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Introduction

From deathscapes to consolationscapes: spaces, practices and experiences of consolation

Christoph Jedan, Avril Maddrell and Eric Venbrux

Human beings are grieving animals and consolation, an experiential assemblage through which grief is ameliorated or assuaged, is an age-old response to loss, expressed variously in different cultural contexts. However, in the context of the West, over the course of the past century, consolation has dropped off the cultural radar, reduced in popular usage to the notion of ‘second prize’ rather than any positive agential process.¹ It might seem that we don’t ‘do’ consolation any more, and Western models of bereavement in the twentieth century typically privileged coping with loss as a linear progression towards ‘closure’. The contributions to this volume highlight this relative neglect of consolation in Western popular and academic discourses *and* show that the international traditions of consolation discussed here illuminate diverse attitudes to death and offer insight to a range of strategies for dealing with bereavement across different cultures, and the varied ways in which grief and consolation are intertwined with the spatial fabric of social worlds across different cultural settings. Indeed, in the context of this volume on *consolationscapes*, the ‘scapes’ suffix is important: ‘scapes’ are concerned with contact zones, spaces of exchange, nexus, i.e. multidimensional. Thus, this volume moves beyond consideration of single thematic approaches to consolation, such as religion, to explore the ways in which varied relational factors coalesce, are expressed, mapped on to, and experienced in and through particular places, including the body, home, landscapes and the virtual arenas of online sites and communities and faithscapes.

Bringing a spatial lens to consolation

Bereavement results in perceiving, inhabiting and experiencing some spaces, places, material and immaterial arena in new and different ways, e.g., through bereavement-induced (im)mobilities, or as sites of comfort and ongoing attachment (i.e. as actual or potential sites of consolation). Further work is

1 Cf. the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Sykes 1982: 201): ‘Consolation n. act of consoling; consoling circumstance; - prize (given to competitor just missing main prizes)’.

needed in order to begin to understand the detailed interplay of complex intersectionalities in the time-spaces of death, bereavement and living with loss at individual and communal levels in different regional and national contexts, as well as in different types of social spaces. This includes consolation, which, with notable exceptions (e.g. Maddrell 2009a), has tended to be implicit rather than explicit in work on geographies and other spatially inflected studies of dying, death, loss and mourning.

This book goes some way to promoting this dialogue through its focus on the relationship between space-place and consolation. In so doing, the book offers a fresh perspective for research on death, grief and bereavement, notably in offering a counterpoint to the *Deathscapes* edited collection (Maddrell and Sidaway 2010) (although aspects of comfort, support and consolation featured in several of the chapters found there, e.g. see Watts [2010] on self-help groups).

Consolationscapes in the Face of Loss offers a multidisciplinary collection of spatially attentive studies, which offer new insights for researchers and students interrogating contemporary bereavement and living with loss within geographies of death and wider interdisciplinary death studies, as well as those interested in emerging social-cultural practices, meaning-making and their role in personal and collective resilience. Through the conceptual discussions and case studies which follow, we argue that understanding consolation and its spatial expression offers key insights central to the coping strategies and resilience of those who experience bereavement and that this, in turn, can provide insight to other forms of loss and associated responses and strategies. In turn, we hope that this volume will speak to emerging scholarship on geographies of resilience (Weichselgartner and Kelman 2015) and solace (*Geographies of Comfort*, Price et al. 2018).

The volume is largely based on presentations given at sessions at the Emotional Geographies conference in Groningen in 2013, convened on the theme of 'Consolationscapes'. With some additional contributions, it brings together scholars from geography, sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy and religious studies. The chapters use various spatial and conceptual mappings of grief and consolation to analyse a range of experiential arenas associated with grief, bereavement and remembrance, comfort and resilience, including battlefield memorials, crematoria, maternity wards, graveyards and burial sites, as well as the related everyday ritual performances and practices marking loss and consolation, and how these enable those living with loss to carry on.

