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Katila, A. (2025). Book Review: Peace and the Politics of Memory. *Memory Studies*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980251345069>.

Johanna Mannergren, Annika Björkdahl, Susanne Buckley-Zistel, Stefanie Kappler, and Timothy Williams. *Peace and the Politics of Memory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2024, 256 pp., £30. ISBN: 9781526178312.

**Reviewed by:** Anna Katila, City St George's, University of London, UK

*Peace and the Politics of Memory* is an open access co-authored book that bridges memory and peace studies. Johanna Mannergren, Annika Björkdahl, Susanne Buckley-Zistel, Stefanie Kappler and Timothy Williams explore how politics of memory affect peace in societies that face legacies of violent conflict, producing a work that opens up new scholarly conversations about how to study the relationship between memory and peace. The book's unique contribution lies in a novel framework for analysing mnemonic formations, 'thematic clusters around certain particularly salient issues or phenomena' (p. 4). The proposed SANE framework offers four conceptual entry points – sites, agents, narratives and events – the interaction of which can according to the authors produce insights on the quality of peace in a specific context.

Following the introduction and the first chapter on the book's conceptual and analytical approach, the authors demonstrate the benefits of the systematic SANE approach through five case studies on Cyprus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda, South Africa and Cambodia discussed in chapters 2 to 6. The case study selection results from the authors' established expertise and influential prior work in these post-conflict contexts. Insights from these case studies converge in chapter 7, in which comparative discussion establishes key findings and conclusions. The authors argue that if entanglements of memory constructions allow plurality, restore dignity and open up inclusive dialogue, a just peace is possible (pp. 199–212). In reverse, the authors highlight that divisive narratives, which do not connect with each other and leave some suffering unacknowledged, result in a shallow peace characterised by the absence of violence (p. 199). While calls for pluralistic and inclusive peacebuilding and transitional justice processes have become frequent in the last decade, *Peace and the Politics of Memory* make a significant contribution by unearthing the relationship between memory – as plural, inclusive and embracing dignity – and a just peace as concrete and located in everyday actions by ordinary people.

Research in *Peace and the Politics of Memory* is guided by approaches to political power (of memory) and shared memories as fluid and changing. The authors express this through the question of 'who wants whom to remember what, and why' (p. 6). By articulating how memory and peace studies interact, Mannergren, Björkdahl, Buckley-Zistel, Kappler and Williams expand a limited body of existing scholarship. It includes, as the authors identify, Manuel Cruz's study (2016) on politics of memory and trauma, Kris Brown's work (2013) on ways in which memory politics reveal tensions and ambiguities that help assess peace processes, and Bernhard and Kubik's edited collection (2014) on the relationship between the politics of memory and new regimes transitioning from communism or socialism to democracy in Eastern European countries (pp. 14–15). While not mentioned by the authors, *Peace and the Politics of Memory* appears to share a starting point with Sara McDowell and Máire Braniff's co-authored *Commemoration as Conflict: Space, Memory and Identity in Peace Processes* (2014). Even though McDowell and Braniff examine ways in which commemoration contributes to and illustrates conflict and undermines peace in six case studies – including

South Africa and the former Yugoslav area – the two books seek to understand the role of memory in the peace-conflict continuum. Both approach socially constructed meanings of sites and spaces by building on Pierre Nora's *lieu de mémoire* and articulate the significance of agents and actors. *Peace and the Politics of Memory* is at the forefront of what may become a new wave of interest in the interaction of memory and peace that builds on publications in the mid-2010s and has recently seen new additions, such as David Mwambari and Andrea Purdikova's chapter 'Memory, Politics and Peace' in the new *Routledge Handbook of Peacebuilding* (2024).

The case studies in chapters 2 to 6 apply the SANE framework, examining how sites, agents, narratives and events shape the chosen mnemonic formation. The authors explore the thematic clusters of nationalism in Cyprus, urbicide in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, representation of international actors in Rwanda, the long history of colonialism in South Africa and the dead in Cambodia. These areas of memory work are shown to be salient for moving towards and maintaining peace. For the authors, 'sites' are 'material representations at particular locations' (p. 21), which social practices of placemaking invest with meaning. The case study on Cyprus analyses the Greek Cypriot Museum of National Struggle, the Turkish Cypriot Museum of National Struggle and the Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre as sites of memory, whereas in the case of mnemonic formation of the siege of Sarajevo, the authors discuss street memorials and plaques, the Martyrs' Memorial in the Kovači cemetery, the Tunnel of Hope Museum, the Historical Museum, and the War Childhood Museum. In these two case studies, the authors explain in detail why they have chosen the specific thematic cluster and mnemonic sites, but the underlying rationale remains less extensively articulated in some other case studies, such the one on Rwanda.

