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Title:

Commemoration Reconsidered: Second World War Veterans' Reunion as Pilgrimage

For the special issue, *Memory Studies*

Key Words:

Social Remembering, Commemoration, Pilgrimage, Transformation, Liminality, Communitas

Author:

Kyoko Murakami
University of Bath, United Kingdom

Abstract

The present article recognises the crucial role cultural and social contexts play in shaping individual and collective recollections. Such recollections involve multiple, intertwined levels of experience in the real world such as commemorating a war. Thus, the commemoration practiced in a particular context deserves an empirical investigation. The methodological approach taken is naturalistic, as it situates commemoration as remembering and recollection in the real world of things and people. I consider the case of a war veterans' reunion as an analogy for a pilgrimage, and in that pilgrimage-like transformative process, we can observe the dynamics of remembering that is mediated with artefacts and involves people's interactions with the social environment. Furthermore, remembering, recollection and commemorating the war can be approached in terms of embodied interactions with culturally and historically organized materials. In this article, I will review the relevant literature on key topics and concepts including pilgrimage, transformation and liminality and communitas in order to create a theoretical framework. I present an analysis and discussion on the ethnographic fieldwork on the Burma Campaign (of the Second World War) veterans' reunion. The article strives to contribute to the critical forum of memory research, highlighting the significance of a holistic and interdisciplinary exposition of the vital role context plays in the practice of commemorating war.

Social practice of commemorating the Burma Campaign

The article is focused on the social practice of commemoration, where the past, whether a person or event, becomes the object of intentional commemoration and is given some historical significance. Acts of commemoration represent a continuing tension between immutable aspects of the past conserved in the present, in contrast with the past as transformable and malleable (Middleton and Edwards, 1990). I shall explore the theme of remembering in context through this case of the Burma veterans' reunion and address how remembering is acted, performed and made meaningful to those veterans and others concerned. I shall go beyond the level of analysis of talk-in-interaction and focus on how talk-in-interaction is mediated by artefacts and embodied action in the specific reunion. In particular, I shall address how the context, whether it is cultural, social or material, shapes the commemorative practice of remembering the Burma Campaign and how the rituals help reorder the meaning making and management of otherwise problematic Anglo-Japanese relations.

The opportunity to research the Burma veterans' *last* reunionⁱ was serendipitous. Sometime in early spring, 2012, I received an invitation to accompany the chairperson of the Burma Campaign Societyⁱⁱ, a London-based Anglo-Japanese non-profit organisation, aimed at promoting Britain and Japan's encounter during the Second World War, to the Burma veterans' reunion. It seemed to be a valuable opportunity to meet Second World War veterans and others involved in the reunion and their commemorative practices. The day started with a coffee meeting in the Imphal Barracks with Burma veterans and guests, proceeding to the main morning event, the Anglican church-led Kohima memorial service in York Minster and the military ceremony in its courtyard. The afternoon programme included a social dinner (as they call it, but it was a lunch) back at the assembly room in the Imphal Barracks and an after-lunch optional visit to the Kohima Museum, also on the site of the Imphal Barracks. My fieldwork was planned and conducted with participant observation in an ethnographic approach. Focusing on my participation in the reunion and other related activities I took ethnographic field notes and photographs through encounters with military staff and civilians working in the barracks and conversations with the veterans and family members throughout the day. This fieldwork derives from my on-going research interests in the cross-cultural understanding and reconciliation of the British and the Japanese concerning the Second World War (e.g., (Murakami and Middleton, 2006, Murakami, 2007, Murakami, 2012). The veterans focused on in this fieldwork are those who fought the Burma Campaignⁱⁱⁱ (1941-1945). It is one of the most ferocious of the Far Eastern Theatre and its epic battles are frequently depicted in historical non-fiction (e.g., Keane, 2010).

Pilgrimage to war graves and battlefields

There is a parallel link between the pilgrimage to war graves and battlefields and veterans' reunions and memorial services as commemorative practices. In common definition, pilgrimage is a journey, made to some sacred place, as an act of religious devotion. Here, the veteran's pilgrimage is rather an analogy. However, the veteran's pilgrimage is associated with some sense of spirituality, as it touches on emotionally and morally difficult issues of surviving the war and the acts involved in the pilgrimage may follow a particular religious practice and/or commemorative rituals (Connerton, 1989).

The impetus for my present study comes from the book entitled *War Grave Pilgrimage* (Walter, 1993). The book is mainly focused on veterans of the First and Second World wars in the European theatre and their family members, but it is comparable to much of the pilgrimage practices exhibited by the veterans who fought in the Far East. Burma Star Association, a Burma veterans' organisation in the UK, for example, organises trips to the battlefields, in particular, for the anniversary of a particular battle within the Burma Campaign. They often call the trips 'Return to the Battleground.'^{iv} Walter, noting the increasing popularity of pilgrimages for the First World War battlegrounds, traces the social cultural background of the post-war times and uncovers the meaning of the trips for, individual, veteran-pilgrims. Lloyd (Lloyd, 1998) wrote in his book *Battlefield Tourism* about the significant role religious imagery, rituals and beliefs played in the trips people made in the name of a pilgrimage to former battlefields. In the pilgrimage, new meanings made through the veteran-pilgrims' constant reflection during the pilgrimage generate the alchemy to transform the person. In order for such a transformation to occur, one needs to take a closer look at a particular social-political, cultural and moral context, focusing, not only on talk-in-interaction, but also in the way in which artefacts, environment, embodied action, collective and personal histories intersect and influence one another.

