Theatrical Sites of Memory: Witnessing Terrorism and War in Post-9/11 Performance

By

Kaitlyn Tossie
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M.S., Illinois State University, 2017
B.S., Ottawa University 2013

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Chair: Dr. Rebecca Rovit

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Dr. Jane Barnette

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Dr. Henry Bial

_____

Dr. Rana Esfandiary

_____

Dr. Stephen Egbert

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The dissertation committee for Kaitlyn Tossie certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

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Chair: Dr. Rebecca Rovit

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Abstract

Thus far in the twenty-first century, the United States has experienced a plethora of nationally tragic and traumatic events which have unbalanced, reshaped, and challenged the identity and collective memory of the American people. Now, in the third decade of the century, we commemorate the significant anniversaries of acts of foreign and domestic terrorism and reach major milestones in the wars in the Middle East. With these anniversaries and commemorations comes a resurgence in Memory Studies focusing on memorial museums and other sites of memory that offer visitors the opportunity to encounter another's lived experience and memory as their own. "Theatrical Sites of Memory: Witnessing Terrorism and War in Post-9/11 Performance" argues that theatrical performances, like museums and memorials, are sites of memory that communicate witness testimony to audiences. In doing so, theatrical sites of memory may transform audiences into empathetic, socially-conscious individuals. I consider how cultural memory is formed, and memories of twenty-first-century trauma are interpreted in theatrical performance using the conceptual frameworks of Michael Rothberg's Multidirectional Memory, Marianne Hirsch's Postmemory, and Alison Landsberg's Prosthetic Memory. With these frameworks in mind, I analyze five dramatic texts and their respective productions about the post-9/11 experience of the Muslim American community, the Iraq War, and the Sandy Hook Elementary mass shooting.

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I am increasingly thankful for my colleagues and friends at the University of Kansas, Illinois State, and Ottawa University—Tia Battle, Nathan Bowman, Lusie Cuskey, Treasure Davis, Alysha Griffin, David Ruis Fisher, and Caleb Stephens—whose presence and artistic and scholarly contributions have inspired me daily to be a better person and scholar. Thank you to Amanda Labonte, whose never-ending support, insight, and willingness to be my travel companion made this dissertation possible. To Jenny Sledge, thank you for validating the frustrations and celebrating the achievements along this journey. I would be remiss if I failed to thank the Facebook Doctoral Mom Group members. Writing a dissertation while mothering is often a difficult and lonely experience, but our silent Zoom study groups have shown me that I was never alone on this journey.

Most importantly, thank you to my family. To my wonderful husband, Miles, who has endlessly supported my dreams. Your love, brilliance, and support have inspired me daily. You have kept me going when it would have been far easier to quit. To my faithful companion, Lou, who was with me for every word I read and every sentence I wrote. To my shining star, Stella Grace. Everything good I have ever done is for you. May you grow up in a kinder, safer, and more stable world than what the words in this dissertation describe.

Dedication

For Stella.

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Introduction

In early October 2021—nearly one month after the twentieth anniversary of the terrorist attacks in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania—I attended an evening performance of *Come From Away*, a Broadway musical about the international travelers whose planes were diverted to Gander, Newfoundland on September 11, 2001. The musical documents the unprecedented moment in history when the US airspace closed and celebrates Newfoundlanders' hospitality in the aftermath of 9/11 and the relationships built out of tragedy.[1]

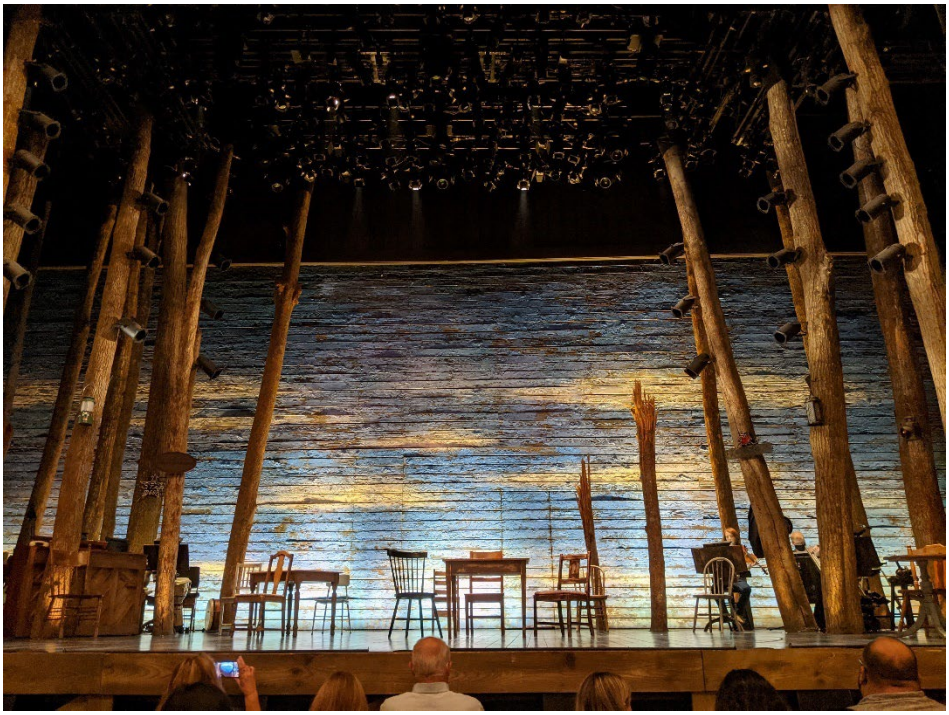

Figure 1: Opening setting of *Come From Away*. Photo taken by author on October 7, 2021.

[1] I acknowledge that using "9/11" as a shorthand for the attacks on September 11, 2001, is problematic; this turn of phrase disregards September 11 of every other year (past, present, and future). Further, "9/11" centers the United States' experience on September 11, 2001, which privileges a nationalist approach to reading the attacks and their aftermath. It is not my intention to approach this subject from a nationalist point of view. Still fully aware of this contradiction, I use "9/11" here and elsewhere to refer to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, as the term is a generally accepted idiom in American culture. I use the date "September 11, 2001" when referring to the particular day. For more on the problematic use of "9/11," please see Kristine Miller, "Breaking the Frame: Amy Waldman's The Submission and 9/11 Memorials," *Journal of American Studies* 54, no. 1 (2020): 218-219, https://doi.org/10.1017/S002187581800141X.

The scenery of *Come From Away* is purposefully nonspecific, yet also evokes a homey feeling with its warm colors and rustic textures. The world of the play felt familiar to me even before the actors and musicians took the stage. The mismatched furniture scattered across the stage recalled my childhood: the curves of a chair echoed the shape of those in my grandmother's dining room, the texture of the wooden tables reminiscent of the antique furniture my mother and grandmother kept. Flanking the stage were tall trees, two of which were broken and significantly shorter than the others. These two trees both foreshadowed the inciting incident of the play and reminded the audience of the destruction of the Twin Towers. Beyond the furniture and trees was a wall of horizontal slats of wood spanning the height and width of the stage. The lit wall alluded to a particular blue September sky. The specificity and ambiguity of the scenography distorted the audience's sense of location and time: we are both "there" in New York City on September 11, 2001, and "there" in Gander, Newfoundland, in the days following the attacks. The indistinct design allows the audience to mentally travel back to wherever they were during 9/11. Simultaneously, I was "there" in New York in 2021, watching the musical.

Come From Away allows audiences to safely (re)experience 9/11 across multiple times ("then" and "now"), places ("there" and "here"), and from a point of view other than their own; so too do more traditional sites of memory such as the National September 11 Memorial and Museum. In this dissertation, I consider how theatrical texts and their corresponding performances operate as sites of memory,[2] much like museums, memorials, and monuments. I reflect on a series of questions: How does the theatre communicate memories that have been

[2] Here and elsewhere, "sites of memory" refer to physical and non-physical locations (art, books, plays/musicals, and the like) that communicate memories to the reader/audience/viewer. The term follows Michael Rothberg's expansion of and alternative to Pierre Nora's understanding of "sites of memory." The following chapter will discuss both Nora and Rothberg's interpretation of the phrase.

forgotten or ignored in official forms of memorialization? How might we reexamine our memories and critique the communication of memory across various sites of memory? What conceptual frameworks might we use to critique and analyze memory communicated by official and theatrical means? I suggest that the theatre memorializes some events more clearly and thoroughly than their official counterparts. As Freddie Rokem reminds us, "What may be seen as specific to the theatre in dealing directly with the historical past is its ability to create an awareness of the complex interaction between the destructiveness and the failures of history, on the one hand, and the efforts to create a viable and meaningful work of art, trying to confront these painful failures, on the other."[3] We can interact productively with the past through performance and playscripts while also creating alternative ways to share memories of the past with others. I argue that these performative and theatrical sites of memory call attention to forgotten, miscommunicated, or ignored memories of nationally traumatic events.

American sociologist Jeffrey Alexander argues that national trauma occurs when the collective emotionally responds to an "explosive" event that draws the public's attention and results in a radical disruption to the social framework of the group.[4] These events result in a cultural trauma that "occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways."[5] Alexander's understanding of national and cultural are fundamental to this study.

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[3] Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), 3.

[4] Alexander also points to Speech Act Theory to understand how traumatic events are communicated and transmitted to others. Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective* Identity, by Jeffrey C. Alexander, et al. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 3 and 11-12. Ebook Central-Academic Complete.

[5] Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 1.

Unsettled Dust: National Traumas in the Twenty-first Century and the Chelsea Jeans Memorial

On the morning I attended the performance of *Come From Away*, I visited the National September 11 Memorial and Museum. In the ghostly footprints of the former World Trade Center North and South (Twin) Towers lies the memorial. The museum is adjacent to the memorial's reflecting pools in the World Trade Center complex. I was nervous about what my response to the museum and memorial would be as I was only ten when the events of 9/11 occurred; how might I respond emotionally to photographs, sound bites, and other artifacts that might be present? Would I remember more, or less, after my visit? Would I feel the weight of the trauma my generation has endured growing up in a post-9/11 world? Admittedly, I also entered the museum with a critical eye, looking for gaps in the narrative presented by the museum curators. As both a historical museum and a mausoleum, would there be moments in the exhibitions where aesthetics and the desire to create an emotional response from visitors overpowered storytelling and fact-sharing?

My overall experience at the museum was surprisingly underwhelming. Guests must navigate disordered, claustrophobic, and overcrowded exhibits, often unsure of which direction they should go; visitors may struggle to glean a cohesive narrative from the museum's shambolic storytelling techniques. Despite the museum's disordered layout, guests encounter extraordinary and emotionally-charged features in the exhibits: voicemails and recordings of 9/11 victims as they left messages for their loved ones, an astounding number of artifacts, and the creators and curators' intent to frame each visitor as a victim of 9/11. For me, however, the most poignant and affecting exhibit in the museum is the Chelsea Jeans Memorial.

Chelsea Jeans was a Lower Manhattan clothing store owned by David Cohen located approximately one block east of the World Trade Center. Chelsea Jeans was once a thriving business; the store experienced drastically lower sales in the aftermath of 9/11 like so many other businesses in and near the Financial District of New York City. Cohen chose to preserve a portion of his store as it had been on the morning of September 11, 2001, now covered in dust that seeped in from the doors and windows. Cohen's memorial was later displayed on the fifth anniversary of 9/11 at the New-York Historical Society; the display is now on a long-term loan to the National September 11 Memorial and Museum. Like all other artifacts on display, forensic anthropologists and the New York City Office of the Chief Medical Examiner have declared that the Chelsea Jeans Memorial is free of human remains.[6]

Figure 2: The Chelsea Jeans Memorial. Collection 9/11 Memorial & Museum, Gift of the New-York Historical Society, Courtesy of David and Sabine Cohen, Photograph by Jin S. Lee.

[6] Amy Weinstein, "Chelsea Jeans Memorial: Preserving the Unthinkable," in *The Stories They Tell: Artifacts from the National September 11 Memorial Museum*, ed. Clifford Chanin and Alice M. Greenwald (New York: Rizzoli Electa, 2013), 130 and 132.

As I approached the Chelsea Jeans Memorial in the museum, the harrowing, otherworldly display, oddly familiar, took my breath away. In front of me—behind glass walls on the three exposed sides of the exhibit—appeared a rack of t-shirts, a shelving unit of folded jeans, and a wall of hanging sweaters. Several of the shirts and sweaters bore American flags. A layer of the iconic dust created by the collapse of the North and South Towers coated the clothing, fixtures, and carpet. I examined the display for quite some time, surprisingly alone for the first time since entering the museum. There was something emotionally jarring about being so close to *the dust* that I had only encountered through uncanny photographs and videos recorded by journalists and bystanders on September 11, 2001. By 2022, we are well aware of the toxicity of the dust as a multitude of survivors, first responders, Lower Manhattan residents, and recovery and cleanup crew members have developed life-altering and life-threatening illnesses. I wondered to myself, "Is it safe for me to be inches away from this dust? How protective are these glass walls separating me from the display?" Nevertheless, this closeness to the dust was beautiful, evocative, and emotionally jarring. Whether or not human remains exist in the Chelsea Jeans Memorial, I witnessed something sacred. Perhaps even more than I had experienced in the "In Memoriam" exhibit I visited earlier in the museum, I reflected on the massive loss of life that the dust represents. I felt that I was as "there" as I ever could be.

As my eyes scanned the Chelsea Jeans Memorial, I noticed a series of three American flags hung above the sweaters on the back wall of the display. It is not unusual to see American flags in the iconography of 9/11, especially in the museum; what was remarkable was the pristine nature of the flags, free from visible dust, unlike the rest of the display. Amy Weinstein, the associate director of collections and senior oral historian for the memorial and museum, states, "Cohen battled accusations that the memorial was merely a commercial ploy. To explain his

motivations, he added to the tableau a laminated photocopy of an American newspaper account reporting a terrorist attack in Israel that had killed his young niece four years earlier, along with an array of American flags. For Cohen, the reality of terrorism was personal."[7] It is unclear whether these three flags now in the display were the "array of American flags" originally placed by Cohen. The flags were not present in the original display at the New-York Historical Society.[8] Regardless, the presence of the immaculate flags can be interpreted in what I believe are troubling ways. The flags, a national sign of American patriotism and nationalism, represent America rising from the ashes of 9/11. Their spotless nature implies that we too will be unblemished by 9/11 and its aftermath—a contradiction to the rest of the museum exhibitions, which suggests that 9/11 will forever scar our American memory. Further, and perhaps most importantly, we can read the untarnished flags as removing the responsibility of the United States for the aftermath of 9/11. What, then, are visitors intended to take away from this display and the museum at large? What memories do these official channels transmit? How are some memories left unmentioned, others exploited, and others still reinterpreted for what may appear to be nationalist means?

The Chelsea Jeans Memorial at the National September 11 Memorial and Museum is a haunting re-staging of life immediately after 9/11. The "window" into the Chelsea Jeans storefront brings visitors as close to being "there" as any of us will ever be again. However, the inclusion of untarnished American flags transports the visitor back to the present. A critical museum-goer must consider what this inclusion means for the retelling of the past. Because we

[7] Weinstein, "Chelsea Jeans Memorial," 130.
[8] See photograph in Weinstein, "Chelsea Jeans Memorial," 131.

continually reinterpret the meaning of memory through the present,[9] exhibits like the Chelsea Jeans Memorial and theatrical and performative texts operate as access points to such memories of national traumas. Significantly, our experience of the present is connected to our understanding of the past; as Paul Connerton asserts, "the past commonly serve[s] to legitimate a present social order."[10] With this knowledge, we can question and analyze the memories communicated through official channels and begin to unearth the overshadowed, ignored, and culturally forgotten memories.

To call attention to specific forgotten, miscommunicated, or ignored memories, I have chosen three American national traumas from the twenty-first century as case studies to analyze how the communication of traumatic memory associated with these events occurs across time and space. These events are 9/11, the Iraq War, and the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting (December 14, 2012). Significantly, 9/11 is the only event of the three case studies explored in this study that has an official memorial dedicated to its memory, though an official memorial to the victims of the Sandy Hook shooting is under construction at the time of this writing. Because of this, I refer back to the National September 11 Memorial and Museum in each case study to ground my comparison of acknowledged sites of memory (i.e., museums and memorials) to theatrical sites of memory.

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[9] Scholars tend to agree that this is the case. See Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, trans. Sara B. Young (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 17; Lewis A. Coser, introduction to *On Collective Memory*, by Maurice Halbwachs, trans. and ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 25; and Maurice Halbwachs, "From *The Collective Memory*," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 142.

[10] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 2-3. Also see Edward W. Said, "Invention, Memory, and Place." *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (January 2000): 179, https://doi.org/10.1086/448963.

Additionally, these national traumas have been broadcast live on television, available for viewers to consume repeatedly through the internet and instant news reporting. Americans watched, on live television, as the second plane crashed into the South Tower of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. We also had the technological capabilities to view and re-view coverage of national events such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and acts of domestic terrorism. We continue to encounter current events (both domestic and foreign) through the immediacy of modern technologies such as the Internet and television. Access to these technologies is critical to the memory frameworks used in this study and will be further addressed in the following chapter.

Much like Rokem's assertion that the Shoah and French Revolution have "formed our modern consciousness, in particular our sense of the historical past as a series of tragic failures of basic human values,"[11] I contend that 9/11, the war on terrorism, and acts of domestic terrorism have altered and reshaped our understanding of what it means to be an American in the contemporary era. Significantly, as a millennial who encountered 9/11 and the war on terror throughout my formative years, I suggest that these events have dramatically influenced the American millennial consciousness and the way that millennials interact with the world around us. The increase in mass (school) shootings—or, more accurately, the increase in widespread news reporting of mass shootings—has also haunted millennials as we came of age and began to have children in a time where the threat of mass domestic terrorism was, and is, ever-present.

While there are other national tragedies and traumas—the 2008 recession, the Boston Marathon bombing, widespread police brutality, and the enduring COVID-19 pandemic, among other events—that have significantly impacted at least a portion of the population of the United

[11] Rokem, *Performing History*, 1.

States, I suggest that these events either do not hold the same weight in the collective American consciousness as the events I have selected,[12] or perhaps they are too fresh in our collective memory for us to fully grasp the trauma of these events. As Cathy Caruth notes, trauma is a belated experience that causes harm to an individual after the initial event.[13] Because of this belatedness, an event cannot be categorized as "traumatic" nor fully understood as it occurs.[14]

I see 9/11 as the epicenter of trauma in the United States in the twenty-first century. As the deadliest terrorist attack on US soil in the nation's history, 9/11 has drastically changed the cultural memory in the United States. Our official government-supported, national memory depicts the following day—9/12—and the weeks that followed as an idealized time when the United States unified regardless of race, ethnicity, and religion. In commemorating the tragedy on its anniversary each year, viral social media posts announce a longing for such unity. However, this act of memory reinforces the selective amnesia regarding the sense of unity that was felt on September 12, 2001. Collectively, we have forgotten how Muslim and Sikh Americans and other people of color were treated—always suspicious that they too might present a threat.[15]

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[12] Aleida Assmann points to 9/11 as a "watershed moment" and states, "One often hears it said that the new millennium only really began on this date." Aleida Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 197. However, other scholars note several problematic reasons for thinking of 9/11 as a historical rupture. See Christine Muller, *September 11 as a Cultural Trauma: A Case Study through Popular Culture* (Cham, Switzerland: Spring Nature, 2017), 2.

[13] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 91-92. Kindle.

[14] Cathy Caruth, introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 8-9.

[15] Much of this dissertation was written in opposition to the culture I grew up in. I was raised in a small town in Southwest Missouri where the population is almost exclusively white, conservative, and Christian. My only encounter with Muslim and Muslim-passing individuals was through national news reports; my initial response to 9/11 and the "War on Terror" (as a child) was influenced by these news reports and the small-town-USA culture I was immersed in.

The "War on Terror" began as an official retaliatory response to 9/11 yet resulted in a complicated and unjustified war in Iraq. While 9/11 had a tremendous impact on Americans as a collective, it is also essential to acknowledge the trauma experienced by military personnel who fought in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).[16] According to a 2008 study, nearly fourteen percent of OEF and OIF veterans that participated in the study were diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).[17] Further, over half of all post-9/11 combat veterans say that their deployment harmed their mental health, and by 2019 over half of the post-9/11 combat veterans say they suffer from post-traumatic stress (PTS).[18] While much of this tragedy—specifically the arrival of deceased soldiers returning to the United States—was kept from the American public's view for the first several years of the war on terror,[19] this trauma was inescapable for most American military personnel.

Much has changed in the United States since 9/11. However, very little has been done to reduce the plethora of mass shootings in the US during the first quarter of the twenty-first century. Indeed, domestic terrorism has escalated.[20] For instance, more children have died from

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[16] Additionally, while it is beyond the scope of this project, we must also consider and reflect on the trauma experienced by Iraqi and Afghan civilians during the "War on Terror."

[17] Jaimie L. Gradus, "Epidemiology of PTSD," PTSD: National Center for PTSD, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed March 8, 2022, https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/essentials/epidemiology.asp.

[18] Kim Parker, et al. "Deployment, combat and their consequences," The American Veteran Experience and the Post-9/11 Generation, Pew Research Center, last updated September 9, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/09/09/deployment-combat-and-their-consequences/.

[19] For a history and analysis of the Dover ban (the censorship of media recording and photographing military caskets), see William O. Saas and Rachel Hall, "Restive Peace: Body Bags, Casket Flags, and the Pathologization of Dissent," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 19, no. 2 (June 2016): 177-208. https://doi.org/10.14321/rhetpublaffa.19.2.0177.

[20] Marita Sturken asserts that the Oklahoma City bombing opened opportunities for terrorism (both foreign and domestic) to occur in the US. Expanding on this, I suggest that 9/11 created a fertile opportunity for domestic terrorism—though already present in the United States—to grow to unprecedented levels. (Citation continues on next page).

gun violence since Sandy Hook (2012) than the total death toll of 9/11 and the total American soldiers killed in overseas combat since 9/11.[21] The mass murder of young children during the Sandy Hook Elementary school shooting could have been the national turning point regarding stricter gun laws and preventing additional mass shootings. Because of Sandy Hook's notoriety and our inability to strengthen federal gun control legislation afterward, the Sandy Hook massacre acts as a stand-in for other acts of domestic terrorism (specifically school shootings) in this study.

Theatrical Memorials

For each case study, I have chosen one to two theatrical texts and their corresponding play/musical productions to examine how performance and the theatrical text communicate memory and trauma. To reflect on forgotten or overlooked memories of the immediate aftermath of 9/11, I analyze Irene Sankoff and David Hein's musical *Come From Away* and *Unveiled*, a one-woman play written and performed by Rohina Malik. From my vantage point as both an audience member and scholar, I consider how these two pieces narrate the often-disregarded experience and memory of the Muslim community in the days (weeks, months, and years) following 9/11. I also examine mediated methods of memory transmission and trauma of the Iraq War on American soldiers and their families through Ellen McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq* and Quiara Alegría Hudes's *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*. McLaughlin, known for her classic Greek

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Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

[21] These statistics include all forms of gun violence, including mass shootings. See Ryan Sit, "More Children Have Been Killed by Guns Since Sandy Hook Than U.S. Soldiers in Combat Since 9/11," *Newsweek* (March 16, 2018), accessed on March 8, 2022, https://www.newsweek.com/gun-violence-children-killed-sandy-hook-military-soldiers-war-terror-911-848602.

adaptations, reinterprets Sophocles's *Ajax* for a contemporary audience. *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* is the first play in Hudes's "Elliot Trilogy." Both playwrights explore narratives of PTSD and memory as trauma traverses across time and space. In light of the abundance of mass shootings in the United States—particularly school shootings—I consider how the memory of the most egregious of these events, Sandy Hook, has been communicated to readers and audiences of Eric Ulloa's *26 Pebbles*.

I assert that these playwrights remember and memorialize twenty-first-century American trauma by creating transient, theatrical memorials that traverse time, space, culture, and identity. These theatrical memorials allow us to connect with others who may or may not have the same shared memory by exposing audiences (and readers) to experiences and memories outside the scope of official memorials like the National September 11 Memorial and Museum. Further, the selected playwrights transform their audience into empathetic, socially-engaged citizens while creating space for their audience to respond to national, twenty-first-century trauma. I contend that Sankoff and Hein, Malik, Hudes, McLaughlin, and Ulloa use theatrical and aesthetic strategies including adaptation, witness testimony, and community discussion to process their latent pain and that of their audience while also challenging the official, cultural memory surrounding national traumas in the United States.

I have chosen these five theatre texts and their respective productions for three fundamental reasons. First and most importantly, each of the playwrights engages with witness testimony. While there are many plays written in response to 9/11, the "War on Terror," and mass shootings, most are about fictional characters or inconspicuously incorporate the event into

the plot rather than keeping the event and its aftermath the crux of the play.[22] The playwrights of the texts I have selected create their scripts—sometimes verbatim—from witness testimony, base their characters on real people who experienced the event, and center the play's action during or shortly after the event.

Using testimony and documents to inform the writing of a play is not a technique unique to the twenty-first century. American theatre-makers often used witness testimony and documents to create documentary theatre/docudrama/verbatim theatre. The Federal Theatre Project, a program established through the New Deal to employ theatre artists in the 1930s, used newspapers and other documents to simultaneously entertain and mobilize audiences. FTP's founder (Hallie Flanagan) and other artists, such as Elmer Rice, were inspired by the Russian and European Living Newspapers during the 1910s and 1920s. Theatre artists also used docudrama techniques to respond to the wars in the twentieth century, particularly World War II and the Vietnam War. More recently American solo performance artists in the 1990s and early 2000s (such as Anna Deavere Smith and, as I will show in chapter two, many Arab/Muslim/Middle Eastern and North African-descended artists) began to include material gathered through interviews in their work. Moisés Kaufman and Tectonic Theatre Project's *The Laramie Project* is

[22] For plays written about or written in the wake of the "War on Terror" or in the context of the American occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq, see *Homebody/Kabul* by Tony Kushner (written pre-9/11, but performed shortly after 9/11), Heather Raffo's *Nine Parts of Desire* (2002), *The God of Hell* by Sam Shepard (2004), *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?* (2006) by Caryl Churchill, Christine Evans's *Trojan Barbie* (2009). Neil LaBute's *The Mercy Seat* (2002) features a fictional character making choices that will determine his future on 9/11; the play is not directly about the terrorist attacks but is a result of 9/11's aftermath. *Back of the Throat* (2005) by Yussef El Guindi and *Disgraced* (2012) by Ayad Akhtar are two plays about the suspicions and Islamophobia Arab and Muslim Americans experience(d) post-9/11. *This Flat Earth* (2018) by Lindsey Ferrentino, *Office Hour* (2017) by Julia Cho, and *The Amish Project* (2009) by Jessica Dickey are plays written in response to or are in the context of school/mass shootings. These examples are but a small sampling of theatrical responses to these events which rely on fictional characters or whose plot eclipses the events they are written about/inspired by.

another well-known piece of theatre that interviews were used to inform the script; this play will be referred to again in chapter four. Holocaust theatre, theatre of war, and theatre of genocide created in the US and abroad often incorporate docudrama and verbatim theatre techniques. Significantly, memorials and museums often use witness testimony to reassure visitors of their authenticity. It is easy for us to see the parallels between theatrical text and performance as a site of memory and these more traditional forms of memorial.

Secondly, many of the plays about national, twenty-first century, American trauma were written shortly after the events they detail. The theatrical works I reference in this study were first performed at least four years after the initial event.[23] Some may suggest that plays written shortly after an event are more truthful or authentic because of their proximity in time to the event; however, no source of writing is unmediated or completely objective. Like narratives written by historians, theatre-makers write history plays (works about historical events) from a specific point of view. Rokem states that "theatrical performances of and about history reflect complex ideological issues concerning deeply rooted national identities and subjectivities and power structures and can in some cases be seen as willful resistance to and critique of the established or hegemonic, sometimes even stereotypical, perceptions of the past."[24] This suggests that we may learn more about the era in which these plays were created and how playwrights and their American audiences responded to these events years after they occurred. As playwrights are temporally distanced from the event, they gain more time to reflect on the

[23] I use the phrase "initial event" to reference Aleida Assmann's understanding of an event's first occurrence and the performativity of commemoration and anniversaries. She states anniversaries "are occasions for interaction and participation. This corresponds to the most basic meaning of anniversaries as a performative form of recollection, …and reaction…. Remembering is about bringing something back through repetitions…so that what is repeated is in the end the repetition itself." Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma*, 200.

[24] Rokem, *Performing History*, 8.

event, process their impressions, and incorporate what they witnessed, including the event's after-effects.

Finally, all of the works I have selected to analyze in this study were primarily written for an American audience and about American trauma in the twenty-first century. American playwrights wrote these theatrical works, with the exception of *Come From Away*. Sankoff and Hein are both Canadians but resided in New York City on September 11, 2001, and had relatives who worked in the World Trade Center. They were also profoundly concerned with how their American audience would react and interpret their musical throughout the creation process. *Come From Away* is further explored in the second chapter. Because this study examines American traumatic events, it is appropriate to explore how Americans have created and interacted with cultural productions representing and responding to this trauma and the memories surrounding the event.

Conceptual Frameworks and Chapter Outline

Just as scholars use various theories rooted in psychology and memory studies to analyze the effectiveness of the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, I ground my study with conceptual frameworks in both memory and performance studies to analyze my sample of plays as sites of memory. Moreover, by focusing on theatrical production and text, I address how the plays communicate memories that may have otherwise been ignored in official memorials or even erased from the public's collective memory. While I consult works by scholars in memory and trauma studies—such as Cathy Caruth and E. Ann Kaplan—I primarily rely on three frameworks to analyze the efficacy of the theatrical text and performance as a site of memory. These connected frameworks integrate Michael Rothberg's "knots of memory" and his concept

of multidirectional memory, with ideas by Marianne Hirsch on postmemory and Alison Landsberg's prosthetic memory. These three frameworks critique and theorize the communication and transfer of memory from one person (or generation) to another, often through film, photography, and the experiential memorial museum.

Rothberg's "knots of memory" concept considers that memories are often tangled with one another; Rothberg refutes the idea that memory, history, and identity are linearly connected. Further, knotted memories cut across time, space, culture, and identity, which allows for examining how memory and identity mutually construct one another.[25] Multidirectional memory—a further developed version of "knots of memory"—suggests that memory is subjected to negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing between social groups, time, and space.[26]

In her book, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, Hirsch defines postmemory as "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right." These memories are, therefore, inherited through "imaginative investment, projection, and creation."[27] In her previous work, Hirsch clarifies that postmemory is less about identity position and is more of a reflection of cultural and public remembrance in

[25] Michael Rothberg, "Introduction: Between Memory and Memory- From *Lieux de mémoire* to *Noeuds de mémoire*," *Yale French Studies*, no. 118/119 (January 2010): 7, JSTOR.

[26] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3.

[27] Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5. Emphasis in the original.

which one might witness, through memory, another's traumatic experience and feel a connection to them. More precisely, postmemory is about "remembering" another's suffering and pain.[28]

'Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory is similar to Hirsch's postmemory framework. Prosthetic memory refers to the notion that collective memory allows us to "suture" ourselves to a past that we have not lived. As a concept, prosthetic memory enables people to feel connected to the past, specifically those who experienced this traumatic past through mass mediation. A crucial ethical dimension of prosthetic memory requires the viewer to remember their contemporary position rather than taking on that of a victim.[29] In the writing of Rothberg, Hirsch, and Landsberg, they consider how their respective ideas apply to heavily-mediated modes of communicating memory such as through television, photography, film, the memorial museum, and other forms of narrative communication. These frameworks, then, allow me to indicate how the memory of traumatic events during the first twenty years of the twenty-first century are interlinked and shared across time and space with those who may not have witnessed the initial traumatic event via theatrical performance and text.

I begin this study by further defining and connecting these three frameworks in chapter one. I trace their lineage through trauma, memory, and performance studies beginning with two French theorists' work on memory and commemoration: Maurice Halbwachs's "Collective Memory" and Pierre Nora's distinction between a site of memory and authentic, unviolated environments of memory. I explore related topics such as Cultural Memory and mediatization that lay a foundation for this study's examination of how the theatrical performance and text may

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[28] Marianne Hirsch, "Project Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy," in *Acts of Memory*, ed. Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe, and Leo Spitzer (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999): 9.

[29] Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 8-9.

communicate memory. I conclude the chapter by briefly considering how one can analyze museums and memorials through multidirectional memory, postmemory, and prosthetic memory theories.

In chapter two, I explore how memories of the post-9/11 discrimination and violence against the Muslim community in the United States are remembered and communicated to audiences through performance and text, yet omitted or neglected by the National September 11 Museum and Memorial.[30] I open the chapter with my memories of a 2018 performance of Rohina Malik's *Unveiled* before beginning my analysis of Irene Sankoff and David Hein's musical, *Come From Away* (2015). I follow this exploration with an analysis of Malik's *Unveiled*. For both theatrical performances, I examine how the playwrights dramatize Muslim characters' experiences of exclusion, mistreatment, violence, and discrimination directly after 9/11. By carrying the frameworks of multidirectional memory, postmemory, and prosthetic memory over from chapter one, I analyze the efficacy of this musical and one-woman play in communicating memory to its audience and draw comparisons to the museum. I contend that these theatrical works not only act as a site of remembrance for the memories surrounding the targeting of Muslim individuals in the aftermath of 9/11 but serve to memorialize these events in such a way that the National September 11 Memorial and Museum does not.[31] I conclude the

[30] Some may suggest that Muslim Americans do not expect their collective trauma to be shared in the National September 11 Memorial and Museum. However, I argue that as the primary memorial and historical archive to the attacks on 9/11 and their aftermath, the Islamophobia, discrimination, and violence directed towards Muslim and Muslim-passing Americans should be acknowledged more thoroughly in the museum than it is in its current state.

[31] Admittedly, though Muslim American memories and experiences are present in these case studies, the Muslim American collective may be forever excluded from the national "imagined community." While theatre artists can include Muslim Americans in the "imagined" theatrical community, we need to do better in including these voices in non-stereotypical, humanized, and fully-developed ways.

chapter with insight from other scholars and my own experience visiting the National September 11 Memorial and Museum and consider the troubling ways Muslim individuals and Islam are (or are not) portrayed in the museum.

I begin chapter three with a description of how the National September 11 Memorial and Museum depicts the "War on Terror" because no official memorial to the Iraq War exists in 2022. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq directly result from the United States' hasty reaction to 9/11; therefore, it is relevant and beneficial to begin with how the museum reimagines and conveys the past wars. Centering Ellen McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq* (2008/2011) and Quiara Alegría Hudes's *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* (2007/2012), I illustrate how the theatre community reacted to the Iraq War. I begin my analysis with *Ajax in Iraq* and follow with *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*. For both plays, I first consider the creation process to indicate how the playwrights and their audiences have reimagined and reinterpreted the war since the plays were originally written. I then analyze these two plays by way of Rothberg's multidirectional memory, Hirsch's postmemory, and Landsberg's prosthetic memory. I also draw attention to the power of these two plays to create an empathetic audience response because of the strategies employed by the playwrights. I end the chapter by contemplating the ways theatrical performance and text may act as a living memorial for the Iraq War.

Chapter four is dedicated to the narratives surrounding and memory of the December 14, 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary. The official memorial commemorating this tragedy is not yet complete. Thus, I reflect on how the National September 11 Memorial and Museum and elsewhere in New York City commemorate domestic terrorism. I then explore the creation of Eric Ulloa's *26 Pebbles* (2017), its use of witness testimony, and themes of national grief and mourning. Using the same conceptual frameworks utilized in previous chapters, I examine how

the theatrical memorial commemorates the victims of the Sandy Hook shooting, and the audience shares empathetic grief through their response to the play. I suggest that *26 Pebbles* operates as a transient, theatrical memorial to other mass shootings and may unify the broader national community in mourning and remembering domestic terrorism.

I conclude this study by looking toward other twenty-first-century American traumas, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and systemic police brutality. I consider how playwrights, audiences, and theatres across the United States are actively responding to these moments of crisis. I reflect on how theatrical responses to these events may act as a memorial while challenging the official narrative, much like the plays responding to 9/11, the Iraq War, and the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting. As demonstrated through this study, playwrights often turn to the voices of those who experience national trauma first-hand, particularly those with mitigated or wholly ignored voices. I conclude that the theatre can be a memorial to recent national events, allowing for memory to be communicated and resulting in an empathetic response from the audience.

Chapter 1- Concepts of Collecting Memory: Mediatization, Legacy, and Empathy

Michael Rothberg, Marianne Hirsch, and Alison Landsberg, among other contemporary scholars in Memory Studies, understand the fundamental idea that memory requires some form of stimulus, trigger, or shock that prompts us to remember. Because of this requirement, Aleida Assmann suggests, "Nothing could have provided a greater shock than the catastrophic destruction and oblivion that marked the middle of the 20th century. It is therefore only logical that…in the aftermath of this unprecedented violence and destruction advocates of memory stepped forward…to view the settings of such catastrophes."[32] Indeed, there is a connection between excessive violence in the past and a desire to remember the effects of that violence in the present. The Holocaust marked a shock and unprecedented violence, primarily affecting Europe, though reverberating across the Atlantic. I suggest that the 9/11 attacks on US soil, waves of domestic terrorism, and the "War on Terror" also serve as "shocks," forms of "catastrophic destruction," and acts of "excessive violence" pertinent to the context of collective memory in the United States. How might we use memory frameworks theorized first by Maurice Halbwachs and subsequently by Jan and Aleida Assmann and those influenced by their work to understand and critique official and theatrical memorials to these events?