Interdisciplinary approaches to consolation

We have claimed above that there has been a relative neglect of consolation in post-war scholarship. The word 'consolation' is not absent from recent scholarly literature, but has been addressed only intermittently and unsystematically. What is evident is the use of 'consolation', almost interchangeably with words such as 'comfort', 'coping', 'resilience' and 'solace', as an indication of an unspecific amelioration of the bereaved's experience and situation (e.g. Kolcaba

2003; Gillis 2012). The wars of 1914–18 and 1939–45 and the associated large-scale deaths of militia and civilians may have marginalised discourses of consolation in Europe in post-war years. Likewise, the notion of consolation may seem hollow in the face of mass disaster, or genocide, such as that of European Jews, as well as Romanies, homosexuals and the disabled, under the Nazi regime, and that of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Trends to secularisation in the West have also been associated with shifts in discourses of consolation (see below); and some memorial culture suggests a passive inclination for forgetting rather than dwelling on loss (Robinson 2010).

There have been a few attempts at offering a conceptual framework of consolation (e.g. Weyhofen 1983; Norberg, Bergsten and Lundman 2001; Klass 2013, 2014), and these represent much needed interventions given the polyvalence of consolation. A good indicator of the complexities is provided by dictionary definitions of *consolatio*, the Latin word from which the English 'consolation' is derived. The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Glare 1996) distinguishes three main meanings, first 'the act of consoling or an instance of it, consolation; the title of books, e.g. by Cicero and Crantor', which the dictionary combines with the meaning of 'the act of allaying (fears)'; second, 'the fact of being consoled' and, third, 'a consoling fact or circumstance'. It is notable that the first meaning pulls together the act of consolation and a specific historical genre, written texts intended to offer consolation. To pursue the etymology further, the verb *solari*, from which the noun *consolatio* is derived, combines the meanings of assuaging grief and 'relieving from physical pain or discomfort'. These dictionary definitions thus point us to a number of complex conceptual issues:

- 1 What is the relationship between consolation and historically situated human experience?
- 2 To what extent is historical material helpful in understanding consolation today?
- 3 How do the spatial and temporal aspects of consolation intersect?
- 4 What is the relationship between activity and passivity; can consolation be actively sought?
- 5 Is there a relationship between offering and receiving or finding consolation?
- 6 How do we apprehend and understand the embodied dialectic between grief and consolation?
- 7 Where is consolation situated within the affective-emotional arena and how does it relate to other affective-emotional registers?

In the light of these challenges we acknowledge the value of preceding work and the limits of this single volume, as well as the aspiration to stimulate further work in this area.

In the humanities – history, classical languages, philosophy, theology and parts of religious studies – research on consolation has always retained a

limited presence. This residual presence can be attributed to those disciplines which address historical material in which the concept of consolation is employed. Within historical studies, ancient consolations have attracted detailed studies (e.g. Kassel 1958; Johann 1968, Manning 1974; Alonso del Real 2001; Lillo Redonet 2001; Baltussen 2013; Jedan 2014a, 2014b on the philosophical material; on early Christian consolations e.g. Favez 1937, Scourfield 1993; Holloway 2001; Jedan 2017), as have later periods (e.g. Moos 1971–1972 on the medieval material; Rittgers 2012 on the late medieval and early modern periods; McClure 1991 on Italian Humanism; Resch 2006 on the Protestant Reformation; Simonds and Rothman 1992 on pregnancy loss since the nineteenth century; also relevant are Laqueur 2015 on the birth of the modern cemetery; Roth 2002, Davies 2002 and Bregman 2012 on sermons and funerary rites; Gilbert 2006 on death culture through the lens of literary criticism; and, finally, Kjærsgaard 2017 on death culture in present-day Denmark). There have been relatively few longitudinal studies of consolation as idea and set of practices, and those that are available indicate decline over time (e.g. Weyhofen 1983, with a phenomenal range). In turn these have influenced the field of pastoral theology, traditionally a stronghold of engagement with consolation, whereby contemporary pastoral theology tends to replicate the broader cultural suspicion of consolation *per se* (e.g. Langenhorst 2000).

