

Mnemonic land war: Memory constellations through Lebanon and South Africa

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journals.sagepub.com/home/mss**Miranda Meyer** 

City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center, USA

Stefan Norgaard 

Columbia University, USA

Abstract

Although Lebanon and South Africa are often treated as exceptional cases, the use of geographic analogies like ‘bantustans’ and ‘Lebanonization’ signals their relevance to many other places. These analogies point to the recognition of a spatial mode of mnemonic war in which struggles over the past are also struggles over land. Such analogies signal recognition but also require forgetting: as narrative chronotopes, they are limiting. To look beyond these limits, we name this shared condition ‘mnemonic land war’ and trace its workings through territorialization, property regimes and planning in South Africa and Lebanon. Understanding these processes as memory-work allows us to see what the places analogized to Lebanon and South Africa share in their mnemonic land wars, and link them into a transnational memory constellation. Understanding this constellation can guide a comparative understanding of mnemonic war ‘on the ground’.

Keywords

bantustans, Lebanon, memory-work, territory, urban planning

Memory travels. People migrate with stories and keepsakes in tow; discourses about the past and how it should be remembered circulate globally. As these practices, discourses, objects, and narratives settle into new places, they challenge existing memory constructions. The effects of such additions can be profound. On one hand, the new arrival is inevitably taken up by existing coalitions, oppositions and arrangements for using and contesting the past in ‘mnemonic war’. On the other hand, the new arrival’s entry can change existing arrangements – just as adding a star to a constellation might merely fill in existing lines or suggest an entirely new picture.

Corresponding author:

Stefan Norgaard, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation (GSAPP), Columbia University, 1172 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10027, USA.

Email: spn2121@columbia.edu

We take up the notions of ‘new memory constellations’ and ‘mnemonic war’ from a perspective informed by our respective disciplines of geography and planning. Following Gordillo (2014), we understand ‘constellations’ to mean places entangled with each other by memory-work (Till, 2012).¹ Within these constellations, some nodes may shine more brightly or dimly; nevertheless, as in the sky, the points that make up the constellation are bound together by recognition and narrative. With this in mind, we take geographic analogies as cues signalling ‘constellations that are more often than not disregarded’ but nonetheless ‘constitutive of living places’ in the present (Gordillo, 2014: 11). Geographic analogies ‘are indirect arguments’ (Agnew, 2009: 431) for the similarity of one situation to another. We can trace such constellations of salience when the terms ‘bantustans’ or ‘Lebanonization’ are applied to other places. Something from Lebanon or South Africa is being recognized elsewhere.

What these analogies recognize is (post)colonial mnemonic war, expressed as spatial fragmentation that remembers and rehearses past conflict and conflicting pasts. ‘Bantustans’ and ‘Lebanonization’ have entered far-flung constellations because they name a recognizable *spatial* mode of mnemonic war. While problematics of collective, public, or (trans)national memory are often conceived as narrative and symbolic contestation, ‘mnemonic war’ can also be understood in a more tangible sense: as land war. Not limited to designated ‘sites of memory’ (Nora, 1989), the work of memory is also found in territory, property regimes and urban planning.

Lebanon’s and South Africa’s roles in transnational constellations demonstrate the relevance of this perspective to many more places. This article follows memory-work through warring recollections of the past built into the processes of urbanization, most visibly as the management and reproduction of social difference – in these cases, race or religion. We follow such legacies in the urban fabric to elaborate the processes through which mnemonic war can be understood as land war.

In the first section, we begin with the concepts of ‘Lebanonization’ and ‘bantustans’, reflect briefly on the ways that Lebanon and South Africa have taught us to think about memory and consider how this understanding shades the analogization of these concepts. In the second section, we offer our conceptual case for understanding mnemonic war as land war, taking three vectors in turn: territory, property and planning. We conclude by reflecting on the transnational constellations of memory revealed by this discussion. Understanding these places as and in constellations can guide a comparative understanding of mnemonic war ‘on the ground’.