In this chapter, I trace the development of concepts in Collective and Cultural Memory, which provide a theoretical framework for my analysis of memorialization, theatrical sites of memory, and national trauma. I begin with French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs's foundational theory of Collective Memory and the importance of social networks, upon which Jan and Aleida Assmann expand in their work on Collective Memory and its formation into

[32] Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 9.

Cultural Memory. I also establish the relevancy of mass media in transmitting memory to others as I consider definitions of "sites of memory" in Memory Studies. I then explore three interrelated theoretical frameworks which lay the foundation for the remaining chapters of this study. I conclude this chapter by examining how sites of memory, including the theatre, incorporate many of these theories in their memory transmission.

Definitions of Collective Memory

Memory includes "the processes of a biological, medial, or social nature which relate past and present (and future) in sociocultural contexts."[33] Memory is ever-changing and dependent on the context within which a memory is recalled. We never recall an event as it occurred, but rather, we reimagine the event through our current sociocultural lens. Significantly, Aleida Assmann states, "Remembering is basically a reconstructive process; it always starts in the present, and so inevitably at the time when the memory is recalled, there will be shifting, distortion, revaluation, reshaping."[34] Further, scholars debate how memory is constructed, gathered, collected, and interpreted. What scholars can usually agree upon is that remembering relies on social structures and is mediated—meaning both transmitted through forms of media (television, film, books, art, the Internet, theatre, and the like) and interpreted through channels outside of ourselves (our social groups, governments, and other empowered networks). In the following sections, I explain these ideas by tracing the creation of and connections between Collective Memory, Cultural Memory, mediatization, and memory frameworks relevant to this study of theatrical memorials in the twenty-first century.

[33] Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 7.
[34] A. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization*, 19.

Socially-Constructed, Collective Memory

Collective Memory is a sub-genre of memory concerned with the social aspects of memory production and recall.[35] Maurice Halbwachs believed that memory is dependent on the social frameworks around us. These frameworks—the social, cultural, and familial circles we consider ourselves part of—help us create our identities and remember our (and others') memories.

The social nature of Collective Memory is critical to our understanding of how memory is collected, transmitted, and thus remembered. Halbwachs claimed, "[a] person does not remember events directly; it can only be stimulated in indirect ways through reading or listening or in commemoration and festive occasions when people gather together to remember in common the deeds and accomplishments of long-departed members of the group. In this case, the past is stored and interpreted by social institutions." Halbwachs referred to these types of memories as "historical memory" and asserted that they were only remembered through the prompting from others.[36] Of more significance, when we recall tragic, national events (e.g., 9/11, mass shootings, bombings, natural disasters), this remembering is triggered by an outside stimulus such as an annual commemoration, news of a similar tragedy, or holding a conversation about the event with a friend.

Halbwachs acknowledged that individual group members perform the act of remembering, yet memories cannot survive without other group members sharing these memories. He asserts that the memories we remember with minimal effort "are recalled to us

[35] Here and elsewhere, I use "Collective Memory" to gesture toward the specific theoretical framework established by Maurice Halbwachs and "collective memory" to reference how we collectively remember.

[36] Coser, Introduction to *On Collective Memory*, 24.

from a common domain (common at least to one or several milieus). These remembrances are '"everybody's"' to this extent. We can recall them whenever we want just because we can [situate] oursel[ves] on the memory of others." Memories of moments in which we are the only person to experience and know of this experience are usually the most difficult for us to recall.[37] "Autobiographical memory" often fades with time unless others with whom we have shared an experience reinforce our memories. Others may strengthen our autobiographical memory if we have told them about an experience. Thus, autobiographical memory is also rooted in our relationships with others.[38] Additionally, memories can change based on our views in and of the present moment. Halbwachs thought contemporary beliefs, interests, and aspirations for the future (and our future selves), alter how we interpret the past.[39]

While the social aspect of Collective Memory is at the center of Halbwachs's understanding of collective remembering, how collective memory creates and transmits cultural knowledge is an essential and influential feature. In this way, Halbwachs's work has influenced many in Memory Studies and other related fields, including theorists Paul Connerton, Edward Said, Wulf Kansteiner, Paul Ricoeur, and Jan and Aleida Assmann. Halbwachs's notion of collective remembering influenced many memory frameworks such as Marianne Hirsch's Postmemory, Michael Rothberg's Multidirectional Memory, Alison Landsberg's Prosthetic

[37] Halbwachs, "From *The Collective Memory*," 141-142.

[38] Coser, Introduction to *On Collective Memory*, 24.

[39] Coser, Introduction to *On Collective Memory*, 25. Jan Assmann agrees and states that our understanding of current situations and events reconstructs all our memories. See Jan Assmann, "From *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 214. It is significant that even in the early stages of understanding collective memory, questions of whom a given memory belongs to, the sharing of memory, and how the present impacts our understanding of the past are all of concern.

Memory, and the Assmanns' definition of Cultural Memory. Collective Memory, therefore, becomes an umbrella term referencing other memory concepts.

Cultural Memory and the Formation of Identity & Legacy

Developed by Aleida and Jan Assmann, Cultural Memory represents a sub-genre of Collective Memory. The Assmanns further expand Halbwachs's theory of Collective Memory into two branches: Communicative and Cultural Memory. Like Collective Memory, both Communicative and Cultural remembering shape and are reconstructed by our worldview in the present. Communicative Memory is collected memory shared through "everyday" interaction, Cultural Memory is formally archived through institutions, and its transmission depends mainly on ritual and media.[40]

Jan Assmann notes that four key elements characterize Communicative Memory: nonspecialization, reciprocity of roles, thematic instability, and disorganization.[41] One does not need to be a historian or linguist to participate in Communicative Memory. There are no special skills one needs to transmit Communicative Memory. Further, Communicative Memory requires that whoever is the speaker in one moment becomes the listener in the next. As there are with most social interactions, there is a "script" and set of "rules" that regulate the transmission and exchange of memory in Communicative Memory. These rules are socially constructed, and the memories produced through these exchanges relate to the group(s) one belongs to.

Communicative Memory is tied to a limited time span that does not extend past three or four generations. This generational connection to a specific memory dissipates with time as

[40] For further development of these simple definitions, see Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 28.
[41] J. Assmann, "From *Moses the Egyptian*," 212.

memory loses its meaning, significance, and is altogether forgotten. For a communicative memory to survive, it must be institutionalized through archives, books, commemorations, and other mediated forms; the memory must become significant to the culture rather than the individual/family.[42] Memory legacy is also fundamental to Marianne Hirsch's work on Postmemory. She notes that Communicative Memory is "located within a generation of contemporaries who witness an event as adults and who can pass on their bodily and affective connection to that event to their descendants."[43]

Cultural Memory, on the other hand, is characterized by "fixed points [marking] fateful events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)." Further, these memories are stored and communicated through the work of "specialized individuals" who cultivate this memory through institutions.[44] Most significant to my study is the social dimension of Cultural Memory. Assmann contends that Cultural Memory denotes sameness and difference, marking who belongs and who does not. Cultural Memory also stores a system of morals held and valued by the group. In this way, Cultural Memory is reflexive as it simultaneously reflects and constructs the group's self-image.[45] This further separates those inside the group from those "marked" as other.

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[42] J. Assmann, "From *Moses the Egyptian*," 213. For example, Todd Beamer's (a passenger on the United Airlines Flight 93 on September 11, 2001) act of heroism and the now well-known phrase "Let's Roll" would have likely been forgotten eighty to one hundred years after 9/11. However, because the phrase is embedded into American cultural memory and incorporated in official and unofficial commemorations, "Let's Roll" and the Flight 93 passengers are likely to be remembered long after those who witnessed 9/11 are gone.

[43] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 32.

[44] J. Assmann, "From *Moses the Egyptian*," 213.

[45] J. Assmann, "From *Moses the Egyptian*," 213-215.

Whereas everyday communication transmits Communicative Memory, Cultural Memory is shared through images, rituals, and oral and written storytelling; all of these methods of communication are expressed through an institution or formal structure.[46] Accordingly, the arts are often utilized in the transmission of Cultural Memory. Aleida Assmann states, "From early on, artists have both invested into and profited from cultural memory, which they have supplemented, criticized, transformed, and opposed in various ways. But they are also its lucid theorists and acute observers. Today, the most conscientious and inspiring self-reflection of cultural memory resides in their artistic creations."[47] Art (in all its various forms) becomes a medium through which Cultural Memory is gathered, stored, and communicated.

Cultural Memory is kept "alive" through art, theatre, and other forms of media.[48] Asserting the living nature of Cultural Memory, as well as its reliance on media, Aleida Assmann states

> Living memory thus gives way to a cultural memory underpinned by media—by material carriers such as memorials, monuments, museums, and archives. While individual recollections spontaneously fade and die with their former owners, new forms of memory

[46] J. Assmann, "From *Moses the Egyptian*," 214.

[47] A. Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 395-396.

[48] While Aleida Assmann refers to Cultural Memory as "living memory," contemporary European theorist Pierre Nora argues that Cultural Memory is no longer memory (living memory) but is now history (dead memory). The concepts of memory and history are deeply intertwined and relevant to my study and the events I reference. See Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (April 1989): 9, https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520. In the following sections, I will further explain Nora's memory frameworks.

> are reconstructed within a transgenerational framework, and on an institutional level, within a deliberate policy of remembering or forgetting.[49]

The transgenerational nature of various forms of media, including the theatre, allows cultural memories to live beyond the limits of Communicative Memory. The present and future generations of a group continue to gain knowledge of "their past, their way of life, their values, important referents, and common orientations" through the media available to the group.[50]

Mediatization of Memory

As we have seen, media and the mediatization of memory play an essential part in understanding and remembering the past. Theorists such as the Assmanns, Hirsch, and Alison Landsberg emphasize that memory is communicated and absorbed through media. This media—whether through photography, film, literature, theatre, or other artistic forms—collectively gathers and culturally imparts memories to those belonging to the group accessing this media. Significantly, the media and institutions responsible for transmitting these memories are not "neutral carriers" of memory. Because these mediums encode selective interpretations of events, a group's self-perceived identity, and the cultural values—based on the creator's point of view—memory-transmitting media are continually constructing altered versions of the past.[51] The construction of memory through mediatized forms is especially relevant when considering traumatic and violent events such as 9/11 and acts of domestic terrorism which are often live-streamed or readily available for us to view.

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[49] A. Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 6.
[50] A. Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 395-402.
[51] Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 114.

Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, for example, argue that media events, especially those watched live, act as electronic monuments that enable the editing and re-editing of collective memory. These electronic monuments "are meant to live in collective memory through association with either the trauma to which they are responses or the exceptional nature of the gratifications they provide." Further, the live-streamed monuments become associated with prior traumatic events. As an example of how tragic and traumatic events can recall already established events in the collective memory, Dayan and Katz suggest that President John F. Kennedy's funeral recalled President Abraham Lincoln's funeral.[52] Regarding 9/11, we might suggest that part of the immediate response to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, was generated by 9/11's "quoting" of the February 26, 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center. Further, media events give meaning to the current event; Dayan and Katz use the 1968 moon landing as an example of Americans experiencing consolation for the Vietnam War and other turbulent events that year.[53] Through these examples, we can see that media allows memory to cross between time and space. Memory transmitted through media can be shared with large groups and through multiple generations, creating a standard version of the past.[54] Michael Rothberg's concept of Multidirectional Memory shows us how some events seem to reference others reaching across time, space, and identity. While some scholars believe this citationality causes competition of memory and justice, Rothberg asserts that this cross-referencing mutually benefits the memory of both events. Within his theory of Multidirectional

[52] Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, "From *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 363.

[53] Dayan and Katz, "From *Media Events*," 363.

[54] Erll, *Memory in Culture*, 126.

Memory, Rothberg refers to "knots of memory" to elucidate the cross-referencing across time and space that I will explore later in this chapter and use to analyze the ensuing case studies.

Like the events examined by Dayan and Katz, twenty-first-century national tragedies—such as those I examine in this study—have been broadcast live on television or readily available for viewers to repeatedly watch from their phones, computers, and television screens. The events are heavily mediated, even through live streaming and broadcast; the camera only allows us to see what it wants us to see. Further, even years after these events, our personal memories may be reshaped by the images and stories captured through media and institutions. Hirsch argues, for example, "as public and private images and stories blend, distinctions and specificities between [our own, personal memories and public memories] are more difficult to maintain…."[55] Indeed, what we think we remember from our experience witnessing an event may have been influenced, manipulated, and even overtaken by the public images and stories surrounding the event.

The arts are powerful tools in memory work, but they are also mediated carriers of institutionalized cultural memory. Theatre and performative storytelling can be beneficial to memory transmission; however, we must acknowledge the power artists maintain in choosing what memories will be scripted and performed. Playwrights write scripts with specific intentions. Directors, dramaturgs, designers, and actors research the topics, events, and stories told in these theatrical texts. However, the final product that an audience witnesses is filtered through these artists' points of view. Much like the audience attending any other commemorative event, memorial, or historical museum, the audience only witnesses what the creators, official storytellers, and institutions consider valuable to remember.

[55] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 34-35.

History and Memory: Nora's Sites of Memory

The mediatized nature of contemporary memorialization becomes problematic for French theorist Pierre Nora. Nora has articulated the difference between what he defines as *lieux de mémoire* and *milieux de mémoire*. Lieux de mémoire are sites or institutions of memory such as memorials, archives, and anniversaries.[56] Sites of memory are characterized by our nearly obsessive desire to gather all remembrances, such as testimonies, documents, and images.[57] Significantly, lieux de mémoire are driven by a movement toward the "democratization" of memory and modern mass culture, which is ever-changing.[58] According to Nora, milieux de mémoire no longer exist due to two factors. Milieux de mémoire are natural environments of memory that are socially communicated and "unviolated." These natural environments of memory communicate memory through gesture, everyday rituals, unspoken traditions, and bodily knowledge; they are most apparent in "archaic" communities which center familial and communal bonds.[59]

For Nora, natural environments of memory are equivalent to memory, whereas "sites" of memory are historical. Nora places sites of memory/history and natural environments of memory/memory in opposition to one another. He asserts that environments of memory/memory are bound to group(s) that connect to that memory, whereas sites of memory/history belong to everyone and, thus, to no one.[60] Nora privileges these natural environments of memory and mourns the assumed loss of this form of collective memory.

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[56] Nora, "Between Memory and History," 12.
[57] Nora, "Between Memory and History," 13-14 and 19.
[58] Nora, "Between Memory and History," 7, 8, and 19.
[59] Nora, "Between Memory and History," 8 and 13.
[60] Nora, "Between Memory and History," 8-9.

While Nora's work has been influential to our understanding of how memory is communicated and stored, many scholars, such as performance studies specialist Diana Taylor, refute the notion that we no longer have natural environments of memory. In her groundbreaking work defining the "archive" and the "repertoire," Taylor uses performance case studies in the Americas to indicate how performance and commemoration communicate embodied memory. She argues that embodied memory is still present but is undervalued and overwhelmed by the archive and material traces of memory and culture.[61] In his study on intercultural performance and embodied memory, Joseph Roach asserts the importance of the "repertoire" in transmitting cultural knowledge and memory.[62] Aleida Assmann uses similar terminology to describe actively circulating and passive cultural memory.[63] Like Taylor, Roach, and Aleida Assmann, Alison Landsberg, Hirsch, and Rothberg acknowledge the significance of embodied, "real" environments of memory and sites of memory such as museums, memorials, and the theatre. Theatre-makers embody and communicate memory to their audiences, yet the theatre remains an institution that mediates memory for the audience. Theatre artists have the power to draw attention to the memories that are forgotten or ignored by official institutions and memory carriers. In what follows, I detail memory frameworks that will assist me in critiquing theatrical texts and performances in their efficacy in communicating such memories related to 9/11, the Iraq War, and mass shootings.

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[61] See Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

[62] Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

[63] See Aleida Assmann, "From "Canon and Archive"," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 334-337.

Frameworks for Obtaining and Interpreting Memory in Theatrical Representation

The three theoretical concepts I use throughout this study—Landsberg's Prosthetic Memory, Hirsch's Postmemory, and Rothberg's Multidirectional Memory—have several key similarities. Each scholar considers how memories are mediated, interpreted, and communicated in the present through institutions and media. The Holocaust is of significance to each of these scholars, but their work can be applied to many contexts. Each theorist also explores the transmission of memory and memory's affective potential when encountering memories of an event one did not experience. Further, Landsberg, Hirsch, and Rothberg make clear that memory does not belong to specific groups but is accessible to anyone; memory is not based on an essentialist framework.

Trying on Prosthetic Memory: "Experiencing" Pain, Evoking Empathy

In her book, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, US theorist Alison Landsberg examines how film and other mass cultural communication function as "technologies of memory." She questions whether viewers are affected by the memories of events they did not live but rather encounter through experiential means (via film, television, experiential museums, and other forms of media). Landsberg uses the imagery of prosthetic limbs to explain how memory surrounding a particular event may be experienced by those who did not live through it.

These prosthetic memories, Landsberg argues,

> are neither purely individual nor entirely collective but emerge at the interface of individual and collective experience. They are privately felt public memories that develop

> after an encounter with a mass cultural representation of the past [via an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum] when new images and ideas come into contact with a person's own archive of experience.[64]

When one visits an experiential site—the Oklahoma City Bombing Memorial and Museum, a film about WWII, a play about the Bosnian genocide, or the 9/11 National Museum and Memorial—they may be affected by the public memories shared through images, storytelling, and other artistic or curatorial strategies. These new images and stories fuse with their memories of past experiences to inform a new understanding of the emotionally affected event. In this sense, the visitor/audience "sutures" themselves to this affective memory and historical narrative.[65]

The relationship between prosthetics and memory is not unique to Landsberg's theory. Landsberg's idea of "prosthetic memories" shares similarities with the descriptors that the Assmann scholars applied to Cultural Memory. Aleida Assmann states, "[Cultural] memory is a prosthetic device, an externalized and reinternalizable collective creation that is transmitted and transformed over time and reshaped by succeeding generations."[66] Landsberg calls these memories "prosthetic" for four distinct reasons. First, prosthetic memories do not result from one's own lived experience. Instead, they are encountered through mediated experience. Landsberg also suggests that prosthetic memories are sensuous and are "worn" or carried on the

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[64] Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 19.

[65] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 2.

[66] A. Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 395.

body like an artificial limb. Landsberg notes that as artificial limbs often indicate a trauma experienced by the body, prosthetic memories also mark an experienced trauma.

Additionally, prosthetic memories—like their bodily counterpart—are interchangeable and exchangeable. Both are also a commodity; one must have the resources to obtain both prosthetic memories and prosthetic limbs. Finally, "prosthetic" also implies usefulness to the memories gained. Landsberg states, "Because they feel real, they help condition how a person thinks about the world and might be instrumental in articulating an ethical relation to the other."[67]

One of the critical elements of Landsberg's framework rests on the notion that memories do not belong to a particular group. "Organic," "biological," and "hereditary" models of memory communication suggest that memory and heredity are equivalent: just as one inherits physical traits from their ancestors, so too do they inherit memories.[68] Landsberg refutes such essentialist understandings of memory. Instead, she argues that memories do not belong exclusively to a particular group but are accessible to all.[69] For her, the reasons for this are two-fold: the "rupture of generational, communal, and familial bonds in the modern era, and the emergence of new technology (film, television, the Internet). The emergence of this technology "transformed memory by making possible an unprecedented circulation of images and narratives about the past."[70] Accessibility to mass culture exposes audiences to other groups' narratives about and memories of events. Moreover, even though the family or community would historically transmit

[67] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 20-21.
[68] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 7.
[69] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 2.
[70] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 2 and 10.

much of a group's memory, the physical "rupturing" of a group and access to new forms of technology grant dispersed group members, and new groups, access to these memories.

The second key element of Landsberg's Prosthetic Memory involves the exposure of memories that are not collected through our own lived experience. Unlike Halbwachs and the Assmanns, Landsberg rejects the idea that *all* memories and identity—created through the act of remembering—are "socially constructed." Prosthetic memories do not result from living in specific social structures but originate from our interactions with mass cultural technologies.[71] Prosthetic memories are experienced with one's body—through viewing film, television, theatrical performance, or visiting experiential museums—and are stored in one's individual "archive" of experience, which influences our relationship to both the present and future.[72] Landsberg thus groups these experiential sites under one term: "technologies of memory." Technologies of memory dramatize or recreate historical events through which an audience did not live.[73] These mass-mediated memories become available to the broader public through technological advances.[74] Of course, one must have the resources available to access these mass-mediated memories.

Landsberg is unique in noting the commodification of prosthetic memories. Through the example of the film *The Thieving Hand*, Landsberg states that the artificial arm in the film is "a commodity that can be purchased by anyone with the means, and it is therefore more accessible than, say, a 'real' arm. Thus, what makes these memories portable is their commodification produced by capitalism."[75] In a contemporary context, images that store and communicate

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[71] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 19.
[72] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 25-26.
[73] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 28.
[74] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 11.
[75] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 27.

memory through technologies of memory can be distributed around the world to anyone with the—primarily fiscal—resources to view and interact with these memories.[76]

Another crucial element in Landsberg's concept acknowledges the difference between our *lived* experience and the experience gained through *mediated* experience. At the height of the memorial boom in the nineteenth century, commemorative structures were designed to produce "memories that unified people across differences of class, ethnicity, gender, and region. But they did so by constructing a common national identity that was supposed to supersede these differences." Prosthetic Memory, on the other hand, requires that differences be acknowledged. Landsberg suggests, "People who acquire these [prosthetic] memories are led to feel a connection to the past but, all the while, to remember their position in the contemporary moment…."[77] To engage with prosthetic memories, one must recognize that the narratives, experiences, and memories they encounter through technologies of memory are not inherited, nor the viewer's own memory; instead, these experiences once belonged to someone else. Once we acknowledge this difference, we can begin to think ethically about traumatic memories and form an empathetic response to the newly acquired prosthetic memories. Ethical thinking is the goal of Prosthetic Memory.

For Landsberg, "thinking ethically" means looking beyond our own desires. She asserts that "Prosthetic memory teaches ethical thinking by fostering empathy" rather than sympathy. Sympathy presumes "sameness" between individuals or groups, allows the sympathizer to "project [their] own feelings onto another," and results in one relishing another's trauma. Conversely, empathy is an experience in which the empathizer "[feels] for, while feeling

[76] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 18.
[77] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 9.

different from, the object."[78] Landsberg suggests that empathy is the predecessor of social responsibility and action. The primary goal for Landsberg is that a prosthetic memory triggers an empathetic response and results in the viewer/audience becoming a political ally for those in groups outside of one's social structures.[79] In this way, the Prosthetic Memory framework can be a socially and politically productive tool for analysis.

Postmemory and the Legacy of Lived Experience

Marianne Hirsch's concept of Postmemory, like Landsberg's ideas on Prosthetic Memory, grant viewers/ audiences access to the lived experience of another. Both frameworks concern a generation or group that did not live through a particular event; the scholars consider how an event might affect those who did not experience it first-hand but through narratives and images. Hirsch studies the potential power of photographs and their ability to communicate memories from one generation to another. She asserts that these images often "tell us as much about our own needs and desires…as they can about the past world they presumably depict."[80] This is partially because we interpret historical events and their memory through a contemporary lens. Hirsch's project is concerned with how family photographs transmit memory and how our present moment can reinterpret or skew this memory.[81] Hirsch challenges us "not to impose retrospection to the point where a photo's own temporality and surface, however delicate and

[78] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 149.
[79] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 21 and 34.
[80] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 52.
[81] As Hirsch and her husband examined family photos taken during WWII, they manipulated the photos to discover more clues about the moment the photographs captured. Hirsch notes, "No doubt, our determination to magnify and enhance the picture—to zoom in, blow up, sharpen—reveals more about our own projections and appropriations than life in wartime Greater Romanian." To an extent, Hirsch and her husband were looking for something to confirm their imaginations, beliefs, and biases. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 59-60.

contingent, is erased."[82] We must see the photo for what it is: an often-skewed moment in time that does not tell us a complete story but can reveal more about our own interpretation of events. We must heed this advice when analyzing any historical moment through mediated technologies such as photography, literature, film, and the theatre.

Hirsch defines Postmemory as,

> the relationship the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they "remember" only by means of stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right.[83]

As the daughter of Holocaust survivors, Hirsch focuses on how memory is remembered by those who did not directly experience a collective trauma and how the lives of the "postgeneration" or "second generation" are shaped by this memory.[84] Her interest in the postgeneration began as she encountered the writings and art created by other children of Holocaust survivors and reflected on her own experience as part of the "generation after." Hirsch wondered "Why [she could] recall particular moments from [her] parents' wartime lives in great detail and have only very few specific memories of [her] own childhood." Postmemory thus becomes a "*consequence*

[82] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 75.
[83] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 5.
[84] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 9 and 11.

of traumatic recall" but is remembered by a generation once removed through the event.[85] The postmemory generation is still affected by the experiences of the previous generation.

The prefix "post" in Postmemory refers to "an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture." Here "post" implies more than a distance in time between a historical event and the present and more than a precise moment in the aftermath of the event. Hirsch uses two compelling examples to demonstrate further how "post" functions in her framework. First, she recalls the meaning of "postcolonial" as the troubling continuation of colonialism rather than its end. She notes the sometimes-problematic nature of some memories continuing and passing on from one generation to another. It is the continuation of memories of an event rather than its ending that is significant to Hirsch. Secondly, Hirsch references Rosalind Morris' suggestion that "post" can operate as a Post-it note that "adheres to the surface of texts and concepts, adding to them and thereby also transforming them…." Hirsch reminds us that Post-its "often hold afterthoughts that can easily become unglued and disconnected from their source. If a Post-it falls off, the post-concept must persist on its own, and in that precarious position it can also acquire its own independent qualities." Hirsch notes that though an event happened in the past, its effects continue to impact the present.[86] The continuation of an event's after-effects and a memory's ability to be separated from its original holder and change during the separation process are at the heart of the Postmemory framework.

While Hirsch has inherited her memory of the Holocaust through familial connections, and much of her Postmemory work features familial legacy, she contends that postmemory

[85] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 4 and 6. Emphasis in the original.
[86] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 4-5.

access is not limited to those with family bonds.[87] Postmemory is generationally structured. Hirsch argues

> postmemory is *not* an *identity* position but a *generational* structure of transmission embedded in multiple forms of mediation. Family life, even in its most intimate moments, is entrenched in a collective imaginary shaped by public, generational structures…and a shared archive of stories and images that inflect the broader transfer and availability of individual and familial remembrance.[88]

One need not be a child of European, Jewish Holocaust survivors to gain access to postmemory; a child of an American, non-Jewish WWII veteran can also be a member of the postmemory generation. Both children belong to the same generational structure. To further clarify the ways memory is mediated and reinterpreted by others beyond the family, Hirsch contrasts Postmemory to Toni Morrison's "rememory," an embodied remembering passed through familial connections.[89]

Assuredly, there are differences between the postmemory of children of survivors and others who have learned about the Holocaust beyond familial narratives. However, Hirsch asserts that both sets of children may be affected by the memory of others. She differentiates these experiences as familial postmemory and affiliative postmemory. Affiliative postmemory refers to shared memories taken on by a later generation without the confines of familial bonds. Hirsch's

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[87] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 6.
[88] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 35. Emphasis in the original.
[89] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 23. See also Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Random House, 2004).

ideas corroborate Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory on the transmission of memory to other bodies. Even while Hirsch confirms that familial generations may transmit memory, with contemporary forms of mediation and technology, she suggests that the postmemory generation can be broadened to include those without familial connections to an event.[90]

The mediation of memory also plays a significant role in Postmemory. Hirsch notes that her specific postmemory of WWII and the Holocaust was still mediated, even though she did not encounter images and videos of the war, concentration camps, and other acts of extreme violence until much later in life. For Hirsch, photography and video allowed her to physically see what she could only imagine prior to seeing these images. Thus, Hirsch suggests, "Postmemory's connection to the past is…actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation."[91] Postmemory is as much about storytelling and imagination as it is about physical manifestations of mediatization. Photographs and film only grant access to these mediated memories for a more comprehensive postmemory generation beyond those that experience a personal transfer of memory between family members.[92] The mediated nature of these memories allows the postmemory generation to "work through" an "inherited" trauma without retraumatizing a viewer.[93] This often occurs by recontextualizing iconic images (and texts) in historical, literary, and artistic work by those within the postmemory generation.[94] As

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[90] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 35-36.

[91] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 4-5.

[92] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 22.

[93] Here Hirsch is using Dominick LaCapra's understanding of "working through." Working through requires an analytical, empathetic response from those who encounter the memories of traumatic events. It is important to empathize with another while (like Landsberg also urges) separating oneself from the lived experience. For LaCapra, one should be "distanced" enough from the event that they can think critically about a given memory. See Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 199.

[94] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 108 and 122.

the postmemory generation recontextualizes and reinterprets narratives and images of memories surrounding the previous generation's experiences, they gain a new sense of power and narrative control. Further, postmemory work strives to "uncover the pits again, to unearth the layers of forgetting…and try to see what these images…both expose and foreclose."[95] Through its mediation, postmemory work may help us discover, interpret, and analyze memories that many institutions and groups have forgotten.

In postmemory work, however, Hirsch warns us that we risk "imitating or unduly appropriating" traumatic experiences of others if we "adopt" these experiences as if we might have lived through them. Indeed, there is a fine line between identification and distance when encountering the memories of others.[96] Hirsch reasserts that "Certainly, we do not have the literal "memories" of others' experiences, and certainly, one person's lived memories cannot be transformed into another's. Postmemory is not identical to memory: it is "post"; but, at the same time…it approximates memory in its affective force and its psychic effects."[97]

Overidentifying with another's memory can be unproductive. Similarly unproductive is the formation of comparative frameworks when juxtaposing multiple traumatic events.[98] As we will see with Michael Rothberg's theory of Multidirectional Memory, comparison of groups' experiences, while useful, may lead to competition between groups, weaponizing and unfairly weighting one trauma over another. Both Rothberg and Hirsch aim to think about the benefits of connecting otherwise divergent events, traumas, and experiences.

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[95] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 119.
[96] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 20 and 35.
[97] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 31.
[98] Hirsch took note of this phenomenon at a conference surrounding the Holocaust and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. See Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 19.

Multidirectional Memory: Crossing Time and Space

Michael Rothberg's Multidirectional Memory concept comprises a framework that "consider[s] memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative."[99] Rothberg proposed the framework of Multidirectional Memory, in part, to counter the rise in memory competition between national, ethnic, racial, and religious groups. While many may question why the United States has a National Holocaust Museum and Memorial on the National Mall but does not have a national memorial to the genocide of indigenous people in the United States or the horrors of slavery in the United States,[100] Rothberg argues that acknowledging one traumatic series of events does not negate the trauma of other events. For Rothberg, memory is not a zero-sum game or real estate development taking up space on the American trauma and memory landscape.[101] Instead, we can honor and commemorate multiple traumas without ranking the severity of these experiences.

Rothberg centers his study of Multidirectional Memory on case studies of the Holocaust. Admittedly, this might seem counterintuitive to Rothberg's argument as the Holocaust tends to overpower other mass traumas. The term "genocide" was coined to describe the effects of the Holocaust, and thus other atrocities struggle to "measure up" to the destruction and horror of the Holocaust.[102] Rothberg argues that "far from blocking other historical memories from view in a

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[99] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3.

[100] The National Memorial for Peace and Justice (2018) is the United States' first memorial dedicated to enslaved black people, lynching victims, and those that faced racial segregation and discrimination under Jim Crow laws. The memorial also confronts contemporary issues such as confronting white guilt and police brutality. The National Memorial for Peace and Justice is located in Montgomery, Alabama—nearly 800 miles from the National Mall.

[101] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 2-3.

[102] See Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 10 and Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

competitive struggle for recognition, the emergence of Holocaust memory on a global scale has contributed to the articulation of other histories—some of them predating the Nazi genocide, such as slavery, and others taking place later…."[103] By noting similarities and differences to other events, such as the Holocaust, Multidirectional Memory opens an opportunity to recognize other traumatic events often forgotten in mainstream memory.

Multidirectional Memory juxtaposes two or more seemingly unrelated events to create meaning. Rothberg suggests, "the content of a memory has no intrinsic meaning but takes on meaning precisely in relationship to other memories in a network of associations."[104] Influenced by the work of Aimé Césaire, Hannah Arendt, Charlotte Delbo, and W. E. B. DuBois, among many other scholars and activists, Rothberg pairs disparate historical events to reveal the intersection of histories and similarities across time and space. One such example in Rothberg's work is his juxtaposition of colonialism to the Holocaust. Multidirectional Memory celebrates the parallels between historical moments which otherwise seem to have very little in common. Rothberg proposes that Multidirectional Memory "is meant to draw attention to the dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and times during the act of remembrance."[105] It may seem as though 9/11, the Iraq War, and domestic terrorism are not directly and intimately connected; however, Rothberg's concept allows us to examine and imagine these events as parallel traumas affecting Americans in the twenty-first century without invoking competitive memory frameworks. Those who believe memory is competitive rather than multidirectional tend to ignore the value of cross-referencing these disparate events and their legacies.

[103] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 6.
[104] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 14 and 16-17.
[105] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 11.

Further, Rothberg refutes the idea that comparison and noting similarities imply that two events are equivalent. Suggesting two traumatic events are identical in significance and effect is not at all Rothberg's intention. He notes that Multidirectional Memory "takes dissimilarity for granted, since no two events are ever alike, and then focuses its intellectual energy on investigating what it means to invoke connections nonetheless."[106] Once we acknowledge the unequal nature of comparison across events, we can begin to identify and create imaginative links between events, groups, and histories that we could not see before. While it may seem that the event which is "less" traumatic gains significantly from this comparative relationship, the "more" traumatic event is renewed in our collective memory. Thus, both events and traumas benefit from identifying similarities across events from disparate times and spaces.

As Multidirectional Memory "cuts across and binds together diverse spatial, temporal, and cultural sites," Rothberg suggests it also unites differing cultural identities.[107] This is important to the idea of theatrical performance and text as a site of memory. Performance is a temporal art that can be shared in many different places and with many different people across the globe. As such, those with different identities and experiences can encounter dramatized memory and respond with empathy for those whose memory is being portrayed. Like Landsberg and Hirsch, Rothberg opposes the essentialist memory structure fundamental to those that believe memory is competitive: "As I struggle to achieve recognition of *my* memories and *my* identity, I necessarily exclude the memories and identities of others." Rothberg attests that "Memories are not owned by groups—nor are groups "owned" by memories." He instead describes the connections between memory and identity as "jagged; what looks at first like my

[106] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 18.
[107] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 11.

own property [i.e., memories] often turns out to be a borrowing or adaptation from a history that initially might seem foreign or distant." Rothberg imagines memory and identity to connect, but certainly not in a straight line. He argues, "Our relationship to the past does partially determine who we are in the present, but never straightforwardly and directly, and never without unexpected or even unwanted consequences that bind us to those whom we consider other."[108]

Rothberg asserts, "the past finds articulation in a wide array of "sites"—considered broadly to include not only monuments and museums, but also novels, cities, personages, symbols, and more…."[109] From Rothberg's perspective, memory and its articulation through these various sites attempt to grab our attention in new and complex ways.[110] Significantly, as Rothberg suggests, non-traditional "sites" such as novels and symbols can articulate memory beyond the traditional memorial, monument, and museum; so too can the theatre. In accepting the theatre as one of these non-conventional sites, we may indeed begin to articulate and experience memory in new ways.

In his later work, Rothberg also uses the imagery of a knot to explain memory's multidirectionality. This metaphor, and the concept of multidirectional memory in general, was created as a rebuttal to the frustrations in Nora's memory framework (*lieux de mémoire* and *milieux de mémoire*). Critics of Nora's work have taken up several issues with his work: his suggestion that memory is no longer part of our daily experience, Nora's notion that time, history, and memory are all linear constructs, and his failure to address gaps in the formation of national histories—especially when considering (or rather, choosing not to consider) colonialism

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[108] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 4-5. Emphasis in the original.
[109] Rothberg, "Introduction," 3.
[110] These "sites" of memory are called "technologies of memory" in Landsberg's work; both theorists consider the broader implications of memorializing through non-traditional methods.

as a factor in identity and nation-building.[111] Rothberg attempts to remedy the faults in Nora's framework through his metaphor of "knots" and understanding of memory as multidirectional. Rothberg's "noeuds de mémoire," or knots of memory, opens up the possibilities of identifying new sites of memory and methods of creating and maintaining collective memory beyond relying on "the framework of the imagined community of the nation-state." Rothberg suggests that thinking of memory as a knot rather than a straight line

> makes no assumptions about the content of communities or their memories [compared to the assumed homogeneity of communities from Nora's point of view]. Instead, it suggests that memory is "knotted" in all places and acts of memory are rhizomatic networks of temporality and cultural reference that exceed attempts at territorialization (whether at the local or national level) and identitarian reduction.[112]

This allows for disparate, often considered "outsider" communities to contribute and access the memory of others. The crossing of time and space and "knotted" intersections of memory and identity will help critique the memorial capabilities of theatrical texts and productions.