However, in recent decades there have been attempts to engage with and recover consolation as a concept and analytical tool – of which this volume is part. In the interdisciplinary field of death studies, for instance, questions of solace, comfort, coping, resilience and consolation in bereavement have been both implicit and explicit (see, for example, Klass et al. 1996, Goss and Klass 2005, and Klass and Steffen 2017 on the common experience of continuing bonds with the deceased). Rugg (2018) has recently explored the individuation of funerary rituals in the ‘West’ as a source of consolation and the threat to this from increasingly impersonal industrialised funerary practices. Klass’ (2014) framework for the consolatory function of religion is of particular significance here, which highlights the importance of ‘cultural/religious resources that range from the literal image of God as an idealized parent to the abstract architecture of Brahm’s Requiem’ (Klass 2014: 1). Also see Jedan and Venbrux (2014), a collection of papers noteworthy for its attempt to trace consolation from ancient to contemporary material (music, newspaper columns, cemeteries, modern theology).

Anthropological studies of lament, wailing and related practices highlight aspects of consolation, for example, sharing the pain of the loss or providing ‘words against death’ (Davies 2002). The spatial dimension of consolatory practices can be seen in the economy of exchanges within the house of mourning among Yemenite Jews in Israel (Gamliel 2014) or spatial metaphors within rural Greek women’s laments, which as Danforth (1982: 142) explains, help to create ‘a feeling of comfort and solace’ in pretending a return of the departed would be possible. Although not discussed explicitly,

Seremetakis' (1991) ethnography of Inner Mani, Greece, cleverly analyses the use of space in mortuary behaviour, including forms of 'spatial intimacy' (Seremetakis 1991: 96). Lotte Buch Segal's study *No Place for Grief* (2016) makes clear that religious and political frames in occupied Palestine leave no further space than acceptance of the consolation of martyrdom by the bereaved mothers in question. In more everyday contexts in rural Europe before the 1960s, Roman Catholic mothers bereft of a small child used to be congratulated for having a little angel in the other world (Venbrux 1991: 197; Behar 1991: 354). The sense of their child being in heaven and the benefit of having a personal mediator in heaven was supposed to offer solace and bring consolation.

Anthropological theory suggests that people turn to religion, when they are confronted with chaos – unable to comprehend, facing injustice or prone to suffering – to cope with such circumstances (Geertz 1973: 100). Losing someone close might be overwhelming on all these counts (intellectually, morally and emotionally), especially in the case of an untimely death. For Klass (2014: 11) religious solace is 'woven into the connection with transcendent reality, the worldview of religious narratives, and the religious community with which people identify'. 'Solace alleviates, but not removes, sorrow or distress', according to Klass (2013: 609). Klass (2014) considers continuing bonds with the dead, often supported by religion, particularly consoling (see also Goss and Klass 2005). However, attention to ancestor-related religious beliefs and practices underscores that consolation should not only be seen as a matter for the living (e.g. Kong 1999). Kwon's ethnography (2013) of spirit consolation rites in Vietnam makes clear that the dead who were victims of atrocities might also be in need of solace themselves.

Within geographical work, studies have highlighted changing life expectancy and consequent attitudes to mortality and consolation in different periods of history, e.g. *Children Remembered* (Woods 2006) and religious practices (Kong 1999). Theoretically, contemporary geographical considerations of consolation sit at the interface of the more-than-representational geographies of religion and spirituality, and of emotion and affect, as well as material and embodied geographies (see Bondi et al. 2005). Building on discussions of continuing bonds and the deceased as a negotiation of relational absence-presence, Maddrell has highlighted the consolation found in this sense of the dynamic absence-presence of the deceased which can be manifest in individual and collective emotional-affective geographies (2012, 2013). Likewise, material and representational vernacular memorials can act as focal points mediating loss and consolatory performative practices (2009a, b). Situating both bodily remains and memories in 'ideal' locations e.g. places associated with memories and identity formation, such as faithscapes and/or natural burial grounds (Maddrell 2011) has also been identified with comfort and the assuagement of grief, as have the virtual spaces of family relations, hospitality and funerary rites in various cultural contexts (Dunn 2016; Evans et al. this volume; Maddrell 2016). More instrumentalist activities such as

