

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF MEMORY ACTIVISM

Edited by Yifat Gutman and Jenny Wüstenberg

*With Irit Dekel, Kaitlin M. Murphy,
Benjamin Nienass, Joanna Wawrzyniak,
and Kerry Whigham*

 Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK



Cover image: In the wake of the 2017 earthquakes in Mexico, memory activists paint a message in protest against the Mexico City Government's imposition of a memorial, demanding the prioritization of reconstruction, disaster preparedness, and a transparent and democratic process for memory processes. Photograph: Sergio Beltrán García.

First published 2023
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2023 selection and editorial matter, Yifat Gutman and Jenny Wüstenberg; individual chapters, the contributors

The right of Yifat Gutman and Jenny Wüstenberg to be identified as the authors of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual chapters, has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

With the exception of Chapters 1 and 47, no part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Chapters 1 and 47 of this book are available for free in PDF format as Open Access from the individual product page at www.routledge.com. They have been made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 license.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Gutman, Yifat, 1977–editor. | Wüstenberg, Jenny, editor. | Dekel, Irit, editor. | Murphy, Kaitlin M., editor. | Nienass, Benjamin, editor. | Wawrzyniak, Joanna, 1975–editor. | Whigham, Kerry, editor.

Title: The Routledge handbook of memory activism / edited by Yifat Gutman and Jenny Wüstenberg ; with Irit Dekel, Kaitlin Murphy, Benjamin Nienass, Joanna Wawrzyniak and Kerry Whigham.

Description: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2023. |

Series: The Routledge history handbooks | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022012564 (print) |

LCCN 2022012565 (ebook) | ISBN 9780367650391 (hardback) |

ISBN 9780367650414 (paperback) | ISBN 9781003127550 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781000646177 (adobe pdf) | ISBN 9781000646290 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Collective memory. | Memory--Social aspects. | Social movements.

Classification: LCC HM1033 .R679 2023 (print) |

LCC HM1033 (ebook) | DDC 303.48/4--dc23/eng/20220509

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022012564>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022012565>

ISBN: 978-0-367-65039-1 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-367-65041-4 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-12755-0 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003127550

Typeset in Bembo
by MPS Limited, Dehradun

10

IMPLICATED SUBJECTS

Jennifer Noji and Michael Rothberg

In 2012, Trayvon Martin, an African American teenager, was killed by a neighborhood vigilante while returning to the home of his father's fiancée in Florida. One year later his killer, George Zimmerman, was acquitted on all charges. In the wake of Zimmerman's acquittal, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter gained prominence on social media. Soon, a social movement going by the name Black Lives Matter (BLM) emerged as one of the most consequential US activist initiatives of the twenty-first century. Indeed, in the summer of 2020 – in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis and in the wake of the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor – BLM spurred what may be the largest series of protests in US history (see Buchanan et al., 2020).

Resolutely focused on transforming the conditions of Black life in the present, BLM can also be considered a form of memory activism. The group practices a work of mourning for the legions of Black Americans murdered by the police, white supremacists, and vigilantes. BLM also links the contemporary production of death to a longer history of racist violence. As Kevin Bruyneel has argued, the group reveals how “the contemporary abjection and treatment of Black Americans as people whose lives have not mattered to the police, the state, and many citizens of the nation is traceable from the time of chattel slavery on up to our day.” In making those lines of connection visible, Bruyneel continues, BLM engages in a “politics of memory that runs directly counter to the white settler vision of the greatness of the abstract past of America” (Bruyneel 2017: 50). BLM's activism – including its memory activism (as defined in this volume) – fits well within conceptions of social movements that understand them as mobilizations of oppressed or victimized people rising up against the state or other powerful forces.

Yet, Martin's death and Zimmerman's acquittal also gave rise to another project that proves suggestive for conceptualizing agency at the intersection of memory and activism. While initial responses to the murder and acquittal involved slogans such as “I am Trayvon Martin” and “We are all Trayvon Martin,” a critique of white Americans' acts of identification with the murdered African American teenager soon emerged. These justifiable critiques led to the creation of a social media activist project called “We are not Trayvon Martin.” Established in the wake of Zimmerman's acquittal, “We are not Trayvon Martin” consisted of a website that gathered together hundreds of short, autobiographical texts, sometimes accompanied by photographs. Instead of asserting direct solidarity with Martin through acts of identification, the contributors of these texts told more complicated stories of

white privilege, passing, and complicity with racist structures. They thus asserted a “differentiated solidarity” with Martin through acts of “nonidentification” and called attention to their unequal positions of privilege (Rothberg, 2019: 5, 137). For contributors supportive of the website’s antiracist project, the act of stating “We are not Trayvon Martin” became the occasion both to mourn Martin’s death and to reveal one’s own implication in the histories and structures that made that death possible. It was, in other words, an act of historical and political responsibility as part of a project of memory activism.