Imagining Community Through Narrative Memorialization

Memorials, museums, history films, photography, and as I will show, the theatre all use medial elements of prosthetic memory, postmemory, and multidirectional memory to narrate and transmit memory to their respective viewers and audience. Memorials and other sites of memory

[111] Rothberg, "Introduction," 4-5.
[112] Rothberg, "Introduction," 7.

are created to recall and create new interpretations of the past and preserve the memory of an event or person. In some cases—particularly at the site of trauma, such as the National September 11 Memorial and Museum—these memorials function as a site of memory and mourning.[113] Significantly, these sites of memory gather competing and often divergent memories in a shared space to find understanding and meaning across these memories and experiences. In this way, there is not a "collective memory," but a "collected memory"; we do not share each other's recollections of the past, but these memories form a narrative tying multiple experiences together.[114] Our collected interpretations of and reactions to the past appear in these sites of memory. However, these interpretations and reactions tend to change and adapt as time progresses.

As shown in this chapter, we interpret memories through a contemporary lens. Moreover, such reshaped memories are ever-changing based on our sociocultural context in the present. W. Lloyd Warner, an American anthropologist, reminds us that acts of memorialization "often have little to do with recreating the beliefs and ideas involved in the actual event. They become condensed versions of much that we have felt and thought about ourselves and the experiences we have in living together. But the *effect* of what has been forgotten remains a powerful part of the collective life of the group."[115] Nevertheless, sites of memory are reflexive as they are both influenced by and influence our understanding of the present. Performance scholar Paul Connerton states that "our experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of

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[113] Julian Bonder, "On Memory, Trauma, Public Space, Monuments, and Memorials," *Places* 21, 1 (March 2009): 62, 64, Art Full Text.

[114] James E. Young, "Memory and Monument after 9/11," in *The Future of Memory*, ed. Richard Crownshaw, Jane Kilby, and Antony Rowland (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 81.

[115] W. Lloyd Warner, "From *The Living and the Dead: A Study of the Symbolic Life of Americans*," in *The Collective Memory Reader,* ed. Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 166. Emphasis in the original.

the past. We experience our present world in a context which is causally connected with past events and objects, and hence with reference to events and objects which we are not experiencing when we are experiencing the present." Further, the way we imagine the past often lends itself to legitimizing the social status quo of the present.[116] In legitimizing the established status quo, some memories are omitted from official narratives and left out of acts of commemoration. As we will see in Chapter two, one such example of this forgetting is related to the discrimination against the Muslim community in the United States after 9/11. The positioning of the Muslim community (or lack thereof) in the National September 11 Memorial and Museum contributes to the continual denial of these memories in an official capacity.

Ironically, the denial of memory in official sites of memory contradicts the very purpose of memorialization: remembering others' memory. Jay Winter asserts that sites of memory only become sites when "people remember the memories of others," including the survivors and their descendants (the postmemory generation).[117] When we commemorate and share memories, we connect to the groups we belong to and those beyond our immediate social groups. Of course, when official acts of memorialization omit the memory of those we might consider being outside our group, we miss an opportunity to develop an empathetic response to their experience. American sociologist Richard Sennet believes that sharing memory with those beyond our social frameworks allows us to "remember well" or become more objective in our interpretation of memory. This can only be achieved when memory is shared with a group of diverse voices.[118]

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[116] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 2-3.

[117] Jay Winter, "Sites of Memory and the Shadow of War," in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susannah Radston and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010): 313.

[118] Richard Sennett, "From "Disturbing Memories," in *The Collective Memory Reader,* ed. Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 284.

Ideally, sharing memory will transcend difference and create a broader sense of community and group identity.

While negating differences in favor of unity and mutual understanding can benefit memorialization, this can also be detrimental. As Landsberg and others have suggested, the monument boom in the nineteenth century created an "imagined community," which produced an illusion of stability and security for the community.[119] Further, this idea of community was usually connected to a nationalist agenda.[120] Edward Said asserts memorialization "is a method for using collective memory selectively by manipulating certain bits of the national past, suppressing others, elevating still others in an entirely functional way. Thus, memory is not necessarily authentic, but rather useful." The "collective" memory then creates a national narrative that assists in shaping the group's identity.[121] As official sites of memory suppress some memories and elevate others to tell a particular national narrative, this also informs the identity of the group's members. If this is the case, then we can surmise that those whose memory is excluded in these official capacities are also excluded from this social group. This leads to shifts in identity and memory and further defines who we are and, more importantly, who we are not.

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[119] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 6.

[120] Benedict Anderson opposes the popular understanding of the nation as a concept and its equation to nationalism. He proposes a new definition of the "nation": an "imagined political community." Anderson also suggests that a national, collective, and cultural memory (and forgetting) inform the "imagined community" of their kinship ties. Anderson's framing of the nation as an "imagined community" has greatly influenced this study's final chapter. Benedict Richard O'Gorman Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 4-6 and 200-204. ACLS Humanities E-book.

[121] Edward Said, "Invention, Memory, and Place." *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (January 2000): 179.

Potential Sites of Memory: The Theatrical Memorial

Like museums and memorials, the theatre communicates memory to its audiences. Scholars such as Taylor and Connerton note the performative quality in acts of commemoration. Connerton argues that ritual and commemorative performances communicate and sustain images and knowledge of the past. He expands on this, stating, "Commemorative ceremonies prove to be commemorative (only) in so far as they are performative…. Performative memory is bodily. Therefore, I want to argue there is an aspect of social memory which has been greatly neglected but is absolutely essential: bodily social memory."[122] While he refers more to everyday, ordinary, embodied memory, the connection between performance and memory is clear. For Taylor performance—like commemoration—is an act that transfers knowledge and memory to its audience while reinforcing the audience's identity. As commemoration is performative, performance can also be commemorative.

Additionally, the theatre is especially adept at communicating narratives of trauma and memory to its audience. While Julian Bonder asserts that art cannot compensate for public trauma and an audience cannot fully know the traumatic experience of another, art and performance can create a dialogic conversation between the event performed onstage and the audience member. Through this act, audiences may process their emotions and thoughts of the event, which becomes a stepping stone to understanding.[123] Similarly, Freddie Rokem also identifies the benefits of performance as a medium in communicating memory. He states that "performing history" will "continue to bear witness even after there are no more direct witnesses at all, extending the chain of witnessing, bridging the inevitable gaps between the

[122] Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 4 and 71.
[123] Bonder, "On Memory," 65.

generations."[124] Thus, the performer becomes a witness to the dramatized history, making the audience a secondary witness.[125] The performer/witness can transmit a memory communicated through their dramatization of the script to the audience. Through the experience of attending a play depicting a historical event, the audience encounters the theatre as a site of memory as if they had visited an experiential museum or memorial. The audience, then, becomes a secondary witness to the event.

Landsberg has asserted that "Although all aesthetic experience has an affective component, the sensuous in the cinema—the experiential nature of the spectator's engagement with the image—is different from other aesthetic experiences such as reading."[126] I argue that the theatre is even more adept at creating an affective experience for the audience. Considering the audience's ability to influence and interact with the performance/actors and an imaginary wall being the only separation between the audience and the performer, perhaps the theatre is more experiential than film or television. As such, the theatre may be more effective in its transmission of memory.

In the following chapter, I will address this by exploring how the 9/11 musical, *Come From Away,* and one-woman show, *Unveiled*, function as sites of memory. The conceptual

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[124] Freddie Rokem, "Discursive Practices and Narrative Models: History, Poetry, Philosophy," in *History, Memory, Performance*, ed. David Dean, Yana Meerzon, and Kathryn Prince (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 21.

[125] In the theatre specifically, we encounter the role of the witness and secondary witness in Bertolt Brecht's "The Street Scene." In this essay, a bystander on the street watches as an accident happens and tells others what the bystander witnessed. The bystander becomes the witness, and the bystander's audience becomes the secondary witness. The bystander/witness can "play" the role of those involved in the accident so well that the secondary witnesses feel they had seen the accident themselves and can hold an informed opinion about it. See Bertolt Brecht, "The Street Scene," in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 121-129.

[126] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 28-29.

frameworks related to memory that I have considered and connected in this chapter will serve my analysis in the ensuing one. I suggest that the two theatrical productions and their respective texts prove effective and affective in transmitting memories that are often forgotten in official memorial contexts. I then reflect on how the National September 11 Memorial and Museum's curators contextualize the post-9/11 violence directed toward the Muslim community. To further support this argument, I will employ the memory frameworks of Prosthetic Memory, Postmemory, and Multidirectional Memory.

Chapter 2- Theatrical Revelations of Forgotten Post-9/11 Muslim Memories

On March 8, 2018, I attended a performance of Rohina Malik's *Unveiled* at the Lied Center in Lawrence, Kansas. The Lied Center is a large performing arts venue where many touring theatre productions and bands perform. On the night I attended the performance of *Unveiled*, the large proscenium stage transformed into a small black box theatre. The audience was required to sit on the stage with the performer, creating an immediate and intimate connection between Malik, her audience, and the stories she would tell.

The acting space Malik performed on was slightly raised by a platform, allowing us in the back of the audience to witness the production without obstructed views. A Persian rug marked the acting space on the platform while also creating a welcoming environment for the audience. A red, Baroque floral wingback armchair sat squarely facing the audience on the carpet. Next to the armchair was a low-profile, wooden table with a white, damask printed tablecloth on top and a tea set with multiple dishes and cups. The simplistic yet inviting setting stood out from the heavy black curtains behind the temporary platform.

Malik embodied five characters throughout her performance—one in each episode of the play. Each character, a Muslim woman who wore a hijab, poured a different tea for a guest. It was immediately apparent that the audience was meant to personify the unseen guest as Malik spoke directly to the audience as if she was interacting with each audience member. The intimate setting, breaking of the fourth wall, and comforting use of tea—a symbol of hospitality in many cultures—invited the audience to listen to the women Malik enacted as they would a friend.

As Malik embodied each woman, she shared harrowing memories of Islamophobia, acts of violence directed at Muslim women, and intolerance. She also educated her audience on the significance of the hijab, Islamic beliefs, and the importance of distinguishing between an

individual and the collective. Moreover, the aftermath of 9/11 on the Muslim community in the United States and England tied each episode of the one-woman play together. Not every character in the play speaks directly about the aftermath of 9/11. Still, an audience member old enough to remember the attacks on September 11, 2001, would likely be familiar with the widespread exclusion and discrimination many Muslim Americans experienced. For those of us who were children in 2001 or may have forgotten the post-9/11 atrocities many Muslims in the United States experienced, *Unveiled* provides a new way of thinking about and remembering the aftereffects of 9/11.

Autobiographical Memories and Mediated 9/11 Images

As a ten-year-old in a rural Missouri community, I experienced 9/11 like much of the world: through television.[127] I walked in a single-file line with my classmates after our art class when our fifth-grade teacher ran out of our classroom and told us that we needed to come inside our room to watch the news. My memories become distorted at this point. How long did we watch the coverage on our outdated classroom TV? Did I witness the second plane hit the South Tower? Did we watch as people jumped from the towers? When I went home that afternoon, did I watch the news as I usually watched cartoons? Surely my parents would not let me continuously view images of mass death like I "remember" I did. Was I afraid? Angry? Sad? Regardless of what I experienced, felt, and saw, I can no longer be sure of which memories of 9/11 are my own and which were mediated through repetitious news stories, images, and the

[127] An estimated two billion people around the world witnessed 9/11. Most of these two billion people watched from their televisions or other technologies (primarily the Internet and radio). See Amy Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 139.

adults in my life; and, yet, I have found that 9/11 continues to shape how my generation interacts with national tragedy and trauma.

My inability to differentiate between lived experience and the memories I have obtained through the experience of others is unsurprising. Cultural analyst E. Ann Kaplan categorizes 9/11 and the spectacle of the attacks as "the supreme trauma of a catastrophe that was experienced globally," and one's response depended on the national and local contexts in which they found themselves.[128] Post-Traumatic Stress in survivors and first responders has been the focus of psychological studies since 9/11; however, more recent studies have begun exploring the trauma of those who experienced the event through television (both nationally and internationally).[129] Further, it is not just those who witnessed 9/11 through a screen who may have forgotten their personal memories of 9/11. Marvin Carlson notes that "even those of us who had seen the actual burning towers began to find our personal images eclipsed by images that were the only visual source for most of the rest of the world."[130] Images, both photographic and televisual, are powerful artifacts. Cultural memory analyst Marita Sturken suggests, "On one hand, photographed, filmed, and videotaped images can embody and create memories; on the other hand, they have the capacity, through the power of their present to obliterate them."[131] Clearly, the iconic images of 9/11 imprinted themselves into our collective and cultural memory. What

[128] E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 2.

[129] Christine Muller, *September 11, 2001 as a Cultural Trauma: A Case Study through Popular Culture* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2017), 16.

[130] Marvin Carlson, "9/11, Afghanistan, Iraq: The Response of the New York Theatre," *Theatre Survey* 45, no. 1 (May 2004): 4, DOI:10.1017/S004055740400002X.

[131] Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 20.

memories, then, do the iconic images of 9/11 that appeared on television screens across the United States in the days following the attacks obliterate, "screen,"[132] or block from view?

I suggest that one set of memories omitted from many Americans' consciousness has been the discrimination and violence directed toward Muslim and Muslim "passing" individuals following 9/11 and continuing today.[133] Specifically, in the case of 9/11, "[the attacks] provided the Bush administration an available schema to demarcate the nation and its others, by projecting the enemy on to countries like Iraq and Afghanistan."[134] Thus, it is unsurprising that people who *looked* like the "enemy" were treated as outsiders and potential threats. Immediately following 9/11, the Patriot Act, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, and the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) targeted Muslims, marking them as potential threats to the nation.[135] In the year following 9/11, "57 percent of American Muslims reported

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[132] "Screen memories," first defined by Sigmund Freud, are "memories that function to hide, or screen out, more difficult memories the subject wants to keep at bay." Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 22.

[133] Rustom Bharucha writes about his experience as "passing" as a Muslim individual post-9/11. He describes "passing" as "a process, a movement which opposes the tendency in identity politics to 'fix' identities within a grid of signs and stereotypes." "Passing" may grant one with certain privileges (e.g., "white passing" allows the "passing" person racial privilege they may not otherwise have access to). Regarding Muslim "passing," however, Bharucha stresses "the situation is different when *one is passed, irreversibly, against one's will*." Indeed, this involuntary and often irreversible "othering" often removes privilege, agency, and intentionality. Rustom Bharucha, *Terror and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 78-79.

[134] Lopamudra Basu, *Ayad Akhtar, the American Nation, and Its Others after 9/11: Homeland Insecurity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019), 4.

[135] These biased programs and laws resulted in search and seizures, surveillance, "voluntary" interviews, and terrorist alerts associated with Islamic holidays. These practices and programs were often ineffective and over-reaching. Further, "though Muslim is a religious label and not a racial one, since 9/11 Muslim American identity has been restructured to reflect the systemic inequality that is readily associated with racial minorities." Michelle D. Byng, "Complex Inequalities: The Case of Muslim Americans After 9/11," *American Behavioral Scientist* 51, no. 5 (January 2008): 659, 662, 665-67, DOI: 10.1177/0002764207307746. For more on racial profiling and violence toward Muslims and Muslim-passing individuals as acts of domestic terrorism, see Alicia Arrizón, "A Forum on Theatre and Tragedy: A Response to September 11, 2001," *Theatre Journal* 54, no. 1 (2002): 117, DOI: 10.1353/tj.2002.0012. For

they experienced bias or discrimination…[and] 48 percent of respondents believe[d] that their lives [had] changed for the worse." Many Muslim (and Muslim-passing) Americans were victims of verbal and physical assaults, xenophobic graffiti, Islamophobia, discriminatory stares, or murdered.[136] It seems as though, particularly on the anniversaries of 9/11, many of us have forgotten the consequences of the national and local laws and anti-terrorism efforts once promoted to protect those deemed non-threatening by government surveillance. How then might we re-remember the effects of 9/11 on the Muslim (and Muslim-passing) community? What is the official memory being shared regarding Muslim American communities after 9/11? Significantly, how has the theatre responded to the social and cultural aftermath of 9/11?

This chapter explores the depiction of the Muslim American and Muslim-passing post-9/11 experiences in official and theatrical contexts. I consider the National September 11 Memorial and Museum the official creator of historical 9/11 narratives, a central archive, and a government-sponsored memory keeper. To counter the official-created narrative, on the other hand, I use two theatrical texts and their respective productions as the unofficial storyteller regarding forgotten 9/11 memory. The productions I consider here are *Come From Away*, the hit Broadway musical by Canadians David Hein and Irene Sankoff, and *Unveiled*, a one-woman play by Rohina Malik. I contend that these plays act as a "site" of memory surrounding the targeting of Muslim and Muslim-passing individuals in the aftermath of 9/11.

Come From Away and *Unveiled* serve as case studies for this chapter for two primary reasons. First, like the plays explored in the subsequent chapters in this dissertation, *Come From*

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more on the NYPD's surveillance programs targeting Muslim Americans, see Diala Shamas, "Living in Houses Without Walls: Muslim Youth in New York City in the Aftermath of 9/11," in *New York after 9/11*, ed. Susan Opotow and Zachary Baron Shemtob (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 206 and 210.

[136] Byng, "Complex Inequalities," 669-670.

Away and *Unveiled* incorporate witness testimony in their respective texts. Most importantly, these productions dramatize the stories of discrimination and violence experienced by Muslims, Muslim Americans, and Muslim-passing individuals in the wake of 9/11. For their musical, *Come From Away*, Hein and Sankoff based their lyrics and dialogue—sometimes word for word—on interviews they conducted with locals from Newfoundland/ "the Rock" and those whose flights were diverted to Newfoundland on September 11, 2001 (also known as "Come From Aways"). Some of those the couple interviewed were Muslims, but most were not. The ensemble musical dramatizes the stories of multiple people (sometimes compiled into a single character). One such character is Ali, who represents the amalgamation of memories of suspicion and tension experienced by several Muslim and Muslim-passing Come From Aways. Similarly, *Unveiled* incorporates the playwright's own experience in the aftermath of 9/11 and that of her friends, family, and acquaintances, together with news reports about discrimination and violence directed at Muslim communities in the United States and in England.

To be sure, neither *Come From Away* or *Unveiled* are examples of perfect theatrical responses to the effects of 9/11 on the Muslim American community. Ideally, these plays would "provide a look into the [Muslim] American culture that displays [Muslim] Americans for who they are—multi-dimensional individuals who are sometimes good, sometimes bad, but mostly compelling." Sometimes Arab/Muslim/Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) playwrights are successful in this endeavor, but sometimes playwrights "reify [negative stereotypes] by restaging several of the negative tropes they so ardently refute."[137] The characters, and the Arab/Muslim/MENA heritage playwrights who write them, are often burdened with dispelling

[137] Michael Malek Najjar, *Arab American Drama, Film, and Performance: A Critical Study, 1908 to the Present* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 2015), Preface, Kindle.

negative stereotypes of Muslim and Arab Americans while confronting systemic discrimination and intolerance in the United States. Arab theatre scholar Michael Malek Najjar argues that "Arab/Muslim Americans are currently faced with an either-or dichotomy that pressures them to choose between their Arab/Muslim heritage/religion and their Americannes."[138] In this way, playwrights may fall into the trap of leaning too far to one side of their identity or the other; or, in the case of non-Arab/Muslim/MENA heritage playwrights, they may write characters that are too "American" or too "Muslim." These plays are, however, still useful in countering Islamophobia and bringing the violence and injustice many Muslim Americans experienced post-9/11 to the forefront of American audiences' consciousness.

Significantly, *Come From Away* and *Unveiled* also avoid retraumatizing audiences through depictions and graphic descriptions of the carnage of 9/11,[139] especially in the immediate years following the attacks. The creators refrained from writing about 9/11 until several years after; *Unveiled* was written and first performed in 2009, and the research from *Come From Away* began on the tenth anniversary of 9/11. Sturken reminds us that official memorialization efforts began to form as early as September 12, 2001. She states, "In some ways, immediate discussion of a memorial allowed people to begin to construct narratives of redemption and to feel as if the horrid event itself was over—containable, already a memory."[140] While immediate memorialization may help us move forward from tragedy, we may not fully

[138] Najjar, *Arab American Drama, Film, and Performance*, "It's not profiling, it's deducation": Post-9/11 Arab American Drama.

[139] Jeanne Colleran asserts, "For understandable reasons—particularly the obscene scale of the attacks in the United States—restaging the violent and excessive aspects of terrorism risks retraumatizing victims and spectators. Then there are the daunting challenges of representing the event without diminishment or aggrandizement." Jeanne Colleran, *Theatre and War: Theatrical Responses since 1991* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 107.

[140] Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 258.

consider the effects of such trauma directly after the event.[141] Freddie Rokem suggests, "When the angel of history is unable to close its wings because of the terrible storm, which Walter Benjamin tongue-in-cheek calls 'progress,' when the smoke and the rubble from the catastrophe have not yet been cleared, it is probably not possible to reflect."[142] Among the numerous "9/11" plays, many such plays were written shortly after the attacks.[143] On the other hand, the creators of *Come From Away* and *Unveiled* had at least eight years to reflect, listen, and watch as the rest of the world responded to 9/11 before writing their respective texts. The time gap between the attacks and the writing of these works allowed the playwrights of *Come From Away* and *Unveiled* to consider much of the aftermath while also grappling with the national and international trauma of 9/11.

To explore how *Come From Away* and *Unveiled* memorialize the experience of Muslims in the post-9/11 United States, I begin my analysis by contextualizing the creation of *Come From Away*. This section provides a production history that points to the sociopolitical and cultural significance of the musical throughout the creative process and subsequent productions. Charting

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[141] Additionally, as Scott Magelssen points out, some feared that a rush to build an official 9/11 memorial would "only offer soothing, celebratory contextualization for the tragedy rather than inviting more complex reflection on trauma and the changing global realities signaled by the attacks." Scott Magelssen, *Performing Flight: From the Barnstormers to Space Tourism* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2020), 120.

[142] The "angel of history" references philosopher Walter Benjamin's quote: "a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them." Freddie Rokem, "A Forum on Theatre and Tragedy: A Response to September 11, 2001," *Theatre Journal* 52, no. 1 (2002): 112, DOI:10.1353/tj.2002.0012.

[143] For example, Neil LaBute's *The Mercy Seat*, one of the most well-known theatrical responses to 9/11, has no witness testimony incorporated in the play and instead acts more as a thought experiment of how one might begin a new life after an immense tragedy. *The Mercy Seat* premiered just over fourteen months after 9/11. Another example is Anne Nelson's *The Guys*, which premiered in December 2001. *The Guys*, a play surrounding a writer and NYFD captain as they write eulogies for firefighters who died on September 11, 2001, incorporates witness testimony, unlike *The Mercy Seat*. However, this testimony features the heroism of first-responders rather than the discrimination of Muslim individuals.

the production history and creative process further indicates how the playwrights, creative team, and *Come From Away*'s audiences have remembered and retrospectively reinterpreted the memory of the aftermath of 9/11. I then examine how memories of discrimination, violence, and suspicion directed toward individuals in the Muslim community are remembered, enacted, and witnessed through performances of *Come From Away*. I follow with a similar production history and examination of *Unveiled*. In both of these analysis sections, I ground my project in the memory frameworks of Multidirectional Memory, Postmemory, and Prosthetic Memory. I then demonstrate how the National September 11 Memorial and Museum depict Muslim Americans and the international Muslim community. I juxtapose the ways memories of discrimination and violence are (or are not) communicated through the theatrical sites of memory and the National September 11 Memorial and Museum. I conclude the chapter by reflecting on "togetherness" and its connection to 9/11 and its aftermath as curated in the memorial and museum.

Theatrical productions can display humanity and kindness and share memories of 9/11. Shortly after the attacks on September 11, 2001, Jill Dolan suggested, "If our imaginations can lead us to profound, performative empathy, I believe ever more strongly that the space of the performance must be harnessed to imagine love instead of hatred, to create hopeful fictions of meaningful lives instead of senseless deaths."[144] The post-9/11 theatre has responded with a similar approach, often including personal experiences and eyewitness testimony and focusing on whatever good one could find after such a tragedy. In the words of Dolan, perhaps the theatre helps us "fill the craters of absence" caused by national trauma.[145]

[144] Jill Dolan, "A Forum on Theatre and Tragedy: A Response to September 11, 2001," *Theatre Journal* 54, no. 1 (2002): 106, DOI: 10.1353/tj.2002.0012.

[145] Dolan, "A Forum on Theatre and Tragedy," 107.

The Arab/Muslim/MENA-descended American theatre responded similarly to the aftermath of 9/11. English professor Suaad M. Alqahtani asserts that many Arab and Muslim American playwrights wrote their post-9/11 plays from their own perspectives as a counter to the stereotypes that thrived in the cultural landscape of post-9/11 America.[146] Najjar agrees; he notes that it was not uncommon for the most well-known Arab American playwrights (Yussef El Guindi, Heather Raffo, Waidi Mouawad, and Najla Said, to name a few) to write about issues of stereotyping, profiling, collective punishment, and other pertinent topics.[147] These playwrights were often forced to humanize Muslim, Arab, MENA, and MENA-descended characters and prove to the American audience that these stereotypes were inaccurate and harmful.[148] Malik bears this burden in her one-woman play, *Unveiled*, as she uses her own perspective and experience to fill counter stereotypes and fill in the gaps of 9/11 memory that are left untold in official memorial capacities. Sankoff and Hein use similar techniques to confront intolerance and othering in their musical.

Come From Away and *Unveiled* both center acts of kindness, community, and unity in their storylines; both portray and describe acts of violence, discrimination, xenophobic rhetoric, and Islamophobia experienced by many Muslim Americans through their Muslim characters. As I will show in the conclusion of this chapter, the National September 11 Memorial and Museum

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[146] Suaad M. Alqahtani, "Post-9/11 Arab American Drama: Voices of Resistance in *Back of the Throat* and *Browntown*," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 38, no. 3 (2018): 394-395, DOI: 10.1080/13602004.2018.1502403.

[147] Michael Jim Najjar, "Contemporary Arab American Theater and Performance in the United States: Restaging and Recasting Arab America in Theater, Film, and Performance," (PhD diss., University of California, 2011), 14 and 62, ProQuest.

[148] See Rana Esfandiary, et al., "2020 ATHE Conference Middle Eastern Theatre Focus Group Roundtable: Pedagogy and Absence," *Theatre Topics* 31, no. 1 (2021): 11, DOI: 10.1353/tt.2021.0008; Najjar, "Contemporary Arab American Theatre and Performance in the United States," 62, 67-69; and Alqahtani, "Post-9/11 Arab American Drama," 397.

avoids thematizing these actions, resulting in the silencing of these memories. The creators of *Come From Away* and *Unveiled* tell uplifting yet insightful stories by incorporating witness testimony gained through personal experience or interviews. Additionally, the characters in both productions speak in first-person narrative, breaking the fourth wall to address the audience directly. These storytelling techniques are especially interesting considering who the target audience was, and is, for both *Come From Away* and *Unveiled*. Like Hein and Sankoff and Malik, Arab/Muslim/MENA American playwrights used their performances to "target wider audiences beyond the Arab American community, trying to shed light on the complexities of these hybrid identities, and to rectify stereotypical misrepresentations portrayed in the media."[149] The theatre was a way for such theatre-makers to reach a broad American audience who may be open to addressing the post-9/11 experience of Muslims and Muslim-passing individuals in the US.[150] Najjar stresses that post-9/11 plays by Arab American playwrights, in particular, served to "educat[e] non-Arab audiences about Arabs, and creat[e] an empathic space within which anti-Arab prejudices and stereotypes can be challenged and overcome."[151] Indeed, Malik and Hein and Sankoff also make dramaturgical and production aesthetic choices that provide the audience an opportunity to empathize with the Muslim characters as they experience discrimination, violence, and harmful rhetoric.

"Something's Missing": Post-9/11 Memory in *Come From Away*

[149] Dalia Basiouny, "The Powerful Voice of Women Dramatists in the Arab American Theatre Movement," (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2009), 5, ProQuest.

[150] Mahmoud F. Alshetawi, "Combating 9/11 Negative Images of Arabs in American Culture: A Study of ussef El Guindi's Drama," *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 7, no. 3 (2020): 178-79, DOI: 10.29333/ejecs/458.

[151] Najjar, *Arab American Drama, Film, and Performance*, "'A psychic civil war onstage': Arab American Solo Performance."

Come From Away is a Broadway musical created by the Canadian couple Irene Sankoff and David Hein. The musical is about an experience in Newfoundland but conjures a specific US-focused meaning and circumstance. *Come From Away* is widely considered a 9/11 musical—though the creative team prefers to think of it as a "9/12" musical[152]—as it takes place on September 11, 2001, and the days that follow. However, as a Canadian musical about 9/11, one may question who the intended audience is. In his analysis of *Come From Away*'s critical reception, theatre scholar Barry Freeman describes his unique relationship to this question as an audience member:

> As an expatriate Newfoundlander watching the performance in Toronto, I felt I occupied a strange position as a spectator: the subject but not the subject, the target but not the target. As much as the musical is about Newfoundland, and as much as it has maintained a relationship with its subject, it is unambiguously calculated for an American audience. Its opening lines anticipate that distant audience, placing the story "On the northeast tip of North America, on an island called Newfoundland," as does the song "Somewhere in the Middle of Nowhere." Clearly, the piece is also a projection of American anxieties, offering an opportunity to reflect on the trauma of 9/11 without looking directly at it, appreciating the goodness it brought out in ordinary people.[153]

[152] Irene Sankoff and David Hein, *Come From Away: Welcome to the Rock* (New York: Hachette Books, 2019), 176.

[153] Barry Freeman, "The Need of a Good Story: Understanding *Come From Away*'s Warm Reception," *Canadian Theatre Review* 171 (July 2017): 57, DOI: 10.3138/ctr.171.010.

After seeing the "post"-COVID-19 pandemic Broadway return of *Come From Away* in October 2021, I agree with Freeman. It is difficult to watch the musical without concretely considering the American sociopolitical context in which *Come From Away* was inspired and situated. Further, Sankoff and Hein both lived in New York City and saw—on television, like most of the world—the United Airlines Flight 175 crash into the South Tower on September 11, 2001. Their experience as New Yorkers influenced the creation of *Come From Away*, as did the use of music to cope with such tragedy and their fear for Hein's cousin who worked in the South Tower (but escaped before its collapse).[154] Further, though Sankoff and Hein were uncertain about the future success of *Come From Away*, it is clear from their first trip to Gander, Newfoundland, that their goal had been to present this piece to an American audience—specifically in New York City.[155]

Interestingly, *Come From Away* is not set in New York City like many other "9/11" productions.[156] Instead, the musical's setting is in Gander, Newfoundland, and its surrounding towns. *Come From Away* is heavily based on a true story beginning with the morning of September 11, 2001, when thirty-eight flights from across Europe destined for airports in the United States made emergency landings at Gander Airport when the US airspace was closed.[157] The episodic plot spans the morning of September 11 to September 16, 2001, including the tension, fear, confusion, and sadness felt, as well as the budding or crumbling relationships that occurred when the population of Gander nearly doubled with international travelers. Characters in the musical include Newfoundlanders and "Come From Aways" / "plane people" / international travelers, played by a small ensemble of actors. Significant for this project, several

[154] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 23-24.
[155] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 8.
[156] See Neil LaBute's *The Mercy Seat* and Anne Nelson's *The Guys*.
[157] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 38-39.

of the "Come from Aways" are from non-European countries; the character of Ali is an Egyptian Muslim, and there are other Muslim and African characters. These characters, particularly Ali, represent those in Newfoundland (and arguably elsewhere) who experienced Islamophobia, xenophobia, and hateful rhetoric during and after 9/11. *Come From Away* critiques this particular response to 9/11 but typically keeps an upbeat and light-hearted approach to the event and various reactions.

The creators of *Come From Away* wrote music that resembled a mix of contemporary and classic, folksy Newfoundlander music. Ian Eisendrath, the musical supervisor and arranger for *Come From Away*, was drawn to the "rhythmic feelings, colors, and harmonic progressions…[and] consistent rhythmic patterns" found in most songs written and performed by Newfoundland musicians.[158] This style of music significantly contributes to the overall tone of the musical: "a casual but energetic 'kitchen party' feeling, as if the cast has gathered with the audience in homes and pubs throughout Newfoundland to share these stories and sing these songs." The energetic and fast-paced narrative and music leave very few moments for the audience to do anything but experience the performance of the cast and musicians.[159] Indeed, the lack of silent moments—even after "Something's Missing," a song exploring the aftermath of 9/11 and the "Come from Away" characters' departure from Newfoundland—prevent the audience from grieving or reflecting on the effects of 9/11 while immersed in the world of the musical. *Come From Away* intends to tell an uplifting story while considering the widely differing experiences and emotions connected to 9/11 and its aftermath.

[158] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 140-41.
[159] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 25 and 142.

Beyond considering the effects of 9/11 on the Muslim and Muslim-passing community, the musical speaks to other historical times of turmoil, nationalism, and xenophobia. J. Kelly Nestruck, a theatre critic at Canada's *The Globe and Mail*, reminds readers that, "at a time when the number of displaced people in the world is at a historical high, worse even than after the Second World War, a story about opening your home to strangers in need—even when they are scared, or you are—could not have arrived at a more crucial moment."[160] Indeed, the hospitality of the Newfoundlanders in *Come From Away* troubles American nationalism, exceptionalism, and prejudice in times when the United States might figuratively open their homes to those that "come from away" in times of crisis. For Sankoff and Hein, the stories they heard during their research for the musical "taught [them] that we can respond to tragedies with kindness and that we don't need to wait for tragedy: We can respond with kindness every day."[161] Responding with compassion is especially relevant considering that xenophobia, Islamophobia, entrapment, and suspicion of Muslim individuals are still problems for the United States twenty years after 9/11.[162]

Cautiously Proceeding with the Creative Process of Come From Away

Come From Away began as Michael Rubinoff, the originating Producer of the musical, introduced Sankoff and Hein to the story of Newfoundlanders who opened their homes and

[160] J. Kelly Nestruck, "Welcome to the Rock," *Come From Away* Digital Lyric Booklet, 8-9, https://alwshowlicensing.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/CFA-digital-lyric-booklet-4-5.pdf.

[161] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 8.

[162] See Basu, *Ayad Akhtar*, 1-2 and Nina Totenberg, "Supreme Court to hear arguments on FBI's surveillance of mosques," *NPR*, November 8, 2021, https://www.npr.org/2021/11/08/1052567444/supreme-court-to-hear-arguments-on-fbis-surveillance-of-mosques.

hearts to international travelers on September 11, 2001. Before approaching Sankoff and Hein, Rubinoff pitched the idea to five other writing teams; these playwrights felt that turning the story into a play or musical was inappropriate and ultimately decided to pass on the opportunity.[163] Sankoff and Hein's interest in the story took them to Gander, Newfoundland, on the tenth anniversary of 9/11. Many "Come from Aways," and Newfoundlanders planned to commemorate the anniversary and celebrate their friendships. Upon their arrival, Sankoff and Hein interviewed as many Come From Aways and "Islanders" as they could, hearing hundreds of stories that would, in some way or another, influence the final product of the musical. Each person they interviewed or listened to a story about inspired at least a fragment of a character's story or personality.

The journey from conducting interviews in Newfoundland to the opening on Broadway was extensive and complex. Sankoff and Hein workshopped *Come From Away* with the Canadian Music Theatre Project at Sheridan College in Ontario, Canada, and Goodspeed Musicals' Festival of New Artists with a cast composed of students from Boston Conservatory at Berklee and The Hartt School of Music in 2012. They presented the musical at the National Alliance of Music Theatre (NAMT) festival in New York City the following year. The creators were nervous about bringing the production to New York: the epicenter of 9/11 trauma, but they received positive feedback and much interest from the festival. Junkyard Dog Productions (founded by Randy Adams, Kenny Alhadeff, Marleen Magnoni Alhadeff, and Sue Frost), the final producers of the musical, approached 5th Avenue Theatre about developing *Come From Away* further in collaboration with Seattle Repertory Theatre. Christopher Ashley—the Artistic Director at La Jolla Playhouse, *Come From Away*'s mentor at NAMT, and the musical's

[163] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 6-7 and 24.

director—also expressed interest in producing *Come From Away* at La Jolla. Preview performances of the musical opened in the spring of 2015 at La Jolla before moving to Seattle for a three-week workshop that winter. At Seattle Repertory, *Come From Away* "broke decades-long-box-office records…(including highest-grossing show and largest single ticket sales day)."[164]

Come From Away was reintroduced to the East Coast in the fall of the following year at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C. The move to D.C. in 2016 carried a significant risk for the creative team. It was the fifteenth anniversary of 9/11, but the country was also experiencing "shifting tectonics of [political and social] current events" with the unforeseen election of Donald J. Trump as President of the United States. Regarding the significant anniversary of 9/11, *Washington Post* critic Peter Marks stated, "The 15th anniversary of the terrorist acts…occurs on Sunday. For anyone with even a faint memory of or connection to those events, the musical by…Irene Sankoff and David Hein will reach into a place in your gut you may have wanted left undisturbed."[165] To ease into presenting the musical to an East Coast audience, the creative team and cast previewed *Come From Away* at Ford's Theatre "for survivors of the Pentagon attack and families of some of the victims." There were also two additional performances on September 11, 2016, followed by a talk-back with Kevin Tuerff, who was a "Come From Away" on September 11, 2001, after the matinee performance.[166] The musical, overall, was met with a positive response which made it clear that "even the most deeply affected American audiences would embrace the show and its message."[167] Assured that American audiences would respond

[164] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 52-56, 85, and 174-75.
[165] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 176.
[166] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 176.
[167] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 177.

well to the musical, *Come From Away* began to prepare for productions in Newfoundland, Canada, and New York City.