From Beirut to the bantustans

Lebanon and South Africa are treated as exceptional cases. The point is illustrated by the analogies that arise from them: to analogize by proper name is to refer to a singularity, the referential thing that other things are like. Yet, when we began discussing our work – one of us, a geographer studying Lebanon, the other, a planning scholar studying South Africa – we found striking commonalities. There are, of course, clear parallels between each country’s extreme institutionalization of race or sect in (post)colonial contexts. The terms ‘Lebanonization’ and ‘bantustans’ point – in part – to the ways that these processes have played out spatially.

We understand bantustans to be the artificial production and designation of territory for specific non-white ethnic groups within apartheid South Africa’s racist hierarchy, through borders and sham nation-state constructions (Lalu, 2006).² Bantustans were also a device to transform Black citizens to non-political subjects through the invention of communally divided pasts and futures (Mamdani, 1996). The processes through which bantustans were implemented – marked by social-class differentiation and indirect rule – have arguably ‘pacified’ and otherwise mutated South African memory politics (Ally, 2011; Phillips, 2020). We understand the term

'Lebanonization' to convey a process wherein sectarianism³ (the sociopolitical salience of religious affiliation) is exploited and territorialized by political entrepreneurs, public space and life is fragmented, and the ethnosectarian community – rather than the state or the society writ large – becomes the key infrastructure of social reproduction (Nucho, 2016). The resulting spatial and social enclaves support a divide-and-rule politics premised on the avoidance of a public realm suffused with the temporality of threat: all problems result from past violence, and all protest leads to future violence (Arsan, 2020). Memory politics in Lebanon work through varied reperformances of sectarianized territory, which summon memories of civil war and anticipate its recurrence (Bou Akar, 2018; Hermez, 2017).

In both cases, the narration of past conflict and present prospects is inextricable from configurations of territory and property. Studying memory in these places therefore necessitates looking beyond explicit commemoration to understand the shaping of time and space used to *make* commemorative places and practices – because these themselves are fragmented and contested (see Bremner, 2005; Bou Akar, 2018). This is not an original contention: the area literatures on Lebanon and South Africa have taught us to think this way. For instance, in studies of Beirut, it is unremarkable that memory politics are territorial, and planning is memory politics; what is interesting is *how* (Haugbolle, 2010; Khalaf and Houry, 1993; Sawalha, 2010). Scholarship in South Africa takes the violently contorted spatiality of racial apartheid and its legacies as given – at territorial, metropolitan, and even domestic/interpersonal levels (Christopher, 2001; Pieterse, 2019). The spatial tactics of race or sect link the two countries both historically and in ongoing practice (e.g. Bollens, 2013; Yazbek, 2016). From these place-specific perspectives, the near-absence of subjects such as territory or planning in theoretical discussions about memory becomes puzzling.

This understanding also drives our interest in tracing new memory constellations called 'bantustan' and 'Lebanonization'. It means that when these terms are applied to places other than their origins, they signal a related kind of mnemonic land war. If these analogies are useful (they are, at minimum, used), it is because they describe situations that are *not* unique to their places of origin. Rather, they are situations occurring in different places, but for which we have no other names. It is these situations that we term 'mnemonic land war'. But what is mnemonic land war? In the next section, we consider the question empirically: since the analogies signalling that situation are borrowed from Lebanon and South Africa, we examine the conditions there that are recognized elsewhere. First, however, we briefly consider the question from the other direction: what do the analogies do?