For pilgrim-veterans, settled sentiments, for example, animosities against the former enemy, through the pilgrimage's rituals, could be reordered and reorganised. Under the veneer of such animosity and hatred against the former enemy, the pilgrim-veteran comes to develop a more complex and nuanced understanding of the multiple perspectives of those involved in the war and therefore arrives at a re-settled position of reconciliation, where contradictions and ambiguities are forged and re-combined as one. Battlefield pilgrimages contribute to a long process of personal transformation, opening up possibilities for a new future. It is this personal journey, or transformative process of the pilgrimage that is the main concern of this article.

Personal and perspective transformation

The concept of transformation is a salient concept, albeit variably and diversely, in the literature of behavioural sciences and humanistic psychology and education (Wade, 1998). Transformation is the changing of character, substance or function (ibid.). During the pilgrimage, a person can experience a transformation. Personal transformation is 'the state of being conscious of one's consciousness' (Ferguson, 1980). Furthermore, it is a *process* of 'engendering full awareness-of awaking and unfolding the neglected potential of human consciousness' (Taber, 1983). This process is not a solitary, individual internal phenomenon. Rather, according to Newman (Newman, 1990), the researcher and the researched both experienced a transformation, suggesting that transformation can affect both individuals within a social interaction. The process of transformation produces a 'person-becoming or a person-in-process' (Goodson, 1977). Perspective transformation, a related term, coined by Merzirow (Mezirow, 1991), highlights the importance of the semiotic nature of personal transformation and the use of language in the transformational experience. Learning as a transformational experience, thus, involves individuals becoming critically aware that personal assumptions made about the world constrain new perspectives, making a choice and adopting a more integrative perspective. Along with Turner's concept of liminality, on which I shall elaborate further below, the concept of personal or perspective transformation is integral to the veterans' reunion as a pilgrimage. Wade sums it up as follows:

The crux of the transformation process is the release from fixed belief systems to an enlarged view of reality. Profound changes in one's perception of reality are described as expanded states of consciousness (1998: 715).

Furthermore, transformation is viewed as a process of self-renewal, the creative restructuring of the self that may follow the painful and disconfirming personal crisis of illness or other extreme personal trauma. Self-renewal is a possible response to pain and struggle, and one that can be facilitated and encouraged (Jaffe, 1985). Such a transformation may be critical for veterans of war who are trying to come to terms with difficult and delicate experiences such as post-war trauma and enduring illness.

Life review

The Burma veterans I met at the reunion are now in their eighties and early nineties, living within the life stage that calls for a life review (Butler, 1963). Coming to the realization that the end of their life is near, the veterans face the need to deal with unfinished business of reconciliation. From a cognitive psychosocial perspective, reconciliation implies multiple layers of cognitive, behavioural and collective transformations. Such layers pertain to the construction of a common integrative narrative of past collective violence, overcoming revenge and negative emotions such as anger, fear and sadness. Some may have undergone an effort to change the image of the perpetrator, managing and repositioning themselves with trust, forgiveness and even hope (Gibson, 2004, Bar-Tal, 2011).

The pilgrimage affords the veterans a temporal displacement, creating a time spent away from home, from the everyday. In everyday life routine, people do not feel that they can afford time to reflect on the extraordinary. The time for removing oneself to

meet their fellow veterans and Japanese people out of the familiar via pilgrimage is important as they can gain different perspectives. An alternative reading of one's life lived is made possible as a life review (Butler, 1963). The life review is defined as follows:

a naturally occurring, universal mental process characterized by the progressive return to consciousness of past experience, and particularly, the resurgence of unresolved conflicts; simultaneously, and normally, these revived experiences and conflicts can be surveyed and reintegrated . . . prompted by the realization of approaching dissolution and death. (Butler 1963: 66)

The life review process represents more than just an act of remembering, It is a final reorganization and integration of the personality (Butler, 1963). The veterans' reunion creates an opportunity for life review, as they approach their age of late 80s and early 90s. Many of the Burma veterans I came across in this fieldwork of the Burma veterans' reunion said that they had not had the opportunities to attend battlefield pilgrimages due to the taxing nature of travelling distances and for financial reasons. They had not had other opportunities to face the Japanese as a former enemy. There had been very few Anglo-Japanese dialogues for the veterans to seek personal or perspective transformation and to deal with the difficult issues of reconciliation and forgiveness in the UK.

Having examined the characteristics of the battlefield and war grave pilgrimage and consulted with the literature of transformation, I ask: how did the Burma veterans experience the reunion and associated activities and in what ways was the reunion somewhat synonymous with the transformative experience of a pilgrimage? Much of the literature examining pilgrimages relies upon Turner's concept of liminality. In the following, I shall summarise the key points of the work on rituals by the social anthropologist, Victor Turner (1920-1983), as a conceptual basis for understanding pilgrimages as a process of achieving a unit of seemingly contradictory beliefs, cultures and religions.