In October 2016, *Come From Away* returned to Gander for two benefit concert performances.[168] The production moved to Toronto, Canada, for an eight-week sold-out run at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in November 2016.[169] *Come From Away* opened on Broadway on March 12, 2017. Before opening the production to the public, a special preview was given to invited New York City first responders to test their reactions to the musical. In the eyes of the creative team, the response from this particular audience would determine the success of *Come From Away* in New York City; if first responders were comfortable with the musical, others would be too. *Come From Away* became a "safe" production to see regardless of whether one was still healing from 9/11.[170] The musical continues to run in New York City at the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre, but the global COVID-19 pandemic forced the production to take a hiatus before returning in the fall of 2021.[171]

Come From Away has received mass critical acclaim. The musical and creative team won several regional theatre and Best Musical awards across North America while produced in San Diego, Seattle, Washington, D.C., Toronto, and New York City. *Come From Away* was nominated for seven Tony Awards, winning one for Best Direction of a Musical.[172] Among these accolades, the vast majority of critics positively review the musical. Ben Brantley, the *New York*

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[168] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 186-187.
[169] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 212.
[170] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 214-15.
[171] There are currently four other companies of *Come From Away*: productions at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto, the Phoenix Theatre in London, and tours in Australia/New Zealand and North America. *Come From Away* was also performed at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, Ireland, from December 2018 through January 2019. Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 7 and 221.
[172] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 220.

Times chief drama critic, wrote that "[*Come From Away*] is as honorable in its intentions as it is forthright in its sentimentality. And it may provide just the catharsis you need in an American moment notorious for dishonorable and divisive behavior."[173] Indeed, many critics point to the musical's ability to speak to current events beyond 9/11. Jonathan Abarbanel from the *Windy City Times* notes, "With the United States flush with bigotry, mendacity, megalomania and bullying from the White House down, it's ennobling—and chastening—to see a Canadian musical that celebrates generosity, kindness, selflessness, courtesy and good humor." Of course, such criticism of the state of affairs and character of the United States can leave one saddened and disheartened. "Ironically," Abarbanel continues, "some will contend that America's churlish [behavior] now descends directly from the then of 9/11."[174] We can see how current examples of xenophobia and Islamophobia may have escalated since 9/11.[175]

As I watched *Come From Away* in the fall of 2021, I was surprised by how emotionally drawn into the performance I was. I felt as if I, too, was a "Come From Away," re-experiencing 9/11 as an adult rather than a child. As it was intended, I felt like I was sharing stories with a friend in their home rather than watching a performance. This is a common experience among audiences. Director Christopher Ashley states, "I've never watched an audience watch a show

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[173] Ben Brantley, "Review: 'Come From Away,' a Canadian Embrace on a Grim Day," *New York Times,* March 12, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/12/theater/come-from-away-review.html.

[174] Jonathan Abarbanel, review of *Come From Away*, by Irene Sankoff and David Hein, Cadillac Palace Theatre, Chicago, *Windy City Times*, August 7, 2019, 24, https://www.windycitytimes.com/m/APPredirect.php?AID=66728

[175] Scholarly work on *Come From Away* is scarce. Barry Freeman's article in *Canadian Theatre Review* and a master's thesis written by Laine Cosette Zizka exploring narratives of the Newfoundland community during and after 9/11 are the primary examples in the English language of scholarship on the musical prior to this dissertation. Laine Cosette Zizka, "You Are Here: Narrative Construction of Identity and Community Resilience in Newfoundland During and After 9/11" (Master's Thesis, Texas Christian University, 2021), ProQuest.

the way I think most audiences watch this one. Most Americans, I think, who were of age during the attacks have a very specific set of memories. They know where they were in their own story. I've never seen a show that operates that way before."[176] *Come From Away* triggers one's own set of memories (even those as limited as mine).

Nevertheless, it also deftly reminds us of the things we may have forgotten: the Muslim community's discrimination, exclusion, and prejudice worldwide, especially in the United States. In the sections that follow, I examine *Come From Away* and the creators' ability to incorporate the testimony of passengers who witnessed or experienced discrimination and exclusion in the days that followed 9/11 while evoking an empathetic response from the audience. I also consider *Come From Away*'s potential for confronting contemporary examples of Islamophobia and xenophobia in the United States.

Testimonial Witnessing in Come From Away

Sankoff and Hein were concerned with accuracy and wanted to authentically portray the experience of facing a national trauma while far from home, with little information available. Due to their desire for authenticity, *Come From Away* may be classified as verbatim theatre; most of the lyrics, dialogue, and story are taken directly from Sankoff and Hein's interviews.[177] They included several moments in their musical, based on the interviews the writing duo held, that described and enacted the discrimination and fear experienced by several Muslim individuals diverted to Newfoundland on September 11, 2001.

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[176] Chris Ashley, *Come From Away: Welcome to the Rock*, ed. Irene Sankoff and David Hein (New York: Hachette Books, 2019), 217.

[177] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 47.

The examples of exclusion and suspicion in *Come From Away* primarily revolve around one Muslim character, Ali. According to Sankoff, "Ali is inspired by at least five people, some through second-hand reports, some through interviews, and our friend Amal, a Muslim woman…who taught us how to pray."[178] Ali is the only named Muslim character and represents many Muslim and Muslim-passing people affected by the aftermath of 9/11. He is not a main character in the musical, but circles the periphery, only stepping to the forefront in moments of tension and crisis. Admittedly, Ali's two-dimensionality is less than ideal; the audience is unaware of the complexity of the people and contexts that inspired the character. Ali's presence, however, still challenges the xenophobic mindsets and ignorance of the post-9/11 experience of Muslim Americans that may be present in *Come From Away's* audience. As Ali experiences discrimination and Islamophobia and becomes the subject of other Come from Aways' anxiety, fear, and anger, the audience is encouraged to witness his pain and empathize with him.

In the song "Darkness and Trees," we learn that Ali was detained and interrogated (presumably because he is an Egyptian Muslim) at the Gander airport. This scene comes from the journal of Beverly Bass, an American airlines pilot. Sankoff states that Bass's crew became suspicious of two men and promptly searched them as Bass observed. While the men's religion is unknown, Sankoff and Hein interviewed a Muslim man who was also detained and searched.[179] Additionally, this scene may have been influenced by Sankoff and Hein's hindsight that dozens of "suspects" were arrested directly after 9/11 at the JFK and LaGuardia airports in New York. Sankoff and Hein remind us that "As more information came in about the hijackers and their methods, security was ratcheted up in new and unprecedented ways every moment.

[178] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 129.
[179] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 156.

There was a scalpel-fine edge between vigilance and paranoia in every aspect of American life."[180]

During the songs "Prayer" and "On the Edge," other passengers become fearful and suspicious of Ali as he prays and speaks with his family (in a non-English, likely Arabic, language) on the phone. These two scenes were based on stories Sankoff and Hein heard as tensions rose between the Come from Aways: One host witnessed an argument in their living room between two American passengers, one who blamed Muslims and one who was Muslim. The Muslim American explained, "It's not all Muslim[s]."[181] Sankoff and Hein also learned of some Come from Aways who became suspicious of Middle Eastern passengers they overheard speaking in Arabic.[182] While tensions eventually defused, these are clear examples of suspicion, discrimination, and Islamophobia memorialized through Sankoff and Hein's creation of Ali.

Additionally, in "Something's Missing," Ali explains that his daughter is frightened to go back to school. One could interpret this as a child being traumatized by the news coverage of 9/11 and concern for her father who was unable to come home for several days; however, it is more likely that Ali's daughter was also experiencing and witnessing acts of violence and discrimination. Significantly, Sankoff and Hein further invalidate the suspicion of and prejudice toward the Muslim community by revealing that Ali is a chef at a hotel and willing to help the Newfoundlanders with food preparation despite the treatment he has experienced by other passengers.[183] During the interview process, these stories were shared with Sankoff and Hein and

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[180] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 149.
[181] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 131.
[182] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 123.
[183] Some may suggest that Ali's willingness to prepare food for those who have wronged him forces him into the "either-or" dichotomy that Najjar speaks to. Ali (and thus Hein and Sankoff) may have chosen to depict himself as a "good" and passive Muslim man as opposed to the violent terrorists responsible for 9/11, which may indeed further trap him into this dichotomy.

incorporated into the musical for the audience to witness. In doing so, Sankoff and Hein allow the audience to connect with a character who encounters circumstances beyond the audience's lived experience.

The characters break the fourth wall and directly address the audience to develop further the connection between the characters and the audience. Freeman praises this apt storytelling technique stating, "the characters speak directly to the audience throughout, giving the impression that the citizens of Gander and the so-called "plane people" are telling stories to the audience at a local shed party."[184] This theatrical strategy encourages the audience to feel as if the memories of the Come from Aways and Newfoundlanders are being told directly to the individual audience member. In this sense, the audience is collecting prosthetic memories directly from the eyewitness's mouth and, through the verbatim theatre technique, is shared authentically with the audience. The witness testimony is significantly more potent and affective primarily because of the intimate experience of the audience's engagement with the characters, music, and theatrical environment.[185]

The audience may connect emotionally with all of the characters, but the prejudice Ali experiences invites an empathetic response from the audience. We witness other characters' suspicions and Ali's degrading encounters with other passengers. The audience is meant to carry these moments in the play with them as they leave the theatre. Still, it is essential to acknowledge that the audience did not experience the Islamophobia and xenophobia Ali faced. Like the

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I suggest that, for the primarily white American audience present at any given Broadway performance of *Come From Away*, Ali's preparation of food may be a way for some audience members to accept Ali's humanity and reconsider their internal Islamophobia.

[184] Freeman, "Need for a Good Story," 54.

[185] See Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 28-29 for the sensuous and experiential nature of film, similar to *Come From Away*'s use of witness testimony.

experiential museums Landsberg refers to, *Come From Away* provides the audience with a "collective opportunity of having an experiential relationship to a…past they did not experience…While these experiences are not…an 'actual' experience of remembered events—they are nevertheless acutely felt."[186] We witness these memories dramatized in the musical and may be inspired to respond to the prejudice and discrimination of others outside the theatre.

Come From Away*'s Opposition to Islamophobia Fifteen and Twenty Years After 9/11*

The timing of *Come From Away*'s arrival to Broadway was fortuitous. The events, spoken lines, and lyrics of the musical had significance to the current events at the time and still challenge audiences in our contemporary moment. Sankoff and Hein note that "By the time *Come From Away* was playing a solid eight preview performances a week at the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre on West 45th Street, there was a significant sea change in the culture; there was a new presidential administration. It would profoundly affect the show's message and its perception."[187] In light of former President Trump's "Muslim ban," which suspended immigration from several Muslim countries, *Come From Away* took on a different meaning for American audiences: "The show arrived on Broadway early in this new presidential administration that asked a lot of people to think about what it means to be an American and what our posture is going to be going forward to people that are unlike us…for Canadians, the show is a point of pride, but for Americans it's a point of hope."[188] More than a year after the "Muslim ban" was lifted by President Joseph R. Biden, the United States remains in as much turmoil and animosity as it was at the beginning of the Trump administration. In light of this,

[186] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 33.
[187] Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 215.
[188] Michael Paulson, in Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 215.

Christopher Ashley declared, "I don't think there's a lot of signs that we're going to be magically living in an incredibly generous and amicable movement over the next ten years. That's why we need a story about the importance of taking care of each other. I think that *Come From Away* will mean different things to different people at different times, but its pertinence is not likely to go away."[189]

Indeed, *Come From Away* has spoken to several different time periods, and the memories shared in the musical are retrospectively reinterpreted for the present moment. As Rothberg asserts, "a given memory rarely functions in a single way or means only one thing…powerful social, political, and psychic forces articulate themselves in every act of remembrance."[190] As new instances of discrimination, racism, and xenophobia creep into the American social landscape, cultural interventions such as *Come From Away* may help us navigate these turbulent times. However, perhaps more significantly are these artistic interventions' ability to prompt our collective re-remembering of nationally traumatic events while also reshaping what facets of an event we choose to remember. *Come From Away* and other theatrical memorials can reconstruct our cultural memory by their inclusion of narratives that have gone largely untold in other, more official memorials.

Personal Memories of Islamophobia Shared in Rohina Malik's *Unveiled*

Rohina Malik's *Unveiled* is a one-woman play about five Muslim women's experiences after 9/11.[191] Malik's experience as a Chicago-based, London-born and raised woman of

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[189] Christopher Ashley, in Sankoff and Hein, *Welcome to the Rock*, 90.

[190] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 16.

[191] Megan Stahl suggests that though *Unveiled* is sometimes considered an Arab American drama, describing the play as a Muslim American drama is more accurate as the "narrative concentrates on the particularities and misperceptions of Islamic practices after

Pakistani-Indian heritage influences her five characters. Malik's characters come from varying backgrounds and locations. The five-episode play features a different Muslim woman in each episode who narrates a specific memory of the aftermath of 9/11 while serving a particular tea to a guest. Maryam, a Pakistani immigrant in Chicago, serves chocolate chai tea in Part One. Noor, a Moroccan-American woman born in Chicago, serves her guest Moroccan mint tea in Part Two. Part Three features Inez, an African-American Texan who converted/ "reverted" to Islam, who serves kahwa saide. A South-Asian rapper, Shabana, serves her guest Kashmiri chai during an interview in West London. Finally, Layla, a Palestinian immigrant in the Chicago suburbs, serves shay bil Maramiya in Part Five. Each tea has a special meaning or is culturally relevant to the character associated with the tea. In this way, Malik also educates her audience on cultural differences rather than creating a Muslim monolith. Further, serving tea is a global act of hospitality, whether in Pakistan, London, or the American South.

There is a deep history of Arab, Muslim, MENA, and MENA-heritage playwrights writing about food to connect to both their non-Arab/Muslim/MENA audiences and their own communities. Dalia Basiouny writes,

> Many Arab American writers foregrounded their Arabness by writing about food. Much of the poetry, short stories, and fiction published in the second part of the twentieth century revolved around a central image of preparing, cooking, or consuming food provided by the mother, the grandmother and sometimes the father…. Writing about food provided a safe way to create connections with their home culture; at the same time food

September 11." Megan Stahl, "Arab and Muslim American Female Playwrights: Resistance and Revision Through Solo Performance" (PhD diss., Tufts University, 2016), 27-28, ProQuest.

> was a bridge to the American reader, who might not have experienced much Arabic culture apart from the food that was being popularized in the new international cuisine: hummus, falafel, and grape leaves. Consuming the food/culture of the other (Arabs) created a sense of familiarity and common points of reference that Arab American writers used to normalize their experiences and to find an entry point to reach their readers.[192]

By serving tea to her invisible guests as she embodies each character, Malik acquaints her audience with a cultural tradition. More importantly, this act functions so that Malik may be able to emotionally connect with her audience as she unravels the post-9/11 memories transmitted through *Unveiled*'s performance. This is a dramaturgical strategy Malik employs to tie each episode of the play together and acknowledge similarities across cultures.

Malik scripts her play so that the audience will embody the guest in each scene; thus, the audience operates as a witness to the stories told by the characters. Additionally, each character in *Unveiled* wears a hijab, signaling their Muslim faith to both the audience and the unseen antagonists in the play. Particularly after 9/11, many non-Muslim Americans associated hijabs and other forms of traditional dress with violence, terrorism, terrorist-sympathizers, and patriarchal control. However, Malik's characters enact ways that oppose the stereotypes placed on Muslim women after 9/11.[193] The act of witnessing these stories, the metaphor of the hijab, and the intimate staging are designed to draw attention to the danger of stereotypes and the similarities rather than differences between the audience and the characters (and thus, the people they symbolize). The purpose of the play can be summarized in a few lines from Layla, the final

[192] Basiouny, "The Powerful Voice of Women Dramatists," 10.
[193] Stahl, "Arab and Muslim American Female Playwrights," 74-75.

storyteller in *Unveiled*: "GET TO KNOW ME!... You see, I wear [a] veil on my head, but my heart is not covered…Remove [the] veil from your heart, and you will realize, that we are one."[194]

The Creative Process of Unveiled

Malik partially bases her characters and their stories on her own experience and the experience of others. Malik asserts that by incorporating actual events in her imaginative writings, the audience can learn a lesson from the experience of others, liberating them from repeating the same mistakes that were made in the past. Malik writes, "I wrote *Unveiled* because I was tired of the negative images of my community that I saw on television, theater and film…. I realized that a hate crime never begins with a weapon. A hate crime begins with an atmosphere where negative stereotypes about a group of people, and degrading language, are allowed to existand [sic] grow."[195] After 9/11, Arabs and Muslims were presented in film and television as terrorists and predisposed to violence while being continually portrayed as potential suspects for crimes by the US news media. Like other Muslim and Arabic artists, Malik felt "a responsibility to present a more accurate depiction of [Muslim] identity" beyond that of "terrorist," potential threat, or "terrorist-sympathizer."[196]

In her dissertation exploring playwrights who question and contradict stereotypes of Muslim and Arabic women, Megan Stahl uses solo performance as a method to critique such stereotypes and collective or monolithic identity. She suggests that *Unveiled* offers "a multitude

[194] Rohina Malik, "Unveiled" (unpublished script, 2016), 29, PDF file.

[195] Rohina Malik, "Note from Rohina Malik," in *Unveiled* playbill (Watertown, MA: New Rep Theatre, 2021), 4.

[196] Dalia Basiouny, "Descent as Dissent: Arab American Theatrical Responses to 9/11," in *Political Protest Theatre after 9/11: Patriotic Dissent*, ed. Jenny Spencer (New York: Routledge, 2012), 144.

of female characters who question and contradict such generalizations." *Unveiled* belongs to an extensive collection of theatrical works incorporating resistance and revision "as a means of being witness to the contemporary realities of Arab and Muslim American women."[197] Like Malik, other Muslim playwrights used solo performances, often based on their perspectives, to communicate their experiences to a broader, non-Muslim/Arab audience. Whereas earlier Arab American playwrights wrote for their own Arab and immigrant communities, contemporary playwrights tend to write with a broader audience in mind to demonstrate the intersectional facets of the playwright's identity and address inaccurate and harmful stereotypes.[198] In performing *Unveiled* for a non-Muslim audience, Malik joins her contemporaries in challenging her audience to reflect on their misconceptions of Muslim women.

Malik's consideration of her audience and what experience she would like them to have is evident soon after the performance begins. Stahl astutely notes, "Given that her play premiered and has been primarily performed in the United States, Malik is likely addressing audiences that are largely American (though racially and ethnically diverse, depending on the area), and therefore personally familiar with the national response to September 11."[199] Malik alludes to 9/11 but does not reenact or graphically describe the attacks—it is assumed that the audience has a frame of reference for the attacks and at least a minimal amount of knowledge of the surge of Islamophobia and xenophobia after 9/11. Significantly, while Malik assumes this knowledge, she educates her audience on elements of Islam and the importance of distinguishing between an individual and the collective.[200] Malik further educates her audience during the dialogue/talk-

[197] Stahl, "Arab and Muslim American Female Playwrights," 3-4.
[198] Basiouny, "Descent as Dissent," 145.
[199] Stahl, "Arab and Muslim American Female Playwrights," 75.
[200] Stahl, "Arab and Muslim American Female Playwrights," 87.

back after each performance. Malik strives to create an environment where no audience member leaves her performance without gaining some previously-unknown knowledge, appreciation, and understanding of Islam and the Muslim community.

Unveiled first premiered at the 16th Street Theater from April to June 2009; a run followed this production at Victory Gardens Theater in collaboration with 16th Street Theater a year later. Widely produced in the Chicago area, Malik has also performed her one-woman play across the United States, including in New York City (June 2015). Moreover, *Unveiled* premiered in South Africa at The Grahamstown Arts Festival and the 969 Festival in Johannesburg.[201] The play was translated into French in 2011 after hijabs, and other traditional head coverings were banned for women while working in the public sector in France.[202] *Unveiled* is praised for providing a voice to those the theatre and other forms of media have historically ignored. While some note that the piece is unsurprising in its message, the play generally receives positive reviews and has been described as "upbeat and very enjoyable."[203] Importantly, *Unveiled* also highlights the injustice and discrimination experienced by many Muslim and Muslim-passing Americans through dramatized personal memories.

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[201] While the playwright usually performs all five characters in *Unveiled*, Gulshan Mia performed the characters at the South African festivals. Malik, "Production History," "Unveiled."

[202] Manya A. Brachear, "Playwright revisits her teen years: Actress takes her play about Muslim women to Niles North," *Chicago Tribune*, May 19, 2011, 8, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2011-05-19-ct-met-muslim-playwright-20110519-story.html. Additionally, the French Senate passed a law that banned anyone under eighteen from wearing a hijab in public in early 2021. See Eleanor Beardsley, "French Senate Voted To Ban The Hijab For Minors In A Plea By The Conservative Right," *NPR*, April 8, 2021, https://www.npr.org/2021/04/08/985475584/french-senate-voted-to-ban-the-hijab-for-minors-in-a-plea-by-the-conservative-ri.

[203] Chris Jones, "5 Muslim women charmingly 'Unveiled' but not revealed," *Chicago Tribune*, March 27, 2010, 18, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

A Generational Trauma: A Muslim Playwright's Testimony

Malik belongs to a particular group of Muslim American playwrights who were old enough to witness and remember the aftermath of 9/11. Writing about the post-9/11 work of other South Asian, Arab, and Muslim playwrights, Lopamudra Basu notes that these writers "[belong] to a generation experiencing what Marianne Hirsch describes as post-memory of the actual trauma, after the immediate impact. There have been a number of other works that have emerged…that represent not only experiences of trauma and loss following the terrorist attacks but also the aftereffects of the attacks…."[204] Like many of her contemporaries, Malik's *Unveiled* speaks to the aftershock of 9/11. Writing after the initial event and waiting until after the dust had settled granted Malik hindsight on how other Americans would respond to Muslim and Muslim-passing individuals after 9/11. However, those who wrote plays shortly after the attacks could not foresee the broader repercussions of 9/11.

Further, while Malik began writing several years after the attacks, we may consider Malik and her contemporaries as first-generation, rather than second or post-generation, witnesses to discrimination and Islamophobia after 9/11. As Malik includes her own memories of discrimination, she becomes part of the generation of Muslim Americans who were "there" and personally impacted by prejudice. Her audiences, then, become part of the postmemory generation and inherit her memories through the dramatization of her testimony.

Though Malik freely uses her imagination in her playwrighting, the overarching stories in *Unveiled* are based on her reality.[205] The fear Malik experienced after 9/11 permeates her script and performance. As Malik left her home in the days after the attacks, she "wore a hat instead of

[204] Basu, *Ayad Akhtar*, 9-10.
[205] Malik, "Note from Playwright," "Unveiled," 4.

a hijab." For years after, Malik felt self-conscious about her faith.[206] The hijab becomes an important and subversive symbol in *Unveiled*. By keeping all five characters in hijabs during the play, Malik "[Frames] the hijab as the central point of conflict…[highlighting] the discrepancy between the Western treatment of the hijab as a symbol of collective identity and the reality of what the headscarf actually means in terms of identity formation for Muslim women."[207] In this way, Malik is "attempting to negotiate the multiplicity of her affiliations and what they mean to her—as well as in the eyes of the world—in the wake of September 11."[208] While working through her identity as a Muslim woman and an American identity, Malik educates her audience through her own lived experience.

The five Muslim women in *Unveiled* each recall vivid memories of when they experienced discrimination or assault in the aftermath of 9/11. These stories are inspired by the experience of Malik, her family, and her friends. In Part One, Malik's Maryam tells the guest/audience that she used to make wedding dresses, but she no longer creates them after a verbal and near physical assault. As previously stated, Maryam re-performs the altercation, noting the attacker's Islamophobic phrases, such as "You A-rabs are all terrorists."[209] As Noor, a lawyer, prepares her recently assaulted client for trial, she describes two separate incidents in Part Two. First, Noor tells her client (the audience) that her husband, Joe, once protected her from some boys in college who called her religious slurs and tried to remove her hijab.[210] Noor

[206] Brachear, "Playwright revisits her teen years," 8.
[207] Stahl, "Arab and Muslim American Female Playwrights," 78.
[208] Stahl, "Arab and Muslim American Female Playwrights," 119.
[209] Malik, "Unveiled," 7-10.
[210] Malik, "Unveiled," 14.

also heartbreakingly describes how two men murdered Joe and then beat and attempted to rape her.[211]

In the third episode of the play, Inez describes how quickly her non-Muslim friends, neighbors, and acquaintances villainized her after 9/11. As Inez, a converted, Black Texan, watches the news on September 11, 2001, in a public place, she quickly notices the temperament of those around her and the hatred, like lasers, coming from their eyes.[212] Stahl asserts that Inez "address[es] the swiftness with which much of the United States began to frame a Muslim woman's veil as symbolic of the ideology that proved the September 11 attacks."[213] For example, Inez describes the terror many who wore religious head coverings felt; she tells the audience about a Sikh man in Arizona murdered by a "Patriot" for wearing a turban. Shabana, a London rapper, describes her mother's fear for Shabana's safety when she chose to wear a hijab in public in Part Four. Her mother voices her worst fears: "It's dangerous! Ever since the vote to leave, the racist people have gone crazy. You saw what they did to the mosque. They hated us before, but now they think they have [an] excuse to do what they like. The world has changed Shabana. It is not safe."[214] Finally, in Part Five, Layla, a mother of young children, describes her experience on September 11, 2001. Layla not only reveals that her brother had heroically run into the Twin Towers, but she enacts her response to a verbal and physical assault as she picks up her children from school.[215]

While Malik addresses and describes several forms of violence, discrimination, and Islamophobia in each of her scenes, she does not dwell on the negativity of these actions.

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[211] Malik, "Unveiled," 16-17.
[212] Malik, "Unveiled," 20-21.
[213] Stahl, "Arab and Muslim American Female Playwrights," 118.
[214] Malik, "Unveiled," 24.
[215] Malik, "Unveiled," 27-29.

Instead, she gives each of her characters moments of power in which they choose to stand up for themselves and what they believe. Malik gives her protagonists control, actively disrupting stereotypes of Muslim women. In Part One, Maryam chooses to make another wedding dress after swearing that she would never make another after being harassed and threatened. Noor tells her client/the audience how she once had to testify against the men who murdered her husband, stating, "You have to speak, your words, they have power…. You have tasted the bitterness of evil, now taste the sweetness of hope."[216] Inez's strength comes from accepting that she was forced to remove her hijab to protect herself on September 11. She asserts that her rights were taken from her as she chose between her safety and her faith. In Part Four, Shabana's power comes from her rap:

> My name Shabana.
>
> Not Osama.
>
> Not Bin Laden.
>
> I'm not a bomber.
>
> South Asian Londoner,
>
> Wrong skin color.
>
> London's callin.
>
> Callin me a Paki.
>
> Terrorist Iraqi.
>
> Sorry, Wrong country.[217]

[216] Malik, "Unveiled," 18.
[217] Malik, "Unveiled," 22.

Distinguishing between herself and the actual terrorists and masterminds of 9/11 gives Shabana agency. Later in the rap, Shabana notes that after the Oklahoma City bombing, Americans did not blame all Christians but instead only focused on Timothy McVeigh, the bomber. Additionally, her choice to continue to wear the hijab, despite her mother's fear and objection, empowers her. In Part Five, Layla defends herself and others when a man attacks a Muslim woman outside of her children's school/mosque. While pleading with the man to get to know her and see her as a human being, Layla educates him on the differences between Islam and the extremist beliefs the terrorists held. All of these women are empowered by their choices in their own ways. Arguably, Malik is also empowered by sharing her story with the audience.

The Role of the Audience: Collector of Prosthetic Memories

The function of the audience is critical to the effectiveness of the testimony and act of witnessing in *Unveiled*. The audience plays a specific role: the listener and receiver of a witness's testimony. In the play, the audience embodies the guest the characters serve tea. In some cases, the audience becomes witness to the trauma experienced by the characters. In Part One, Malik, as Maryam, "speaks the lines of both [Maryam] and [Maryam's harasser] as though the exchange is occurring in the present."[218] Whereas the other characters in the play tell a story through traditional narration, Maryam vocally re-performs her experience. The audience listens and watches as Maryam is verbally abused and threatened.

[218] Stahl, "Arab and Muslim American Female Playwrights," 80.

Even in scenes wherein the characters do not perform their experience for the audience but simply narrate their stories, the audience bears witness to the effects of these experiences. For example, Noor recounts the murder of Joe, her husband:

> It was Friday evening as I drove into the college parking lot. Joe was going to meet me there…. But when I got out of my car, he wasn't there…. I saw a group of boys beating Joe. Joe saw me, and he screamed "RUN!" I tried to run as fast as I could, but two of the boys grabbed me and pulled me behind the building where Joe was. They had knives. Three of them pinned me to the floor and someone punched me in the face (Pause)…. I was screaming and begging them to stop. But they kept saying, "No mercy for terrorists."[219]

Noor does not re-embody the attack as she describes it to her guest. Still, the audience embodies the guest and becomes a witness, part of the postmemory generation to the Islamophobia and violence directed at Muslims in the United States post-9/11. Malik's consistent breaking of the fourth wall to speak directly to the audience compounds the audience's role as a witness. If one listens to the memories carefully, they may leave the theatre with a sense of empathy.

When the memories shared directly to the audience relate to the xenophobia and Islamophobia that Muslim characters (and consequently real Muslim individuals) experience onstage, the audience begins to empathize with the character. To be sure, the audience does not experience the discrimination that the characters do; the audience is simply a witness to these moments. However, the memories shared by the characters in *Unveiled* should "suture"

[219] Malik, "Unveiled," 16.

themselves to the audience like a prosthetic limb. After encountering these memories, the audience should leave the theatre with new knowledge and hopefully empathy for the experience of many Muslim Americans.

Confronting Intolerance by Crossing Time and Space

Situating her play in multiple locations, including Chicago, the US South, and London, Malik speaks to issues of intolerance, Islamophobia, and exclusion across numerous spaces. In doing so, Malik indicates that discrimination and hate are not isolated to any one geographic region. *Unveiled* is relevant to all audiences regardless of the location where they may live. Moreover, Malik does not situate the play in a particular time; it is unclear whether the audience encounters each character a year after 9/11, ten years later, or in 2022. Instead, the vague reference to time in *Unveiled* indicates that intolerance and discrimination are still ongoing problems in the United States. *Unveiled* is as pertinent now as in 2009 when Malik wrote the play.

Unveiled speaks to contemporary events while maintaining the relevance of 9/11 to the narrative. Indeed, as Rothberg argues, "In 'making the past present,' recollections and representations of personal or political history inevitably mix multiple moments in time and multiple sites of remembrance; making the past present opens the doors of memory to intersecting pasts and undefined futures."[220] Malik mixes the past (the direct aftermath of 9/11) with recent events. The play addressed the French law banning hijabs in public workspaces in 2011 when *Unveiled* was translated into French and confronted the continuation of Islamophobia

[220] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 35.

and unjustified surveillance in the United States in 2021; all the while, the aftermath of 9/11 lies ominously underneath the surface.

Stahl notes that when Malik performs Unveiled now, she "engag[es] with very different sociopolitical circumstances. Thus, the performative reflexivity of the work, the way in which the [performer] relate[s] to the material and the effect it has on the perception of their own hybrid identit[y] has likely shifted over time."[221] Significantly, the audience's reception of the play may have also shifted as social, political, and cultural circumstances in the United States have changed over time. I suggest that *Unveiled* has an even more profound significance today as it speaks to broader issues such as hate crimes and xenophobia. The play confronts the current sociopolitical climate in which Jewish and non-white Americans and immigrants continue to be targets of violence and intolerance in the United States. Still, the Muslim American and Muslim-passing experience in the aftermath of 9/11 is omnipresent in *Unveiled*.

As *Unveiled* and *Come From Away* continue to take on new relevance in the United States, I suggest we consider their role as a site of memory to racially and religiously-driven trauma. These theatrical texts and productions confront issues of discrimination, exclusion, and intolerance across the United States while drawing connections between the contemporary moment and the past. As *Come From Away* tours across the United States and continues performances in New York and productions of *Unveiled* continue in person, and virtually, the theatrical memorial these performances represent can reach a broad audience, expanding the postmemory generation. *Come From Away* and *Unveiled* shed light on memories that many may have preferred to forget; the National September 11 Memorial and Museum still keep such memories hidden in the shadows of the archive (if present at all). As Sodaro argues, "Since its

[221] Stahl, "Arab and Muslim American Female Playwrights," 98.

opening, the museum has exceeded four million visitors and promises to impart a particular 'prosthetic memory' of 9/11 to many millions of visitors in coming years. However, the danger is that this memory will strengthen the kind of outsider/insider division and triumph of the glorious nation that can contribute to new forms of twenty-first-century violence…."[222] Now that I have indicated how we might consider theatrical text and performance as a site of memory, I will turn to the widely-considered official site of 9/11 memory: the National September 11 Memorial and Museum. The museum effectively memorializes the victims of 9/11, while displaying an extensive archive of historical and emotionally-jarring artifacts, both clear goals of the memorial and museum. Unfortunately, despite the efforts to curate a narrative of survival, comradery, and a collective rise from the dust of national trauma, the aftermath of 9/11 on the American Muslim community largely goes unexplored and unexplained in a site meant to contextualize and memorialize a national tragedy.

The 9/11 Museum and its Contextualization of the Muslim Community

From the beginning of its conception, the curators and designers of the National September 11 Memorial and Museum were torn between who, what, and how the memorial and museum would commemorate those murdered at the World Trade Center complex, including those who died during the February 26, 1993, terrorist attack. The memorial became an "all-encompassing memorial site" commemorating those that died in the 1993 attack and the Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania, and New York City 9/11 victims.[223] Further, the Memorial

[222] Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity*, 161.

[223] Karen Wilson Baptist, "Incompatible Identities: Memory and Experience at the National September 9/11 Memorial and Museum," *Emotion, Space, and Society* 16 (August 2015): 4, DOI: 10.1016/j.emospa.2015.05.003.

Mission Statement stated that the goal of the museum and memorial was to "Remember and honour [sic] the thousands of innocent men, women, and children murdered by terrorists" at the site, as well as recognize the courage, compassion, and good deeds that sprung from 9/11, and be an inspiration to end "hatred, ignorance, and intolerance."[224] The museum was created with four critical commitments: preservation, commemoration, education, and inspiration. It is "Dedicated to documenting the history of a transformative global event, the Museum presents objects and stories from those who witnessed and experienced the terrorist attacks and the aftermath of 9/11 firsthand."[225] The museum acts as a companion to the memorial and "provides a permanent record not only of what happened that day but of the events leading up to it, the recovery efforts, and the ongoing and ever-evolving effects of those attacks on our world today." Further, Joe Daniels, the former President and CEO of the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, claims that the designers and architects of the museum were committed to "ensuring that future generations will know the story not only of 9/11 but also of 9/12—a story affirming that, when circumstances required, the world came together with limitless compassion."[226] The question becomes, What will these future generations learn about 9/12 while visiting the museum? What will they remember about those villainized based on their appearance and religion?

The tension between the story of "9/12" as a day filled with kindness, empathy, and support and the disturbing reality experienced by many Muslims and Muslim-passing people in

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[224] Significantly, the terrorists involved in the 1993 and 2001 attacks are appropriately not listed among those who died. Additionally, recognizing the good that came from 9/11 masks the event's nationalist, xenophobic outcomes. Young, "Memory and the Monument after 9/11," 88.

[225] Alice M. Greenwald, "The Museum," in *The Stories They Tell: Artifacts from the National September 11 Memorial Museum*, ed. Clifford Chanin and Alice M. Greenwald (New York: Rizzoli Electa, 2013), 13.

[226] Joe Daniels, "Introduction," in *The Stories They Tell: Artifacts from the National September 11 Memorial Museum*, ed. Clifford Chanin and Alice M. Greenwald (New York: Rizzoli Electa, 2013), 8.

the United States naturally fits within the inherent conflict of the museum and memorial as both a burial/memorial site and history museum.[227] The museum is compelling and successful in its goal of narrating stories of survival and sacrifice and memorializing the victims of 9/11. However, it is less effective in conveying the meaning of 9/11, particularly for those viewed as outsiders of the community.[228] The museum avoids critical engagement with the effects of 9/11 on the Muslim community in the United States. The lack of critical analysis is most evident in the historical exhibits of the museum.

In the "Before 9/11" section of the historical exhibition, a film titled the "Rise of al-Qaeda," narrated by news anchor Brian Williams, plays on loop.[229] With the information shared in this film and the remaining supplemental panels in the exhibit, it is assumed that visitors have enough information to understand the reasoning for and aftermath of 9/11.[230] Unfortunately, this is not necessarily the case. In Sodaro's study of memorial museums, she details the frustration with the lack of context regarding extremist beliefs:

> The museum garnered criticism in its early days for not doing enough to distinguish Al Qaeda from the peaceful practice of Islam; indeed, some of the terminology used in the museum—"fringe elements of Islam," "Islamist" and "jihad"—could potentially conflate

[227] Many scholars and journalists have written about the conflicting interests, differing opinions, and debates surrounding the Museum and Memorial, particularly regarding the families of victims and first responders. See Young, "Memory and the Monument"; Baptist, "Incompatible Identities"; Marita Sturken, "Containing Absence, Shaping Presence at Ground Zero," *Memory Studies* 13, no. 3 (June 2020): 313-21, DOI:10.1177/1750698020914015; and Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas, *Affective Heritage and the Politics of Memory After 9/11: Curating Trauma at the Memorial Museum* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 44.