As analogies, 'bantustans' and 'Lebanonization' function as chronotopes: congealed narrative time-space that organizes thinking, knowing and meaning (Marková and Novaes, 2020). Chronotopes offer a way of understanding sites where 'time, as it were, thickens' and space becomes 'charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history' (Bakhtin, 1981: 84). They permit us to understand time in its interconnection to a specific place, and space as saturated with historical time. Although Bakhtin first developed the concept for literary analysis, chronotopes have been taken up in a variety of fields. In critical geopolitics – the same field that attends most closely to geographic analogies – they are seen as a way of characterizing places by locating them in the narrative spacetime of geopolitical discourse (Klinke, 2012). It is with this in mind that we attend to the *analogization* of 'Lebanonization' and 'bantustans' by treating them as chronotopes. Since chronotopes structure possible narratives and group narratives into genres, these geographical analogies suggest that specific kinds of repeated pasts and anticipated futures are being recognized elsewhere. As Ricoeur (2009) reminds us, 'recognition *is* the mnemonic act par excellence' (pp. 429–430). To know something is to remember having known it before. It is these links of salience that we count as constellations of mnemonic war. Today, the term 'bantustan' is applied to Palestine (Farsakh, 2005), Native American reservations (Walker and Sonnad, 1988) and Bosnia

(Campbell, 1999). Likewise, pundits lament or anticipate the ‘Lebanonization’ of Iraq (Setrakian, 2010), the post-Soviet countries (Human Rights Watch, 1991), or the United States of America (Ghattas, 2020). The terms mark the achievement or maintenance of power through social separations that sustain past conflicts and conflicting pasts.

At the same time, the recognition signalled by geographical analogies entails forgetting: in focusing on what in one place reminds us of another, other qualities tend to recede (Agnew, 2009). It is thus unsurprising that, despite empirical similarities, ‘bantustan’ and ‘Lebanonization’ analogies are used differently. In their narrative knotting of setting and temporality, chronotopes define ‘a set of stakes or a matter of concern’ (Schrader, 2010: 207). These analogies signal different stakes and so play different geopolitical roles. Each term congeals a geopolitical moment; the international mobilization against apartheid in the 1990s, or multinational involvement in the 1975–1990 Lebanese civil war. These moments have come to stand in for a broader class of events. Accordingly, ‘bantustan’ analogies foreground coloniality and segregation imposed from above, while ‘Lebanonization’ foregrounds collapse and fragmentation that comes from within. The latter term carries a condescending note: ignoring that Lebanon’s situation is also the result of colonial trajectories and segregating structures, it signals that people just could not figure out how to get along (Rosenfeld, 1991). Thus, in the 1990s, scholars warned of ‘global apartheid’ as a colonizing geopolitical order of capital and North/South inequalities (Dalby, 1998), while pundits feared ‘the Lebanonization of the world’ as a consequence of ‘tribalism’ (Barber, 1992). The two terms coexist because each invokes a story with different stakes (oppression vs infighting); that is, each remembers and forgets different things about histories that are much more similar than the analogies’ uses suggest. The stakes of these chronotopes allow the analogies to link places into constellations, but limit what can be said with the analogies. This article therefore foregrounds not the analogies themselves, but the shared condition of ‘mnemonic land war’ to which they point. Doing so, can allow more nuanced and grounded perceptions.

We now turn to the empirical question of what mnemonic land war might be. In the next section, we trace three vectors of mnemonic land war from Lebanon and South Africa: territory, property and planning. Naming these commonalities might render mnemonic land war in other places recognizable by means other than analogy.

Mnemonic land war

Territory

If the kind of mnemonic war to which ‘bantustans’ and ‘Lebanonization’ are recruited is a land war, then one of its key vectors is territory. Territory is a strategic asset in that it offers both security and opportunity, both fixing and movement (Muscarà, 2005). At the same time, territorialization is memory-work, and struggles over territorial control can constitute mnemonic warfare. Any territory is a bundle of functions (Sack, 1986) and relations (Elden, 2013) in terms of some specific mode of control or type of occupancy, operating contextually through the efforts and imaginations of those who hold it (Brighenti, 2006). Thus, territory can be made and maintained in terms of memory. The resulting divisions may overlap and interpenetrate: territorializations of social difference such as race or religion need not imply permanent entrenchment or the ‘failure’ of the nation-state territories with which they coexist. Rather, territory also works as a memorial landscape of (un)belonging (Alderman and Inwood, 2013; Schein, 2009).