Liminality and *communitas*

Pilgrimage is a practice where the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, the good and evil, blurs. For Turner (1995(1969)), pilgrimage operates as a rite of passage, with three stages: (1) social and spiritual separation from the community; (2) a 'liminal' stage where the pilgrim, who is on the margin, experiences the sacred and supernatural in the intense bonding of 'communities'; and (3) reintegration into the everyday community.

Pilgrimages offer a liminal process in which one is between being in the everyday/mundane and the sacred. It is fair to say, however, that not all types of pilgrimages need to invoke a deity, nor are performed to please any deity. The "sacred" in pilgrimages is not a separate entity, but rather the entire *communitas* assembled in the sacred space of the grave/the cemetery and its physical environment (Turner, 1995(1969)). The concept 'communitas' is defined as an intense community spirit, the feeling of great social equality, solidarity and togetherness. It is in the liminality where *communitas* and social-interrelated-ness emerge. Liminality is one of the guiding concepts that Turner used in his ethnographic work on rituals in African cultures. With

its Latin origin of crossing a 'threshold', liminality was coined by Arnold van Gennep, who called the 'liminal phase' a "rites de passage" ("rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age" according to van Gennep's in Turner: 94). Turner's elaboration on liminality offers a remarkable insight as to what is at stake in our understanding of the battlefield pilgrimage:

Ritual and ceremony can be looked upon as spatially and temporarily arranged actions, involving several participants acting in concert, and employ objects. Rituals are semiotic wholes, and it may be possible to produce grammars (rules of communication) that describe them. (Turner, 1995(1969))

Turner explains how liminality works in rituals and ceremonies in terms of transition:

Van Gennep has shown that all rites of passage or "transitions" are marked by three phases: separation, margin, and aggregation. The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behavior signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions...or from both. During the intervening "liminal" period, the characteristics of the ritual subject (the "passenger") are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase (reaggregation or reincorporation), the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of a clearly defined and "structure" type; he is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions (Turner 1995/1969: 94-5).

In conjunction with this transitional and temporal concept of liminality, Turner discusses the sense of togetherness and social-interrelatedness or collective sentiment using the term 'communitas' as a characteristic of people experiencing liminality together. *Battlefield pilgrimages*, whilst being highly restrained in verbal forms of communication (how the war should be talked about and remembered), provide opportunities for perspective transformation.

According to Turner, transitional characteristics in the liminal process are not always fixed in oppositional terms (e.g., making a distinction between the secular and the sacred in the rituals). Rather, every social position has something sacred about it. The sacred character is *acquired* during rites of passages, through the changing of positions. He notes that part of this sacredness is *achieved* through the transient humility learned in these phases, allowing people to reach a higher position. Pilgrimages are, then, a dialogic practice. If this is the case, then, in what way does a pilgrimage allow people to achieve transformation to a sacredness or higher position? What is important for the battlefield pilgrim is that it is the ritual's liminal process for achieving communitas, involving new meaning making, but more specifically, *circumventing* meanings. Pilgrims perform this very communicative art of circumvention in which they set aside the settled meaning. It is the process where the pre-existing and settled meaning can be re-ordered for perspective transformation. What Turner is referring to is an ontological change – a particular 'being' in the world and a shift in one's way of being as distinct from one's values or consciously held beliefs.

Sociality and materiality of commemoration

The current article takes an ethnographic approach to studying the commemorative practice of the Burma Campaign in the veterans' reunion. The veterans, and those participants including myself as the researcher, remember together not only with the use of language, but also with artefacts. This is supported by a material view of remembering, expressed by Radley and other social psychologists (Middleton and Edwards, 1990, Middleton and Brown, 2005). As Radley says:

A social psychology of remembering is that one must look beyond the idea of a single cognitive faculty which people have in common to the proposition that their ways of remembering may be different depending upon their relationship to their community, including the world of objects it produces and preserves.
(Radley, 1990)

He argues that 'remembering is something which occurs in a world of things, as well as words, and that artefacts play a central role in the memories of cultures and individuals' (1990: 57). In particular, he emphasises the crucial role that objects, materials and conditions play, in which remembering can be fruitfully studied as a social and cultural phenomenon.

An equally important for materiality of remembering is to look at how people remember through the use of artefacts. The veterans and other participants' use artefacts for remembering, such as the poppy badges and pins, flags and bemedalled uniforms, the brass band, battalion insignia printed on the paper placemats, and their dress code such as navy blue blazer jackets and beret hats, wheel chairs and canes, as well as cleric robes. The artefacts are critical aspects of understanding the mnemonic importance of the commemorative practice of any war. 'The significance of the artefacts, now removed from the temporal and spatial context in which they were obtained, is made through their being the object of discourse' (Radley, 1990). Those medals were carried through beyond the time and space of the war to the present and future context. Not only do artefacts constitute the context and help structure the rituals and activities of the commemoration of the war, but they work as an *aide de memoire*, triggering particular memories. They work as a memento, or a reference point, with which people talk and interact with others. This view reflects the role of the artefact as a meditational tool, with which the veterans use to remember. Vygotsky's classic example, tying a knot in his handkerchief as a reminder, illustrates that 'human beings actively remember with the help of signs' and 'humans personally influence their relations with the environment and through that environment personally change their behavior, subjecting it to their control' (Vygotsky, 1978). By interacting with artefacts, the veterans and other participants in the reunion and the memorial service present more than individual acts and performances. The past is recollected together with others. The sense of the past is revealed through efforts to evoke either a sense of continuity with, or a discrete break from, what has gone before.