[228] Marita Sturken, "The 9/11 Memorial Museum and the Remaking of Ground Zero." *American Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (June 2015): 475 and 485-86, DOI: 10.1353/aq.2015.0022.

[229] Sturken, "The 9/11 Memorial Museum," 486.

[230] Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity*, 150-51.

> Islam and terrorism in the minds of some. There is a small panel that gives a visual depiction of the minuscule position of Al Qaeda within Sunni Islam, but in the museum's one hundred thousand square feet of exhibition space, this tiny graphic is easy to miss. From my experience, most visitors watch some or all of the ["Rise of al-Qaeda"] video and perhaps glance passingly at the information panels; after all, one has just emerged from an emotionally draining experience, and "we all know" who committed the attacks.[231]

A low "continual drone sound" permeates this same exhibit. The sound is subtle yet affective; as Scott Magelssen describes it, "it is definitely meant to accompany scenes involving bad guys."[232] Throughout the "Before 9/11" exhibit, it is clear who the intended "bad guys" are meant to be. Visitors must search for any information on the deleterious actions of the United States. Sturken suggests that this is the museum's most significant shortcoming. The museum's small "After 9/11" exhibit contains "one image of Guantanamo, one post about a protest against the war in Iraq, one small picture of Afghanistan, and one mention of the Patriot Act; visitors then exit the gallery to see the bin Laden brick."[233] Failing to critique the misconduct of the United States with equivalent resources and power continues the narrative that the United States was (and continues to be) an innocent victim of evil attacks and unprovoked, unjustified hatred.

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[231] Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity*, 150-51.

[232] Magelssen, *Performing Flight*, 124.

[233] Sturken suggests that narrating the full extent of Guantanamo, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the effects of the Patriot Act may be too much for the museum to explore fully. However, she notes that critically reflecting on such matters is necessary for interpretation, especially when one of the goals of the Museum is to educate future generations. Sturken, "The 9/11 Memorial Museum," 486-87. Amy Sodaro also notes the few images and artifacts referencing the United States' wrongdoings. See Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity*, 152-153.

In her study examining the affective curation of the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas further specifies the ways the museum intensifies intolerance, resulting in the inability to heal in the United States collectively. There are inclusions of artifacts—such as the bin Laden compound brick and the images of the 1993 and 2001 attack perpetrators—that inflame Islamophobic and xenophobic feelings and mindsets. Micieli-Voutsinas notes that the most troubling aspect of the historical exhibit is

> the orchestration of affect in the previous gallery, ["September 11, 2001"/Historical Exhibit 1 (HE1)], which leaves visitors in a state of emotional overload when entering ["Before 9/11"/Historical Exhibit 2 (HE2)]. Here, affect bubbles over to reveal the most viscerally raw emotional responses from museum visitors: disgust, anger, and rage.… Despite a small information graphic attempting to differentiate al-Qaeda from the broader "Muslim world," visitors will come away from HE2 with a racialized understanding of the attackers and "why they hate us." As cultural differences buttress latent fears of "the Arab world" and Islam, xenophobia and Islamophobia fill the atmosphere of HE2, leaving visitors' feelings as far as "good" Arabs and Muslims are concerned.[234]

As the official archive and storyteller of 9/11 cultural memory, it is the responsibility of the museum to rewrite the Islamophobic narrative. However, in the "After 9/11" exhibit, any attempt to do so arrives "too little, too late."[235] The damage has already been done.[236]

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[234] Micieli-Voutsinas, *Affective Heritage*, 77.

[235] Micieli-Voutsinas, *Affective Heritage*, 78.

[236] There are several other instances in the Memorial and Museum where the Muslim and Arab communities have been slighted in the memorialization efforts. Magelssen points out that "it's unclear whether any kind of Muslim was ever seriously considered by museum planners as a

When I visited the National September 11 Memorial and Museum in October 2021, I witnessed many of these same troubling curation issues. The "September 11, 2001" exhibit was overstimulating and emotionally draining. By the time I entered the "Before 9/11" exhibit, I was mentally exhausted. Though I was sensitive to the nationalist curation of the "Before 9/11" exhibit, I understand how xenophobic and Islamophobic feelings might surface after such an emotionally taxing experience. In the "After 9/11" exhibit, very few examples depict the post-9/11 experience of many in the US Muslim community. In the exhibit, a photo of a handmade banner displayed in Union Square Park reads, "Please don't hurt our Muslim neighbors"; a painting entitled "Islamic American," which the artist created to indicate that though we all may look different from one another, we are still Americans; and poster from the Arab American Institute (September 2001) with the saying "Americans Stand United." These were the only three artifacts I saw that hinted at any conflict with the Muslim community in the United States. Significantly, there is no context for these images and artifacts. Instead, they are located on a massive wall with many other photos displaying the various responses to 9/11. Without context, without telling the story of the sudden rise in violence directed toward Muslim and Muslim-passing Americans, it seems improbable that any future generation could grasp the severity of the violence and discrimination through these few images.

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potential visitor demographic," and no Arabic translations of maps/guides were available to Arabic-speaking visitors until after a 2017 settlement. Magelssen, *Performing Flight*, 126. Additionally, Micieli-Voutsinas tells the story of Mohammad Salman 'Sal' Hamdani, an NYPD cadet and part-time EMT, who died in the attack after courageously running into the burning Towers on his way to work. Because Hamdani was Muslim, he was intensely investigated by authorities and villainized in the media for over six months while his parents searched for him. He has since publicly been honored in several ways, yet his name appears on a South Tower memorial pool panel with other victims without official affiliation. His name is not grouped with other first-responders, which "leaves his death unresolved: it procures disbelief in Hamdani's innocence and enables the ongoing erasure of Muslim victims in the post-9/11 imaginary." Micieli-Voutsinas, *Affective Heritage*, 44-45.

Alice M. Greenwald, the current President & CEO of the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, describes the story told at the museum "as much or more about 9/12 as [it is] about 9/11." The sense of unity and support depicted through the artifacts, images, and narrative told in the museum are designed to "affirm…that we are all most human when we recognize our common humanity."[237] While the museum succeeds in identifying moments of humanity, it shifts away from criticizing moments in which Muslims and Muslim Americans were depicted as being less than human or an outsider to the affected community. Scott Magelssen states, "Sometimes at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, the dramaturgy of making sense involves framing the absence of some things to help us remember them. And absenting other things so that we don't."[238] The 9/11 Memorial and Museum's memorialization of victims and the Twin Towers' destruction appropriately and effectively honors the victims of the attacks. Nevertheless, the exhibition tends to disregard the post-9/11 experience of many in the US Muslim community. Is there a way to simultaneously commemorate the attacks, memorialize the dead, remember the sense of community gained for many, and reflect on the post-9/11 experience of the Muslim community? I believe the theatrical memorials explored in this chapter do so.

"We'll Walk Out Together"

Throughout the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, there is a significant emphasis on the notion that we are all "survivors" of 9/11. In her description of the museum's

[237] Alice M. Greenwald, "Tribute," in *The Stories They Tell: Artifacts from the National September 11 Memorial Museum*, ed. Clifford Chanin and Alice M. Greenwald (New York: Rizzoli Electa, 2013), 129.

[238] Magelssen, *Performing Flight*, 126.

mission, Greenwald states, "the Museum strives to connect visitors to the shared human impacts of these events. The attacks were not someone else's tragedy, someone else's loss. These brutal acts of mass murder were an assault on all of us. In that sense, this Museum is about all of us."[239] One could argue that all living Americans are indeed survivors of the national trauma of 9/11. Incorporating the Vesey Street stairs / "Survivor's Stairs" as a transition to the memorial exhibit(s) at bedrock further implies that we are all survivors of 9/11.

The "Survivor's Stairs" that once accessed Vesey Street from the World Trade Center's Tobin Plaza gave many 9/11 survivors an escape from the burning towers. Now non-disabled visitors must walk down a set of stairs that run parallel to the new location of the "Survivor's Stairs." The inclusion of the Stairs "remind[s] us that, in some sense, we are all survivors of 9/11, living now in a world defined by that seminal event."[240] As we walk down the museum's stairs, we can imagine ourselves running down the "Survivor's Stairs," embodying those who survived 9/11 while empathizing with and witnessing the terror the actual survivors must have faced.

Finally, at the end of the museum exhibition, visitors are given one final place to pause before ascending to ground level: here, museumgoers view "a large photograph of Ground Zero on the first anniversary of the attacks, next to which appears Joe Bradley's May 2002 quotation, engraved on the concrete wall: 'We came in as individuals. And we'll walk out together'."[241] We

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[239] Alice M. Greenwald, "Remembrance," in *The Stories They Tell: Artifacts from the National September 11 Memorial Museum*, edited by Clifford Chanin and Alice M. Greenwald, 43.

[240] Chanin, Clifford and Alice M. Greenwald, ed. *The Stories They Tell: Artifacts from the National September 11 Memorial Museum* (New York: Rizzoli Electa, 2013), 15.

[241] Sarah Senk, "The Memory Exchange: Public Mourning at the National 9/11 Memorial Museum," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 48, no. 2 (2018): 270, DOI: 10.3138/cras.2017.029.

can read this quote in several ways. First, we might consider its original context: Joe Bradley said this quote at the ceremony where the Last Column, the final remnant of the Twin Towers, was removed from its original site.

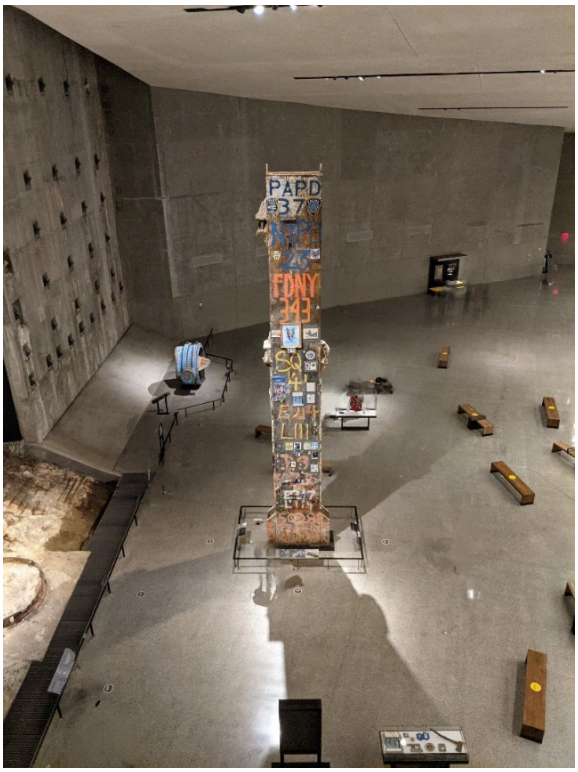

Figure 3: The Last Column.

As the crews arrived at Ground Zero as individuals, they left the site as a team that had completed an extraordinary task in clearing the rubble caused by the attacks. We also may read this quote as an indication that, through our experience in the Museum, we are expected to be changed human beings, no longer seeing ourselves as individuals but as a collective who have shared trauma.

Additionally, one might take this quote to mean that Americans are part of a collective with a shared trauma. While this may be true, we did not all experience 9/11 and its aftermath in the same way. We did not all "walk out together" from 9/11's metaphorical rubble. Indeed, some people were left behind and targeted by the rest of the collective. Reflecting on the notes she

took during her walks in New York City after 9/11, Kaplan states, "I also now understood, of course, that we really had not been "together," as my notes from the time assumed. Many Arab and Muslim individuals have been (and continue to be) arrested or interrogated. There is an entire spectrum of responses to the attacks, a diversity of interpretation."[242]

Now over twenty years after 9/11, Americans are perhaps far enough removed from the event that we can critically analyze the ways we choose to memorialize the event and the victims. At the heart of all memorialization is the desire to keep memory alive; both the National September 11 Memorial Museum and the productions of *Come From Away* and *Unveiled* communicate memory to their respective audiences. The National September 11 Memorial Museum and other official forms of commemoration continue to reinterpret 9/11 as a tragic event that brought Americans closer together. However, the theatrical memorial effectively dramatizes the aftereffects of 9/11 on Muslim and Muslim-passing individuals. As "9/11" musicals and plays consider the role of "community" in a post-9/11 world, they attempt to unite their audience into an imagined community of a diverse group of individuals, regardless of denomination and citizenship status. Theatre artists are not always successful in this endeavor, but perhaps it is time we turn to live theatre to memorialize national traumas.

[242] Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, 17.

Chapter 3- Theatrical Memorials to Military Trauma

How do we reconcile the depiction of military strength, power, endurance, and stability with the knowledge that many veterans return home from war with trauma, PTSD, and other (visible and invisible) war wounds? When there is no official commemorative site for those who died or the trauma service members experienced in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, what other methods of memorialization may effectively remind us of those we have forgotten in official memorial contexts? The theatre, I argue, is a profound method of memorialization that can draw attention to these topics while also connecting the war experience in Iraq to that experienced by veterans of twentieth-century wars.

As of the first half of 2022, there is no official US memorial to the Iraq War. Therefore, I turn to the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, which contextualizes the beginning of the "War on Terror" as a response to the attacks on September 11, 2001. As addressed in the previous chapter, scholars such as Marita Sturken, Amy Sodaro, Scott Magelssen, and Jacque Micieli-Voutsinas take issue with the curatorial decision to avoid serious questioning of the United States' problematic policies and actions before and after 9/11, as well as the depiction of Islam and Muslims in the US and abroad.[243] As the curators forgo critique of the United States' policies and military actions, the museum seems to promote the narrative that the US was, and continues to be, an innocent victim to evil attacks and unprovoked, unjustified hatred. This narrative is increasingly problematic as the US government, led by President Biden, continues to

[243] See Sturken, "The 9/11 Memorial Museum," 486-87; Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity*, 152-53; Magelssen, *Performing Flight*, 124-26; and Micieli-Voutsinas, *Affective Heritage*, 44-45 and 77-78.

enact controversial policies that endanger civilians in the Middle East, specifically in Afghanistan, after decades of military presence in their countries.[244] It is not the museum's purpose to memorialize the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars; however, as the national archive of 9/11 artifacts which includes objects related to the "War on Terror," examining the inclusion of these artifacts and the way military action is depicted in the exhibits informs our cultural memory and current meaning of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars.

The museum exhibits tend to favor the objective success of military operations related to the "War on Terror," eclipsing any notion that military members suffered traumatic experiences in their service during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As Amy Sodaro asserts, "The museum's scant mention of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq contextualizes them within the 'Global War on Terror' and is primarily aimed at celebrating the heroism of the troops and suggesting that the war was a necessary response to 9/11…."[245] Indeed, infographics and artifacts including "challenge coins," clothing worn by members of the Navy's Seal Team Six responsible for capturing Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan (May 2, 2011), and a brick from the bin Laden compound can be found among the historical exhibits.

The compound brick is of particular interest to this study's overarching question of how national traumas are remembered and memorialized. A journalist donated the brick to the National September 11 Memorial and Museum. He was diagnosed with a brain injury that he

[244] In February 2022, President Biden ordered that the frozen $7 billion in Afghan assets in the United States be split between a fund for 9/11 victims and humanitarian aid in Afghanistan. Removing humanitarian funds from Afghan civilians—who have endured decades of war and US military presence and paid the price for the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks—is depicted as cruel and unjust. See Aamer Madhani and Kathy Gannon, "Biden frees frozen Afghan billions for relief, 9/11 victims," *AP News*, February 11, 2022, https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-business-united-states-terrorism-b2743737c3286dbba95a7663615e37be.

[245] Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity*, 152-53.

received while reporting on the war in Iraq and later died by suicide. Sturken asserts these artifacts are "a reminder of another sad consequence of the wars that emanated from 9/11, the thousands of American veterans and journalists who have been disabled, killed, or have committed suicide in the last decade."[246] Moreover, we must also acknowledge the plethora of American veterans who have suffered from emotional and mental trauma during the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. Because there is no formal memorial to military personnel and the trauma they experienced during the "War on Terror," and the National September 11 Memorial and Museum cannot fully commemorate the effects of the wars, I suggest we look toward theatrical performance and text to memorialize the trauma the experienced during the Iraq War.

In this chapter, I examine how playwrights Ellen McLaughlin and Quiara Alegría Hudes craft their scripts to protest the Iraq War and commemorate the effects of the war on active-duty service members and veterans. I assert that McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq* and Hudes's *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* operate as sites of memory to the visible and invisible wounds of war. This chapter alludes to the overarching "War on Terror" in the Middle East, while maintaining a primary focus on the Iraq War (2003-2011), as do McLaughlin and Hudes. I turn to aspects of Rothberg's Multidirectional Memory, including his idea that memories cross time, space, and culture to evoke an empathetic response. Additionally, the generational trauma relevant to Hirsch's concept of Postmemory and Landsberg's affective prosthetic memory framework allows me to analyze how the experience of marginalized identities has been medially transmitted and dramatized for our present moment.

I will describe the multitude of performative responses to the Iraq War and identify common themes and techniques used in plays, film, and television shows about the war. I open

[246] Sturken, "The 9/11 Memorial Museum," 472-73.

my examination of theatrical memorials to the war with an introduction to McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq* before analyzing the memorial qualities of the play. I follow with a study of Hudes's *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*. I consider the commonalities and differences between the two dramatic works and explore the playwrights' methods of memory transmission pertaining to the war in their plays, using the theories in Memory Studies. I conclude by suggesting the playwrights elicit a critically empathetic and socioethical response from their audiences that inspires spectators to support service members and politically engage with issues related to veteran affairs.

Performative Responses to the Iraq War

Since the ancient Greeks, the theatre has been a place of communal grieving and political activism. The theatre's role as a site of mourning and sociopolitical commentary intensified in the months and years following 9/11. Though not always directly political, the "theatre still offered a protected space to voice alternative views about current events…."[247] Performance scholar Jenny Spencer notes that theatre artists were concerned with national solidarity yet also expressed "skepticism of nationalist rhetoric and offered trenchant critiques of the ways patriotic discourse was being deployed against others at home and abroad."[248] Perhaps most notable about this critique by theatre artists was Harold Pinter's speech as he received an honorary degree at the University of Turin in 2002. In this speech, Pinter charged the Bush administration with being "a bloodthirsty wild animal" that would undoubtedly attack Iraq. The actress Kathleen Chalfant read Pinter's speech at a gathering on December 9, 2002, sponsored by "Not in Our

[247] Jenny Spencer, introduction to *Political and Protest Theatre after 9/11: Patriotic Dissent*, edited by Jenny Spencer, New York: Routledge, 2012, 2.

[248] Spencer, introduction to *Political and Protest Theatre after 9/11*, 4.

Name," which challenged the New York theatre community to change the narrative from one that the Bush administration controlled.[249]

The theatrical response to the "War on Terror" is often compared to European theatre and the American political theatre of the 1960s. Theatre scholar David Callaghan argues that much of the theatrical response was far less critical of foreign policy and military actions than the response to the Vietnam War.[250] Marvin Carlson asserts that although the US does not have a strong history of political commentary in theatrical spaces, especially compared to Europe, the response to the war in Iraq "produced the most concentrated and dedicated political theatre to appear in America since the 1960s."[251] As US theatres—specifically in New York City—became hubs of theatrical activism, there was a lack of innovation regarding form and aesthetics. Instead, theatres relied on traditional techniques—such as documentary and verbatim theatre—and produced revivals and adaptations of classic plays. Like their film counterparts, they shifted focus to the soldier/veteran and their experience with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).[252]

Instead of critiquing the reasons for war or its effects, writers and directors tended to examine the individual service member who is often the protagonist in twenty-first-century films, television series, and plays. These narratives feature themes of volunteerism for military service and issues of class.[253] Typically, the film's military protagonist volunteers for service.

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[249] Carlson, "9/11, Afghanistan, and Iraq," 9.

[250] David Callaghan, "Where Have All the Protestors Gone?: 1960s Radical Theatre and Contemporary Theatrical Responses to U.S. Military Involvement in Iraq," *Theatre Symposium* 14 (2006): 105, ProQuest.

[251] Carlson, "9/11, Afghanistan, and Iraq," 16.

[252] Lindsey Mantoan, *War as Performance: Conflicts in Iraq and Political Theatricality* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 8.

[253] Lewis Beale, "The Vietnam and Iraq wars have been controversial, yet total catnip for filmmakers," *Los Angeles Times*, November 22, 2016, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/envelope/la-en-mn-vietnam-iraq-war-movies-20161028-story.html.

The central figure, often raised in a poor or working-class family, has been influenced by 9/11, patriotic and nationalist ideologies, or family legacy.[254] In focusing on the individual or small group of service members, the audience often connects to the character; consequently, the war feels more personal to the viewer. Further, plays and other performative art forms also depicted the struggles of returning home from war and living with PTSD and other war wounds.[255]

In the theatre specifically, documentary theatre (docudrama) and verbatim theatre were popular genres for creating theatrical responses to the Iraq War. In her 2012 study of theatre and war since 1991, Jeanne Colleran argues that the goal of such types of theatre is to "produce not only discussion, but empathy, and even community and solidarity."[256] Playwrights in the United Kingdom most often used docudrama in response to the Iraq War. British playwright David Hare's *Stuff Happens* (2004) is one of the most well-known political plays about the lead-up to the war in Iraq. *Stuff Happens* is considered a docudrama despite Hare's creative liberties to dramatize his story. *Talking to Terrorists* (2005) by Robin Soans is an authentic piece of verbatim theatre written based on interviews and testimony of people from around the world who have been impacted by or taken part in terrorist activity. *Talking to Terrorists* was written to produce empathy and discussion in audiences, as it concerns the everyday people who, in some way, are impacted by terrorism. The Scottish play *Black Watch* (2006), about the Black Watch military regiment during the Iraq War in 2004, was primarily based on interviews of former

[254] Popular films about the Iraq War, such as *The Hurt Locker* (2008), *The Messenger* (2009), *The Green Zone* (2010), *American Sniper* (2014), *The Wall* (2017), and *Sand Castle* (2017), narrate the experience of a small number of military members granting the audience insight into the individual character and their respective circumstances.

[255] See *Home of the Brave* (2006), *In the Valley of Elah* (2007), *Stop-Loss* (2008), and the largely successful series *Army Wives* (2007-2013) depict the experience service members with PTSD and those recently returning home from war face.

[256] Colleran, *Theatre and War*, 142.

Scottish soldiers.[257] In their well-known plays about the Iraq War, British playwrights reflected the unique perspective held by the United Kingdom as the US's ally. However, an American audience was not necessarily the target audience for these plays. It is, therefore, critical that we examine the work of American playwrights when considering how the theatre in the United States might operate as a site of memory for American audiences.

American playwrights also incorporated interviews, military testimony, and documents in their respective plays responding to the Iraq War. Much like *Talking to Terrorists*, American playwright Karen Malpede also chose to feature a wide variety of characters based on interviews in her 2004 play *Iraq: Speaking of War*. Malpede narrates the experience of Iraqi civilians, American soldiers, and journalists worldwide to explore the effect of war from multiple perspectives. McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq* and Hudes's *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* also incorporate interviews and testimony from service members and their families.

During the years of the Iraq War, revivals and adaptations of classic plays also saw a reemergence in American theatre. US theatres rarely used revivals to comment on political circumstances compared to European theatres. However, this began to shift in the theatre produced during the war.[258] Such revivals "allow[ed] audiences to read aspects of the war in Iraq

[257] *Black Watch* was produced in New York City in 2007 and described as "a blazing redeemer in the grayness of the current New York theater season." Ben Brantley, "To Tell These War Stories, Words Aren't Enough," *New York Times*, October 27, 2007, https://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/24/theater/reviews/24watch.html. Ben Brantley further notes that when *Stuff Happens* was first produced in the US in 2006, the production was scaled back. In the US, the play seemed like "a collective work of imagination that attempts to grasp how and why an unnecessary and unwinnable war was allowed to happen." In London, it appeared as an "arrogant, animated history book with a fixed agenda." Ben Brantley, "David Hare's 'Stuff Happens': All the President's Men in 'On the Road to Baghdad'," *New York Times*, April 14, 2006, https://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/14/theater/reviews/david-hares-stuff-happens-all-the-presidents-men-in-on-the.html.

[258] Carlson, "9/11, Afghanistan, and Iraq," 15.

into the directorial and/or visual design concepts…."[259] Adaptations, specifically those inspired by classic Greek tragedies, also allow the audience to situate the play in the context of the Iraq War.

There is a rich history of using Greek tragedies and adaptations of these plays to comment on war and violence in the United States. Modern playwrights have criticized the Iraq War through their interpretation of classic Greek texts and their adaptations.[260] Lindsey Mantoan argues that "Like *Antigone*, the Trojan War and other classics were adapted to the Iraq War because struggles with honor and respect for the enemy became meaningful again. In particular, stories from the Trojan War offered new ways to examine the trauma experienced by veterans."[261] *Trojan Barbie* (2009) by Christine Evans took a contemporary spin on the mythical Trojan War by thrusting the protagonist back into time. Ellen McLaughlin's adaptation of *The Trojan Women* (2003), initially written in response to the Balkan wars, found new meaning for Americans in light of the invasions in Afghanistan and Iraq. McLaughlin also adapted *Lysistrata* (2006) during the Iraq War. Additionally, restagings and adaptations of Aristophanes's *Lysistrata* comprised the Lysistrata Project, an international theatrical protest staging *Lysistrata* and various adaptations of the play on March 3, 2003. Theater of War Productions—founded in 2009—also shows the relevance of Greek classics to modern experiences by staging readings of Sophocles's *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* for veterans, current military personnel, and their families.

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[259] Callaghan, "Where Have All the Protestors Gone?," 111.

[260] For a history of US adaptations of classic Greek plays as a commentary on war, see Kathryn Bosher et al., ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Greek Drama in the Americas* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015) and George Rodosthenous, ed. *Contemporary Adaptations of Greek Tragedy: Auteurship and Directorial Visions* (New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017).

[261] Mantoan, *War as Performance*, 66.

With the number of plays written in response to the Iraq War, we might ask what these plays are memorializing. What are we grieving? What are the plays' value in the moment of creation and the future? What about now, as it appears the "War on Terror" is coming to an end? How do we memorialize through these plays? To answer these questions, I consider McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq* and Hudes's *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* as theatrical memorials to trauma that service members experience during war.

McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq* (2008) and Quiara Alegría Hudes's *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* (2005) exemplify the collection of plays written about the general "War on Terror." Specifically, *Ajax in Iraq* and *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* (*Elliot*) encompass the themes explored in the collage of plays written in response to the Iraq War. In both plays, the playwrights use witness testimony and center the experience of individual service members. paying particular attention to the role and effects of PTSD. About spectatorship that may result in a prosocial response, trauma theorist E. Ann Kaplan suggests:

> witnessing happens when a text aims to move the viewer emotionally but without sensationalizing or overwhelming her with feeling that makes understanding impossible. "Witnessing" involves not just empathy and motivation to help, but understanding the structure of injustice—that an injustice has taken place…. Art that invites us to bear witness to injustice goes beyond moving us to identify with and help a specific individual, and prepares us to take responsibility for preventing future occurrence.[262]

[262] Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, 23.

Kaplan praises such art, including literature and film, for its ability to evoke empathy from its audience and move spectators to action. Indeed, as we will see, live theatre has the potential to elicit in audiences ethical witnessing as well. Both playwrights inspire audiences to connect to the onstage characters forced to the periphery of society. This challenges spectators to leave the theatre with new perspectives.

War Adaptations: A Female Ajax

Ajax in Iraq was first performed in 2008 as a collaborative effort with director Scott Zigler and the ART/MXAT Institute for Advanced Theater Training at Harvard University class of 2009. As military suicides were on the rise when McLaughlin wrote *Ajax in Iraq*, battle casualties also peaked in the year before and during the writing process. McLaughlin writes that the play "was born of a particular moment in the Iraq War—2007 and 2008—and a particular group of collaborators, the class of 2009 at the ART/MXAT Institute."[263] She agreed to make *Ajax in Iraq* as much about the actors' perspectives on war as her own. Accordingly, McLaughlin asked the actors to devise their own theatrical pieces that related or responded to war in any way. All the actors conducted interviews as well; some interviewed grandparents who had lived through World War II or friends who had fought in Afghanistan or Iraq, and others reached out to homeless Vietnam veterans. Actors also based their devised performances on independent research on topics ranging from war mythology to soldiers' videos and blogs.[264]

In 2010—two years further into the war—McLaughlin had another opportunity to revisit the play. With a new collaboration with Flux Theatre Ensemble, *Ajax in Iraq* was produced Off-

[263] Ellen McLaughlin, "On Finding Ajax in Iraq," *PMLA* 129, no. 4 (October 2014): 835, DOI: 10.1632/pmla.2014.129.4.834.

[264] McLaughlin, "On Finding Ajax in Iraq," 835.

Off-Broadway in 2011.[265] Frank Theatre, a regional theatre in Minneapolis, also performed *Ajax in Iraq* in 2011. US college and university theatres have most often produced the play since 2012. It has also been performed outside of the US. No Man Apart Physical Theatre Ensemble is the only other professional theatre group to produce the play since its rewriting; the ensemble performed *Ajax in Iraq* in Santa Monica in 2014 and again in Los Angeles in 2016.[266]

The number of productions of *Ajax in Iraq* has decreased in recent years, yet critics tend to agree that the play is "heartbreaking," "harsh," "and very effective."[267] Anita Gates from the *New York Times* described the Flux Theater Ensemble's performance as a "fervent and valiant" production of the "sophisticated" *Ajax in Iraq*. Gates notes that the play "preaches, calmly" and is a "notable addition" to McLaughlin's "career as a playwright of fierce moral conviction."[268] In criticism of the piece, some critics found that "While informative," the testimonial scenes can be "repetitive and overly long." Jordan Riefe of *The Hollywood Reporter* suggests that "if there is any criticism of McLaughlin's play it's that it could use a trim." However, he argues, "If art is a public service, then McLaughlin has served her public well" by exposing war as the greatest enemy to us all.[269] Generally, reviewers describe the play as "bluntly affecting."[270] The harshest

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[265] Ellen McLaughlin, *Ajax in Iraq* (New York: Playscripts, 2011), 8.

[266] "Chronology," Ellen McLaughlin, accessed March 24, 2022, https://www.ellenmmclaughlin.com/chronology.

[267] John Olive, "Ajax in Iraq at Frank Theatre," How Was The Show?, November 5, 2011, https://www.howwastheshow.com/2011/11/ajax-in-iraq-at-frank-theatre/.

[268] Anita Gates, "The Insanity of War Is Not Ancient Myth," *New York Times*, June 17, 2011, https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/18/theater/reviews/ajax-in-iraq-at-the-flamboyan-theater-review.html.

[269] Jordan Riefe, "Theater Review: Ajax in Iraq," *The Hollywood Reporter*, May 13, 2014, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/lifestyle/lifestyle-news/theater-review-ajax-iraq-703901/.

[270] Rohan Preston, "'Ajax' indelibly reveals the extremes of war," *Star Tribune*, November 7, 2011, https://www.startribune.com/ajax-indelibly-reveals-the-extremes-of-war/133368073/.

criticism, however, comes from Clifford Lee Johnson III. Johnson suggests that *Ajax in Iraq* is a "theatrical misfire" due to its alternating and "tedious" scenes between the ancient and modern, yet also describes the play as "surprising" and "moving."[271] I suggest that the juxtaposition of the ancient and modern in McLaughlin's adaptation powerfully enables the audience to identify a legacy of military trauma across time and space, creating new meaning for our present moment.

An Adaptation of Ajax for the Present: Ancient and Contemporary Effects of War

Linda Hutcheon, the author of the authoritative *A Theory of Adaptation*, describes adaptation as "an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works. This 'transcoding' can involve a shift of medium (a poem to a film) or genre (an epic to a novel), or a change of frame and therefore context: telling the same story from a different point of view…."[272] Hutcheon notes that "adaptation is how stories evolve and mutate to fit new times and different places."[273] Thus, McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq* is a quintessential example of adaptation as the playwright alters the context and point of view of Sophocles's *Ajax* to tell a modern, American story.

Ajax in Iraq merges Sophocles's play (5th century BCE) with a contemporary exploration of war and military culture, explicitly addressing the experience of female soldiers. In *Ajax*, Agamemnon and Menelaus—Greek kings and commanding officers—betray the titular character after the armor of his deceased friend, Achilles, is given to Odysseus instead of Ajax. Mourning the loss of his friend and in a fit of rage over this injustice, Ajax vows to kill Agamemnon,

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[271] Clifford Lee Johnson III, "Ajax in Iraq," *Backstage*, August 15, 2012, https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/ajax-iraq-61754/.

[272] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), 7-8, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[273] Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 176.

Menelaus, and Odysseus. To protect the three men, Athena—goddess of war and reasoned thinking (and thus also madness)[274]—misleads Ajax into believing he has murdered the men while actually killing the livestock of local herders. After Athena releases Ajax from his delusion, he realizes what he has done and becomes overwhelmed with shame. Ajax then dies of suicide after his war bride, Tecmessa, begs him to think of her and their son. After Ajax's death, Agamemnon and Menelaus want to leave Ajax unburied. On the other hand, Odysseus and Teucer—Ajax's brother—argue that even an enemy deserves to be buried with respect.

McLaughlin's female protagonist parallels her Greek counterpart. Both are fierce warriors known for their skill and bravery and experience heart-wrenching, traumatic betrayals from their superiors, resulting in both characters taking their own lives. At the beginning of *Ajax in Iraq*, we learn that A.J. has begun to behave strangely; it is not until later in the play that we discover she has become a survivor of command-rape by her superior officer. A.J.'s trauma deepens when most of her team is shot or killed in an explosion while out on a mission. After recovering her squad's bodies, A.J. expects to be recognized for her bravery but instead is raped again by her Sergeant (named Sergeant in the script).[275] Knowing she would likely not be believed should she report her Sergeant and the trauma surrounding her experiences, A.J. withdraws into madness and massacres an Iraqi civilian's flock of sheep. With the threat of becoming dishonorably discharged, A.J. takes her own life like Ajax.

Known for her adaptations of class Greek plays, McLaughlin's reinterpretations are often modernized and set in a far more contemporary time and place than ancient Greece. However,

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[274] McLaughlin, "On Finding Ajax in Iraq," 837.

[275] This incidence of violation is the only act of violence staged in front of the audience. The other instances of rape are alluded to, and, much like classic Greek tradition, characters narrate rather than stage the chaos surrounding the death of A.J.'s comrades. The staging of rape in *Ajax in Iraq* will be further explored later in this chapter.

Ajax in Iraq takes an entirely different form from her usual adaptations. She engages in gender-bending the play to comment upon the increase in women enlisting in the armed forces since the Gulf War and the surfacing of sexual harassment and assault cases in the military.[276] Accordingly, she writes,

> I found that simply making a modern version of the play with a female Ajax (whom we called A.J.) just didn't seem sufficient to the gravity of the original text somehow, nor did a relatively straightforward version of the Sophocles play do justice to the complexity and specificity of the Iraq War and of the ways we were trying to address it. So I decided to combine two equally weighted, intertwining narratives, classic and modern, each enriching the other as we saw how they reflected and deepened each other. I found that I liked the shimmer of the female-male, modern-ancient, vernacular-poetic double resonance of the tragedy when the two streams were braided together in counterpoint.[277]

Ajax in Iraq is a relatively faithful adaptation of Sophocles's text; the plot remains mostly the same, but McLaughlin changes the context, language, and sex of the titular character to inform a modern audience of the continued traumatic effects of war. Jane Barnette, author of *Adapturgy: The Dramaturg's Art and Theatrical Adaptation*, notes critics of adaptations tend to favor fidelity—or "accuracy (as defined by the critic) to the original author's intent (as understood by the critic)."[278] Critics place "value wherein proximity to what is presumed to be the original is

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[276] Sharon Friedman, "The Gendered Terrain in Contemporary Theatre of War by Women," *Theatre Journal* 62 (December 2010): 596, Project Muse.

[277] McLaughlin, "On Finding Ajax in Iraq," 836.

[278] Jane Barnette, *Adapturgy: The Dramaturg's Art and Theatrical Adaptation* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2018), 76.

considered better than distance from it."[279] Instead, Barnette suggests that discovering the "spirit" or "essence" of the source is essential to unlocking the success of an adaptation while moving away from the strict criticism of fidelity. The source text's spirit, or "the breath of life," helps to establish the critical elements of a story that must be communicated to an audience. It reveals too the creative interventions present in the adaptation.[280] This is especially true when considering Greek adaptations.

Further, we must remember that several adaptations of Greek classics, such as *Ajax in Iraq*, are not first-generation adaptations. Indeed, as Mantoan reminds us, "many of these [Greek tragedies] were already adaptations, or selections from the mythological canon shaped with a new focus in order to speak to a cultural moment in ancient Greece. Ajax, for example, draws from a brief passage in the *Iliad* in which Odysseus apologizes to Ajax in Hades."[281] Additionally, even the *Iliad* is an adaptation, specifically from Homer's interpretation of the mythology passed down in ancient Greece.[282] Although questions of fidelity to an original text or source historically lie at the heart of adaptation debates, we need not limit ourselves to those that are typically "faithful" to their source. With this newfound freedom, scholars and theatre artists can begin to shift focus to the effectiveness of these plays and illuminate adaptation's use for a contemporary audience.