The simplest way to observe territorial memory-work is to note that commemoration makes and marks territory.⁴ Toponyms change and monuments fall when territory changes hands because to control what is remembered and forgotten in a place is to claim it (Azaryahu and Kook, 2002).

The sect-based political parties competing within Lebanon mark their Beirut territories with checkpoints, graffiti, and memorials to their own wartime martyrs (Haugbolle, 2010; Hermez, 2017). During the pacted transition from apartheid to post-apartheid democracy, Hendrik Verwoerd Drive and Voortrekker Road gave way to Nelson Mandela Boulevard and Albertina Sisulu Road, at times with great controversy. Disputes over which street should bear Nelson Mandela's name become a struggle to reproduce or break down de jure segregation's de facto afterlife. Accordingly, commemoration both reflects and inscribes a map of belonging and exclusion. If 'the spatialisation of memory is embedded in strategies to determine where and how things, activities, and people should be placed' (Edensor, 2005: 830), this map of belonging is a territorial one.

We can, therefore, see territory as a mnemonic system beyond explicit commemoration. This line of inquiry has two ramifications: the territorial joining and separation of pasts, and territorial reproduction. First, the territorial joining and separation of pasts underscores that – like race and sect – territory is ideally *categorical*. Categories have their own etiologies, lending their pasts to whatever they contain: 'we no longer need to remember the particulars; we remember and preserve the categories' (Bowker, 2014: 572; cf. Spillers, 1987). Similarly, by articulating existing places together (Sörlin, 1999) and dividing them from others, territory reworks their pasts. Places which may have been intertwined for centuries suddenly and retroactively occupy separated trajectories through time when a border falls between them; one is now part of the Republic of South Africa's past, the other that of the Bophuthatswana bantustan. Sectarianized territory similarly makes places part of distinct communities' pasts, and so guarantees that these pasts remain distinct (Bishara, 2021).

The making and taking of territory is pragmatic as well as ideational. Territory is produced through infrastructural processes that link and separate people and places (Mann, 1984), such as those to be discussed below under *Property* and *Planning*. The resulting landscape of belonging is thus the product of a very concrete struggle for land that is also a set of struggles over the past and its meaning for places. In this sense, territory is one kind of memory constellation. Commemoration is a means to compete for strategic advantage in land and resources; at the same time, this competition is memory-work even without explicit commemoration. Both remembering past conflict and expecting 'the war yet to come', Lebanon's sect-based political parties jockey for advantageous territorial position by influencing Beirut's urban planners (Bou Akar, 2018).

Territorial reproduction describes how these strategic positions persist, as mnemonic war takes place by other means 'in the meanwhile' (Hermez, 2017). The divisions and connections that constitute a territory can only last if people maintain their reality – both materially, and in treating territorial demarcations as the reference system for where people and processes belong. At one and the same time, territorial formations have to be remembered and to work as reminders. As in the bantustans, territory can influence planning and property regimes long after the fact. This is a process of *recall*, not mechanical path dependence: past and present territorial formations may be summoned forth or overwritten through irredentist disputes, property claims, planners' references to older plans. The ongoing presence and effect of territorial connections and separations is itself mnemonic.

This point can be exemplified by customary, ritual practices for knowing and remembering territory found around the world (Houseman, 1998). In England, 'beating the bounds' meant walking the largely unmarked boundaries of one's community while beating the ground with sticks, singing and undergoing minor physical pain – all to make the route memorable. It was testifying to this embodied experience that made a land claim binding in a dispute (Brady, 2019). Such rituals are mnemonic techniques that do not *create* territorial relationships but reproduce them while initiating new members (Houseman, 1998). The security theatre of national borders can be seen in a similar light, as it meets and differentiates insider and outsider bodies through technoscientific