We can approach the veterans' reunion by tracing the people's use of artefacts and symbolic tools and their interaction within the environment, examining how this use and interaction shapes the commemoration in question.

Burma veterans' last reunion

In order to elaborate on the notion of liminality and *communitas* in the transformative experience during a pilgrimage, I draw upon my fieldwork conducted on 26th April 2012, a visit to the Burma Veteran's Reunion in York, the United Kingdom. The examples come from a collection of materials gathered in my on-going association with members of a special interest group called the Burma Campaign Society (hereafter, BCS) based in London (for details, see Footnote 2). For the Burma veterans' last reunion, I accompanied the chairman of the BCS. There were a few other Japanese participants from the society as well as a newspaper journalist from Japan. I was part of the Japanese representative group, a guest of the BCS chairperson, Michi^v. During the coffee meeting, the first activity of the reunion programme, Michi introduced me to several Burma campaign veterans and their spouses and family members. Through these initial introductions, I gradually navigated my way through a series of activities and events in the programme. Throughout the day I came across people from all walks of life—British and Japanese, Nepalese Gurkha soldiers, young and old, war veterans, active combatants and civilian, journalists, religious figures (vicars and bishops), the mayor and other dignitaries—all gathered in one place. The boundaries between the professions, roles, social status, race and ethnicity blurred on this occasion. Thus, the reunion offered a rare opportunity for them to be in the same place and time together and to socially interact. It is in this liminal process in separation and displacement from the everyday that aspects of the perspective transformation were identified.

In the following, I shall describe the three stages of transition: separation, liminal process and an emergence of *communitas* for reintegration. The reunion starts with a clear sense of separation from the everyday, in experiencing a different kind of time and place from that of the veterans' and participant's home. Physically entering into the Imphal Barracks, the military site, with a checkpoint at the gate, a military colour scheme and imposing architectural style of buildings, sets up a different space-time from home. The change of frame (Goffman, 1981) is palpable at the onset of the reunion events. Seeing the venue with staff in uniform, military vehicles, objects and signposts changes the nature of the social interactions. It creates space and time away from the everyday. The reunion and memorial activities/rituals take place in venues dictating the aims of the event and there is a clear expectation of what is appropriate to say and of how to behave in each activity. They therefore help organise and frame the way in which the reunion is experienced. Seemingly the frame has a set of expectations. The coffee morning meeting is meant to encourage informal conversations, getting people to mingle with others and get acquainted (and for veterans to re-kindle their friendship) with one another for the day. The Kohima Memorial service was held in York Minster whilst the military ceremony took place in the Minster's courtyard. This presents a mixed modality of the religious and the military. A dark, solemn atmospheric space created in the typical cathedral structure makes us appear as small dots in the larger scheme of history and humanity. The music, the hymns, specifically chosen for the occasion, and the national anthem, invoke particular sentiments and emotions related to the experience of the Burma campaign for the veterans, albeit, exactly what these mean, varies between individuals. For those others (including myself) who do not have direct experience of any war, the entire atmosphere and environment simply make us pay respect to the Burma veterans, in awe with the grand significance of the occasion of their gathering in one place. The environment and its affective impact is discussed in what Anderson calls 'affective atmosphere' (Anderson, 2009). Affective

atmosphere holds a series of opposites—presence and absence, materiality and ideality, definite and indefinite, singularity and generality—in a relation of tension. Notably, what might be thought of as opposites are embraced and held as one, which echoes what Turner says happens in the liminal process.

Life Review: on-going task of transformation

At the Kohima Imphal barracks meeting room, during morning coffee time, before the memorial services, I was introduced to a lovely couple – Ray, aged 91, and Ruth, aged 75. They said that they had recently taken part in a visit to the grave for the war dead in Kohima, Northern India, as part of their world tour. They said they had always wanted to return; they wanted to ‘let go with ghosts’, but it took them a long time to materialise their wish. They felt it would be their last time to visit the grave. Again, what they told me points to Butler’s notion of life review (Butler, 1963). They have been engaged in the life review, whilst everyday facing the challenges and difficulties of ongoing transitions from Burma. It seems that having a memorial in Kohima was not enough for them. They felt they needed to *go to the battlefield*. They wanted to have a dialogue with his fellow soldiers who died in Kohima. They have come to the veterans’ reunion for the last 10 years or so and were determined to go to Japan to meet Ray’s former foe. The reunion seemed to offer them a time to undertake the life review, reflecting and re-evaluating the past and present.