When considering the purpose of adaptation for the stage, Barnette asks, "*why this source as theatre now?*" This question asserts the importance of considering time and space, while

[279] Barnette, *Adapturgy*, 40.
[280] Barnette, *Adapturgy*, 109.
[281] Mantoan, *War as Performance*, 66.
[282] Lindsey Mantoan, "Reframing the Iraq War Through Performance: Politics, Rhetoric, and Resistance" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2014), 155, ProQuest.

understanding one's local audience and contemporary international concerns.[283] We might also ask this question as: why this memory as theatre now? Phrased in this way, we place emphasis on theatricality and the power of theatre. Unlike other media that Memory scholars tend to readily analyze, the theatre performance is a live art form that results in a relationship between the audience and the performer. The audience watches, listens, and witnesses as the actor enacts or narrates a given memory. Film and television allow the audience to gaze upon the actor, but the live quality of theatre adds an additional layer of authenticity to the shared memory. The live performer narrates or performs a memory as if it were their own lived experience; the audience may then suspend their disbelief and accept the communicated memory to be an accurate retelling of an event. Moreover, the theatre relies on the audience members' imaginations to interpret the signs and symbols present throughout a performance. Whereas film and television have the ability to visually transport audiences to the past, the theatre (like the novel and radio) requires the audience to imagine the past *as if* they had experienced the event for themselves. Additionally, the question can be phrased more generally as "why this play now" to reveal the purpose behind any theatrical production at a particular point in time. For McLaughlin, the myth of Ajax seemed increasingly relevant to the circumstances of the Iraq War.

McLaughlin, for example, felt compelled to write about war because the United States had just experienced the bloodiest year of the Iraq War at the time of her writing; and it seemed like the war would never end.[284] McLaughlin also questioned the moral implications of sending

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[283] Barnette, *Adapturgy*, 36.

[284] In 2007—the deadliest year for US soldiers during the Iraq War—nearly 4,000 troops had died, and 30,000 were wounded. The Iraqi civilian death toll has also continued to haunt the war in Iraq. In a single battle (Battle for Fallujah) in 2004, 800 civilians were killed. By July 2006, civilian deaths had reached their peak; the Pentagon does not keep statistics on civilian casualties, but an estimated 1,000-3,500 civilians died that month alone. See "The Iraq War," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed March 24, 2022, https://www.cfr.org/timeline/iraq-war.

young men and women to a war that they did not create. Discussing the process of creating *Ajax in Iraq* with the ART/MXAT Institute's class of 2009, McLaughlin writes, "It seemed to me that the current war was their war rather than mine in the sense that my generation was essentially sending their generation to fight its battles. I knew what I felt about it all but wanted to know what it meant to them." By working with the material the students researched and generated, McLaughlin wanted to create a play that addressed the students' ideas as much as her own.[285] *Ajax in Iraq* remains relevant to a twenty-first-century American audience as an adaptation of a classic Greek play, yet McLaughlin's play also traverses multiple American generations. In this crossing of time and space, McLaughlin's text opens a dialogue among groups who may have differing opinions about the war and its effects.

Memory as an Act of Adaptation: Crossing Time & Space

Memory recollection is also a form of adaptation. A memory is never a complete and wholly accurate recollection of an event. Instead, memory is both "borrowed" from the past to inform our understanding of the present and re-interpreted in the current moment to illuminate new concerns with the past. Michael Rothberg acknowledges the adaptive qualities of memory, stating,

> Memories are not owned by groups—nor are groups jagged; what looks at first like my own property often turns out to be a borrowing or adaptation from a history that initially might seem foreign or distant. Memory's anachronistic quality—it bringing together of

[285] McLaughlin, "On Finding Ajax in Iraq," 835.

> now and then, here and there—is actually the source of its powerful creativity, its ability to build new worlds out of the materials of older ones.[286]

At first glance, it may seem as if Ajax's circumstances have very little to do with the twenty-first-century military service member. However, McLaughlin's play adaptation indicates that her two protagonists and thus the people they represent (the Greek mythical figures, Greek veteran playwrights and audiences, and twenty-first-century American service members) are connected. These disparate groups share a similar experience and trauma that spans their respective time and spaces.

McLaughlin's juxtaposition of multiple wars in her play reveals similarities and differences in the war experience. Mantoan argues, "The significance of adapting classic narratives and myths to contemporary settings lies in both the connections across millennia and the elements unique to the contemporary moment." She cites Jill Lane, stating that it is not the "timeless" or "universal" nature of classic Greek stories, structure, or narratives that make the play relevant to the present. Instead, it is that "certain human, social struggles repeat themselves at intervals in history, and a complex, rich structure [and narrative] becomes—sadly—meaningful, again and again, to express the horror of the unburied dead, [and] the costs of civil war."[287] Therefore, our inability to acknowledge physical and mental war wounds and systemic injustice makes *Ajax* a fitting story to adapt, providing commentary on the Iraq War.

Further, McLaughlin crosses time and space in *Ajax in Iraq* by noting correlations, such as PTSD and injustice, in the classic and modern military contexts. The knotted structure that

[286] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 5.
[287] Mantoan, "Reframing the Iraq War Through Performance," 154.

Rothberg describes implements the idea that multidirectional memory permits memories from multiple times and spaces to bind together, creating a commentary on the continuation of similarities between events. The past becomes present through this mixing of time and space.[288] The ancient becomes layered into the present in *Ajax in Iraq*.

A Memorial to the Marginalized Experience

A central point of sharing memories is to connect with others in various chronological times and geographic spaces by experiencing circumstances we have initially thought were utterly different from our own. When we listen to and experience (prosthetically) the memories of others, we begin to acknowledge the commonalities that join these disparate memories. This is especially true when we experience the memories of people who have been historically marginalized. Rothberg states, "the moments of contact," between legacies of traumatic events,

> occur in marginalized texts or in marginal moments of well-known texts. The evidence is there, but the archive must be constructed with the help of the change in vision made possible by a new kind of comparative thinking…. The greatest hope for a new comparatism lies in opening up the separate containers of memory and identity that buttress competitive thinking and becoming aware of the mutual constitution and ongoing transformation of the objects of comparison.[289]

[288] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 35.
[289] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 18.

For Rothberg, if we look to those in the "margins" of history, with whom we may have considered different from ourselves, we may discover similarities that unite our shared experiences. We can evoke an empathetic response when we identify with those whose experience is typically situated outside of the cultural memory of an event (e.g., Muslim Americans in the context of post-9/11 memory and the female soldier experience). Alison Landsberg also notes the connection between a "prosthetic" experience and empathy:

> Technologies of mass culture are a preeminent site for the production of empathy. The wide circulation of mass-mediated images brings people into contact with other people, other cultures, and other histories divorced from their own lived experience. Through mass culture, people have the opportunity to enter into a relationship with the "foreign." Gradually, they learn to feel emotionally connected to what is intellectually at a great remove.[290]

"Technologies of memory"— specifically film for Landsberg's purposes—are critical for the success of establishing this emotional connection. I suggest that theatre, like film, can also produce such empathetic responses from an audience. The audience should empathize with A.J. in *Ajax in Iraq*; she is the most marginalized character. A.J. represents the real people who inspired McLaughlin's play and have experienced similar traumas as A.J. When we have an emotional response to her circumstances we begin to empathize with those she represents.

A.J. is a young female soldier silently suffering from the abuse she experiences at the hand of her commanding officer and later a victim of PTSD-induced suicide. As a woman in the

[290] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 47.

military—a historically male profession—her superiors force A.J. to the periphery. Sergeant's status, the secrecy embedded in US military culture, and A.J.'s involuntary shift to the margins enable Sergeant to violate A.J. continually without consequences. McLaughlin notes,

> Rape as an act of suppression and domination is an unsurprising if horrific outcome of the aggression that war can unleash, as all military history teaches us, but it has acquired a new virulence now that so many women soldiers (one in seven of the active military) serve on equal terms with men and expect to be treated as comrades. "Command rape" or "rape by rank" is peculiarly traumatic since the victims suffer at the hands of people they have to obey and on whom they depend for their survival. It is the rawest form of betrayal.[291]

We know that many rape survivors, both military and civilian, remain silent after the assault. This silencing is a byproduct of the marginalization rape survivors experience. Further, as Mantoan and Margaret Lebron argue, service members and their suffering are often systemically ignored by both the US military and the home front.[292] Soldiers are also often ignored when they experience PTSD.

By staging two moments of rape in *Ajax in Iraq*—one explicitly staged, the other alluded to—McLaughlin shifts the narrative focus of women soldiers as marginal identities to the forefront. Additionally, the audience witnesses A.J.'s rape and must consider their role in this

[291] McLaughlin, "On Finding Ajax in Iraq," 836.

[292] Mantoan, *War as Performance*, 84 and Margaret Lebron, "Crossing the Military-Civilian Divide: Performance, Affect, and Embodiment in Staging Veterans' Stories," (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2017), ProQuest.

violation and betrayal. As A.J.'s comrades fail to act on her behalf, so too does the typical American fail to acknowledge the (physical, mental, emotional, and sexual) trauma military personnel may experience.[293] Lucy Nevitt argues that the staging of rape—with its obvious connection to the power dynamics of men and women—highlights that rape and other acts of "male (hetero)sexual power [are] able to sit relatively comfortably within existing social power relationships [and structures]." Nevitt inquires whether it is ever possible to stage rape without citing the history of pornography and sexual oppression;[294] I suggest that it is precisely this history that concerns McLaughlin. The playwright appears to be interested in how sexual oppression, power dynamics, and military culture intertwine. By writing simulated and suggested rape scenes, she widens a window of critique into war and US military culture.

Similarly, Mantoan notes, "By showing the violation, rather than starting after it, the play forces audiences to consider the culture and law regarding command rape, an uncomfortable topic that nonetheless demands broad attention."[295] About McLaughlin's play, she contends further,

> *Ajax in Iraq* shifts this [power] hierarchy, revealing an abject body historically erased and doing so in such a way that resists voyeurism.… By not only showing soldiers discussing rape, but showing the rape itself, *Ajax in Iraq* takes power away from individual male commanding officers in the US military who behave exceptionally—with double standards and exemptions—and seek to place this power in the hands of a community

[293] Mantoan, *War as Performance*, 80.
[294] Lucy Nevitt, *Theatre & Violence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 32-33, 35.
[295] Mantoan, *War as Performance*, 83.

that includes AJ's fellow soldiers within the world of the play, as well as the audience present at the performance.[296]

Indeed, sexual assault in general, but an assault by those in positions of power in particular, is an uncomfortable topic for audiences to reckon with. However, McLaughlin invites audiences to engage in a difficult conversation about rape in the military through her play. As A.J.'s comrades become aware of the trauma she experienced after her suicide, McLaughlin simultaneously awakens her audience to the injustice experienced by many in the military at the hand of their commanding officers, the larger military structure, and civilian ignorance.[297] When another soldier claims that A.J.'s suicide was a betrayal to those that survived her death, Pisoni—one of A.J.'s comrades—makes the soldiers' kinship with A.J. clear while challenging the audience to notice the pain of others:

PISONI:

Well, we have to look at it. And she wasn't a stranger. She was one of us. But she did this anyway. That's the kind of pain she was in. There must have been a thousand times she tried to signal that pain. We didn't see it because we didn't want to. To say that her killing herself is a betrayal of any of us just keeps us from seeing how much her killing herself is about our betrayal of her. We should have paid better attention. I don't want to think about this. But we're the only ones who can. No one back home will do this for her, they just don't know. We do. So let's give her that.[298]

[296] Mantoan, *War as Performance*, 84.
[297] Mantoan, *War as Performance*, 85, 86.
[298] McLaughlin, *Ajax in Iraq*, 53.

In this final scene of the play, A.J.'s comrades hold a memorial service for her. They can commemorate her life and memory only after acknowledging their role in her marginalization. Through the act of memorializing A.J., her fellow soldiers become more empathetic and vow to pay better attention in the future.

The Soldier's Experience in Iraq: Service-Induced PTSD, Betrayal, and Confusion

At the center of *Ajax in Iraq* lies the issue that A.J. feels she cannot report the command rape she experienced. In exploring the more comprehensive problem regarding the secrecy and lack of justice for wrongdoings in the United States military (particularly during the Iraq War), McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq* "investigates the harm caused by US military policy and culture."[299] The playwright further critiques the injurious and toxic military culture by including oral histories of veterans, active-duty service members, and their families. McLaughlin and her collaborators, for example, used interviews with such service members, as well as blogs, videos, and other research methods to learn more about war from members of the military.

The testimonies that the creative team discovered influenced both the structure and content of the play. Throughout *Ajax in Iraq*, McLaughlin includes scenes in which the soldiers, veterans, their families, therapists, and others narrate their fictional experiences—experiences inspired by the research she conducted with her actor-collaborators. I agree with Mantoan, who argues that these testimonies "transform private, personal pain into collaborative public dissent."[300] Such public protest and grieving, experienced by many throughout and particularly at the height of the Iraq War, is an active part of memorializing and remembering.

[299] Mantoan, *War as Performance*, 67.
[300] Mantoan, "Reframing the Iraq War Through Performance," 196.

The playwright, her collaborators, and their audiences discussed the effects of war trauma and PTSD during the Iraq War. Much like many veterans and active-duty service members, McLaughlin's protagonists are haunted by their respective war trauma, grief, betrayal, and sexual assault. In a talkback session for a Theater of War Productions's staged reading (2014) of *Ajax*, a physician specializing in treating veterans with PTSD said that the inability or unwillingness of the play's chorus to see Ajax's mental and emotional pain resonated with him. This type of pain was something he knew firsthand from conversations with soldiers and veterans who continue to fight mental battles when they return home from war. These veterans often "struggle to reconnect with friends and family that are 'blind' and 'deaf' to their suffering."[301] McLaughlin's A.J. never makes it home from war, but it is her friends and comrades who ignore her unusual behavior and disengagement until it is too late.

Further, we see how A.J.'s mental wounds of being repeatedly raped by her Sergeant without recourse and witnessing the death of most of her team manifest themselves when she murders a flock of sheep. McLaughlin incorporated the research she undertook with her collaborators while developing this scene; she concludes:

> We identified a trend, no an epidemic, of suicide by soldiers, occurring sometimes during their tours of duty, sometimes after they'd returned to civilian life. Military psychiatrists use the term *moral injury* to describe the common experience of soldiers crippled less by the trauma of battle than by their feelings of shame and guilt related to the damage done to their deeply held beliefs about right and wrong. Besides suicide, this psychological

[301] Sophie Klein, "Theater of War: Ancient Greek drama as a forum for modern military dialogue," *Contemporary Adaptations of Greek Tragedy: Auteurship and Directorial* Visions, ed. George Rodosthenous (New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017), 160.

> crisis can lead to "berserking"—soldiers' turning on innocent civilians, prisoners in their care, or, increasingly often, their own troops. A common theme of many of these suicides and psychotic breaks seemed to be a loss of faith in commanding officers, a sense of betrayal, and, most important, a feeling of having been shamed—"thrown away," one soldier's suicide note said—by the American military, which they had once been proud to serve.[302]

The concept of "berserking," attributed to psychiatrist Jonathan Shay, inspired McLaughlin's understanding of PTSD. "Berserk" comes from a Norse word referring to "frenzied warriors who went into battle naked, or at least without armor, in godlike or god-possessed—but also beast-like—fury." As cited in Karen Malpede's introduction, Shay concludes "that the berserk state is ruinous, leading to the solder's life-long psychological and physiological injury if he survives. I believe that once a person has entered the berserk state, he or she is changed forever."[303] Both Ajax (in the source text and McLaughlin's adaptation) and A.J. enter into this "berserk" state. Their shame and guilt haunt them. Ajax is plagued with shame, knowing he ever desired to murder Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Odysseus and mistook livestock for these men. He also experiences survivor's guilt after his dear friend, Achilles, died in battle, but he survived. A.J. experiences the same survivor's guilt, but the shame she feels is doubled. A.J.—as many rape survivors can attest to—feels shame for being raped, as well as knowing she likely will be

[302] McLaughlin, "On Finding Ajax in Iraq," 835.

[303] Karen Malpede, introduction to *Acts of War: Iraq and Afghanistan in Seven Plays*, ed. Karen Malpede, Michael Messina, and Bob Shuman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), xxiv.

dishonorably discharged for her actions during her "berserk" state. Neither A.J. nor Ajax can live with these feelings haunting them for the rest of their lives; the only end they can see is suicide.

The soldier and veteran narratives that McLaughlin incorporated in *Ajax in Iraq* elucidate the themes of confusion and betrayal that many in the military have experienced. Confusion about the purpose of the war and who the true enemy was became a challenge for many of the service members interviewed. McLaughlin reports, "Civilians looked like insurgents, and insurgents look like civilians…. But the greatest confusion for the soldiers in Iraq concerned their mission. No two soldiers interpreted what they were doing in the same way."[304] In the Forward to a collection of plays about the Iraq War, Chris Hedges reminds us that in the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, "the enemy is elusive and rarely seen, murder occurs far more often than killing. Families are massacred in air strikes and drone attacks. Children are gunned down in blistering suppressing fire laid down in neighborhoods after an improvised explosive device goes off near a convoy."[305] Civilian deaths drastically rose in the Iraq War, and part of this was because it was difficult to identify who was a civilian and who was the enemy.

McLaughlin incorporates the blurring of innocence and villainy in the first choral scene in *Ajax in Iraq*, where a group of soldiers describes the complexities of knowing who is a civilian and who is "the enemy":[306]

> **F.** You're always second-guessing everything because the rules for engagement are just unworkable.… 'cause you have to draw fire in order to legitimize firing back in a civilian

[304] McLaughlin, "On Finding Ajax in Iraq," 836.

[305] Chris Hedges, forward to *Acts of War: Iraq and Afghanistan in Seven Plays*, ed. Karen Malpede, Michael Messina, and Bob Shuman (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), viii-ix.

[306]McLaughlin and her collaborators' interviews and research inspired the choral scenes.

situation, which is, let's face it, this entire war. We're the only ones in uniform here, you know what I mean?

C. How do you know who the insurgents are?

I don't know, man.

…

A. Were there accidental casualties? Well, yeah.[307]

Just as Ajax and A.J. mistake livestock for men in a moment of PTSD-induced madness, McLaughlin's collaborators interviewed soldiers who described the possibility of murdering a civilian when mistaking them for the enemy. Such a mistake would likely have an extremely negative impact on a service member's mental health, which McLaughlin cleverly reveals in her characterization of A.J.

Hedges also identifies how betrayal functions during war: "War is always about betrayal. It is about betrayal of the young by the old, of cynics by idealists, and of soldiers and Marines by politicians.… This betrayal is so deep that many never find their way back to faith in the nation or in any god."[308] Betrayal and exceptionalism intertwine in *Ajax in Iraq*. Mantoan argues,

> While both Ajax and AJ are betrayed by their superior officers' exceptionalism—or belief in one's superiority—surfaces in different ways in Sophocles's and McLaughlin's interpretations of this ancient story. Sophocles's Ajax suffers precisely because he views

[307] McLaughlin, *Ajax in Iraq*, 10-12.
[308] Hedges, Forward to *Acts of War*, x.

himself as exceptional…. McLaughlin's AJ suffers because her superior officer believes he is exceptional and doesn't need to abide by the rules that confine other soldiers.[309]

As her Sergeant betrays A.J., her fellow soldiers fail her; they do not acknowledge the pain and trauma that she experiences. The theme of betrayal is apparent too in the choral scenes. At the beginning of the play, soldiers describe feeling betrayed by their superior officers and government leaders:

F. It's this feeling of all of us, the Iraqis and the American soldiers, we're all being just hung out to dry.

A. But even at the beginning, when Bush was saying things like "Mission Accomplished" to an enemy who had only just begun to hit hard and dirty, telling them to "Bring it on" when the troops didn't have armor, shit, we didn't have full battle-rattle until, like, well, do we even have it *now?* So you started feeling that the people in charge don't know what they were doing.… I don't know who I'm more angry at, the enemy or the higher-ups, I mean, the disconnect—

…

D. SO what's the mission anymore? Remember when it was about WMDs? That's why I was here. That's what I was told the mission was. O.K. so it turns out there weren't any, no WMDs, weren't ever any. When we heard that we were like, so what the fuck are we doing over here? Then we hear that the mission is the security of the Iraqi people?… That

[309] Mantoan, *War as Performance*, 79-80.

> was a big surprise to us.… We've disbanded the army, there's no police force…. You ever tried to make a living cow out of a cooked hamburger?[310]

Feelings of betrayal by superior officers, politicians, and the broader United States government are common among active-duty service members and veterans. Bryan Doerries, the founder of Theater of War Productions, interviewed Jeff Hall, a soldier who believed that the US Army and his superiors had betrayed him and the soldiers under his command. Hall felt that the Army (commanding officers and government officials) did not want to win the war and that in order for his soldiers to come home safely, he must protect them from both outside threats and from his superiors.[311] Doerries describes one of the first staged readings of his translations of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* in front of a military audience. He writes about the tense talkback, which included a conversation between military wives, commanding officers, an Army chaplain, and service members, who fixated on a single line in the play: "Witness how the generals have destroyed me!" Moreover, Doerries explains that the wives of generals defended their husbands' roles in the war, while other service members and their loved ones deeply connected to the line in the play. Regardless of one's connection to this particular sentence, it was clear to Doerries that those in attendance of the event bore "witness to the truth of the experience of war" through his play translations.[312] McLaughlin's adaptation, *Ajax in Iraq*, like Doerries's translations, reveals this truth about bearing witness.

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[310] McLaughlin, *Ajax in Iraq*, 11-12.

[311] Bryan Doerries, *The Theater of War: What Ancient Greek Tragedies Can Teach Us Today* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 126.

[312] Doerries, *The Theater of War*, 84-88.

Witnessing through theatrical performance has been one mode of memory sharing. As Freddie Rokem asserts, "The arts…will continue to bear witness even after there are no more direct witnesses at all, extending the chain of witnessing, bridging the inevitable gaps between the generations."[313] If bridging difference, finding similarities across generations and locations, and evoking an empathetic response to someone else's memories belongs to the process of memorialization, then the theatre is capable of achieving these goals as well.

A Legacy of Military Trauma in *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*

McLaughlin's merging of ancient and contemporary characters and themes contributes to the distinctive form of her stage adaptation Quiara Alegría Hudes also uniquely structures her narrative of war that crosscuts time and space and memories of the past and present. She organizes her complex familial narrative of military legacy around the concept of a musical fugue, specifically the fugue structure created by Johann Sebastian Bach. As a musician and composer, Hudes gravitates toward lyrical forms and music aesthetics in many of her plays. To navigate the intricacies of generational trauma caused by war—or perhaps to further complicate them—Hudes relies on a fugue to blur the line between the present and flashbacks, including memories and their retellings. Created with two or more instrumental or vocal "voices," a fugue is a musical structure that gives the impression of pursuit. The fugue begins with a statement of a subject and a response in a singular voice. A counterpoint or counter-subject voice closely follows the answer. The third and fourth voices follow if needed. A fugue has three key components: it must be distinctive enough to recognize when the melody reappears, short enough

[313] Rokem, "Discursive Practices and Narrative Models," 21.

that the listener can remember the "subject," and can vary in length.[314] The fugue is relevant to both the content and structure of Hudes's play; as we will see, the overlapping "voices" highlight the effects of war as the "subject" of the play.

Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue is the first play in a trilogy about the Ortiz family and Elliot's journey to rediscover himself after experiencing familial trauma and the aftermath of his first tour in Iraq. *Elliot* follows Elliot Ortiz—a Puerto-Rican American, nineteen-year-old who enlisted in the United States Marine Corps like his father and grandfather—as he contemplates returning for a second tour of duty. Through an evocative and symbolic retelling, we discover that during his first tour, Elliot was severely wounded. Hudes interweaves into her narrative the Ortiz family legacy of war as she includes scenes that recount the experience of Elliot's mother (a former nurse at a military hospital) and father during the Vietnam War and Elliot's grandfather in the Korean War. Hudes incorporates multiple familial voices to demonstrate a generational trauma and embodied memory passed down from grandfather to son to grandson.

The prevalence of generational military service and trauma in *Elliot* intrigues the reader, because Hudes never intended to write a "war play." However, she was concerned with the concept of youth and the future after soldiers return home from war. In an interview, Hudes says of her writing process,

> I wrote [*Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*] because here we were sending a young generation off to war. That alone, sociologically, seemed like a valid story to tell. What will this mean to our generation? The story gets told time and time again because we keep doing that. Of

[314] Vaclav Nelhýbel, *The Fugue in the style of the 18th Century*, Folkways Records FW03609, 1964, 00:00-29:47, Spotify.

> course, after that play was complete, the question—what does it mean to send a young generation off to war?—doesn't end. That question continues. What does it mean to bring them back into our society? What does it mean for their children? That question opens up and unfolds into more questions.… I was very interested in the subjective legacy of war. How do our wars continue to trickle down to future generations?[315]

Like McLaughlin, Hudes wanted to feature generational issues and the war in Iraq in her play. One play was written by a playwright belonging to the generation of military and government leaders that commanded young men and women to go to war; Hudes belonged to the generation deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. In *Elliot*, Hudes effortlessly weaves her concerns about generational trauma and the legacy of war into her familial narrative.

Initially, Hudes intended to write *Elliot* as a stand-alone play about the Ortiz family, not as part of a trilogy. Along with Miracle Theatre in Portland, Oregon, Hudes developed the play with support from a fellowship through Page 73 Playwrighting. *Elliot* premiered in workshop form in September 2005.[316] Hudes admits *Elliot* is short for a full-length play and thus ensured that there was a "conversation…led by a veteran" after each performance.[317] The official world premiere in January 2006 occurred with Page 73 Productions at The Culture Project in New York City. Most notably, *Elliot* was a finalist for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.[318] Additionally, *Elliot* was performed at the US embassy in Armenia in 2014 in an effort to better

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[315] Harvey Young, "An Interview with Quiara Alegría Hudes," *Theatre Survey* 56, no. 2 (May 2015): 190, DOI: 10.1017/S004055741500006X.

[316] Roberta Uno, ed., "Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue," in *Contemporary Plays by Women of Color: An Anthology*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2018), 79.

[317] Young, "An Interview with Quiara Alegría Hudes," 191.

[318] Lebron, "Crossing the Military-Civilian Divide," 170.

support veterans in Armenia.[319] Since its premiere, regional and university theatres in the United States have continued to produce *Elliot*. In her dissertation on performances of veteran narratives, Lebron notes that the three plays of the trilogy "are almost always performed in isolation." Often when full productions of the plays are staged in the same city, they tend to be what Lebron has called "uncoordinated efforts by various theater companies over a variety of years."[320] Since 2017, there have been very few examples of collaborative efforts to produce the trilogy prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.[321] It is unfortunate that more theatres do not produce the trilogy successively or in collaboration with other theatres because *Water by the Spoonful* and *The Happiest Song Plays Last* (the latter plays in the trilogy) expand the world of the Ortiz family (specifically Elliot), further the character development, and reveal broader implications of generational trauma and memory.

As a single play, some audience members take issue with *Elliot*'s shallow character development and suggest that Hudes has favored a broader commentary on the Iraq War, generational trauma, and military legacy, leaving her characters underdeveloped. Most critics could resolve their negative responses to *Elliot* by pointing to Hudes's thorough exploration of the characters in the last two plays of the trilogy.[322] However, many critics review the play favorably. Phoebe Hoban from the *New York Times* identified Hudes's *Elliot* as a "rare and rewarding thing: a theater work that succeeds on every level, while creating something new."

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[319] Lebron, "Crossing the Military-Civilian Divide," 169-70.

[320] Lebron, "Crossing the Military-Civilian Divide," 170.

[321] Three Houston area theatres (Mainstreet Theater, Stages, and Mildred's Umbrella Theater Company) in conjunction with Sin Muros, a Latinx Theatre Festival, produced the trilogy in a coordinated effort in February and March 2020. Teatre Paraguas, the Santa Fe Playhouse, and Ironweed Productions also collaborated in a staging of the trilogy in 2019.

[322] Kerry Reid, "Elliot, a Soldier's Fugue at Steppenwolf Theatre," *Chicago Reader*, November 16, 2006, https://chicagoreader.com/arts-culture/elliot-a-soldiers-fugue/.

She also praised the playwright for writing a play that acts as an indictment of the Iraq War without ever invoking politics.[323] In a review for Steppenwolf's 2006 production of *Elliot*, Catey Sullivan described the play as an "eloquently structured but predictable treatise on the impact of three wars on three generations in the same family."[324] Perhaps *Elliot*'s harshest theatre critic, Mark Blankenship, agrees with those who point to the lack of character development in the trilogy's first play. He also suggests that the playwright's techniques lead to an alienating effect of using two contrasting sides of the stage for different characters. Moreover, the very little dialogue, theme, and structure of the musical fugue that inspired the playwright is so easily grasped that it oversimplifies the play.[325] I suggest that the fugue structure serves as an especially effective format for a play that speaks to shared experiences across time and space. This recognizable melody forces the reader or audience member to acknowledge the broader scope of war trauma and culture rather than a single, personal narrative to which we have grown accustomed. Elliot's is the responding voice, and Pop and Grandpop act as the second and third counter-subject voices. The non-fugue scenes operate as preludes that Anne García-Romero aptly describes as poetic reverberations of Elliot's military service.[326] The fugue complicates the organization and narrative of *Elliot*. Still, the musical structure beautifully functions as a metaphor for military legacy, war trauma, and Latinx and Black history in the US military.

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[323] Phoebe Hoban, "3 Generations of Soldiers' Stories in a Melancholy Key," *New York Times*, February 7, 2006, E7, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

[324] Catey Sullivan, "Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue," *Windy City Times*, November 11, 2006, https://www.windycitytimes.com/lgbt/Elliot-A-Soldiers-Fugue/13278.html.

[325] Mark Blankenship, "Elliot: A Soldier's Fugue," *Variety* 401, no. 13 (February 2006): 72, ProQuest.

[326] Anne García-Romero, "Fugue, Hip Hop and Soap Opera: Transcultural Connections and Theatrical Experimentalism in Twenty-First Century US Latina Playwriting," *Latin American Theatre Review* 43, no. 1 (2009): 88, DOI: 10.1353/ltr.2009.0038.

The Fugue's Crossing of Generational Difference

The concept of a fugue encompasses the play's content, themes, and structure. Four fugue scenes "divide the play into sections which mark major events in Elliot's life in the play: preparing to ship off for his first tour of duty, Elliot's killing a person in Iraq, Elliot's leg injury in Iraq and Elliot's shipping off for his second tour of duty."[327] In these scenes, we witness Elliot's experience, as well as his father's and grandfather's memories. The men's experiences create intersecting layers in many of the play's scenes. We witness these moments occurring on stage simultaneously, yet they take place across multiple time points and geographic spaces. For example, in the first fugue scene, we are introduced to Elliot when he walks onstage. It is 2003, the night before he deploys to Iraq. Moments later, we are introduced to Pop in 1966 as he returns from the deck of the USS *Eltinge*. As Elliot and Pop continue their preparations, Grandpop enters his tent in Inchon, Korea, in 1950.[328] Thus, we catch a glimpse of each man's experience at the beginning of their tour in this scene. The layered nature of this scene across time and space (and the fugues that follow) evokes the play's overarching military culture and experiences of service members.

The generational sharing of trauma and memory in *Elliot* is reminiscent of Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory. To be sure, the familial bond is not a prerequisite for postmemory's success. Nevertheless, Hirsch asserts, familial legacy in the postmemory context is more potent than affiliative bonds.[329] Hudes's play shows the strength of war trauma and

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[327] García-Romero, "Fugue, Hip Hop and Soap Opera," 88.

[328] Quiara Alegría Hudes, *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2012), 7-15.

[329] Marianne Hirsch, "Marked by Memory," in *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, ed. Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 77.

memory transmission across generations. Hirsch notes that postmemory "is a question of adopting the traumatic experiences—and thus also the *memories*—of others as experiences one might oneself have had, and thus of inscribing them into one's own life story. This form of identification means the ability to say, 'It could have been me; it was me, also," and *at the same time*, *categorically*, 'but it was not me.'"[330] Each man's experiences (and thus memories) are mirrored by their family members, yet their individual experiences are not the same. However, the trauma originally caused by war is omnipresent in the successive generations' lives; each passing generation of Ortiz men carries the trauma and memories of the generation before them, inscribing them into their own life stories.

Similarly, Hudes purposefully connects the Vietnam and Korean Wars with the Iraq War by literally staging all three wars and the play's present on the same stage. In many scenes (especially the fugue scenes), we catch glimpses of all three men's experiences in their respective wars. In the Production Notes of *Elliot*, Hudes writes, "Time within the 'Fugue' scenes is fluid and overlaps. When Elliot steps into the 'Fugue' scenes, he's in 2003 Iraq. When Pop steps into the 'Fugue' scenes, he's in late-1960s, Vietnam. When Grandpop steps into the 'Fugue' scenes, he's in 1950 Korea. Often, these disparate time periods occur simultaneously."[331] Hudes quite literally blends the past with the present in her play.

As Hudes combines the past and present through the fugues, she signals similarities across military service, generational war experiences, and twentieth and twenty-first-century wars. Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory guides us to view this juxtaposition as an opportunity to see the broader culture of war at work rather than a competitive environment for

[330] Hirsch, "Marked by Memory," 76. Emphasis in the original.
[331] Hudes, *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*, 5.

military legacies and their respective wars. García-Romero describes Hudes' application of the fugue in her play as a "structural polyphony" that "allows for a multiplicity of voices echoing each other while maintaining their unique identities. In utilizing the fugue structure, Hudes sets up the expectation of a multi-vocal landscape which surrounds one main theme or idea."[332] The fugue structure allows the audience/reader to see the similarities and differences between Elliot's experience in Iraq, Pop's military encounters in Vietnam, and Grandpop's service in Korea. As Rothberg expresses the power of juxtaposing seemingly disparate events to highlight shared experiences, Hudes's polyvocal narrative also reveals shared threads of trauma and embodied memory across generations of military service.

Further, in her interview with Alexis Greene, Hudes states that she imagined the stories in her play "on top of each other visually." Through the fugue structure, the playwright places the various stories "in relief" to counterpoint the others' experiences and narratives.[333] Whereas García-Romero suggests Hudes's theatrical fugue is underdeveloped because it does not allow a complete understanding of Elliot's experience, perhaps this is the purpose.[334] By generalizing Elliot's experience, other characters get the chance to share their experiences in the military, the so-called "underdeveloped" fugue shows the similarities, and differences, across the broader US military structure. As audience members and readers, we can acknowledge these similar experiences and empathize with the characters and the people they represent.

[332] García-Romero, "Fugue, Hip Hop and Soap Opera," 88.

[333] Alexis Greene, "No Place Like Home: Quiara Alegría Hudes Tells A Philadelphia Story All Her Own," *American Theatre* 25, no. 8 (October 2008): 34, ProQuest.

[334] García-Romero, "Fugue, Hip Hop and Soap Opera," 90.

Sincerity vs. Fidelity: Adapting Witness Testimony to the Stage

Beyond her use of the musical fugue, Hudes includes vital witness testimony in *Elliot*. Central to the play is Hudes's muse, her cousin Elliot Ruiz who—like his theatrical counterpart—was also a marine in Iraq. Hudes interviewed her cousin and uncle (who served in Vietnam and inspired the character of Pop).[335] The playwright's relatives' lives significantly influenced the play, yet *Elliot* is not biographical. This was a strategic move for Hudes. She wanted to represent the broader Puerto-Rican community living in the continental United States but did not want to "air her family's secrets."[336] Additionally, Hudes conducted thorough research as she developed *Elliot*. She researched topics such as the Marine Corps, drug addiction, and the Middle East to understand the world in which her characters live. Hudes also relied on Ruiz to correct the intricacies of the character and has described him as a collaborator.[337]

The inclusion of witness testimony follows concerns of authenticity and a playwright's creative intervention in her interpretation of the testimony. Lebron argues that theatre productions that incorporate veterans' stories and eye-witness testimony "often emphasize their authenticity while ignoring the editorial interventions of the [playwrights] and the inherent politics of the form itself."[338] Julia Boll expands on this idea stating, "The unique emotional experience of the theatre seems to have a numbing effect on the ability to perceive what is presented as biased, neglecting the whole process of editing and arranging…."[339] I suggest that Hudes uses veterans' narratives to her advantage without over-emphasizing authenticity.

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[335] Hudes, Elliot, *A Soldier's Fugue*, vii.

[336] Stuart Miller, "A Sort of Homecoming," *American Theatre* 31, no. 1 (January 2014): 87. Performing Arts Periodicals Database.

[337] Miller, "A Sort of Homecoming," 88.

[338] Lebron, "Crossing the Military-Civilian Divide," 110.

[339] Julia Boll, *The New War Plays: From Kane to Harris* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 101.