Despite not having the longevity or large-scale impact of BLM, “We are not Trayvon Martin” produces an important insight for scholars of memory activism: many significant activist projects involving social remembrance emerge neither from victims nor perpetrators but rather from “implicated subjects” (Rothberg, 2019). The concept of the implicated subject was developed to describe subjects who, like the contributors to the website, occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; implicated subjects contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes. Less “actively” involved in histories of violence than perpetrators, implicated subjects do not fit the mold of the “passive” bystander either. Although indirect or belated, their actions – and inactions – help propagate the legacies of historical violence and prop up structures of inequality in the present. Derived from the Latin *implicāre*, meaning to entangle, involve, and connect closely, *implication*, like the proximate but not identical term *complicity*, calls attention to how we are *folded into* (*im-plic*-ated in) events that at first seem beyond our agency as individual subjects (see Sanders, 2002; Rothberg, 2019).

Although the vocabulary of implication and implicated subjects has not been central to the nascent study of memory activism, we argue that some of the most prominent examples of scholarship in the field treat projects in which implicated subjects play crucial roles in mobilizing memory. In the remainder of this essay, we first illustrate this claim by attending to two foundational books on memory activism that involve prominent examples of implication. We then turn to our own example of “implicated” memory activism in greater depth: mobilization against the incarceration of migrants and refugees at the southern border of the United States. Putting a focus explicitly on implicated subjects as agents of memory activism helps to clarify the motivations that drive social movements. Such a focus reveals that a sense of historical and political responsibility is a prominent driver of memory activism and that when memories of injustice combine with a sense of present-day implication a particularly powerful impetus to action can emerge. Finally, we note that a sense of implication not only motivates many memory activists but is also linked to activist goals: that is, the memory activist projects we highlight often directly address other implicated subjects and seek to elicit recognition and acknowledgment of political responsibility in a broader public in order to foster large-scale transformation.

Examples of memory activism by implicated subjects have been at the forefront of this emergent subfield of memory studies, even if we have lacked the vocabulary to see that. Indeed, two of the field-defining works that have shaped thinking about memory activism – Jenny Wüstenberg’s *Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany* and Yifat Gutman’s *Memory Activism*, both published in 2017 – concern in part what we would describe as implicated subjects. As a brief discussion of these works will illustrate, implicated memory activism is particularly marked in the post-Holocaust German and post-Nakba Israeli contexts, but these examples are not unique.

Wüstenberg helps fill an important lacuna in accounts of German Holocaust memory by studying activist memory from below, in particular two projects emerging from civil society, the History Movement and the Memorial Site Movement. Before Holocaust memory became a widespread, defining instance of (West) Germany's official national identity – emblemized by such large-scale projects as the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin – it found a place, Wüstenberg shows, in the civic initiatives of ordinary citizens. As she makes clear, “victims of the Nazi reign ... played a pivotal role in marking” the “German landscape recalling the Nazi dictatorship” early on. And yet, she continues, “the victims only achieved a marginal level of recognition during the first 40 years after the war” (Wüstenberg, 2017: 80). The grassroots movements of the 1980s that Wüstenberg studies built on those earlier efforts to create the infrastructure that has since been embraced by top-down memory entrepreneurs and the state. Those movements of the 1980s, she clarifies, were diverse in composition but overwhelmingly involved actors from the postwar generation who grew up in the wake of the Holocaust and thus were neither victims nor active supporters of the Nazi regime. This postwar generation, “made up of people who had been shocked by the refusal of the parent generation to confront the Nazi past,” was motivated above all by feelings of indirect responsibility – not direct guilt – and thus by a self-reflective grasp of diachronic implication (Wüstenberg, 2017: 100; on diachronic implication, see Rothberg, 2019: 8–9).