How people are brought together: Emergence of conversations

As the reunion programme progressed, the social and cultural boundaries between British and Japanese, civilian and non-civilian gradually dissolved through conversations and laughter. In the morning, when there was a much more rigid, structured ritual of commemoration, including the holding of religious and military ceremonies, participants in the reunion seem to stick to their own cultural/social groups. The change in the affective atmosphere was notable and conversations between people from different groups became more frequent outside of the ritual setting. Informal conversations began to emerge as the participants walked along the corridor of the Minster, on the footpath to the courtyard, or whilst sitting next to each other in the transport returning to the barracks. Although it may seem rather insignificant to some, the idea of the Burma veterans and their family members striking a conversation with Japanese guests in a delicate context such as this, is in itself a positive sign for Anglo-Japanese reconciliation.

Listening to the veterans’ stories

Telling stories in the reunion seemed a default mode of communication. This was also the case with my research interviews with the POW veterans in 1999 and on other informal occasions I had with veterans of the Second World War. Often when older individuals start to talk about the (good) old times, they talk at length and we, as listeners, begin not to listen attentively. The elderly ramble and stories go around in circles in a repetitive fashion. This is something that often, in our everyday, busy lives, we do not have the patience or tolerance for. Active, emphatic listening is an art of communication and is essential for a veterans’ reunion such as this. When it comes to gruesome stories of combative and traumatic experiences, there is now hardly any place or room for those veterans to tell their stories or to be listened to. Here in the Burma veterans’ reunion, although in a restrained fashion, the memories of the war dead were fondly reminisced. The veterans recounted their stories one after another at

the reunion. The interactional order, to use an ethnomethodological, conversation analytic term, was maintained through what Harvey Sacks calls 'second stories' (Sacks, 1992), which was to maintain the topical coherence of what seemed to be acceptable and expected in the given context. The participants, including myself, listened attentively to the veterans' stories of survival from the war, its horror and the madness of performing a soldier's duty. What I observed at the reunion is a different discourse, a circumvented version of accounting for the war, the Burma Campaign and its consequences.

After the morning programme, lunchtime offered a different frame. Even though the lunch seating was pre-arranged according to formal membership and cultural group, people started to talk beyond their group and some moved to our tables to strike up a conversation. Over- and after-dinner conversations were much livelier, as military music was played by a brass band and various speeches were made by those honorary figures. Being of a lively, cheerful atmosphere, our Japanese lunch table was visited by a few others. For example, a military officer, in splendid uniform with a chest full of medals, displaying the higher echelon of his class, came to greet me, stopped by and asked me why I had come to this event. He was interested in my autobiographical account and research interests. His subsequent response to my story and research interest was somewhat different and more empathetic with the Japanese side. He emphasised that a long time had passed and it was time now to understand that it was a fierce war, a war that should never be repeated. His response shifted the focus of conversation to the current conflicts in Middle East as a result of the Arab Spring. Our conversation was elevated from the Burma Campaign and the war history shared between the British and Japanese, to the level of humanity, by asking how we can work together to eradicate war and conflict around the world.

Having crossed the threshold at the separation stage, in the liminal process of moving from the margin to the sacred, where ambiguities and ambivalences emerge, the pilgrim veterans and participants in the reunion event started to identify and recognise multiple perspectives of the event in question. The structured nature of rituals help create a safe space with a clear boundary of what is (and is not) appropriate in a given situation in terms of social interaction. Within that rigid structure, the veteran pilgrims and the other participants at the reunion mingled with the Japanese guests. This is where people engaged in perspective transformation. It is within this stage that attempts at a life review would occur, in which, participants engaged in attempts to resolve the difficult issues raised by the war and its impact on their lives.

Putting the pieces together

Throughout the coffee meeting and the social dinner, I quickly learnt that, not only the Burma campaign veterans, but also the family members themselves were on a pilgrimage journey. Those I met were attending the reunion in order to find out about the unknown aspects their fathers' and husbands' lives. These fathers and husbands, like many other traumatised war veterans, never spoke about their wartime involvement as active combatants in the Burma Campaign. It was apparent that talking about Burma was restrained within domestic life in the post war period. Many of the family members hardly understood the deep significance of the memorial services and the reunion. The accompanying family members glimpsed a side of the life of spouses and fathers, which they had previously not been able to. They participated in the

Kohima memorial services in York Minster and the Imphal Barracks, where the reunion was held, became sites of pilgrimage. They witnessed military rituals being performed alongside the religious, Anglican Church ceremony, honouring those who had made the ultimate sacrifice. Life review, instead of being a solitary reflective process, became a socially engaged process, where the pilgrim veterans could undertake the life review within the presence of family and friends.