fundraising and lobbying for causes associated with the deceased and/or the cause of their death can also offer some consolation. These processes are notable in the case of unpredicted, untimely and avoidable death, whereby the sense of consolation grows from ensuring changes take place – in medical research, in safety systems, in infrastructure – in order to reduce the likelihood of the tragedy recurring, being inflicted upon others (Maddrell 2013), processes that can morph into political campaigns (Stevenson et al. 2016).

The following chapters build on and contribute to this body of historical and emerging contemporary engagements with varying ideas of consolation and diverse place-temporalities of consolatory practices.

The chapters

Following this Introduction, the chapters are organised into three broad sections. The first section explicitly addresses consolation as a concept, its dialogic and dialectical relationship to grief, including the links between the *Consolationscapes in the Face of Loss* and *Deathscapes* volumes. The second section examines sites and practices of consolation in the European context, and the third section enriches our understanding of consolation conceptually through attention to case-studies drawn from the Global South.

In the first section, Christoph Jedan and Avril Maddrell explain what consolation is, how it functions and how it is spatially constituted. Both chapters thus respond to the scholarly challenge we are facing today: ‘We have (...) extremely limited scholarly or pastoral notions of what consolation is’ (Klass, unpublished). Christoph Jedan’s chapter rests on the premise that previous models of consolation have been too limited, failing to extrapolate a comprehensive conceptual framework from the wealth of historical material, such that they are either strongly social-scientific models with little connection to a broader range of material, or they are conceptions based on humanities approaches that fail to connect to social scientific expertise. The new ‘Four-Axis Model’ is designed to capture abiding consolatory themes against a background of historical change, from Greco-Roman Antiquity to today’s world of internet memorials and bereavement psychology. The model allows us to compare changing emphases in consolation. Jedan argues further that the historical-conceptual perspective helps in solving an important conundrum: on the one hand, the concept of consolation appears to offer an astonishingly useful analytical tool for analysing spaces and practices to do with loss and bereavement, yet at the same time the word ‘consolation’ is greeted with a certain reservation. In fact, as long-term linguistic usage can show, we tend to avoid the word ‘consolation’ in favour of other concepts, such as ‘coping’. Jedan’s historical and conceptual analysis shows how the three most notable models of consolation available today are in fact rooted in very different historical eras, highlighting correspondingly different concerns. The rejection of some aspects of consolation can thus go hand in hand with the fact that the psychological literature on grief and bereavement retains

important aspects of consolation. With its strong emphasis on the *longue durée* of ideas about consolation, the Four-Axis Model can be useful for the interpretation of a wide range of spatial and historical phenomena, and Jedan offers examples of how the model can be applied, making use of Maddrell's tripartite model of consolation spaces.

Avril Maddrell's chapter focuses on bereavement and draws on previous scholarship in emotional-affective geographies of loss and remembrance to explore the dynamic and dialectical relationship between grief and consolation. It outlines a conceptual framework for understanding the *spatial* experience and practices associated with loss and remembrance, and how these in turn can be experienced – and even curated – as spaces and practices of consolation as part of wider therapeutic spatialities. This framework is used to 'map' and analyse the ways in which varied relational factors are expressed and experienced in and through particular places, including the body, home, landscapes and the virtual arenas of online memorials, social media and faith communities. This framework is then used to understand something of the bittersweet comfort which kin report experiencing as a result of deceased organ donation and the resulting consolation of knowing beneficiaries of donated organs are 'living memorials', embodying a degree of corporeal liveliness of the deceased, and in some cases engendering a sense of biologically grounded kinship.

