were the ones they left behind. They were often signed with name, origin and other characteristics which may have risked them being identified in places they were trying to leave. This duality of simultaneously being visible while needing to be invisible has also been noted by others (Derluyn *et al.* 2014; Wagner Tsoni and Franck 2019). Mementos such as drawings, poems, and written accounts left on pieces of paper, or as graffiti and carvings on the walls of abandoned buildings offering shelter, police cells, and detention centres, often related to experiences of being on the move, exile, and references to the homeland. They represented a tapestry of people, experiences, and time, connected through a common history of migration. Although tokens of belonging, such as a scarf or bracelet with the colours of the Afghan flag, were visible among some young Afghans on the move in Greece, and some shared pictures of loved ones on mobile phones, few participants spoke of objects carried along the journey. Some instead described how they had lost personal belongings, how these had been thrown away or that they had been robbed. It is therefore possible that they created tokens that connected them to the past but that were simultaneously indicative of their present, which in turn, others might remember them by. This is suggested by the following account by an Afghan 17-year old:

> Hello, I'm a good and tidy boy who lives in Greece, and I have a bad memory that I'll never forget. In Greece, I turned from 16 to 17 years old, and I can't remember a single pleasant day here. From when I left, I haven't seen my mates, or the sweet tears of my mother. She asked: 'Will you return one day?' When I placed the heavy sack on my shoulders, from the border of Nimroz I came to the border with Iran. I was sent [smuggled] by an un-Muslim [ethnic group]. That road [journey] made me very sad.

Such written accounts were not uncommon. Another account included the following phrase: 'I don't know where to start but I have so many things in my heart, that I could fill a hundred pages to empty myself'. As this sentence suggests, their expressions could serve as a form of release. Such expressions could also represent a manifestation of their hopes and dreams. For instance, representations of the journey and routes drawn by young Afghans in Patra often extended to destinations further north and westward, even if arrival elsewhere only existed as a hope. Memorializations in the form of religious, cultural, and familial practices also became visible as they shared their experiences.

Memorialization through religious, cultural, and familial practices

Communal religious and cultural practices took place on the move and in Norway. Some who took part in such observances, explained how these engaged and uplifted them. They could offer strength and a sense of relief, as well as represent a clear break from their everyday activities. They included group experiences but also rituals practiced across the world by millions that not only tied

them to memories of their own past but also connected them to the observances of others in other localities. Images of religious observances were the fourth largest theme in the photo diaries. While this can be a sole result of when cameras were distributed, Yawar explained how during ten days of *Muharram*, most Shiites at the informal settlement abstained from seeking onward movement from Patra's port. *Muharram* is a month of mourning for Shiites in commemoration of Imam Hossein, the grandson of Prophet Mohammad, who was martyred in 680 C.E. in Kerbala, Iraq. Monsutti (2007a: 189) notes that among Hazaras in Quetta (Pakistan), the tenth day, *Ashura*, 'allows people to express death, suffering, political injustice, poverty, a sense of honour, group identity, guilt and a will to expiate sins, and the expectation of better days to come.' While religious and cultural observance may fulfill important functions, they are also dependent on remembering, as raised by Ghazwan:

> We had a *Nowruz* [Persian New Year] party at the reception centre [Ghazwan explains, referring to a time after he himself had been settled in a Norwegian municipality]. We did it before, but we almost forgot everything because we were over a year on the move, a year at the reception centre, then a year living [among people who did not share those traditions]. And during all that time, we didn't have any of those celebrations.

Memorialization may therefore both be embedded in and be reinforced by memory. It may also be under the constant threat of forgetting.

Prayer, music, or food were part of such observances. However, these were also part of everyday memorialization. Ritual, sound, and taste evoked other places and provided comfort in the present. Some young Afghans recalled how recitation, for instance, had offered comfort during particularly distressing parts of their journeys.

> I was terrified [crossing the Aegean Sea]. Both the boat and the sea were black. We were lucky but I couldn't even make myself look at the sea. I just kept on saying [. . .a *Salawat*, a blessing on the Prophet and his family]. Maybe I said it a "million" or two "million" times! I don't remember, I was too scared, so I repeated it all the way. I thought maybe I'll die, maybe not. I didn't know (Ihteram).

> There were gunshots when we crossed the mountains [from Iran to Turkey]. I just recited the *Shahada* [the declaration of faith]. I thought I would surely die, but Allah helped me, and I managed to arrive (Razi).

Food was also a recurrent topic in the narratives. Often, it related to food eaten during the journey or its insufficiency: the repeated (hard) bread and yogurt several participants remembered receiving from smugglers, encounters with new dishes, or biscuits, nuts, and dates packed for energy during arduous crossings. Accounts of food also related to traditional dishes and eating as a communal practice. As Monsutti (2010) and Kohli *et al.* (2010) observe, food involves the negotiation of identities and rituals around food and commensality may reveal boundaries and hierarchies. Dishes are also affected by the food habits and places

of exile. Very few participants said that they already knew how to cook traditional food prior to their migration. Others spoke about learning this in exile. For those who could cook, it also gave them the ability to bring people together. Food was therefore important for reproducing social ties (Kohli *et al.* 2010; Monsutti 2010).