memory practices ranging from passports to biometrics (Johnson et al., 2011). Subnational territory can be reproduced similarly. At tense moments in Beirut, various sect-based militias' checkpoints spring up, often in the same places they did during the 1975–1990 civil war – locations remembered in vivid, embodied ways by those who lived through it (Hermez, 2017). The ID card to be shown at such a checkpoint records the bearer's religious affiliation: Lebanese electoral law ties citizens to their sects regardless of their personal identification or involvement, and to their ancestral villages regardless of where they actually live, in order to maintain the sect-based quota system (Arsan, 2020). Thus, territory appears as a mechanism to make places and papers hold the past still, such that not only difference in sect but the memory of where this difference was in the 1930s must be reperformed. This 'frozen' territory is then referenced in the (re)sectarianization of wartime territory in the city.

In all these ways, territorialization remakes both places' relationships to one another and their meanings as places by sustaining the terms of past and anticipated conflict. The territorial map of belonging does extensive memory-work even as it shifts through time.

Property

Property regimes shape territory, and territorial contestations shape the dynamics of property and proprietors. We advance the following three elements of property key to its role in mnemonic war: (1) the socially specific character of property regimes, (2) the explicit mnemonics of legal property versus possession, and (3) the enduring memory constellations of accumulation and dispossession. Property is mnemonic land war expressed through legally and socially sanctioned ownership. As a system, property denotes 'to whom things belong' (Krueckeberg, 1995: 301) – and, in terms of *landed* property, who belongs where.

That property is socially specific means it varies widely. Contextually defined rhetorical acts are required to recognize a property claim. Rose (1985) writes, 'the useful labor [rewarded by the common law of first possession] is the very act of speaking clearly and distinctly about one's claims to property' (p. 82). Property claims in post-apartheid South Africa can only be clear and distinct in relation to the *longue durée* of colonialism, militarism and apartheid, contexts in which land ownership and occupancy have been racially and ethnically restricted. Racial-justice commitments to redress property in South Africa require memory-work to address the legacies that occasion them. In Lebanon, by contrast, the legal system is divided into civil courts and multiple sect-specific courts handling personal status law. This system divides property claims, disputes and inheritance – and the terms on which they can be pursued – for individuals of different sects (Kanafani, 2016). In other words, property is made intelligible in part by sect. At the same time, these separations between civil and religious laws are determined 'precisely [by] the regulation of inheritance and (real) property rights' (Egan and Tabar, 2016: 7); the law and its sectarianizing distinctions depend on reference to multiple juridical traditions of property.

This brings us to the explicit mnemonics of property. These undergird the legal architecture that makes property legitimate, its rhetorical justification and recognition. In South Africa's Common Law system, where past legal precedents shape subsequent jurisprudence, juridical reasoning must recall past legal decisions and must rely on specific modes of testimony that are admissible as evidence. Lebanon's Civil Law system, by contrast, prioritizes statute. In practice, however, the system is both patchworked and highly informal, so that for specific people in specific cases Ottoman, French or Lebanese civil law, the law of their father's sect, or effectively no law at all may apply (Egan and Tabar, 2016). This means that outcomes rest less on precedent than on which legal past takes precedence, and on personal networks including clientelist ties to sect-based elites, with the informal mnemonics of favours owed and traded (Kanafani, 2016). In either case, legal systems

shape *what kind of remembering* is recognized as intelligible, and therefore, what kinds of property territorial claims are effective. Law is part of the strategic terrain of mnemonic war.⁵ Thus one aspect of postcolonial memory-work in pursuing justice in property (or preserving an unjust status quo) is a struggle over legally admissible remembering. For instance, the formal admissibility of traditional authorities' claims to property in South Africa remains contested (Wotshela, 2014).

