

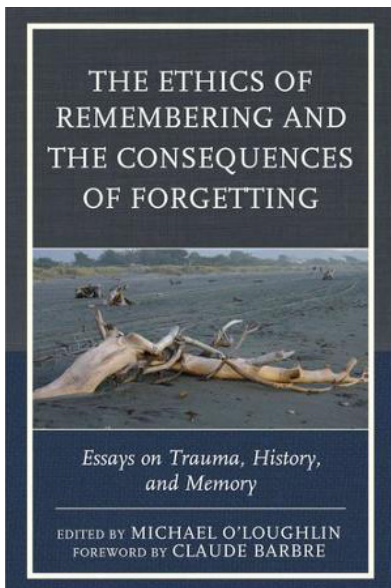
Book Review

The Ethics of Remembering and the Consequences of Forgetting: Essays on Trauma, History and Memory.

Edited by Michael O'Loughlin. (2014). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
ISBN 978 14422 3187 0: pp. 396

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There is a powerful metaphor for the world of unmetabolised ancestral trauma in a scene from *The Two Towers* (Tolkien, 1965), the middle volume of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings trilogy which is hauntingly depicted in Peter Jackson's film of the same name (Jackson, Osborne, Walsh, & Ordesky, 2001-2003). Frodo and Sam, the unlikely Hobbit heroes entrusted with destroying the magically powerful ring, must venture undetected into the terrifying Land of Mordor, seat of the Dark Lord Sauron. They allow the treacherous creature Gollum to lead them along a dangerous, secret pathway through the Dead Marshes. This vast bog was once an ancient battlefield and all around long-fallen warriors float, forever unburied, in pools of water. Frodo, the stumbling protagonist burdened by the weight of the ring and his epic task, is lured by flickering lights to join the ever-suspended undead in their watery graves. Interestingly, Tolkien

later wrote that this scene owes much to the horrific things he himself had witnessed during the First World War when countless bodies of slain soldiers floated in muddy, rain-filled shell craters after the Battle of the Somme (Tolkien, 1981).

The Ethics of Remembering and the Consequences of Forgetting adds usefully to the growing body of work throwing welcome light on the ghostly marshland of intergenerational trauma. The editor, Michael O'Loughlin of New York's Adelphi University, has pulled together a fine collection of writing that explores the nuanced convergences of trauma, history, and the complexities associated with remembering and memorialising.

Stansfield, G. (2015). [Review of the book *The ethics of remembering and the consequences of forgetting: Essays on trauma, history and memory.*] *Ata: Journal of Psychotherapy Aotearoa New Zealand*, 19(1), 83-85. DOI:10.9791/ajpanz.2015.07 © New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists Inc.

I once had the pleasure of listening to O’Loughlin give a paper about the lasting impact of the 19th century Irish Famine. Hearing him was my first introduction to the work of Abraham and Torok (1994) and their notion of “the phantom”, an image that describes how unprocessed traumatic events continue to shape the psychic life of individuals, families, and whole communities for years, and even generations, after the original trauma.

Abraham and Torok (1994) described a process that begins with “entombment”, the encapsulation of the unsayable, unbearable trauma as an unconscious secret. This leaves a psychic “gap” in the parents where children unconsciously and non-verbally feel something “should be, but isn’t” because it’s never explicitly heard or seen, or it lies behind a “screen memory or false story”. Later, through what Abraham and Torok call “endocryptic identification”, children of trauma survivors internalise and empathically identify with the “ghostly absences” in their parents. Like Tolkien’s Frodo powerfully drawn to the unburied dead, they find themselves unconsciously compelled to “heal” their traumatised elders, replace lost relatives, avenge past hurts or enact unformulated trauma.

As one might expect, there is much talk of similar, phantom-like processes in this volume, along with some of the many ways in which previously unprocessed trauma emerges as symptoms, phobias, psychoses, and enactments. Nirit Gradwohl Pisano, in her chapter called “Ghosts in the Mirror”, writes engagingly about one of the women she interviewed for her research and book called *Granddaughters of The Holocaust* (2012). Other writers explore similar themes related to victims of the Spanish civil war and of Lithuanian dissidents deported to Siberia during Stalinist crackdowns.

Minh Truong-George, an Auckland psychotherapist, writes movingly about the many overwhelming feelings associated with her return to Vietnam, 33 years after leaving there as a refugee with her family when she was a young girl. She describes her terrifying PTSD symptoms and how her Buddhist practice, and insight from Buddhist teaching, helped her bear this painful process.

Norma Tracey and Graham Toomey write about the deadly impact of colonisation, displacement, severed social links, and cultural alienation in the lives of Australian Aboriginal people. They introduce us to *dadirri*, an ancient “witness circle” and place of deep listening, and speak about how art, music, and storytelling help with restoring fractured identity, history, and the capacity for symbolisation.

There is a full introduction from O’Loughlin and a useful paper of his own about trauma and its troubled place in relation to a psychoanalysis which has often been blind and resistant to consideration of social and historical context.

Some chapters consider the ethics of uncovering, retelling, and re-remembering severed narratives and links. Ricardo Ainslie looks at the brutal, racist murder of an African American man in East Texas in 1998, its context within a history of slavery, oppression, and racial trauma, and then the important role of memorialisation in the healing of collective trauma. Billie Pivnick and Tom Hennes also reflect on the ethics and complexities of memorialisation, particularly in their work on a museum of memory for the September 11 attack on the twin towers in New York.

I especially enjoyed Angie Voela’s reflections on the place of art in relation to unmetabolised ancestral trauma. She does this by way of a painting by Barbara Loftus and the theoretical work of artist, psychoanalyst, and philosopher Bracha Ettinger. Loftus’s

painting, called Hildegard Under the Table, invites the viewer into the domestic world of her Jewish mother and grandparents before their flight as refugees from Nazi Germany. Voela's troubled participation in a "site of memory", where she witnessed a scene preceding a traumatic past event, fuels her curious explication of Ettinger's thinking. Ettinger's notion of the Matrix (a supplement to the Lacanian phallus) as a feminised space, where fragilized, "partial subjects" seek co-constructed meaning through "borderlinking", leaves Voela (and us) more hopeful about the possibilities of communicating aspects of traumatic experience.

This volume is more of an "advanced reader" than an introductory clinical text, but it nonetheless contains much that feels especially relevant for us here in Aotearoa New Zealand with our particular, complexly layered histories of migration, conquest, loss, and dislocation. I can wholly recommend it.

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Dr Gavin Stansfield is an experienced Auckland psychotherapist and supervisor with an ongoing interest in intergenerational trauma and the socio-historical context of mental health. He originally trained as a medical doctor in South Africa and worked in holistic general practice, community-based psychiatry, and hospice, before focusing exclusively on psychotherapy. Gavin trained through the Auckland University of Technology's psychotherapy programme and is an active member of NZAP and the New Zealand Chapter of the International Association for Relational Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy. He has a keen interest in contemporary psychoanalytic theory, especially intersubjective self psychology and relational psychoanalysis.