The examination of agents asks who can shape a memoryscape within a specific context and how (pp. 23–24). This allows the case studies to analyse the relationships, acts and decisions by organisations and individuals, including elite political leaders, curators and activists. For example, the case study on Cambodia, which discusses the Tuol Sleng genocide museum, Choeung Ek killing fields, local religious memorials and unmarked mass graves, foregrounds the government that runs the Tuol Sleng genocide museum and memory entrepreneurs, such as museum staff and the late King Sihanouk. The case study on South Africa, in turn, includes the ANC, the Heritage Foundation that works for Afrikaners, the Rand Club that protects the British colonial narrative, the Castle of Good Hope and community activists, such as those involved in the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum. The book's discussion about sites and agents overlaps to various degrees in the case study chapters. Even though the sections are integrally connected, they do not appear repetitive due to the different perspectives: social meaning making, and who the agents are, what they do, how and why. Consideration of funding sources and their impact on agents is helpful in explaining the opportunities and challenges the agents face.

*Peace and the Politics of Memory* discusses narrative as a 'meaning-making instrument' (p. 26). This allows the authors to explore 'what is distinctive about a particular narrative, why it is narrated in this way [ . . . ], and how it helps people make sense of their world' (p. 26). They highlight that agents mediate, edit, translate and curate narratives, constructing a specific view of the past in the present. In the case study on Cyprus, the authors identify tensions and divisions within and between the nationalist narratives of the Cypriot Greek and Turkish communities that both silence minority communities. In the case study on Rwanda, they foreground the state's control of memory narratives, unpacking the representation of international inaction during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, support for perpetrators and the legacy of colonialism. However, the analysis is based only on official and formal sites, such as the Kigali Genocide Museum and the Campaign Against Genocide

Museum, which is reflected in the findings that could have in more detail articulated the connections between the role of genocide memory in foreign policy and its impact in Rwanda.

The book approaches events as performative mnemonic practices that are temporary, even when regular or repeated, including ceremonies, protests, marches and burials, amongst others. The case study on South Africa examines the Rhodes Must Fall campaign, the ANC's decision to replace colonial national holidays with alternative holidays, such as Mandela Day, Youth Day and Reconciliation Day, alongside events organised by KhoiSan groups to honour Krotoa, a Khoi woman who worked for the Van Riebeeck family in her lifetime, and other community-based heritage celebrations. Events construct and mediate narratives according to the needs and priorities of some agents, and they take place in different locations, some of which may already be sites with invested social meaning. The authors' analyses compellingly centre on such connections, enabling a rounded understanding of the case studies. In this context, it would have been useful to reflect further on the generalisability of the findings regarding the relationship between sites and events.

*Peace and the Politics of Memory* draws attention to the changing nature of mnemonic formations. The chapter on Cambodia traces change in memoryscapes from the 1980s and 1990s to the present. However, change is less at the forefront in some other case studies, such as the ones on the siege of Sarajevo and Rwanda. The relationship between time and change in sites, agents, narratives and events is thus an area for future discussion and conceptualisation that may build on *Peace and the Politics of Memory*. Another area for future interest emerges in relation to the role of arts in or as mnemonic formations. In some chapters, such as the case study on Cyprus, one of the discussed sites is an art museum. While the book refers to arts in this way as part of memorial sites and events, there is potential for future research on the ways in which the SANE framework is or is not applicable to the analysis of artworks that circulate widely and can be accessed or consumed from homes anywhere in the world.

Overall, *Peace and the Politics of Memory* opens up a new conversation about the intersection of memory and peace studies. By introducing the systematic SANE framework for analysing mnemonic formations, the book raises the important questions of how to study memory and why to analyse specific components of memory over others. Due to the clarity and conciseness of the writing, the book is easily accessible for memory studies scholars and students from different disciplinary backgrounds, who might benefit from applying the SANE framework, or engagement with it to reflect on their own methodological decisions and transparency. *Peace and the Politics of Memory* lucidly articulates the relationship between memory and the quality of peace.

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### **Author biography**

Dr Anna Katila is an early career researcher in the Department of International Politics at City St George's, University of London. Her research on the legacies of mass violence and newly established peace analyses discourses and narratives – legal, creative and media – and focuses on transitional justice, interdisciplinary methods, memory, postcolonialism and gender. Her work has been published in *International Journal of Transitional Justice* and *Textual Practice*. Her chapter 'Justice for the Srebrenica Genocide? Law, Theatre and Memory' is forthcoming in *The Palgrave Handbook of Literary Memory Studies*.