Similarly, the memory activism Gutman discusses in her eponymous volume involves heterogeneous actors. For instance, her opening example describes the group Zochrot (“We Remember”), “a small group of primarily Jewish Israeli activists who had been organizing tours of destroyed Palestinian villages” (Gutman, 2017: 1). As part of these tours, the Jewish activists would “invite former Palestinian residents of the sites, today refugees,” to “describe to mostly Jewish Israeli tour participants what their prestate life was like on-site and their fate in the 1948 war” (1). While Palestinian victims of the Nakba play a key role in this scenario, as well as in the other activist projects Gutman studies, we see that some of the initiators as well as the intended audience of the memory tours come from the side of the perpetrators without necessarily being themselves direct agents of displacement. In fact, Gutman situates her study of memory activism in the first decades of the twenty-first century within a post-Second Intifada context of “growing polarization, violence, and separation between Israelis and Palestinians” (5). Within that grim political context, a shift took place from “bi-national ‘people-to-people’ meetings” to “one-sided acknowledgment of Israel’s historical responsibility for Palestinian suffering” (5–6). This shift in recent activism to “one-sided acknowledgment of ... historical responsibility” signals in turn a self-reflexive engagement with implication. Studying a similar activist milieu, though without an explicit focus on memory, Fiona Wright confirms the significance of that shift: she characterizes Israel’s radical left as a movement driven by “a difficult and troubled negotiation with complicity” (9). Drawing on the work of Mark Sanders, which treats South African intellectuals under apartheid, Wright asserts: “the idea of complicity complicates a reading of Jewish Israeli left radical activism as simply a heroic resistance purified of its implication in the forms of power and violence it aims to subvert” (10). As with “We are not Trayvon Martin” and the grassroots German activists, the activism of Zochrot and other Jewish Israeli groups sometimes takes the form of what Wright calls “public and political mourning,” a work of memory that resists state commemoration and highlights the activists’ implication in the violence they are recalling. The examples of Wüstenberg’s and Gutman’s books confirm that – although they have not yet been named as such – implicated subjects have been crucial agents in accounts of memory activism.

As the “We are not Trayvon Martin” project suggests, the “implicated” German and Israeli memory activism we find in Wüstenberg and Gutman is also a prominent feature of contemporary social movements in the United States, especially those that oppose injustices to racialized minorities, migrants, and refugees. In response to the Trump administration’s “zero-tolerance” and family separation policies, social movements spread throughout the country, condemning the state’s actions and asserting solidarity with incarcerated immigrants and refugees. We focus first on Japanese Americans, an ethnic population that had been forcefully removed from society and incarcerated by the US government during World War II (WWII). For many Japanese Americans, the present-day incarceration of migrants and refugees recalls dark memories of the Japanese American Incarceration, an event that had also been implemented in the name of national security.

By recognizing parallels between past and present, Japanese–American activists have begun to rally around the slogan “Never Again Is Now,” a declaration that history is – or may be at risk of – repeating itself. Japanese–American activist efforts sharply increased in June 2019 when the US government announced its plans to detain migrant children in Fort Sill, a US Army Base in Oklahoma and a facility previously used to incarcerate Indigenous people in the late 1800s and Japanese immigrants during WWII. Fort Sill, a site layered with historical trauma, came to serve as a rallying point for Japanese Americans as well as Indigenous communities and allies. In the summer of 2019, protests against Fort Sill erupted across the country. During these protests and others, Japanese–American activists mobilized memory of the Japanese American Incarceration in order to highlight alarming similarities between the US state’s actions during WWII and its actions today. What can this resurgence of memory activism tell us about the motivations of social movements?

We have identified three common strands of logic driving Japanese–American activism: identification with currently incarcerated migrants, a universal humanitarian impetus, and – most important for the purpose of this essay – the recognition of one’s implication in state actions. Identification with contemporary migrants based on Japanese Americans’ collective memory of victimization and incarceration is demonstrated in speeches by Japanese–American activists at the Little Tokyo Fort Sill Protest, which occurred on 27 June 2019 in Downtown Los Angeles. Bruce Embrey, one of the protest’s speakers, announced, “We know what it’s like to be branded as invaders that threaten this nation’s way of life by those seeking political advantage.”¹ However, as another Japanese–American speaker, Daren Mooko, attests, Japanese Americans are also driven by a universal, humanitarian impetus unrelated to their community’s collective memory of persecution. Mooko states: “We must speak out not only because of our community’s experiences during World War II, but also because we see the conditions of these detention centers for what they are – a human rights violation.”² By employing human rights discourse, Mooko frames the US’s contemporary incarceration of migrants as a universal concern.

The third major logic motivating Japanese–American activism is the recognition of implication: social actors recognize themselves as implicated in the very events they are protesting. Recognition of implication is demonstrated, for example, by the statement, “We already did this,” printed on the posters distributed at the Little Tokyo Protest. These posters, created by the Asian–American activist organization *Visual Communications*, display the images of Apache leader Geronimo, who died as a prisoner of war at Fort Sill; Kimiko Kitagaki, a Japanese–American child incarcerated during WWII; and the funeral procession of Jakelin Caal Masquin, a Guatemalan child who died while detained in US custody.