In colonial contexts, property quickly shades into territory (Daigle, 2018). In South Africa, the 1894 Glen Grey Act and Native Lands Acts of 1913 and 1936 were legislative projects of the pre-apartheid Unionist government that sought to restrict land ownership by non-white South Africans to an area approximating 13% of the nation's territory (Levy, 2019). These legal restrictions on property ownership were eventually formalized into the borderlines of bantustans during apartheid – a broader strategy in colonial Africa to produce and manage ethnic difference by assigning it to homelands claimed to be primordial and, therefore, to hold the collective memory of the subject-communities produced (Mamdani, 2020). Widespread forced removals are merely one origin story for the bantustans. Property, in this context, both justified racialized land ownership and dispossession, and inspired memory practices and resistances that endure today.⁶

Finally, the constitutive outside of property is dispossession. Dispossession is not a one-off violence: it proceeds in periodic waves of creative destruction that profit landowners and dispossess dwellers. Yet, dispossession is resisted. Low-income tenants battling eviction and displacement navigate 'the relationship between property and personhood in the context of long histories of racial exclusion and colonial domination' (Roy, 2016: A1) through efforts of 'emplacement' (Roy, 2016: A3), meaning tactics of organized occupancy to enable shelter and inhabitation. Just as there are multiple legal epistemologies of property structuring admissible remembering, there are multiple practical 'enactments of property' (Blomley, 2004: 15), often pursued mnemonically (Jonker and Till, 2009). Emplacement might look like using a formally vacant tract of land to hold events remembering what was once there, or quietly transgressing property rules with communal practices remembered from the homeland.⁷ In former South African bantustans, residents repurpose apartheid-era buildings like the Bophuthatswana Kgotla plaza as a place for assembly. These emplacement tactics belong to the activist repertoire of the dispossessed. The memory-work of asserting presence and claiming possession can be understood as a challenge to the legally recognized property regime of remembering.

The two sides of this encroachment follow one another in waves. In each wave of accumulation, there is dispossession, along with memories that stretch into constellations between places lost, arrived at, returned to (e.g. Fabricant, 2012: 23–25). Property regimes and memories of dispossession interpenetrate, building up complexes of property claims, presence and absence. The struggle for land enacted this way does not result in a single, coherent constellation; the same place may be a bright node in one constellation, a dim one in another, depending on the memories and people involved (Gordillo, 2014).

Planning

Our final vector of mnemonic land war is planning. 'Modernist' planning has a militarist logic: to control and shape territorial dynamics by segregating warring or unequal groups. By this view, structural-planning logics prevent violence better than could the most sophisticated of military tools. This aim to *prevent* gestures to the simultaneously mnemonic and anticipatory nature of planning (Bou Akar, 2018; Gunder, 2008), and its conjoined militaristic and temporal assumptions. In Beirut, planning practice is a deliberate contest between warring sect-based political organizations, a contest structured centrally by the past and with political entrepreneurs and private developers keenly aware of different possible urban futures (Bou Akar, 2018). Sennett (1993) summarizes this succinctly:

. . . A planning strategy of segregation has become the modern norm. The thrust of modern urban development has been precisely to create cities consisting of isolated zones . . . The justification for the modern norm of planning is technological efficiency and the division of labor. Beirut obliges us to think again about this modern planning norm; *in Beirut, it appears as a logic of war-time space made into peacetime space*. (p. 4, emphasis added)

From Beirut to Johannesburg, everyday logics of urban planning aim to structure and suppress conflict. Materialized as territory, property and infrastructure, plans are memory-work: they respond to past conflict and anticipate its recurrence. However, while dynamics in the United States structuring ‘opportunity hoarding’ (Tilly, 1999) and ‘concentrated poverty’ (Wilson, 2008) aim to suppress social interaction and violence, the construction of unequal landscapes likewise exacerbates social conflict and unrest – not least through dispossession. Consider Neil Smith’s (1996) research on gentrification in New York’s Lower East Side alongside Bou Akar’s (2018) framing of Beirut’s peripheral neighbourhoods. Both are ‘frontiers’ for capital and in imagination: spaces of reconfiguring that periodically and violently dispose of residents. As in a military battle, these frontiers are subject to a very physical contest for land (Roy, 2006). In envisioning and constructing urban futures, they generate varied constellations of the past.