Moreover, Hudes's fugue technique cross-references multiple wars, thus, highlighting, rather than hiding, the playwright's role in editing and arranging the stories represented. By straying from a naturalistic storytelling style, Hudes embraces theatricality and reveals the devastating nature of war.[340]

Like debates about an adaptation's fidelity, a call for reliability, trustworthiness, and authenticity persists when dramatizing witness testimony.' Lebron proposes a framework of sincerity rather than accuracy to analyze and critique plays that incorporate testimony in order to counter the focus on authenticity. Sincerity, like acknowledging the "spirit of the source," considers the author's intention when critiquing such work. In her examination of the Elliot trilogy, Lebron argues that Hudes's aesthetic devices—such as ghosts and music— "closely link its protagonist's military experience with the experiences of his civilian, minoritarian neighborhood."[341] I expand on this argument to suggest that such staging of sincere, rather than faithful, testimony connects Elliot's experiences (both the character and inspiration) to the broader military community. I agree with Lebron as she opposes German theorist Walter Benjamins's insistence that "the presence of the original is the prerequisite of the concept of authenticity."[342] Indeed, the inspiration, or the "spirit" of the testimony, is as essential as a word-for-word dramatization of witness testimony. For Lebron, playwrights like Hudes gain an opportunity to work within the confines of the reality and truth of what service members and veterans experienced and still embrace aesthetic forms, creativity, and ambiguity.[343]

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[340] McLaughlin also avoids an over-emphasis of the authenticity of the use of witness testimony. By literally layering the past and present, modernizing a classic narrative, and including fragments of testimony interspersed in the play, *Ajax in Iraq* accentuates McLaughlin's creative interventions.

[341] Lebron, "Crossing the Military-Civilian Divide," 11-12.

[342] Lebron, "Crossing the Military-Civilian Divide," 171.

[343] Lebron, "Crossing the Military-Civilian Divide," 172.

Significantly, Landsberg's connection between authenticity and prosthetic memory is useful to iterate in conjunction with Hudes' aesthetic choice to use testimony in her play. Landsberg reminds us, "If identity is largely a product of memory and if authenticity is no longer an essential component of memory, new possibilities are available for individual and group identity."[344] As we yield to creative interpretation of witness testimony—in the theatre and other sites of memory—we engage in prosthetic memory, allowing audiences to experience the memory of others imaginatively.

Military Trauma: The First Kill and Betrayal

The witness's memories that Hudes shares in *Elliot* are similar to those adopted in *Ajax in Iraq*. In Hudes's script, the men do not address mistaking civilians for "hostiles;" however, the second fugue scene in the play explicitly addresses the haunting and emotional trauma one experiences after their "first kill." At the beginning of this fugue, we sense the uncertainty and fear that Elliot feels after he kills a combatant for the first time:

> GINNY: The green profile of a machine gun in the distance.
>
> ELLIOT: Waikiki, look straight ahead. Straight, at that busted wall. Shit. You see that guy? What's in his hand? He's got an AK. What do you mean, "I don't know." Do you see him?
>
> …
>
> Is this your first? Shit, this is my first, too. All right. You ready?
>
> Ginny: In the dream, aiming in.

[344] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 46.

In the dream, knowing his aim is exact.

In the dream, closing his eyes.

(Elliot closes his eyes)

ELLIOT: Bang.

…

GINNY: Nightmares every night, he said.

A dream about the first guy he actually saw that he killed.[345]

We later learn that Elliot carries this man's passport with him until the last play of the trilogy.[346] In *Water by the Spoonful*, we also discover that Elliot is literally haunted by the first man he killed in Iraq.[347] Arguably, Elliot's war experiences burden him; he carries the trauma of shooting someone with him long after his tour in Iraq. It is an unspeakable trauma, even though he suspects his father and grandfather experienced similar circumstances in the wars they fought. In this sixth scene, the second fugue of the play, Pop also experiences fear and nervousness as he too completes his first kill. Like Elliot, Pop also removes a wallet from the man he killed. Both

[345] Hudes. *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*, 27-28.

[346] Hudes, *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*, 54.

[347] The idea of haunting is fitting for theatrical performances and adaptations. In *The Haunted Stage*, Marvin Carlson notes the haunting features and nature of the theatre: the use of ghost lights, theatre superstitions, plays being figuratively haunted by their predecessors performed in the theatre, previous plays written by the same playwright, use of similar scenography, etc. See Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2003). Additionally, adaptation can also be considered an act of haunting/ghosting; as Barnette tells us, adaptation is often considered "a kind of ghosting, given the inescapable and highly charged relationship between the source and the adaptation." Barnette, *Adapturgy*, 46. Hutcheon also speaks to this idea of haunting by introducing the term "palimpsestuous" to allude to recognizing the source text through the adaptation. Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 6.

men "remov[e] ID and intel from dead hostiles" simultaneously. Their bodily movement, like their experiences, are parallel.[348]

The theme of betrayal, and the desire to murder one's commanding officer, which we saw in McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq*, also appear in *Elliot*. In a prelude scene toward the end of the play,[349] Elliot stands in the garden and reflects on his first tour in Iraq. As he thinks about the items service members bring with them to remind them of home, Elliot confesses that he had wanted to murder his superior:

> One night, I don't know why, I was just going to kill my corporal. He was asleep. I put my rifle to the corporal's head and I was going to kill him. All I kept thinking was the bad stuff he made us do. He was the kind of guy who gets off on bringing down morale.… I was ready to pull the trigger. Waikiki woke up and saw what I was doing. He kicked my arm like, "Eh, man, let's switch." So I looked at my pictures and slept, he went on watch.[350]

Because this scene is a prelude instead of a fugue, we do not know if Pop or Grandpop had similar feelings of betrayal or a desire to kill their commanding officer. We know, however, that Elliot believes that he and Pop lived very similar lives in the military.

In the final prelude scene, Elliot reveals that he read all of the letters Pop wrote to Grandpop during his tour in Vietnam. Elliot is surprised at the similarities:

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[348] Hudes, *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*, 28-31.

[349] *Elliot* is comprised of fugue and prelude scenes. All non-fugue scenes—regardless of their location in the script—are preludes as they precede a fugue scene.

[350] Hudes, *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*, 54-55.

ELLIOT: I was like, Pop, I fucking walked in your shoes.

…

Pop, we lived the same fucking life.

POP: All these thoughts were going through my head like thinking about the Bronx, you, Mom.

ELLIOT: It's scary how much was the same. Killing a guy. Getting your leg scratched up. Falling in love.

…

ELLIOT: Nightmares. Meds. Infections. Letters to your father.

…

POP: It was like, shoot someone, destroy something….

ELLIOT: You see all the shit you can't erase. Like, here's who you are, Elliot, and you never even knew.[351]

Such scripted moments express the similarities between lived war experiences regardless of the war, time, or geography. Instead of putting the three wars represented in *Elliot* in competition with one another, we must reckon with the larger picture of war trauma and toxic military culture. In identifying these similarities across three wars and through three generations of men, we are encouraged to acknowledge the painful events and circumstances likely experienced by all service members.

[351] Hudes, *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*, 58-59.

Latinx Military Service as Marginal Identity

I have shown that Hudes uses the fugue structure to reveal differences between Elliot and his family's military service. The same fugue structures demonstrate the difference between the characters' experience and that of the typical white male service member in the US military. Elliot, his family, and the Puerto-Rican community he represents are often marginalized. Elliot, his father, and grandfather all experience PTSD and physical war wounds, which—like McLaughlin's A.J.—adds to their marginal status. However, in Hudes's play, the family's identity as Latinx service members explicitly marks them as other or outsider.

Hudes sees Elliot and his story as "both quintessentially American and a great representation of the Puerto Rican experience…."[352] Thus, Elliot's story represents both the typical American military experience and specifically the Puerto Rican experience in the military and the United States. García-Romero further suggests about the play trilogy that,

> on one level, Hudes could be stating that the impact of the subject of military service is all pervasive and that regardless of generation or military conflict, the devastation of war is universal. However, also embedded in this play is the notion of the Ortiz family's Puerto Rican culture versus their US lives. With the US life being the hegemonic standard, the Puerto Rican culture then takes a subaltern position, existing in counterpoint [reflective in her fugue structure] to the subject of the majority US culture, which Elliot and his family embrace in their Philadelphia existence.[353]

[352] Miller, "A Sort of Homecoming," 87.
[353] García-Romero, "Fugue, Hip Hop and Soap Opera," 88.

Indeed, regarding the history of Latinx and Black service members serving in the military, Elliot and his family act as a counterpoint to the military history of primarily white service members. Elliot's circumstances complicate his enlistment in the military as a Puerto Rican marine.

We are initially led to believe that Elliot has a biological military legacy. However, in *Water by the Spoonful*—the second play in the Elliot trilogy—we learn that his mother and father are not his biological parents. Therefore, this legacy is culturally inherited rather than biologically passed down. As Patricia Ybarra argues, "This makes his patrilineal relationship to military violence allegorical rather than biological.… Hudes stages familial legacy ambivalently, but suggests that legacies are determined at least as much by circumstances of poverty and possibility as by biological or cultural determinism."[354] Thus, Elliot is marginalized because of the cultural and economic circumstances that he and his family face as Latinx Americans. Additionally, their marginalization is furthered by their social status as wounded veterans/marines with PTSD.

Theatrical Memorialization and Empathy

Memory connects us to those we may consider as "other." As explored above, the protagonists in *Ajax in Iraq* and *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* are often "othered" or marginalized due to their identity markers (Puerto Rican, woman, soldier/marine, suffering from mental health disorders). Rothberg and Landsberg acknowledge the power that memory holds in eliciting empathy in the audience for those from whom we initially felt different. Rothberg contends that when one's thinking incorporates multidirectional memory, there is "potential to create new

[354] Patricia Ybarra, "How to Read a Latinx Play in the Twenty-first Century: Learning from Quiara Hudes," *Theatre Topics* 27, no. 1 (March 2017): 51, DOI: 10.1353/tt.2017.0001.

forms of solidarity and new visions of justice."[355] Rothberg problematizes frameworks centered on competitive memory, stating, "As I struggle to achieve recognition of *my* memories and *my* identity, I necessarily exclude the memories and identities of others. Openness to memory's multidirectionality puts this last assumption into question as well. Memories are not owned by groups—nor are groups jagged."[356] We respond to others' trauma with empathy as we unravel the tangled nature of memory and identity. Landsberg also notes the possibilities of empathetic responses when encountering prosthetic memories via mass culture. For Landsberg, "The wide circulation of mass-mediated images brings people into contact with other people, other cultures, and other histories divorced from their own lived experience. Through mass culture, people have the opportunity to enter into a relationship with the 'foreign.'"[357] As we encounter film, television, and theatrical productions that center another group's trauma, we become empathetic to that group.

I argue that, through the technique of narrating the memories of marginalized characters based on or inspired by real people, McLaughlin and Hudes have created opportunities for audience members to empathize with the protagonists—and thus the larger communities they represent. In turn, the spectator or reader may engage in conversation about rape in the military, PTSD, and other war trauma. As Landsberg, Rothberg, and other theorists such as E. Ann Kaplan, have made central to their writing, the hope is that such proactive spectatorship could potentially lead an audience to take further action after leaving the theatre. Contemporary

[355] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 5.
[356] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 5.
[357] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memories*, 26.

playwrights such as McLaughlin and Hudes employ aesthetic and dramaturgical writing strategies such as those explored in this study to evoke a "critical empathy" in their audience.[358]

In contrast to this "critical empathy" is Kaplan's concept of "empty empathy." Empty empathy responds to images of suffering that are unaccompanied by any context or background information. Much of the reporting Kaplan saw concerning the Iraq War can be categorized as empty empathy. Kaplan states that she "could hardly believe that [she] was seeing an actual war taking place and not watching yet another war movie." This distortion of reality made Kaplan "emptily empathize" with the soldiers and civilians depicted in the media.[359]

Kaplan further confronts the reporting of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq by arguing that focusing on the individual, rather than the larger issues at play—such as the reasons behind going to war, its global and political impact, and the war's impact on Iraqi civilians—elicits a sentimental response from the viewer that they will soon forget. By encouraging spectators to enter the personal lives (before, during, and after their tour in Iraq) of service members, news reports create an emotionally moving yet fleeting image in our minds about the suffering experienced during war.[360] A focus on a single individual thus could hinder the spectator from asking more critical and necessary questions about the Iraq War.

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[358] In her work on trauma and film, Kaplan suggests that witnessing may develop community bonds through empathetic response. However, she challenges her reader to avoid "empty empathy," further discussed in the following pages. Though her analysis primarily focuses on film and photography, the implications of her study apply to the theatre as well.

[359] Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, 94.

[360] Kaplan. *Trauma Culture*, 94-95. Kaplan also notes the similarities between the images and profiles of deceased soldiers in the reporting surrounding the wars and flyers posted by loved ones of those who were missing or died in 9/11. Further, Kaplan draws our attention to the Iraq War headlines, which specifically drew parallels to 9/11 through reporting how 9/11 influenced the service members' desire to join the military. See Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*, 95-98 for more examples.

Both *Ajax in Iraq* and *Elliot* require audiences to consider the broader effects of war and the US military culture. McLaughlin writes her script as a sharp critique of war, demonstrating similarities between ancient war trauma and that experienced by contemporary military personnel. Although her play has two protagonists, McLaughlin effectively uses testimony from others affected by the war to demonstrate the expansive consequences of war. Moreover, as rates of service member suicide and mass diagnoses of war-induced PTSD are at the forefront of *Ajax in Iraq*, the audience is encouraged to reflect upon the broader consequences of war.

Hudes achieves a similar goal; yet she takes a different approach. She is especially successful in preventing feelings of empty empathy in her audience by providing dramaturgical opportunities in the structure of the play for multiple narratives to be simultaneously shared. García-Romero suggests that perhaps Hudes chose the fugue structure to explore Elliot's war experience precisely because of the fugue's limiting qualities. The musical form does not allow Hudes to thoroughly examine the dynamics between Elliot's past, present, and future, nor the complicated desire he holds for both military and civilian life. The fugue arrangement, a European construct,[361] also restrains Elliot in fully discovering the multiple and intersecting facets of his American culture and Puerto Rican heritage. If the fugue structure limits what can be said about the experience of Elliot, the protagonist, it cannot encapsulate the experience of the other three characters. In advancing this idea, García-Romero suggests that the multiple generational voices in *Elliot* represent the broader military collective and must then demonstrate a range of responses to the varying views of military service.[362] Accordingly, Hudes makes it

[361] It is interesting that Hudes chose the European fugue structure to arrange her narrative of the Puerto Rican military legacy rather than turning to a Latin musical form.

[362] García-Romero, "Fugue, Hip Hop and Soap Opera," 91.

impossible for the spectator or reader to solely focus on Elliot's story (that of both the character and Hudes's cousin) in her play.

Lebron argues that though plays like *Ajax in Iraq* and *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* do not prioritize the healing of active-duty and veteran characters in their plays, they establish ways in which audiences can share the suffering of these characters and the communities they represent.[363] Karen Malpede, a playwright who has written about the Iraq War, underscores this point as she suggests that fellow playwrights like McLaughlin and Hudes counter "empty empathy" through their plays. They allow the audience to experience whatever they are capable of feeling at the moment of witness by limiting staged violence. Instead, McLaughlin and Hudes rely on "image-filled language" or carefully choose moments of violence to dramatize for the audience.[364] Significantly, Malpede asserts,

> Audiences who are deeply moved, whose perceptions have been altered, who are immersed in ambiguity, who recognize the other in themselves and remember the dead, and who come this far together, in the communal seeing place of theater, have been changed. They feel more alive, courageous, more affirmed in their connectedness, more able to be present in the world.[365]

Audiences of *Ajax in Iraq* or *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* ideally would experience a change in their perspective as they witness a narrative of someone they may have deemed as "other."

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[363] Lebron, "Crossing the Military-Civilian Divide," 174.
[364] Malpede, Introduction to *Acts of War*, xxv.
[365] Malpede, Introduction to *Acts of War*, xxx.

As we consider both theatrical and physical memorials to the Iraq War—and the war on terrorism in general—we note that currently, no physical memorial to these wars exists. Will the US government or a non-profit group construct a physical memorial or monument? Will there be as much controversy as there was surrounding the 9/11 Memorial and Museum or the National Vietnam Memorial? As scholars such as Rothberg have begun a serious inquiry into the consideration of literature and art as "sites" of memory,[366] we may extend our understanding of "sites" of memory to include theatrical texts and performance. Thus, might plays such as McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq* and Hudes's *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* satisfy our need for a physical memorial? My analysis of the plays in this chapter and others like them that dramatize the after-effects of battle on human bodies and minds will continue to foster dialogue about the war, US imperialism, PTSD, and sexual assault in the military. Memory is constantly being negotiated in our present as we experience a change in meaning. Plays like *Ajax in Iraq* and *Elliot* create spaces wherein spectators may participate in the negotiation of memories related to the "War on Terror," while remembering the suffering of others and creating a new cultural memory surrounding the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

[366] Rothberg, "Introduction: Between Memory and Memory," 3.

Chapter 4- Imagined Community and Temporary Memorials: Commemorating Victims of Domestic Terrorism

Figure 4: The Battery Labyrinth.

During my October 2021 visit to New York City, I strolled through The Battery enjoying a cup of coffee, leisurely searching for The Battery Labyrinth—a circular walking path created to commemorate the first anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. As I entered the park, I noticed a fenced-in area filled with rows of white vases with white flowers inside them. This memorial honored those who had died of gun violence in New York City. I sat on the iron benches next to the temporary memorial. How serendipitous it was that I had stumbled across this memorial to gun violence victims on my way to commemorate those who died on 9/11 by walking in The Labyrinth. With the connections between gun violence as an act of domestic terrorism and 9/11 already firmly placed in my mind, it was an unexpected occurrence that these two memorials

should be so closely positioned in the same park.[367] As I sat on the benches and looked across the sea of white flowers, I watched other Battery Park visitors interact with the memorial. Some visitors stopped to look at the temporary memorial and took selfies (as people are oddly wont to do at sites of memory). Others expressed frustration—for one local, the memorial seemed to have disrupted her usual walking path. Still, others walked past the memorial without a visible or verbal sign of acknowledgment.

Figure 5: The Battery Labyrinth.

[367] Because The Battery features many memorials, the choice to memorialize victims of gun violence there may not seem as serendipitous to those more familiar with New York. Many of the memorials in The Battery commemorate various wars. The Korean War Memorial is one of the few locations visitors can see from inside The Labyrinth's walking path.

Figure 6: A memorial to gun violence in New York City. Located in The Battery.

Figure 7: Lin Evola's Peace Angel (1997). Located in the National September 11 Museum's Tribute Walk.

The next day at the National September 11 Memorial and Museum, I was again struck by a seemingly disconnected, perhaps random, encounter with a memorial to gun violence. Located in the Tribute Walk area of the museum, parallel to the "In Memoriam" exhibit and at the foot of the "Survivor's Stairs," is a bronze sculpture of a robed angel on a pedestal. The "Renaissance Peace Angel" by Lin Evola (1997) belongs to a series of sculptures that form a symbol of peace and unity from decommissioned firearms and other weapons. At the hem of the angel's robe is a plaque, also made from melted weaponry, that reads:

Peace Angels are here
to fortify
we—the people of the world nation
of many faces
we stand together.
Equal in race, sex and creed.
In solidarity, we strive to overcome the
obstacles of fear and hatred
as we melt the weapons—
the tools of the destruction of our time.
Together we pledge our courage
and create symbols of peace.[368]

[368] Lin Evola, *Renaissance Peace Angel*, sculpture, 1997, The National September 11 Memorial and Museum, New York, NY.

Evola intended to display the sculpture at the World Trade Center complex before September 11, 2001. After 9/11, the artist met Antonio "Nino" Vendome, whose family owned a restaurant in lower Manhattan, operating as a canteen for rescue and recovery workers. Evola and Vendome agreed to place the sculpture in front of the restaurant, which became a landmark for those working at "Ground Zero." Many of the first responders, search and rescue workers, and volunteers signed the cement base of the sculpture.[369] Because of its significance as a landmark for 9/11 workers, the museum curators displayed the sculpture alongside other art pieces dedicated to 9/11 victims and first responders. It is difficult to pass through the Tribute Walk without noticing the Peace Angel. However, only a critical eye may note this statue's complexity as a compound memorial to 9/11 and gun violence.

In this chapter, I continue to explore the merit of a theatrical memorial to twenty-first-century trauma. I reflect on temporary memorials such as the one I encountered in Battery Park, the construction of a permanent memorial to mass shootings, and a theatrical memorial to the Sandy Hook shooting. The Sandy Hook shooting serves as a case study for my examination of theatrical memorials while representing other mass shootings in the United States during the twenty-first century.

I begin with a judicious summary of the Sandy Hook shooting. I do not intend to re-traumatize any reader and consequently avoid overwhelming descriptions in favor of general yet pointed statements. I also offer a reminder of how the victims were depicted and memorialized (both in official and unofficial capacities) in order to stress the national mourning for the Sandy Hook victims. Considering the importance of how we commemorate traumatic national events, I

[369] Display text, *Renaissance Peace Angel*, The National September 11 Memorial and Museum, New York, NY.

examine Eric Ulloa's verbatim play, *26 Pebbles*, as a theatrical memorial to the Sandy Hook shooting. I begin with the creation process and reception of *26 Pebbles* before analyzing the play's commemorative attributes. As I have suggested in earlier chapters, the audience becomes witness to these events through active spectatorship in the theatre and engagement with memorials and museums. I conclude by contemplating the significance of productions of *26 Pebbles* by high school and university theatre departments. School-aged and university students are often the targets of mass shootings, especially in schools. Therefore, it is meaningful that students, who are most affected by this type of gun violence, stage an interventionist play like *26 Pebbles*.

In my study, I specifically consider mass shootings as the epitome of gun violence and domestic terrorism. I purposely conflate and interchange these three terms while acknowledging that not every act of gun violence or domestic terrorism comprises a mass shooting.[370] I also acknowledge that defining terrorism, particularly its reference to mass violence in the United States, is complicated and sparks debate among scholars and US government agencies.

Virginia Held, a Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the City University of New York, notes that terrorism is "political in character" and is often an attack on "members of an opposing group."[371] The FBI states that though political goals can be a factor, any act of domestic terrorism may stem from "political, religious, social, racial, or environmental"

[370] Everytown defines a mass shooting as "any incident in which four or more people are shot and killed, excluding the shooter." "Twelve Years of Mass Shootings in the United States: An Everytown for Gun Safety Support Fund Analysis," *Everytown For Gun Safety*, June 4, 2021, https://everytownresearch.org/maps/mass-shootings-in-america-2009-2019/. There is some debate on whether three or four victims should define a mass shooting and whether familicide can also fall under this definition.

[371] Virginia Held, "Terrorism," in *Ethics and World Politics*, ed. by Duncan Bell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 346.

ideologies.[372] This definition of domestic terrorism is, perhaps purposefully, vague and wide-ranging. Held notes that civilians are often targets—though she suggests that defining "terrorism" on this feature alone further complicates even the clearest form of terrorism (i.e., 9/11) as the Pentagon was also a target on September 11, 2001—and the goal is to "spread fear among a wider group than those directly harmed or killed.[373] Marita Sturken makes clear that terrorism "functions by targeting people who are not directly responsible for the wrongs being addressed, and thus by creating innocent victims." She asserts that terrorism (both foreign and domestic) tends to create a "culture of fear"[374] Christine Muller stresses terrorism's creation of "sufficient fear" in a population, but suggests this is intended to "erode social and political trust."[375] Rustom Bharucha, citing the US State Department's definition points to terrorist's noncombatant targets and, importantly, acknowledges that acts of terrorism are "usually intended to influence an audience."[376]

Because there is no single definition or interpretation of "terrorism," I have chosen to focus on the targets and intended results of its violence when referring to mass shootings as acts of domestic terrorism. It may be difficult to discover an ideological motivation for many mass shootings, but nearly all mass/school shootings are an attack on (often innocent) civilians. I am also interested in how mass shootings and other forms of domestic terrorism create a "culture of fear" that grew out of the mass violence in the 1990s and expanded after 9/11. Many Americans felt a loss of "innocence" and fear that another attack could be imminent. Today the same anxiety persists through the threat of mass shootings; US school children, teenagers, and young

[372] "Terrorism," FBI, accessed May 1, 2022, https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism.
[373] Held, "Terrorism," 346.
[374] Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 5 and 7.
[375] Muller, September 11, 2001 as Cultural Trauma, 7.
[376] Bharucha, *Terror and Performance*, 4.

adults attending college often carry this burden daily. Finally, the intent to "influence" an audience via acts of terrorism is intriguing as we consider our reliance on media to inform our understanding of terrorism in the moment and in its aftermath. As many Americans experienced 9/11 through television and global technologies, so too do we encounter domestic terrorism through the Internet and news reports. The memory frameworks I have employed in this study also emphasize the role of mediatization.

Mass shootings have dominated news cycles in recent years, just as 9/11 did. Despite this parallel, not every incident of gun violence, nor even each mass shooting, is recognized by the media. According to Craig Rood, a scholar interested in how we communicate about divisive public concerns,

> [The] calculus [to determining which mass shootings gain national attention] is complicated but a central factor is the identity of the victims. Age matters: those who are younger are judged more vulnerable and in need of our protection. Location matters too: those who are in spaces presumed safe, such as a school or a church, are more easily presumed innocent…. Location also matters in terms of geography: newscasters and leaders often refer to "quiet" or "bucolic" communities as being ripped apart by violence.[377]

One such instance that gained national attention was the 2012 mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. The Sandy Hook shooting seemed different, perhaps more devastating, than

[377] Craig Rood, "'Our tears are not enough': The warrant of the dead in the rhetoric of gun control," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 104, 1 (January 2018): 52. Doi.10.1080/00335630.2017.1401223.

other mass shootings because of the young age of most of the victims.[378] It was easy for all of us, even those without children at the time, to imagine that the victims involved were our own children, grandchildren, siblings, nieces, and nephews. Additionally, the Sandy Hook shooting ushered in a new era in the gun control debate.[379] Because of its national impact and ability to affect most Americans, I consider the Sandy Hook shooting a nationally traumatic event. In this study, I frame the Sandy Hook shooting to represent other mass shootings in the United States during the twenty-first century.

The Sandy Hook Elementary Shooting: "These Children are our Children"

Sandy Hook is a small village in Newtown, Connecticut. It is "a quiet town full of good and decent people that could be any town in America."[380] On December 14, 2012, the community of Sandy Hook experienced an immense tragedy that reignited the gun control and violent video game debates and discussions on mental healthcare. Inspired by prior shootings,[381]

[378] Rood, "'Our tears are not enough'," 51.

[379] In general, Democratic politicians supported stricter gun laws. In contrast, Republican politicians and the National Rifle Association argued that gun legislation was at fault for mass shootings and looser gun laws would prevent further mass shootings. As Justin Eckstein and Sarah T. Partlow Lefevre note, "Sandy Hook is rhetorically codified as the moment where the gun debate stalemated." Justin Eckstein and Sarah T. Partlow Lefevre, "Since Sandy Hook: Strategic Maneuvering in the Gun Control Debate," *Western Journal of Communication* 81, no. 2 (March 2017): 226, DOI: 10.1080/10570314.2016.1244703; For more research on the gun control debate post-Sandy Hook, please see Eckstein and Lefevre, "Since Sandy Hook" and Kevin H. Wozniak, "Public Opinion About Gun Control Post-Sandy Hook," *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 28, no. 3 (April 2017): 255-278, DOI: 10.1177/0887403415577192. For a summary of the grass-roots movement toward stricter gun control post-Sandy Hook, see Mimi Swartz, "Things Have Changed Since Sandy Hook," *New York Times*, May 21, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/21/opinion/sandy-hook-santa-fe-gun-control.html.

[380] "Text of Obama's remarks in Connecticut," Politico, December 16, 2012, https://www.politico.com/story/2012/12/obama-speech-transcript-sandy-hook-newtown-connecticut-085157.

[381] Lanza was obsessed with earlier mass shootings, including the Columbine High School shooting (1999); an 1891 shooting of school children; the Amish schoolhouse shooting in

Adam Lanza shot his way into Sandy Hook Elementary School. He subsequently murdered twenty children and six adult educators. All of the children found in their first-grade classrooms were six and seven years old. Before arriving at Sandy Hook Elementary on December 14, Lanza also murdered his mother, Nancy. Lanza died of suicide before the police were able to arrest him. The Sandy Hook shooting was at the time the second deadliest mass shooting following the Virginia Tech shooting (2007) and the most fatal mass shooting at an elementary school.[382] The news media immediately swarmed Newtown—as they do with other school shootings—and reported from Newtown for several weeks. Unsurprisingly, Americans were eager to learn more about the event and understand the implications of such a tragedy which generated unusually high levels of coverage.[383]

Like Columbine, the Sandy Hook shooting "struck deep psychic blows, not only in citizen's individual psyches, but also in the collective sentiment."[384] As Americans, we were shocked and, spurred by our grief, seemed ready for gun reform after Sandy Hook. However, the experience and intensity of mourning depended on the location where one resided. National mourning of geographically-specific, traumatic events tends to subside as news coverage diminishes and changes. In the case of Sandy Hook, as the "distance between [the] shooting and

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Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania (2006); and the Northern Illinois University shooting (2008). Lanza also maintained a spreadsheet listing mass shootings prior to the Sandy Hook shooting. Stephen J. Sedensky III, "Report of the State's Attorney for the Judicial District of Danbury on the Shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School and 36 Yogananda Street, Newtown Connecticut on December 14, 2012," November 25, 2013, 26-27, https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DCJ/SandyHookFinalReportpdf.pdf.

[382] Christopher M. Duerringer, "Dis-Honoring the Dead: Negotiating Decorum in the Shadow of Sandy Hook," *Western Journal of Communication* 80, no. 1 (January 2016): 87.

[383] Jaclyn Schildkraut and Glenn W. Muschert, "Media Salience and the Framing of Mass Murder in Schools: A Comparison of the Columbine and Sandy Hook Massacres," *Homicide Studies* 18, no. 1 (February 2014): 24. DOI: 10.1177/1088767913511458.

[384] Schildkraut and Muschert, "Media Salience," 24.

publication increase[d], the information pertaining to the victims and mourning sentiments decrease[d].”[385] Joshua H. Stout refers to this phenomenon as “concentric mourning,” which “refers to the way emotional sentiments dissipate with larger degrees of separation between the victims and the bereaved. Feelings of mourning become less intense the farther one is from the victim—relationally, physically, or emotionally.” This implies the varying degrees of mourning across the United States.[386] Indeed, many Americans deeply mourned the loss of twenty children and six educators, signaling another blow to American society’s perceived “innocence.”

Our national mourning was partially due to the depiction of the children of Sandy Hook as “our children” in the media and in speeches given by political leaders.[387] In his Briefing Room statement given hours after the shooting, President Barack Obama asked that we recognize not only the children of Sandy Hook but all gun violence victims as our children.[388] He conflated multiple mass shootings across time and space in this speech. Rood argues that President Obama “intensifie[d] memory” by pointing to numerous tragedies to make gun control supporters, “especially those who have not been directly affected by gun violence,” feel as if we were all impacted by such tragedy.[389] In this speech, we are meant to feel emotionally connected to victims of gun violence, especially the victims of Sandy Hook. President Obama expanded on his

[385] Joshua H. Stout, “Broadcasting Bloodshed: Concentric Mourning and Media Framing Across Rampage School Shootings,” (MA Thesis, University of Delaware, 2018), 43, ProQuest.

[386] Stout, “Broadcasting Bloodshed,” vii and 44.

[387] This was not the first time the dead have inspired or justified collective action at the national level. President George W. Bush also invoked the “warrant of the dead” in a speech nine days after 9/11: “We have suffered great loss. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment.” Rood, “‘Our tears are not enough’,”49.

[388] Megan Slack, “President Obama Speaks on the Shooting in Connecticut,” *The White House: President Obama*, December 14, 2012, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2012/12/14/president-obama-speaks-shooting-connecticut.

[389] Rood, “‘Our tears are not enough’,” 59.

earlier familial metaphor at the memorial for the Sandy Hook victims two days later; here, he nodded to the nation-as-family rather than the immediate familial connection to the victims.[390] As an "imagined community," President Obama vowed that the nation would help carry the emotional burden of those affected by the shooting.

As mentioned in the introduction to this study, Benedict Anderson's framing of the nation as an "imagined community" is fundamental to this chapter. For Anderson, the nation "is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." We join a nation when we consider ourselves part of that community, even though we will likely never know all of our fellow community members.[391] Moreover, the memories we choose to collectively (culturally) remember and the narratives we choose to forget partially dictate the nation's composition.[392] Throughout this chapter, I call upon Anderson's "imagined community" to demonstrate how theatrical performance forms its own community among the audience, actors, and those whose words inspired the play and extends to audiences who witness other performances of the play. I suggest that it is the memories dramatized in *26 Pebbles* that unite this "imagined community."

Memorialization of Sandy Hook Victims

When domestic terrorism and mass violence occur, temporary memorials often appear. Sometimes these memorials take the form of blood drives, fundraisers for victims' families, and

[390] "Text of Obama's remarks in Connecticut," Politico.
[391] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6-7. Emphasis in the original.
[392] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 200-203.

signs saying "Pray For [insert name of city/town]."[393] People also create makeshift memorials. Individuals participate in memorialization by contributing teddy bears, crosses, flowers, and other sentimental items to these memorials.

Newtown community members quickly created temporary and spontaneous memorials after Sandy Hook, soon overwhelming the town's landscape. Across the United States, citizens memorialized the victims of Sandy Hook with the same fervor. In her chapter on "bodiless memorials," Candi K. Cann suggests the commemoration efforts for Sandy Hook "was in some ways, the closest trend in memorialization to the events after 9/11, in both scope and response."[394] As American flags hung on car windows, in storefronts, and on clothing after 9/11, so too did temporary memorials to Sandy Hook appear. Two weeks after the shooting in Newtown, many of the makeshift memorials were dismantled and removed from public spaces by city officials to guide the community toward "healing" and "moving forward."[395]

In a more official act of memory, the Sandy Hook Memorial began construction in August of 2021 and is scheduled for completion before the tenth anniversary of the massacre (December 2022).[396] The memorial lies near the original site after five acres of land were

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[393] Swartz, "Things Have Changed Since Sandy Hook."

[394] Candi K. Cann. *Virtual Afterlives: Grieving the Dead in the Twenty-First Century* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 2014), 43 and 44.

[395] Removing the makeshift memorials in Newtown should not be read as discourteous or insensitive of the city officials. The temporary memorials posed safety and traffic hazards to the public and were categorized and moved to a more permanent and official location. Cann, *Virtual Afterlives*, 44-46.

[396] Other permanent memorials to specific victims have been constructed prior to the ground-breaking of the official Sandy Hook Memorial. These include nature preserves and playgrounds dedicated to the memory of individual victims. See KT Doerr, "Never forget Sandy Hook Elementary: Haunting memorials to a school massacre." *Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology* 2, no. 2 (December 2019): 173-190, DOI: 10.7577/rerm.3675 and Peter Magnuson, "Sandy Ground," Parks and Recreation, National Recreation and Park Association, July 1, 2013, https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2013/july/sandy-ground/.

donated toward memorialization efforts. A description of the memorial refers to its features which "include[s] a path circling through woodlands and meadows, eventually meandering to a water feature with a sycamore tree planted in the center. A fountain rests on a granite basin that is engraved with victims' names."[397] The fountain with engraved names is similar to the National September 11 Memorial, whereas the walking paths remind us of The Battery Labyrinth. Both spontaneous and temporary and official and permanent, these memorials share the same goals. These acts of commemoration recall those who died, contribute to healing, provide a place to grieve, and communicate a sense of community and shared experience to the visitors. I contend that Eric Ulloa's play, *26 Pebbles*, realizes each of these objectives.

26 Pebbles

"Each death sent vibrations far beyond the grieving family and friends….": this is how playwright Eric Ulloa viewed the Sandy Hook shooting in conversation with a Newtown resident. Yolie—the Newtown community member and a character in Ulloa's *26 Pebbles*—described the reverberations of the shooting like twenty-six pebbles being thrown into a pond sending ripples across the larger body of water.[398] This imagery inspired the title of the play.

Eric Ulloa is a Cuban-American actor and playwright. He is a political activist but does not write politically-explicit theatre. Most of his work examines the themes of "community, family, ancestry, toxic machismo behavior and other topics that arise from [his] upbringing."[399]

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[397] "Sandy Hook Memorial Starts," *Engineering News Record* 287, no. 4 (August 16, 2021): 4, Academic Search Complete.

[398] Eric Ulloa, "Ripples of Change: Documenting real-life tragedy onstage," Dramatics, accessed March 26, 2022, https://dramatics.org/ripples-of-change/.

[399] Eric Ulloa, "How Do You Define a 'Latin Show?'," TDF, November 8, 2021, https://www.tdf.org/stages/article/2769/how-do-you-define-a-latin-show.

Ulloa was the librettist for *Passing Through* (2019), a musical based on a true story of a man walking from Pennsylvania to California; the musical celebrates America and its music and is about confronting one's past. He is the playwright of *Reindeer Sessions*, a play about a reindeer in anger management. Ulloa wrote the "Viva Broadway: Hear Our Voices" special (2020), a virtual concert celebrating Latinx milestones in the theatre. As the theatre community took a hiatus due to the COVID pandemic and the US saw a rise in political activism, Ulloa recorded a podcast series entitled "Do You Hear the People Sing?: A Theater Person's Guide to Saving Democracy" (2020). Moreover, Ulloa believes that theatrical performance is a powerful tool that demonstrates humanity and "chases away the ignorance and darkness in the world."[400] This belief is evident in *26 Pebbles*.