> I cooked in Afghanistan with my mother, I had learnt everything! I make Afghan food for the other boys living here [referring to the living unit for unaccompanied minors where Rozbeh lives in Norway]. I cook when I visit my friends. I also cook for Eid [feasts/religious festivals, Rozbeh said, referring to *Eid-e Fitr* or *Eid-e Ramazan*, that follows Ramadan, the month of fasting]. I tell the staff [at the living unit] that they should learn because soon I will move out, and new Afghan boys will move in. Then they can make it for them. I show them.

For Rozbeh, cooking was associated with memories of his mother, from whom he had learnt to cook. By encouraging the staff to learn and by trying to teach them, Rozbeh seemed eager to provide the possibility for other young Afghans in a new environment to be met with the familiarity and comfort that often comes with the smell, sight, and taste of cherished dishes. Similarly, Ebadullah highlighted a meal as his 'best' memory from the journey.

> We got to know these Afghan smugglers and we went to their house and their wives made *qābuli pilāv* [pilaf rice dish with meat, carrots and raisins]. It was so delicious! [. . .] It was the first time in months that I ate *qābuli*. I was so happy!

For Ebadullah, this familiar taste in a foreign and insecure environment provided a respite. It was the wives of his smugglers who made this respite possible. Although smugglers were often described as a source of insecurity, some remembered how their smugglers had not only been vital in their onward migration but had shown hospitality and kindness. Participants detailed the diverse nature of the people they interacted with along the way. While the young people shared numerous distressing experiences and encounters from their journeys, including life-threatening situations, acts of kindness, both given and received, were also important parts of their memories. Such acts included a helping hand while crossing a difficult stretch, taking turns at holding watch at night, and offers of food, clothes, tickets, money, or directions without asking anything in return. As Noor Mohmmad recalled from a chance encounter with a group of fellow Afghans:

> I will never forget them. I had their number and we used to speak often [after I arrived in Norway] but I lost my phone and lost their number. If I travel back to [country], the first thing I will do is go back to that newsagent and maybe I will find them there again!

These Afghans had offered him tea, food, a roof over his head for the night, and directions for the next leg of his journey. In the absence of contact, or even knowledge about their whereabouts, it was also the memories that kept them from fading, as shared in Noor Mohammad's narrative about the journey.

Discussion

We have explored memories, 'mementos on the move', and memorialization among a group of young Afghans in Norway and Greece. In drawing these observations, we do no more than bring the reader to wonder at how participants' memories of their past were constructed and constrained by their present circumstances. We have attempted to show that memories were themselves not static or singular. Rather, they wove in and out of mementos and memorialization, so that autobiographical memories and their plural resonances lived side by side. They were sometimes insistently present, and at other times needing to be stowed away. We have shown that the young people often remembered journeys as long and dangerous, punctuated by acts of courage, colour, and light along the way. Not everything was bleak, dark, or remembered in black and white. And though the journeys formed the spine of the stories told, neither the journeys nor their recollections lay in straight lines. Instead they showed contours that accumulated into memory landscapes, arrayed according to their notable features. Some memories were like constellations representing a resource and lighting the way forward. Others did not emerge willingly into the light. Participants balanced forgetting and remembering within themselves as well as between them and the researcher. Yet while we have delineated the complex relationship between remembering and forgetting, we also know that there are contexts such as asylum adjudications where life needs to be recalled in a sequential straight line, not as a knotted, contradictory, or jumbled set of experiences. Studies at the intersection between memory, emotion, and law point to the ways trauma, language, and culture interfere with requirements within asylum processes for people to be tidy in their recollections (Herlihy *et al.* 2012). So in some situations there is a pressing need for neatness, sequence, and order. In such contexts, young asylum seekers may struggle with balancing the need to remember with the need to forget.

In our enquiry, whatever the flow of life where memories, mementos, and memorialization coincided, the outcomes of the journey had been highly uncertain for all the young Afghans. For participants refused asylum in Norway or those seeking onward migration from Greece, outcomes still remained uncertain. Among some participants, the choice of carrying a complex bundle of memories into an occluded future was burdensome. So, the memories of the journeys became part of how the past was curated into story form, the ways the present was experienced, and the future imagined. Memories were therefore always touched by time in some way or other, even if time remained elastic in the story telling, expanding some moments, and contracting longer periods. They helped the young people anchor their lives or find moorings among their fast-changing circumstances. They were there as troubles and reassurances, to show others and to keep private.

Given the layered nature of participants' memories, mementos, and memorialization, it is possible to reconsider Miller's (2006: 320) question at the beginning: 'Can there be such a thing as too much memory'? The answer, perhaps unsurprisingly, is yes and no. The core issue may be how memories are imprinted, shared, managed, and integrated as they swell and fade at different times and cycles of life.

In other words, finding the balance between remembering, remembering to forget and forgetting to remember moved like a gyroscope. They constantly need maintenance and calibration as people navigate past experiences, present situations, and aspirations for the future.

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