Reworking social relation

This reunion seemed to be about social relations—broken human ties—being repaired, hated enemies becoming friends and ruptured family ties being mended. People's desire and intention for reconciliation were palpable. I came to know this from a number of autobiographical stories that the participants told at the reunion. Michi, BCS chairman, a daughter of a Burma veteran, led me through the day, giving me ample opportunity to observe this very issue of how people used the reunion to rebuild broken ties. She thinks that her unprecedented acceptance to the Burma veterans' community, despite being Japanese, is attributed to the fact that she is the daughter of a Burma veteran, a military veterinary surgeon in the Japanese Imperial army. This intergenerational succession of family history works as an entitlement for membership to the reunion (Rydstrøm, 2007, Bietti, 2010). In one of the interviews I conducted with Michi prior to the reunion, her autobiographical story highlighted the immense significance of her father's involvement in the Burma campaign. She grew up listening to him reminiscing the war. She also revealed in tears that she had to learn to normalise her father's routine violence towards her at home. War creates broken families. The very act of telling her autobiographical story may serve as her own life review, a way of allowing her to actively work through such difficult and unresolved issues.

The desire to know, to uncover the family secret, wanting to mend the lost relationship, was omnipresent. When it comes to civilian participants at the reunion, working on a life review, another woman across the table from me at lunch caught my attention. . British and in her late 50s, she said that she came to the reunion because of her father. She was reticent at first, with a friend accompanying her for support who spoke on her behalf when we first introduced ourselves. I waited until after lunch to ask more questions as to what she was hoping to achieve by coming to this reunion. Slowly, she started to open up amid the noisy, cheerful environment of post-lunch. Her autobiographical story was in relation to her father's secrecy about the Burma Campaign and his path during the Second World War. Her father passed away years ago and, like Michi's father, without ever speaking of the war, let alone his presumed involvement in the Burma Campaign. At the table, facing me, she showed me a few photographs, as if there were no need for further explanation. In affirmation to my question, she said her father had fought in Burma. How she found out was my next question. She turned the photographs to me and explained one by one, whilst flipping over the back of the photo to show some scribbles. Posthumously, the photographs were found while clearing up some of his belongings, and she discovered that her father had fought in Burma. The face of the soldier in uniform bore a clear resemblance to her. The handsome picture of her father appeared in a local newspaper clipping. A few minutes of her reminiscing about her father, shared with us at the table, indicated to me how important it is to acknowledge the women's place in the reunion, as daughters or wives of the veterans. They needed such a gathering to trace and

reconnect with their own husband or father who was suffering from the devastating effects of a direct involvement in the Burma campaign. Through participation in the reunion, they developed empathy toward and reconciliation with their father/spouse, which also facilitated their own life review. The significance of the reunion, at least from the point of view of the two women I met, is apparent to the lives of family members as they try to make sense of their life at a particular stage, putting together missing pieces, however long it may take. The family issue described here can be explained in terms of proximity and distance (Rydstrøm, 2007). Focused on the perspectives of young post-war generations, Rydstrøm (2007) describes the tension between the younger generations within families and their effort to bridge the gap between themselves and their parents and grandparents, concerning the extent to which they are able to forget the past and look toward the future. The family relationship is an integral part of the commemorative practice, often highlighting the complex ways in which both war and post-war generations attempt to remember what the war means to them and how they can overcome brutality, sorrow and anger.

Reintegration

Multiple modalities used for the rituals and ceremonies (e.g., military and religious, military and civilians, formal speeches and informal conversations, music and poetry reading, a minute silence) produced a collective plot for both the veteran and non-veteran participants. As the day's programme drew to a close, the ritual structure clearly signified the end of the liminal process, where new meanings emerged through new interactions and engagement with others, with the mediation of artefacts and environments. The dinner ended in a more relaxed atmosphere, where people freely mingled with one another, rekindled their friendship and fondly reminisced about past times. The exit from the ritual process of the pilgrimage was marked by a few speeches thanking the participants, thereby drawing the reunion to a close, followed by an invitation to the Kohima Museum where further conversations could take place for those veterans and friends and family who so wished. At that stage, the venue of the reunion was filled with a sign of amicability. Strong handshakes and embraces, exchange of contacts, waving and gentle kisses on cheeks produced an affective atmosphere (Anderson, 2009). The veterans, their accompanied friends and families and guests slowly left the venue. I observed the assembly room becoming quickly deserted – with only the flags, empty chairs and scattered paper copies of the programmes and placemats left on the dinner tables remaining. At that stage, Michi, the Japanese journalist and I each exchanged our own reflections of the reunion and how it went. We were all relieved that the day ended without any problem. This was particularly important, as all of us, being Japanese living in the UK, had faced unpleasant encounters with the Second World War veterans who had served in the Far East. At the time of the Japanese Emperor's visit to the UK in 1998, verbal hostilities were unreservedly expressed toward the local Japanese population who had no direct involvement in the war. I personally felt that it was an achievement in which I maintained my composure of keeping conversations amicably with the Burma veterans, family members and military staff at the reunion. We all departed from the Barracks with positive feelings about the process of integration to the everyday. When passing through the military checkpoint at the gate, I felt an enormous sense of relief on crossing the threshold back to the everyday and thereby completing the pilgrimage.