The second section, which analyses spatial-conceptual constellations in Europe, the historical breeding ground of much of today's discussion about consolation, opens with two chapters based on case studies in the Netherlands (Nugteren, Hoondert). The other two chapters discuss case studies from England and Scotland (MacKinnon) and Denmark (Kjærsgaard). In 'Consolation and the "Poetics" of the Soil in "Natural Burial" Sites', Albertina Nugteren draws on her ethnographical monitoring of three natural burial sites in the south-east of the Netherlands. Nugteren distinguishes and discusses consolation in relation to three motivations or 'catalysts' of a rising interest in natural burial: (1) environmental concerns to minimise one's ecological footprint; (2) spiritual and aesthetic needs to 'get back to nature' in death; and, most radically, (3) a counter-cultural rejection of 'ingrained divides between body and soul, or between humans and nature'. Whilst the first two catalysts are compatible with 'shallow' ecological outlooks that still put the individual centre stage, the third derives from a sense of 'ontological alienation'. Natural burials motivated by such radical concerns focus on the soil. Nugteren argues that the difference in perspective can account for the disturbing quality which natural burials possess for some: Focusing on the soil counteracts the 'cultural preference for upwardly mobile symbols'. The consolation found in the most radical form of motivation for natural burial should be understood as a 'biophilic surrender'.

In his chapter 'The Crematorium as a Ritual and Musical Consolationscape', Martin Hoondert combines fieldwork at the Tilburg crematorium with music theory to focus on the under-theorised role of music in ritual studies. He argues

that music creates space in interaction with the ritual and physical place and that the consolation-landscape produced by music must be understood in the light of the interaction of the three categories. For Hoondert, it is an important argument that the ‘romantic’ music – the label is here not understood as a historical term, but denotes a musical style (‘slow tempo, smooth rhythms and relatively few dissonant harmonies’) – often heard at cremations is not intrinsically ‘more capable of bringing about a feeling of consolation than other styles’. If it functions as ‘comfort’ music *par excellence* that attempts to transform the listeners’ mood, this must be ‘strongly determined by the physical and ritual space’.

In ‘Emotional Landscapes’ Dolly MacKinnon analyses two memorial sites for victims of civil war in seventeenth-century England and Scotland. She approaches emotions from a framework of ‘emotional practices’ pioneered by Monique Scheer (2012). Emotional practices must be embedded in ‘emotional communities’ which actively mobilise, name, communicate and regulate emotions. Approaching memorial sites through a lens of emotional practices and communities allows MacKinnon to trace the history of two exemplary sites, Naseby (Northamptonshire) and Wigtown (Dumfries and Galloway), and to lay bare important aspects of memorialisation and consolation: first, how access to memorials may have been regulated by, and restricted to, closely knit emotional communities, as is witnessed by the fact that the early Naseby memorials were placed on private land, and access thus was restricted to like-minded groups of Royalists. Second, the degree to which such sites can be contested; the memory that is consoling to descendants of the victims can be a cause of triumph for those aligning themselves with the victorious. Even the existence of some groups of victims may be controversial, as happened in the curiously gendered denial of female victims of the Wigtown executions, and the denial of a ‘baggage train’ of women and children in the case of the Battle of Naseby.

In the chapter ‘Danish Churchyards as Consolation-landscapes’, Anne Kjærsgaard questions the highly secular appearance of Danish cemeteries. Indeed, an interpretation of Danish cemeteries as secular does not tally with the fact that most are run by the established Danish Lutheran church. Kjærsgaard argues that the visual restraint and absence of Christian symbols should not be understood as ‘secular’ but as the materialisation of Protestant aesthetic-religious norms. She argues further that the relatively small number of publicised contestations of those Protestant norms allow us to infer a much larger number of conflicts that have been quietly dealt with by local church authorities. The examples provided by Kjærsgaard identify Danish churchyards as consolation-landscapes that are the backdrop to the rich ritual activities of lived religion. On this basis, Kjærsgaard asks whether Denmark’s Protestant churchyards are, or can continue to be, sufficiently inclusive.