26 Pebbles is a play about Newtown, Connecticut, and the Sandy Hook Elementary mass shooting. In the style of Moisés Kaufman's *The Laramie Project* and loosely inspired by Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, *26 Pebbles* is set in an "existential town meeting."[401] Six actors play two to four characters each. The characters represent a Newtown community member Ulloa interviewed five months after the tragedy. *26 Pebbles* belongs to the genre of verbatim theatre; each word of the script is attributed to a community member Ulloa interviewed. Importantly, none of the characters, nor those Ulloa interviewed, are the surviving children or the family members of the victims. The playwright's decision to only interview adults and create adult characters recalls Marianne Hirsch's description of how memory is communicated within a generation. Hirsch states that Communicative Memory is "located within a generation of

[400] Eric Ulloa (@TheUlloa2), "Happy #WorldTheaterDay The most powerful weapon we have is the humanity that spills off our stages and chases away the ignorance and darkness in the world," March 27, 2022, 9:51 a.m., https://twitter.com/TheUlloa2/status/1508094342438731778.

[401] Frank Rizzo, "Newtown is 'Our Town' in '26 Pebbles'," *American Theatre*, February 1, 2017, https://www.americantheatre.org/2017/02/01/newtown-is-our-town-in-26-pebbles/.

contemporaries who witness an event as adults and who can pass on their bodily and affective connection to that event to their descendants."[402] Through his play, Ulloa communicates adults' memories to the audience who are familiar with the national trauma associated with mass shootings. The play is a tool for transmitting memory and functions as a living archive transforming these stories into cultural memory. Consequently, *26 Pebbles* simultaneously transmits and creates cultural memory like other, more traditional commemorative sites.

Ulloa points to the collective connection we felt to the Sandy Hook victims and their families by focusing on how the "concentric circles" of tragedy "[reach] out into the world, eventually touching us all."[403] Ulloa felt this ripple effect when he learned about the shooting. He states, "I remember the details were still vague on how many died and then I (along with the rest of the world) watched via updates on my phone as the story grew impossibly horrific in scope."[404] Ulloa recalls being stunned as he bartended a corporate holiday party on December 14, 2012, when employees complained about a lack of specific alcohol; how could they continue with "business as usual" when twenty children and six educators were murdered earlier that day? His frustration grew when it seemed that everyone had "moved on" after the media left and gun control policy hit a stalemate.[405] In the hope of helping the community process the tragedy—and arguably to heal his own pain and grief—Ulloa decided to write a play about Newtown and the Sandy Hook shooting.

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[402] Hirsh, *The Generation of Postmemory*, 32.

[403] Kevin Moore, "Producing 26 Pebbles at The Human Race," *Breaking Character*, October 31, https://www.breakingcharacter.com/home/2019/3/25/producing-26-pebbles-at-the-human-race.

[404] "Community and Growth: A Conversation with 26 Pebbles author Eric Ulloa," Breaking Character, January 27, 2022, https://www.breakingcharacter.com/home/2022/1/27/26-pebbles-author-eric-ulloa.

[405] Eric Ulloa, Forward to *26 Pebbles* (New York: Samuel French, 2017), 8.

In his desire to interview community members of Newtown, Ulloa turned to Moisés Kaufman for his expertise in using interviews to inform the dialogue of his characters. Kaufman, with Tectonic Theater Project collaborators, wrote *The Laramie Project*—a play surrounding the murder of Matthew Shepard—after extensive interviews with the Laramie, Wyoming community. Ulloa traveled to Newtown, heeding Kaufman's advice on conducting interviews and using social media to contact potential interviewees. Interviews began five months after the shooting, yet those Ulloa had approached through social media were hesitant to speak to him due to fallouts with other writers. Ulloa eventually gained the trust of his interviewees, though, and by his third visit to Newtown, he had interviewed sixty people.[406] Ulloa chose not to include the perspective of every person he interviewed, but confirms that "The vulnerability and honesty that these strangers offered [him] with their beautiful truths shaped every bit of the play" regardless if they became a character in *26 Pebbles* or not.[407] Although crucial to his play, the interviews were not the only inspiration Ulloa took from Newtown. Indeed, the landscape and culture of the town equally influenced him.

The New England charm and geography and his communication with everyday people reminded Ulloa of another play; Thornton Wilder's iconic *Our Town* and Newtown seemed eerily similar.[408] Upon discovering this connection to Wilder's play, Ulloa states,

> My drive through Main Street on the way back to the hotel turned into an aha moment that solidified my approach. The town hall and general store and the white picket fences that dotted the landscapes brought to mind another famous, though fictional, town. I felt

[406] Rizzo, "Newtown is 'Our Town' in '26 Pebbles'."
[407] "Community and Growth," Breaking Character.
[408] Rizzo, "Newtown is 'Our Town' in '26 Pebbles'."

> transported to Grover's Corners from *Our Town*. I understood that this would be a play about a small town shaken by the American epidemic of gun violence, and it would all be taken from these interviews I was about to conduct.[409]

Additionally, the play's structure "nods" to *Our Town*. Ulloa begins with a simple, hyper-realistic, town-hall-style performance that recommends audience interaction. However, once the shooting occurs in the play via the sound of broken glass, the reality of the play is also shattered, causing disconnection, abstraction, and nonlinear narration. According to Ulloa, "It's not until [the characters] all come together…that we return to reality and a place where the hope of healing exists."[410] This technique indicates that hope is the purpose of the play.

Importantly, though the shooting occurs at the play's climax, *26 Pebbles* is not about death; and no violence occurs onstage. Instead, the play is about hope, community, and restoration. Ulloa aims for the stories of those he interviewed to live on and educate audiences.[411] Moreover, while he contributed to "the noise" surrounding the Sandy Hook tragedy, Ulloa suggests it is a noise that seeks solutions and contributes to healing.[412] Ulloa has not categorized his work as a memorial to the victims or the Newtown community. However, those who have been part of the production teams of *26 Pebbles* compare the play to other memorials. Mary Leonard, who helped to produce the collegiate premiere of *26 Pebbles*, encourages others who perform the play to "honor the souls who lost their lives that day"

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[409] Ulloa, "Ripples of Change."
[410] "Community and Growth," Breaking Character.
[411] Ulloa, Forward to *26 Pebbles*, 9.
[412] Ulloa, "Ripples of Change."

through their work on the play.[413] Coryn Carson describes the play as "a eulogy for anyone who has been impacted by a tragedy. It is also a template that teaches us how a community can heal."[414]

Further, to make *26 Pebbles* as accessible as possible, Ulloa has taken measures to ensure that the play is cost-effective. The stage for *26 Pebbles* is mostly bare, only requiring a few chalkboards. The cost to produce the play is not financially prohibitive, which means that most theatres can afford to stage *26 Pebbles*.[415] The stories told in the play have been shared in theatres across the United States, resulting in a temporal memorial that has been accessible to a broad American audience.

26 Pebbles was first performed at the University of Wisconsin- La Crosse in 2016 and was followed by a benefit reading in Washington, D.C., at Arena Stage. The play's regional premiere occurred in February 2017 at the Human Race Theatre in Dayton, Ohio. After its 2017 publication, *26 Pebbles* became one of Samuel French's most produced plays, especially in academic theatres.[416] To be sure, *26 Pebbles* is an excellent play for high schools and college theatre departments to perform as the threat of a mass shooting in American schools has become a common occurrence. High school or college theatre groups will perform all but one scheduled

[413] Mary Leonard, "Knowing the People of Newtown: 26 Pebbles," *Breaking Character*, August 30, https://www.breakingcharacter.com/home/2019/3/26/knowing-the-people-of-newtown-26-pebbles#:~:text=26%20Pebbles%20provides%20a%20unique,message%20of%20hope%20and%20healing.

[414] Coryn Carson, "Community Activism and 26 Pebbles," *Breaking Character*, March 15, https://www.breakingcharacter.com/home/2018/12/11/community-activism-and-26-pebbles.

[415] "Community and Growth," Breaking Character.

[416] Ulloa, "Ripples of Change."

production of *26 Pebbles* in 2022; the exception, Phantom Projects Theatre Group, will be performing the play for a teenage audience.[417]

After the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse production, Leonard suggested that *26 Pebbles* "compels us to rethink our perceptions of mental illness, gun control, and safety in our schools and public arenas and odes this in a way that ultimately translates a message of hope and healing." For Leonard, the play's message challenges audiences to learn, do, and listen more than they did prior to entering the theatre. She argues that audiences are "somehow different" after witnessing *26 Pebbles*: "We are humbled by the words and actions of the people of Newtown and see ourselves in the people of this town in so many ways. We are simply trying to live our lives without the fear of this type of massacre happening, and we often naively think it could never happen in our communities."[418] However, we are all at risk of being victims and survivors of mass shootings like the Newtown community. Thus, *26 Pebbles* becomes a powerful site of memory, fostering a connection between survivors of violence, victim groups of mass shootings in various times and locations, and those who have not experienced the trauma first-hand.

This is especially relevant as mass shootings recur. After he produced *26 Pebbles* in Orlando, Florida, Carson considered the ongoing nature of this national trauma: "I knew Orlando had to see it. Twenty-six lives lost at Sandy Hook; forty-nine at Pulse. I knew there was a powerful conversation to be had between these two communities. Three days before our production of *26 Pebbles* opened, the Las Vegas shooting occurred." In this context, *26 Pebbles* addresses multiple mass shootings simultaneously. The play about the Sandy Hook shooting was performed for an audience still recovering from the Pulse nightclub shooting, as details from the

[417] "26 Pebbles," Concord Theatricals, https://www.concordtheatricals.com/p/62654/26-pebbles. "Our History," Phantom Projects Theatre Group, https://phantomprojects.com/history/.

[418] Leonard, "Knowing the People of Newtown."

Las Vegas concert shooting occurred just days prior to the performance's opening. Carson also notes *26 Pebbles*'s unique ability to remind the Orlando audience that they were not alone in their experience but part of a community that was also processing and healing from similar trauma.[419] Carson is not the only theatre-maker to notice how the play transcends time and space, reaching multiple communities touched by gun violence. In writing about the regional premiere of *26 Pebbles*, Kevin Moore states, "we had just experienced the horrible tragedy of San Bernadino—soon to be followed by many more tragedies, including Orlando and now, Las Vegas."[420] It seems that, even though *26 Pebbles* was written in response to a particular event, the meaning and message of the play memorializes victims of other mass shootings in the twenty-first century.

A Temporary Theatrical Memorial

The memorial's location is essential in temporary and makeshift memorials that appear spontaneously after a tragedy. As Cann asserts, "The *place* of memorialization is important because of the memories of the living and the meaning assigned to the location in the context of grief and loss." The memorial's location becomes a sacred place where one may communicate their grief. This is true whether the memorial is located at the site of death or elsewhere: "it is not the dead body but, rather, the grief of the survivors that makes the place important."[421] Like the transient memorials dedicated to victims in the wake of the Sandy Hook shooting, *26 Pebbles*—a play exuding grief and communal recovery—is also a temporary memorial. In what follows, I consider the theatrical production techniques and dramaturgical features in the playscript of *26*

[419] Carson, "Community Activism and 26 Pebbles."
[420] Moore, "Producing 26 Pebbles at The Human Race."
[421] Cann, *Virtual Afterlives*, 22-23. Emphasis in the original.

Pebbles as they replicate those used in other commemorative sites. These narrative and production-driven elements include aesthetic means that call forth memory across time and space, form an "imagined"/national community, frame the audience as a witness, position mass shootings as a generational trauma, and incorporate other common memorialization tropes (candle lighting and singing of hymns) that engage active spectatorship.

As stated earlier in this chapter, President Obama correlated multiple acts of gun violence in his speeches about the Sandy Hook shooting. Of President Obama's speeches, Rood notes,

> He went even further back in time by mentioning the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School and the 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech. Since these shootings were not confined to any one geographic region, he suggested that the problem of gun violence is a national problem. With the exception of Chicago…this is a sequence of mass shootings. Syntactically, then, he moved back in time to suggest that what happened in Newtown was part of a larger history of such mass shootings…. By mentioning previous mass shootings, he was asking us to remember the victims of those shootings, even if abstractly.[422]

President Obama elicited memory across time and space to assist in his future efforts to strengthen gun control laws, I suggest that the outcome of referencing memories that traverse time and space is two-fold. In situating Sandy Hook in a more extensive history, President Obama brought prior shootings to the forefront and signaled to the American people how they may respond to these traumatic events.

[422] Rood, "'Our tears are not enough'," 56-57.

In this way, as a site of memory, *26 Pebbles* addresses prior shootings along with other nationally tragic events to locate the trauma and mourning experienced by those impacted by the Sandy Hook shooting. At the play's climax, a father with PTSD, whose two children attended Sandy Hook (Darren), describes the realization that the "worst case" scenario has occurred. There had to have been more victims, Darren states poignantly: "I knew with that, you know, the information that there was more than the three—*(Sniffles.)* Him being in a classroom. And the numbers, we just watched in horror, as it went from a handful…to a dozen…twenty. *(Beat.)* And I thought, we've topped Columbine."[423] Before the Sandy Hook shooting, Columbine epitomized mass school shootings in the United States.[424] In comparing the number of Sandy Hook victims to those at Columbine, Ulloa (through Darren) justifies and legitimizes the response of Sandy Hook community members while remembering the victims of previous shootings (specifically Columbine). Similar to Michael Rothberg's assertion that mutually referencing the Holocaust and colonialism benefits the memory of both contexts, Ulloa's comparison of Columbine and Sandy Hook draws attention to multiple school shootings and their traumatic aftermath. By referencing the trauma of Columbine, the playwright solidifies the memory of Sandy Hook in the consciousness of the audience and reminds the victims of the Columbine victims simultaneously. In this way, Ulloa memorializes each US mass school shooting subtly and effectively.

Ulloa also alludes to other nationally tragic events in *26 Pebbles*. Shortly after Darren references Columbine, Carole—the human resources director of Newtown—notes the

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[423] Eric Ulloa, *26 Pebbles* (New York: Samuel French, 2017), 25-26.

[424] The framing of Columbine as the most notorious school shooting is an interesting cultural phenomenon as Columbine was not the first school shooting nor the deadliest. The Virginia Tech and University of Texas shootings (and later the Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida and Sandy Hook) surpassed Columbine's death toll. Columbine was, however, the most-deadly K-12 school shooting until 2012, when the Sandy Hook shooting occurred.

similarities in emotional responses to the John F. Kennedy assassination (1963) and the recent Sandy Hook shooting. She says, “The safety of this little town, it’s like when Kennedy died, that peace overall has been shattered.”[425] Indeed, as parents sent their children to school on what began as a quiet December morning, the peace and safety they expected was quickly taken away, along with their children. Parents across the United States were emotionally unsettled and feared that their children would have a similar fate to the Sandy Hook students.

Significantly, toward the end of the play, the town rabbi (named “Rabbi” in the script) leads a protest outside of the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) building. He shouts, “We live in a society of 32,000 deaths by guns alone every year! If these people died in the battlefields of Afghanistan, we wouldn’t accept it. Yet when it happens right here in the cities of America, we somehow are mysteriously silent!”[426] Here Rabbi places the Sandy Hook shooting in a long history of widespread gun violence and references the Afghanistan War, wherein many US military service members lost their lives. In noting the discrepancy in Americans’ response to gun violence and military deaths, Ulloa gives one of his sharpest critiques of lax gun control policies.[427] With his reference to the Afghanistan War, Ulloa once again ties the memory of Sandy Hook to other national tragedies.

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[425] Ulloa, *26 Pebbles*, 29.

[426] Ulloa, *26 Pebbles*, 43.

[427] Importantly, overt political activism is not a goal of Ulloa’s in *26 Pebbles*. Some may be frustrated with his lack of political writing; to this end, Ulloa states, "I'm just not that writer though. I hate being in an audience and being preached to…. Tell me a story, introduce me to people I care about and allow me to make up my mind about what I do with the messages presented to me….how the audiences digest the play is how the play really ends, long after they've left the theatre." Though immediate action may not be his goal, I suggest that Ulloa's play is political in subtle yet effective ways. "Community and Growth," *Breaking Character*.

In the play's climax, Rabbi establishes the shooting was a "scene of tragedy, of a national scale mega tragedy."[428] The Sandy Hook shooting was a national tragedy that affected nearly every American due to the scale and shock of the event; Rabbi situates the shooting in the broader American context. He is not the only character to make a connection between national events. Mike—a man born and raised in Sandy Hook—describes a national "imagined community" with Sandy Hook in the center. He addresses the importance of the overwhelming media response, asserting, "'this is the center of the world right now. Think about it. Sandy Hook is the center of the world…the universe…it's here.' I knew that without [the media] here, the rest of the world wouldn't be able to get all of the details. Wouldn't be able to mourn with us."[429] The media, which seemed to suffocate Newtown, made it possible for the broader, national community to empathize with the families of Newtown. He claims that reporters—many of whom had been to warzones and witnessed death and destruction up close—were emotional, indicating that "we're all in this together. The whole country is in this together."[430]

We also witness the negotiation between the play's characters as part of a larger community and the immediacy of their positions as Newtown community members. In the same portion of dialogue which references President Kennedy's assassination, Carole notes, "I think that's the biggest thing that happened here, the shattering of the illusion of…our little world. How did this happen to us? And the magnitude of every flag in the nation at half-staff for Newtown. What? What just happened here?"[431] Here, Carole acknowledges the significance of national mourning while contextualizing the experience as personal to Newtown residents. In

[428] Ulloa, *26 Pebbles*, 28.
[429] Ulloa, *26 Pebbles*, 32.
[430] Ulloa, *26 Pebbles*, 32.
[431] Ulloa, *26 Pebbles*, 29. Ellipsis in the original.

questioning how such tragedy could happen "here" and "to us," Carole implies that their small town could never have imagined a mass shooting occurring; Newtown was somehow different. Thus, if this tragedy could happen in Newtown, it could happen anywhere. By personalizing the experience, Carole makes us aware that gun violence affects us all.

Productions of *26 Pebbles* serve as a transient memorial to mass shootings by linking audiences across the United States. Like other sites of memory dedicated to national trauma (i.e., the National September 11 Memorial and Museum), audiences from all across the United States encounter memories of the traumatic past. As is the nature of theatrical performances, multiple theatres in different locations may produce *26 Pebbles* simultaneously. Moreover, once the performance run ends, another theatre may choose to produce the play. In doing so, *26 Pebbles* potentially connects audiences from across the United States in a larger network, forming an "imagined community" that has encountered and experienced a similar memory narrative.

Dramaturgically, *26 Pebbles* situates its prospective audiences as "survivors" and witnesses to the shooting.[432] As in the other theatrical works discussed in previous chapters, the audiences of theatrical sites of memory typically bear witness to the embodied memory of the represented traumatic event. Yet *26 Pebbles* goes further by placing the audience in an active role in the scripted performance. The audience is expected to participate in the play's opening moments. The actors speak directly to the audience throughout the play, much like they would during a community town hall meeting.

[432] Notably, the audience is not imagined as a child survivor who experienced the shooting first hand, nor a parent of a victim. Instead, like the characters in the play, the audience is framed as a fellow Newtown community member participating in a town hall.

Ulloa recommends that actors pass out name tags to audience members as they enter the theatre "to establish the concept of a community town meeting."[433] Using name tags is not a requirement: there are alternative lines in the script which avoid reference to the name tags. However, encouraging the audience to imagine that they are entering a Newtown town hall meeting decreases the aesthetic distance between the reality of the audience, the performance, and the reality of the actual Newtown community members Ulloa interviewed.[434] In the opening moments of the play, the character of Jenn addresses specific audience members by name and asks that the audience "Turn to [their] neighbor, check out their name tag and say 'Hi!'"[435] Not only do individual audience members connect with the characters in *26 Pebbles* through the use of the name tags, but they also address other audience members, thereby forming a community with everyone in the theatre.

In joining the Newtown community, comprised of the characters and the rest of the audience, the play narrows the gap between those Ulloa interviewed and the individual audience member. The actors embody the characters who speak the words of those who knew the victims and live in Newtown. As the audience hears the words of real people, they become witnesses to the memories of the Sandy Hook shooting as if they were in Newtown themselves. In essence, such a technique closes the distance of the concentric circles of mourning; through *26 Pebbles*, we are close to those directly impacted by the shooting.

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[433] Ulloa, *26 Pebbles*, 6.

[434]This is also a common technique used in memorial museums. At the Titanic Museum in Pigeon Ford, TN, and Branson, MO, visitors are given boarding passes with a Titanic passenger's name on them; visitors are encouraged to track the experience/fate of their respective passenger. At the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, visitors are given the name of a victim/survivor, which they can track throughout the museum. Visitors/audience members are invited to become embodied witnesses to the memorialized event in all three circumstances.

[435] Ulloa, *26 Pebbles*, 13.

While some in the audience may have experienced or lost a loved one to mass domestic terrorism, most audiences will have been less directly affected by school shootings. Nevertheless, *26 Pebbles* provides us with a space to mourn and remember the victims. We may vicariously experience what it might feel like to live in Newtown during and after the Sandy Hook shooting. In light of Landsberg's theories of active spectatorship, audience members attending performances of *26 Pebbles* may access memories of those who lived the event and thus experience these memories prosthetically. The playwright's hope remains that such prosthetic memories will empower the audience to take social and political action.

Perhaps most importantly, *26 Pebbles* speaks to the generational trauma that Marianne Hirsch describes through her compelling concept of postmemory. Toward the end of Ulloa's play, the mother characters voice the trauma that their children experienced and the process of healing their children undergo as survivors of the shooting. Julie, Carrie, and Jenn recount their children's fear, anxiety, and inability to sleep. Jenn and Carrie both repeat the words, "There's gonna be trauma." The youngest children may have experienced the worst of the trauma. As Carrie recalls, the first graders were "in that hallway, in that area, and they're—they are completely different because they actually thought they were dying that day."[436] As a generation that survived Sandy Hook, these children will carry the experience and resulting trauma with them.

Darren also addresses the notion of generational trauma:

> We don't know all the things that are broken, we're still discovering them, 'cause we've been asleep and haven't been paying attention. I've read a lot about Columbine, ya know,

[436] Ulloa, *26 Pebbles*, 44-45.

> ten to fourteen years later on. The principal, um, said he, ya know, he's had kids go through that were fine. They appeared to be fine, went to college, ya know, appeared to be fine, got married, appeared to be fine, had children and bam! They just fell to pieces. Generational PTSD.[437]

Darren's speech is vital to understanding how the concept of generational trauma applies to twenty-first-century students across the United States. First, it is apparent that even the students who may appear to be "fine" directly after the Sandy Hook shooting, and even those in other parts of the school, may experience PTSD later in life. They belong to the generation that was "there" during the shooting. Secondly, by including Columbine, Darren signals to other mass school shootings; this insinuates that all survivors of mass school shootings are part of a generation that has experienced similar reverberating trauma. Third—and notably for my study—I suggest that Darren's speech silently includes all twenty-first-century American students in a broader generation of post-9/11 trauma. Just as Hirsch sees all those alive during the Holocaust as part of the "first-generation," the students who experience the threat of the mass shooting endemic are also first-generation witnesses. Whether students in the 2000s are survivors of mass school shootings or not, they all function as a generation affected by the trauma of living in a culture where their schools, churches, and shopping malls are no longer safe.

Finally, *26 Pebbles* features other common techniques in memorialization. These include candle lighting, singing hymns, and writing the victim's names, or reciting them aloud. Immediately before the shattering glass effect that symbolized the school shooting, the play's characters reminisce about the town's annual traditions as the actors light candles and

[437] Ulloa, *26 Pebbles*, 45.

"congregate together." They blow out the candles just before the glass shatters.[438] A common part of ritualized vigils and other memorial services, the effect of the candle lighting represents the town's sorrow as the theatre goes into darkness. Hymns are also typically sung in Christian funeral and memorial services. The characters in *26 Pebbles* sing the hymn "Come Thou Fount" before extinguishing the candles. They repeat the hymn as the actors write the victims' names on the chalkboards.[439] In a sense, recording victims' names on the chalkboards serve as a spontaneous memorial like one would see throughout Newtown after the shooting. Further, writing victims' names (usually in stone) is a common technique used in permanent memorial structures such as the Vietnam War memorial, the National September 11 Memorial, and the forthcoming Sandy Hook Memorial.

As a site of memory, *26 Pebbles* is unique in its inclusion of the shooter. The play includes roughly five pages of dialogue and soliloquies, which humanize and sympathize with Adam Lanza. Unsurprisingly, the inclusion of the shooter is quite controversial. As Father Weiss—the community's religious leader—admits that he lights twenty-eight candles rather than twenty-six, some characters exit the stage with visible rage.[440] The lighting of twenty-eight candles signals that some mourn the deaths of Lanza, his mother (who is rarely described as one of Lanza's victims in our collective memory), and the Sandy Hook children and educators. As explored in chapter two, including perpetrators in acts of official remembrance is almost always looked upon as being in poor taste. Many plays, however, do include the perpetrator.[441]

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[438] Ulloa, *26 Pebbles*, 20-21.
[439] Ulloa, *26 Pebbles*, 20-21, 29.
[440] Ulloa, *26 Pebbles*, 36-41.
[441] See *The Amish Project* by Jessica Dickey, a play about the Nickel Mines schoolhouse shooting. Many anti-genocidal playwrights also incorporate the voice of the perpetrator.

The numerous inclusions of memorial techniques ascertain the position of *26 Pebbles* as a site of memory to mass school shootings. By reading *26 Pebbles* through the lens of memorial frameworks, including multidirectional memory, postmemory, and prosthetic memory, we can see how audiences receive communicated memories. As is the hope of the theorists who developed frameworks for understanding the transmission of memory, Ulloa too hopes that the play will influence and inspire audiences to listen more, act justly on behalf of others, and keep the memory of victims of mass shootings alive.

26 Pebbles Productions as a Temporary Site of Memory

As one of Samuel French's most produced plays in 2018,[442] what does it mean for high school and college students to perform *26 Pebbles*? In 2017 and 2018 alone, several notable mass shootings occurred, including the Rancho Tehama Elementary School in Reserve, California (2017) and the 2018 shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (MSDHS) in Parkland, Florida, and Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, Texas. As these acts of domestic terrorism continue to occur, it is logical that teenagers and young adults would want to perform *26 Pebbles*, perhaps as both a form of protest and a memorial to their peers across the country.

Parkland High School (Pennsylvania) performed *26 Pebbles* shortly after the shooting at MSDHS. Although director Mark Stutz had already chosen the play prior to the February 2018 shooting, he found that his students felt a kinship to their Florida peers as "Parkland" is significant to both schools.[443] In a sense, the students honor the victims and survivors of the

[442] Ulloa, "Ripples of Change."

[443] Sarah M. Wojcik, "Parkland Providing encore performances of '26 Pebbles' play that qualified students for International Thespian Festival," *The Morning Call*, June 14, 2019, https://www.mcall.com/news/local/parkland/mc-nws-parkland-26-pebbles-performance-20190614-s3pc5cnrubekhixb7g6zt6thdu-story.html.

MSDHS through their performance of 26 Pebbles. Also in 2018, Santa Fe, New Mexico students performed *26 Pebbles* amidst social media threats to the school. The director, Reed Meschefske, suggested that perhaps *26 Pebbles* was too topical at the time, and people may not want to see it.[444] Indeed, as school shootings plague the United States, *26 Pebbles* will continue to be relevant as a memorial to victims of mass shootings and all too timely for a generation carrying the burden of this trauma.

Theatrical performances, like makeshift memorials, are impermanent. They are transient—each specific performance is performed at a specific time for a specific audience, never to be witnessed precisely in the same way again. Theatrical texts, however, are unique in that they can be produced in multiple places simultaneously or successively. As one school or theatre company closes a production of *26 Pebbles*, another group may choose to produce the play. In this way, plays and musicals have the potential to reach audiences across the United States and beyond, including international communities. If we consider plays such as *26 Pebbles* to be a [temporary, transient, and movable] site of memory, we can memorialize nationally traumatic and tragic events as an "imagined community."

[444] Robert Nott, "Santa Fe High theater students present '26 Pebbles,' about the aftermath of Newtown shooting," *The New Mexican*, AP News, March 1, 2018, https://apnews.com/article/03f040ee0cb14760acf913a2d9777731.

Conclusion- Recent Events as Trauma: Future Memorials

In this study, I have shown how theatre-makers in their theatrical performances and text memorialize explosive events in the US thus far in the twenty-first-century. Such events—like 9/11, the Iraq War, and the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting—scar our collective memory and result in a cultural trauma.[445] We may come to understand the theatrical memorial as a powerful yet ephemeral site of memory. The theatrical memorial has the potential to reach Americans across the US regardless of their proximity to the physical site of death (e.g., Ground Zero) or the lack of an official memorial to what may be viewed as a national trauma. In doing so, the theatrical site of memory forms a broad "imagined community," to borrow a term from Benedict Anderson, through the common experience of viewing an eyewitness's memory dramatized on stage. As we move further into the twenty-first century's third decade and witness more events that will likely be defined as a national trauma in the future, it is ever-more pressing to acknowledge theatrical text and performance as a memorial to past events.

Over the past three years, we have experienced a global pandemic that has caused the death of over 976,000 Americans at the time of this writing. Just two months after the outbreak of the COVID pandemic in the US, many Americans watched live on social media the murder of George Floyd, a Black man from Minneapolis. As a nation that already witnessed decades of high-profile cases of police brutality, Floyd's death—along with the murder of Breonna Taylor (2020) and Atatiana Jefferson (2019)—sparked mass protests across the United States

[445] Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 1.

throughout the summer of 2020. Then, after the 2020 election, just days before then-President-Elect Biden would take the oath of office, insurrectionists stormed the US Capitol Building. More recently, Americans have re-experienced the culture of fear that Marita Sturken refers to as we watched the Russian invasion of Ukraine.[446] Many Americans fear the US will be forced to enter the conflict, which likely would result in a third World War.

Interestingly, most of these events were experienced virtually, through social media, television, or the Internet. We watched on television as COVID deaths soared and many encountered the murder of Black Americans and subsequent "Black Lives Matter" protests through social media. We kept an eye on any news reports that updated Americans on the January 6th insurrection. Significantly, "millennial" and "Gen Z" Americans encountered the Russia-Ukraine conflict through TikTok, a video-sharing social media application. As Ukrainian and Russian soldiers and Ukrainian citizens share their experiences with the app, people from across the globe medially experience the war too. In this way, TikTok collapses geographic distance. To be clear, the invasion of Ukraine is not yet an American trauma. Yet, the emotional response toward these events indicates how witnessing, mediatization, and time and space are significant to our interpretation of traumatic events and our creation of cultural memory.

It is uncertain how many of these events will be interpreted in the US several years from now. Because we retroactively describe an experience as "traumatic," we are temporally too close to grasp these events import fully to what may become our collective memory. Jeffrey Alexander reminds us that "Events are not inherently traumatic. Trauma is a socially mediated attribution." However, he also asserts that we may sense that an event will be described as

[446] Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 5.

traumatic before, during, or after an event occurs.[447] We can, then, assume that some of the events I have referred to will be considered cultural traumas in the future. Significantly, we do not know whether playwrights will identify the aforementioned events as traumatic, or useful inspiration for their plays and musicals. As we move further from the historical events unfolding around us, perhaps we will see more plays that represent their aftermath and belated trauma. We have already begun to memorialize police brutality as a national trauma through theatrical text and performance in the current moment.

With the deaths of Floyd, Taylor, and Jefferson fresh in our collective memory, police brutality remains a reality for many Americans throughout US history. Playwrights have written about acts of police violence and misconduct. Among such plays are Antoinette Chinonye Nwandu's *Pass Over* (2021), Dael Orlandersmith's *Until the Flood* (2019), and Geraldine Elizabeth Inoa's *SCRAPS* (2018). We may consider some of these plays as theatrical memorials to those murdered by police.

As we experience new theatrical memorials to recent events in the future, we might consider how these plays simultaneously are formed by and create cultural memories. What will these plays mean to us five to ten years from now? How will our perspectives change as the events recede into the past? What will we remember—or forget? Moreover, how might these theatrical texts and performances revive our American sense of community and empathy?

James Young asserts that the more fractured and heterogeneous a society becomes, "the stronger [the fragmented groups'] need to unify wholly disparate experiences and memories within the common meaning seemingly created in common spaces. As we face disunity in our nation, we turn to the monument or memorial to, at the very least, create an illusion of shared

[447] Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 8.

experience and memory.[448] However, as I have shown in this study, government-sponsored and commissioned acts of memorialization often exclude marginalized voices, further separating fragmented groups. Young states that hope exists for the memorial if we can shift our understanding of national memory from a "collective" to a "collected" memory. In doing so, he aptly notes, "we recognize that we never really shared each other's actual memory of past or even recent events, but that in sharing common spaces in which we collect our disparate and competing memories, we find common…understanding of widely disparate experiences and our very reasons for recalling them." Moreover, we may acknowledge that these competing memories are part of a "never-to-be-completed process," because as Young reminds us, we are always retroactively interpreting the past.[449] The theatre, I have argued, serves powerfully as a site of memory to how we in the US since 9/11 have "collected" memories of events we deem traumatic. Through a theatrical memorial, then, we may honor disparate and competing memories, while simultaneously shedding light on those memories often forgotten in official memorial capacities.

I began this dissertation by introducing Michael Rothberg's understanding of memory's multidirectionality, Marianne Hirsch's concept of Postmemory, and Alison Landsberg's Prosthetic Memory framework. The three scholars suggest that individuals or groups communicate or transmit their memory of historical events—often through mediatized technologies such as film, photography, and literature— to those who did not live through the event. For Hirsch and Landsberg, the memory of an event becomes embodied or "sutured" to or carried in the viewer's body. This results in the viewer feeling as if they had experienced the

[448] Young, "Memory and Monument," 79-80.
[449] Young, "Memory and Monument," 81.

event themselves. Within Rothberg's conceptual framework, the shared memory illuminates similarities and differences between two disparate lived experiences. All three scholars imply that the communicated memory has the power to evoke empathy and thereby result in a prosocial response from the spectator or secondary witness.

I used the events of 9/11, the Iraq War, and the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting as case studies to point to the efficacy of the theatrical memorial to twenty-first century national traumas. I employed Rothberg, Hirsch, and Landberg's frameworks to analyze these texts and performances as sites of memory. I argued that playwrights nudge their audience toward an emotional connection to their characters by adapting witness testimony for the stage and dramatizing memory that bonds seemingly unrelated times and spaces. Significantly, I have suggested too that these theatrical memorials create an "imagined community" that may inspire a reinterpretation of past events for our present moment and how we have chosen to remember or forget the effects of the traumatic event.

Rothberg, Landsberg, and E. Ann Kaplan consider visual art, film, and literature's usefulness in communicating traumatic memories to the viewer or reader. However, these scholars have not yet evaluated theatre's merits in achieving the same objectives. This study intervenes in this gap in the research and builds upon the work of theatre and performance studies scholars like Freddie Rokem, Diana Taylor, and Joseph Roach, who have explored the ability of live performance to transmit both historical narratives and embodied memory to audiences. The preceding chapters explored the interdisciplinary nature of theatre to merge our understanding of performance with concepts relating to trauma and memory communication. In this way, I highlight the mutual influence that Theatre and Performance Studies may have on Memory Studies and vice versa.

To further bridge this gap in the research, I suggest that we continue to examine the explosive events to which I have alluded to in these pages. We may consider whether theatre-makers will continue to create what I suggest are memorials to these tragic events, which in turn, may become cultural traumas. Secondly, we may ask whether theatres will continue to produce such plays. Furthermore, we may reflect upon the broader implications of these productions on the international community. As touring productions of *Come From Away*, for example, are performed abroad, how do international audiences respond to what we have designated as an "American" traumatic event? Do the dramatized memories connect with the international community's tumultuous experience in the twenty-first century or do international audiences only imagine the production as an "American" play/musical? We may also consider the ethics of the theatrical memorial. Because the theatrical site of memory brings dramatized memories to the audience, rather than remaining at the site of death or trauma like the National September 11 Memorial and Museum does, perhaps it is time to consider the ethical implications of the theatrical memorial. Finally, as I began to examine in this study's final chapter, how does the theatrical performance constitute and create, what I have termed based on my reading of Anderson's work, an "imagined community"? I suggest further research into theatre's role in establishing an "imagined community," especially given audiences' disparate and diverse life experiences, memories, and identities.

As we approach significant anniversaries and have passed milestone markers of the nationally traumatic events addressed in this study—the twentieth anniversary of 9/11, the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and Iraq, and the tenth anniversary of the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting—scholars in Memory Studies continue to study how we remember these events years after they occurred. I have asserted theatre's role in memorialization and suggested

that we look to playwrights and other theatre-makers to note how Americans have responded to events—we now consider traumatic—throughout the first quarter of the twenty-first century as we reinterpret these events in our present. The theatre may prove to be an especially effective alternative to official memorials, with its potential through live performance to mend some of the social fragmentation we experience in the United States. It is not simply the aesthetics of the production, dramaturgical choices of the playwright, the interpretation of the director, or the presence of the audience that make the production valuable as a theatrical memorial. Perhaps the most vital aspect of the theatrical memorial is the audience's experiential encounter with an eyewitness's memory. As the spectators "suture" the memory to themselves and becomes part of the event's postmemory generation, they may feel previously unobtainable, critical empathy for others.

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