Like property, plans, planning, and planners are backed by legal regimes. Zoning and land-use regulations prioritize and protect the rights of private-property owners and landed neighbours. Municipal ordinances use land-use controls and the availability of housing to deliberately segregate residents by race, class or religion. In former South African bantustans, the seemingly apolitical placement of new post-apartheid jurisdictional lines – for both city boundaries and the infrastructural provision of public services – has extraordinary consequences for memory (Ramutsindela, 2007). In the process, some memories are pitted against others to exacerbate unequal power dynamics.

Carving up territory into zones of differentiated governance and political belonging not only affects how residents perceive their political community, but also material inequalities among places (Dillon, 2014). Much like admissible testimony, territorial referencing has successfully justified – or prevented – significant urban development through terms like ‘community character’ or ‘preservation’ (Trounstine, 2018). What is to be preserved for whom is a struggle for the past and its placement. In former South African bantustans, place names are fraught mnemonic devices connecting to specific jurisdictions of political belonging and service-provision (Nyambi and Makombe, 2019). In Beirut, heritage preservation claims anchor planned redevelopment projects (affiliated with sect-based political coalitions) that displace residents while asserting new elite visions of the city (Makdisi, 1997), but occasionally block developers’ paths (Kanafani, 2016). Transgressing these spatiotemporal divisions became an important aspect of Lebanon’s 2019 uprising in turn.

Planning processes are, in essence, a warring dialogue between the past, present and possible futures of a place. Residents’ repurposing of formal plans give rise to distinct *underlives* and *afterlives* that perform memory-work and shape the production of space. Following Goffman (1961), ‘underlives’ are actions that subvert or undercut the expected roles of a given actor: in this case, the planned-upon. These insurgent practices give unpredictability to the formal plan, such that plans’ impacts can be difficult to control. US ‘ghettos’ were perceived by residents as simultaneously a space of forced confinement and material deprivation, and also a site of cultural flourishing and reappropriation. The ‘Black ghetto’, however brutal and violent its urban-planning origins, takes on memories of both planning premises from above and residents’ repurposings from underneath (Freeman, 2022). ‘Afterlives’ refer to the way that testimony can reveal obscured planning choices of the past (Ross, 2002). In Lebanon, the cultural, political and artistic memory-work of activists

on the afterlife of rail lines lost in wartime is accompanied by an independent Master Plan ‘that secures the [infrastructural] connection and interconnection of all Lebanese regions and ensures . . . balanced development’ for the future; counter-planning rail is a way to reject a civil-war legacy of sectarianized and unequal fragmentation of public space.⁸

If abstract zones and districts are ‘frontiers’ in land war, the vernacular meaning and perceptual histories of the places they territorially rearticulate are contested in mnemonic war. Planners periodically arrange and rearrange visions of space that rarely exist on the ground as intended. Yet, when we consider planning and plans as constitutive of their underlives, afterlives and repurposings, a fuller picture emerges that connects the discipline of planning with tools and practices of mnemonic war.

Conclusion

‘Mnemonic land war’ is a situation recognizable in many places. The spatial and temporal territorialization of difference works through the often banal tools of urbanization such that struggling over land is struggling over memory, and vice versa. We have described Lebanon’s and South Africa’s mnemonic land wars as a way of understanding the phenomenon in the wider constellations signalled by the analogies of ‘bantustans’ and ‘Lebanonization’. However, we emphasize that this does not mean that the situation everywhere is *the same*. Mnemonic land war follows its own unique histories and topographies wherever it is found. But the recognizable condition is worth tracing, whether as activist ‘countertopography’ (Katz, 2001) or memory ‘constellation’ (Gordillo, 2014). In the former framing, the political-economic ‘contour lines’ linking one place to another show where points of leverage might be shared, what struggles for justice in one place might learn from another. In the latter, tracing constellations illuminates not only linked histories but the meaningful links made by memory-work.⁹ Lebanon and South Africa may be especially bright nodes in this constellation, but they are not alone.