The third section shifts the boundaries of discussion beyond the Global North. It opens with anthropological research in Australia, among the Tiwi on Melville Island and Bathurst Island, approximately 80 km north of

Darwin. In 'Moving through the Land', Eric Venbrux analyses the nexus between ritual, consolation and space. He focuses on rituals of wailing and lament to show how ritual drama can provide consolation. He thus counteracts the comparative neglect of consolation through ritual activity in the study of Aboriginal Australia, which has led to remarkable misinterpretations, denying the Tiwi mourners, for instance, their sincere feelings of grief. Venbrux reconstructs the Tiwi cycle of mortuary rites in which territorial passage, wailing and consolation are interlinked. Ideally, the rites start in the localities of the living and with intervals go on in space and time until the beginning of the final rite (called *iloti*, meaning 'for good') at the burial place, an area reserved for the spirits of the dead. In the ritual drama, given its purpose to direct the spirit of the dead from the world of the living to the world of the dead, the people of different bereavement status all play a role in the remembrance and dissolution of a particular metaphorical relationship with the deceased. In this context compassionate support and protection is given to the bereaved.

The other chapters in this section focus on Africa, more precisely what UN publications still refer to as 'Sub-Saharan Africa', i.e. Zimbabwe, Uganda and Senegal. The chapters by Joram Tarusarira and Sophie Seebach both put the issue of consolation in post-conflict societies centre stage. Both suggest to us editors that in the wake of continuing-bonds research in recent years, death studies researchers have *decathected* from Sigmund Freud in too radical a way, since both fruitfully employ parts of the analytical vocabulary of Sigmund Freud and his followers to characterise ritual and consolation.

In 'Rituals, Healing and Consolation in Post-conflict Environments', Tarusarira analyses the consolatory function of Ndebele funeral rites, with special attention to *umbuyiso*, a ritual 'bringing home' one year after the initial funeral. He attributes an important role to 'transitional objects' and to 'closure' produced by the rituals, and he analyses how a state-sponsored massacre known as Gukurahundi, which took place between 1982 and 1987 among the Ndebele people, and its legacy of disappeared persons hinders the performance of ritual and the finding of consolation.

In 'Love the Dead, Fear the Dead', Sophie Seebach focuses on death rituals in Acholi in northern Uganda, a region similarly torn by civil war. The 'LRA war', so called after Joseph Kony's 'Lord's Resistance Army' the most successful rebel army opposing central government, raged from 1986 to 2006, with deportations, abductions of children, killings and the mass encampment of civilians. Seebach shows not only how the civil war hindered the population's ability to perform fitting death-rites, but also how in the post-conflict era reburials integrate the dead into the traditional ritual texture and thus offer consolation. Seebach analyses how death rituals produce consolatory landscape, but she also points to the ambivalences of continuing bonds under-theorised in the recent literature. In this context she reminds us of the usefulness of Freud's notion of the 'uncanny': just as the compound needs to be safeguarded against the intrusion of the uncanny bush, just so

‘people might (...) feel trapped in the continuing bonds between the living and the dead’ and feel the urge to push back, so much so that one of Seebach’s interviewees commented on Danish burial rites ‘Ah, your custom [of cremation] is better’.

‘It’s God’s Will’, the final chapter in this collection, analyses consolation and religious meaning-making in urban Senegal. With the great majority of its population identifying as Muslim, Senegal adds an interesting perspective to the previous two African case studies. As highlighted by Ruth Evans, Sophie Bowlby, Jane Ribbens McCarthy, Joséphine Wouango and Fatou Kébé, geographies of loss in majority Muslim contexts are an understudied area. Their empirical work is particularly wide-ranging, drawing on fifty-nine in-depth interviews with individuals who had recently experienced an adult relative’s death, working moreover with key informants, focus groups and participatory workshops. The authors interpret their findings on the basis of Dennis Klass’s (2014) framework for religious consolation, and underscore *inter alia* the importance of continuing bonds for consolation, and of ritual activities as expressions of continuing bonds.

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