Figure 10.1 Lights for Liberty Protest on 12 July 2019, Downtown Los Angeles. Photographer: Jennifer Noji³

By employing the collective “we” – as in “we Americans” – the poster aligns its viewers with the entity that “already did this.” Rather than asserting, for example, “the state already did this,” and holding the US government solely accountable, the poster implicates its viewers and holds them, at least partially, responsible for present-day events, together with the demonstrators’ own “we.” By fulfilling basic civic responsibilities, such as working and paying taxes, Japanese Americans, like most American citizens, inevitably help perpetuate the government’s policies. The poster’s purpose is thus twofold: making visible a genealogy of US incarceration *and* holding its viewers accountable for the current incarceration of migrants.

For some Japanese Americans recognition of their own implication in state actions ultimately inspires a rejection of complacency and engagement in activism. This process of recognition and rejection is demonstrated in the speech of Joy Yamaguchi, a fourth-generation Japanese American who participated in an on-site protest at Fort Sill. On behalf of those Japanese Americans who attended the protest, Yamaguchi states: “We had to go to be the allies and accomplices that our families did not have when they were forcibly removed from their homes because they looked like the so-called enemy. We were compelled to leverage our privilege as Japanese Americans to fight for those who are currently struggling under these... incarceration systems” (JANMdotorg, 2019).

By calling attention to Japanese Americans’ “privilege,” Yamaguchi acknowledges their current positions as implicated subjects. Furthermore, by asserting that they would be “the allies that [their] families did not have,” Yamaguchi illuminates Japanese Americans’ transformed positions: from victims to implicated subjects and, ultimately, from implicated subjects to potential agents in solidarity with other targeted minorities. Yamaguchi calls for Japanese Americans to accept political responsibility and break the cycle of inaction that helps to perpetuate state-legitimized mass incarceration.

Yamaguchi’s call to action demonstrates how this social movement is not only motivated by the recognition of activists’ own implication but seeks to catalyze a more widespread recognition among other implicated subjects. This hoped-for outcome of activism is encapsulated

by one of the movement's other key slogans, "Don't Look Away," which is chanted at protests, written on posters, and used as a hashtag on various social media platforms. Similar to "We already did this," the activist slogan "Don't look away" commands its spectators to recognize the events unfolding around them and their implication within them. Thus, the phrase "Don't Look Away" specifically addresses implicated subjects, demonstrating how implicated subjects are often both the initiators and targets of social activism.

Japanese-American mobilization in support of contemporary refugees helps bring into focus a final point about the motivational structure that underlies the relationship between implication and memory activism. Japanese Americans' multifaceted subject positions – formerly victimized and currently implicated – demonstrate Rothberg's notion of "complex implication," which denotes the "coexistence of different relations to past and present injustices" (Rothberg, 2019, 8). Since categories such as victim, perpetrator, and implicated subject are mutable positions that individuals "occupy in particular, dynamic, and at times clashing structures and histories of power," people are often "complexly" situated: that is, like present-day Japanese Americans, "complexly implicated" subjects both inherit histories of victimization and find themselves entangled in currently unfolding injustices (8). As the case of post-Holocaust Jewish-Israeli activists in Israel also confirms, the combination of links to both victimization and the perpetuation of injustice in the present appears frequently in the realm of implicated memory activism (although the German case explored by Wüstenberg is clearly different). We find a similar complex positioning, for example, among the young Jewish-American activists who, like their Japanese-American peers, have been protesting the incarceration of migrants under the slogan "Never Again." In such initiatives as "Never Again Action," Jewish-American activists are confronting their implication in the US state and voicing an "obligation" to "never let anything like the Holocaust happen again."⁴ The powerful impetus offered by complex implication in the Jewish-Israeli, Japanese-American, and Jewish-American cases indicates the conceptual richness and political potential of the terrain of implicated memory activism – a terrain that will repay further investigation.

Notes

- 1 Full video coverage of the Little Tokyo Protest can be found on the Japanese American National Museum's YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2z7g7OkFL94&fbclid=IwAR3fd0ymLE1YjEWV-kqhs588_NX0jqtosvDVVjuKo72LauFTeVRlleOmBQs
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 This photograph was taken at the Lights for Liberty Protest on 12 July 2019, in Downtown Los Angeles. This poster was, however, created at the Little Tokyo Protest two weeks prior, which demonstrates how protesters reuse material from previous actions and more broadly reveals a continuity between distinct protests that comprise a larger social movement.
- 4 <https://www.neveragainaction.com/>

Additional Resources

Gutman, Y. (2017a) *Memory Activism: Reimagining the Past for the Future in Israel-Palestine*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press.

Never Again Action <https://www.neveragainaction.com/>.

Nikkei Progressives <https://www.nikkeiprogressives.org/>.

Rothberg, M. (2019) *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Tsuru for Solidarity <https://tsuruforsolidarity.org/>.

Wüstenberg, J. (2017) *Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.