This assertion of company returns us to the chronotopic question of stakes, or ‘matter[s] of concern’ (Schradler, 2010: 297). If the analogies we opened with share fragmentations of space, time and meaning, they retain distinctiveness through their concerns: ‘Lebanonization’ refers more to destructive infighting, while ‘bantustans’ evoke dominating segregation. These distinctions primarily reflect the moments in which Lebanon and South Africa have taken the global spotlight (the Lebanese Civil War and the internationalized fight against apartheid). They also reflect older, colonial ideas about these places that do each a disservice – for instance, that Lebanon is inherently and eternally a tinderbox of ‘primordial hatreds’ waiting to explode (Makdisi, 2000). But these explanations are not *stakes*; for those, we must turn to the chronotopes’ implicit futures. References to bantustans, and, through them, apartheid, now signal that the devastating situation can end. In linking their situation with South Africa’s, Palestinians signal its severity, its unacceptability and the fact that it can be changed (Kasrils et al., 2021). Lebanonization, however, remains a dismal fate. The intractability built into the word implies no escape. But each evoked future forgets some elements in the process: the legacies of apartheid still require work, while in Lebanon, ‘so much is still here, a place of unbelievable possibility, trying to find its way forward, . . . into the future’ (Ghattas, 2020).

As an alternative to these analogies, ‘mnemonic land war’ is not intended to be hopeful in itself. The struggles discussed come with real violence and deep loss. But as a constellation that gathers many more nodes with their own conditions, outcomes and possibilities, we hope that it allows the recognition inhering in geographic analogies about Lebanon and South Africa to be made more explicit and more mutual. Tracing this constellation might allow the mnemonic recognition of other chronotopes, too, with different stakes.

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ORCID iDs

Miranda Meyer  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9697-6280>

Stefan Norgaard  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1902-2862>

Notes

1. For reasons of space, we cannot discuss or review broader approaches in memory studies in this paper, but we are broadly influenced by the materialist and place-based orientation of Halbwachs' (1992) collective memory.
2. Bantustans did not only take place in South Africa, but also in Namibia, known as South-West Africa and controlled by the apartheid state until 1990.
3. Note that 'Lebanonization' is not coterminous with sectarianism itself, or sectarianization in general. On the much longer history of sectarianism, see, for example, Bishara (2021) and Makdisi (2000).
4. Theorists of territory consider economic, strategic, legal, political and technical relations (Brighenti, 2006; Elden, 2013; Sack, 1986), but rarely memory (Paasi, 2020).
5. This often entails enforced forgetting. In the United States, enforced forgetting underlies the paradoxical disputes between colonists and Indigenous Americans over land 'ownership' (see Cronon, 2011: 57).
6. For example, the oral history and archival work of the Surplus Peoples' Project (SPP): <https://spp.org.za/>.
7. This point is inspired by Oscar Oliver-Didier's presentation, 'Rican/Struction: Radical Placemaking, Memory and Latinx Futurity in the South Bronx Casitas', in a session we co-organized with Scott Webster at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers (27 February 2022).
8. See the organization Train/Train Lebanon, <http://traintrainlebanon.org/>; see also the initiatives of the Beirut Urban Lab, <https://beiruturbanlab.com/>. The Lebanese artwork that responds to these issues is more than worthy of attention but is too extensive for this article to meaningfully discuss.
9. See productive, ongoing political conversations among Lebanese and Bosnians, or the widespread inspiration provided by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission – despite its deep problems.

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Author biographies

Miranda Meyer studies territory as a memory practice and infrastructure as a form of collective memory. With a background in Middle Eastern Studies, her current work focuses on the experience of sectarianized violence as a temporal repetition in Syria and Lebanon through cartography, hydrology, waste management and heritage.

Stefan Norgaard studies urban/planning theory and local-government and planning law, and conducts mixed-methods research on planning practice in the related but distinct contexts of South Africa and the United States. Norgaard is passionate about participatory democracy and particularly how American and South African cities' racial-capitalist structures affect just planning outcomes.