Multimodality, silence and the hidden

War grave and battlefield pilgrimages are sites of multiple meanings, revealing complex and dynamic relations, tensions and contradictions between the individual and the collective understanding of the past (family, nation, international levels). They are imbued with semiotic materials such as personal stories, speeches, texts, images, rituals and music. There are emotions that are often hard to speak about and classify. The site of this reunion pilgrimage is fraught with unfinished business of various kinds, albeit political, family, moral, and spiritual. It provides invaluable opportunities for pilgrim participants to work out moral and emotionally difficult issues. Although the ritual aspect of the reunion guided the veterans and other participants during the day, the post-reunion feeling I had was more the weight of the past, an extremity and intensity of emotions and finally a sense of relief that the reunion took place without any hostilities and conflict between the British and Japanese reunion participants over the status of the Burma Campaign. It gave me a far greater understanding of the complexities of commemorative practices such as the reunion as a pilgrimage. Under the structured and rule-governed guise of rituals, Connerton elaborates as follows:

The first line of argument, which I shall call the psychoanalytic position, consists in the view that the ritual behaviour is best understood as a form of symbolic representation. Rites are said to be the systematically indirect statement, encoded in the symbolism of the rite, of conflicts which that rite disguise and to that extent denies. (1989: 48)

He goes on to explain further how the ritual manages potential conflict and hostilities, which could have arisen during the reunion:

The primary process, which is held to explain the secondary process of symbolic representation, is located in the life-history of the individual... What all such interpretations have in common is that they decode the ritual text as conflict-laden and hence as in some way freighted with strategies of denial. (Connerton, 1989: 48)

We might be tempted to interpret the conversations that occurred during the reunion as the discourse of forgiveness and reconciliation based on what has been uttered and explicitly stated. Yet, there is a sense in which, what really mattered, was what was *not* spoken (Hirschauer, 2006). There was a mutual awareness that humans are able to perform unspeakable acts. Through the exchanges I had with those at the reunion, albeit with military, veteran or civilian participants, a constant reference to the current war and conflict around the world was made. Reunion participants seemed to be reflecting on the current condition, extrapolating the misery of the great wars into present on-goings in Afghanistan and even extending it to the uprisings in the Middle East. The past conflict in Burma was constantly being stretched to the present, as the reunion participants were seeking to make sense of Burma in the present context. In this very interface of people, mind, history, memory and memorial objects and activities, we come to see that the past as immanent (Birth, 2006). Borrowing from this notion, the past's presence, the Burma conflict, in the present, takes many forms, such as storied memories, texts, and memorial objects such as the veterans' hats and blazer jackets, medals, poppy badges and so forth. Conspicuous traces of the past serve as sites to shape inter-subjective relations, forming new dialogues and interactions. Likewise, Birth suggests, experiences in the present produce unwanted, anxiety-

provoking flashbacks, although the emotions that I detected were understated, overlooked and even well managed. Perhaps, this might exemplify an art of repression in which remembering and forgetting are psychologically bound together (Billig, 1999).

Birth (2006) underlines the inter-related nature of the present and the past, arguing that the immanent past can influence the reproduction of knowledge and subjectivity, as much as present concerns can shape the past. By focusing on the cultural and intersubjective engagement with manifestations of the past, old distinctions such as global–local, individual–culture, history–memory, and even past–present–future start to blur. Equally significant to note was the sense of concession, tolerance and sensitivity to the presence of the Japanese (people like myself and a few others). Perhaps animosity against the Japanese has softened and there is a slight sense that the Japanese people are now tolerated and accepted in their sacred space, the Imphal Barracks. Despite sounding as if I am overstating, a sense of willingness to forgive the other was there and by being at this reunion, it *felt* as if the process was complete.

Summary

In this article, I have explored the significance of pilgrimage to war graves and the battlefield in the context of the Burma veterans' reunion. Drawing on Victor Turner's concept of liminality and *communitas*, I extended an ethnographic gaze to the case of the Burma veterans' reunion and illustrated how those people involved experienced a pilgrimage-like, perspective transformation. As a limitation of this study, my claim of perspective transformation is rather modest in a sense that it can be observable on this particular reunion occasion in the context of a commemorative practice. Possibly and very likely, similar perspective transformations may have *already* been prompted and worked on by the veterans to a degree. The reunion as a commemorative practice in a specific context (i.e., Britain, at a particular time; more than 60 years after the war) afforded me an opportunity to observe empirically a transformative experience in the ritual process of liminality and in building a *communitas* for the veterans and those concerned. I have attempted to explicate what remembering in context means within the war veterans' reunion, involving the joint commemoration of the fierce conflict known as the Burma Campaign during the Second World War. This is a highly subjective account of the reunion as a pilgrimage and of how I, as a Japanese researcher, experienced a commemoration of the Second World War in 21st century Britain. This exploration is motivated by a critical stance to my own research and its discursive psychological argument and its methodology (Murakami, 2012). The key concern of this article goes beyond the centrality of discourse and incorporates the ethnographic approach to exploring the materiality of remembering—material conditions under which social remembering takes place. The pilgrimage offers a place where alternative discourses can be formulated, the process account of personal (and collective) transformation.

What was being remembered in the commemorative ceremonies and rituals held by the Burma veterans reunions? Connerton (1989) says that '[p]art of the answer is that a community is reminded of its identity as represented and told in a master narrative' (70), in this case, the community (or *communitas* in Turner's sense) of those who are involved in the Burma campaign, its veterans, their family members and even those people such as myself and other Japanese and British who have a stake or interest in the Burma campaign and the veterans' affairs. At the same time, this identity was not a

given feature of the community. Those who are concerned, when it is possible, come to the same place and perform the same rituals, year after year, in order to work up and reassure themselves of the identity of the Burma veterans. The *communitas* in that sense is not a perpetually fixed and stabilised entity. Rather, it involves a continuous engagement with social others, mediated by artefacts, in which social relations and identity reassurance are performed and socially and culturally reproduced.

Implications

Lastly, I briefly address the theoretical implications of this work for memory studies. Focusing on the ethnography of the reunion, the social anthropological insights drawn from Victor Turner complement the discursive argument of remembering. The discourse—focusing on communicative remembrances—along with attention to how material conditions matter, and how the remembrance rituals in the reunion afford the people's experience of transformation from the everyday to the sacred. The ethnography of the reunion may present a stronger argument for the material basis for remembering and is critical in understanding how individuals remember in particular contexts.

We also need to consider the limitation of Turner's functional approach, which has been criticised by some anthropologists for its failure to address competing discourse, agendas and views that are held by different stakeholders and participants (e.g., Eade et al, 1995 in Bowie, 2006). For this reason, Turner's view of pilgrimage as *communitas* can be seen as representing only *one* particular discourse concerning pilgrimage, instead of a thorough empirical description. As my ethnographic account on the Burma veterans' reunion attests, whilst there is a governing discourse in the way in which people commemorate the Burma Campaign, there are many more subtle nuances, hidden discourses and symbols, which reveal moral dilemmas, unspeakable personal emotions and sentiments in the undercurrent of the reunion. I hope to have illustrated those in this article. A Turnerian paradigm is said to push the deterministic model of the pilgrimage, marginalising or suppressing the essential heterogeneity of the pilgrimage process (Eade and Sallnow, 1991). Clearly, further research is needed, but if we are to advance our thinking on remembering in context, we ought to build on Turner's approach, by venturing into an ecological approach to remembering (Mori, 2011). The case presented here demonstrates how remembering in context is a multimodal, dynamic phenomenon of transformation, in need of concepts that look at body-relation, emotions, affect and time. The case of the veterans' reunion can be viewed as a meaningful practice of commemoration, the effects of which, are analogous to those battlefield pilgrimages that build *communitas* of war veterans and their family members.

Silence is another vexing area for research on remembering in context. I have illustrated an inevitable silence that the context affords in the reunion. Silence, not speaking about the past, can be construed in different ways, depending on the context and the social relationship of those involved in the conversational and interactional frame. Some of the silences observed in the reunion may be synonymous with forgetting (Connerton, 2008) and contribute to an institutional silence in which failures to engage in dialogues with the other (e.g., former enemy) are present. Silence can also be thought of as a space of ambiguity, where meaning has not been totally settled. Ubiquitous forms of silence (i.e., not going into the details or status of the conflict

regarding the Burma Campaign) can be seen as time-space, where possibly other meanings could be incorporated into future dialogue.

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Author biography

Dr Kyoko Murakami is a lecturer at the Department of Education, University of Bath, UK. Her research interests include discourse analysis, narrative learning, and dialogue for peace and reconciliation. Her recent publications include a monograph *Discursive Psychology of Remembering and Reconciliation* (2012). She is working on reminiscence, materiality and embodied knowing in learning and teaching practices.

ⁱ The Burma veterans' reunion is held annually in conjunction with the Kohima Memorial Service. However, I was told that the 2012 reunion would be the last one, as the veterans were getting old and too frail to continue attending the reunion and the memorial service in the years to come. However, under the new patron, Prince Andrew, of the Kohima Educational Trust, it has now been decided that the reunion and the memorial service will continue. The current article focuses on this last reunion held on 26th April 2012.

ⁱⁱ Burma Campaign Society (est. 2002) 'organises and encourages research and debate of this wartime encounter and of the consequences of it. This is an initiative of people of different generations, beginning with veterans on both sides. It includes many people who are involved in Anglo-Japanese relations, or are interested in and have connections with Burma, or just those who have an interest in history' (from BCS website: <http://theburmacampaignsociety.org>) (accessed on 15-May-2012).

iii 'The campaign was the longest fought by the British in the Second World War. In December 1941 it began, for the British, with disaster, retreat and loss of face in front of the subject population. It ended in August 1945, in triumph with the total defeat of the occupying Japanese army. In the end, Japan suffered her greatest defeat on land in her history... The fighting took place not only in jungle but in mountains and across the Burmese plain. The climate was the enemy of both sides. Disease and infection...decimate[d] armies as well as the monsoon...creating gruesome conditions (Roswell, unknown, website).' The battle of Kohima (1944) and the battle of Imphal (1944) are well known battles attributed to the campaign.

iv The accounts of the trips written by the veteran participants are featured in the organisations' website and/or newsletter for members to read and to share their memories (<http://www.burmastar.org.uk/commando.htm>).

v This is a pseudonym.

DRAFT