religions

MDPI

Article

Memoriography as a Theo-Ethical Methodology for Working with Collective Memories of the Marginalized

Seulbin Lee

Graduate Department of Religion, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN 37240, USA; seulbin.lee@vanderbilt.edu

Abstract

This paper offers 'memoriography' as a theo-ethical methodology for working with collective memories of marginalized people. Conducting ethnographic and qualitative research that draws on people's stories and memories involves practical and philosophical challenges, particularly when these stories are shaped by violence and trauma. This paper critically examines these methodological challenges for theology, ethics, and broader religious studies. On a philosophical level, this paper challenges positivist and colonial assumptions that have limited our capacity to hold and wrestle with collective memory, by conceptualizing memoriography within the post-positivist research paradigm and with hauntological insights. On a practical level, memoriography offers three major hermeneutical suggestions for engaging memories of the marginalized: (1) the necessity of holding multiple temporalities, (2) the significance of attending to paradox and aesthetics in resistance to essentialism, and (3) the importance of understanding the networked nature of collective memory and its implications for interpretation. Through this two-fold analysis, memoriography not only guides us to fully embrace sites of ambiguity and tensions of collective memory, but also calls for us to advocate for conditions that allow these memories to be heard across various sites of scholar-activism.

Keywords: memoriography; hauntology; post-positivism; ethnographic research; temporality; counter-memory; democracy; politics of memory; methodology; religion and social movement; activism; scholar-activism

1. Introduction

Growing up in the city of Gwangju, where the May 18 Democratic Uprising emerged in resistance to state violence in 1980, I have witnessed my community wrestling with the trauma-ridden legacies. The May 18 Democratic Uprising (hereafter, the May 18 Uprising) refers to a historic South Korean pro-democracy movement, in which citizens stood up against the authoritarian regime in resistance to the brutal massacre in Gwangju. As members of the city, it was our duty to remember the truth despite the ongoing manipulation of the collective memory of the uprising. The trauma of the martyrs and survivors is transmitted to other citizens through various forms of mediation, such as commemoration services, public education, conferences, research, monuments, artworks, and literary works. The transmission of memory facilitates the collective experience of *han*, the Korean term referring to the accumulated socio-psychological energy shaped by experiences of sorrow and frustration, which may have parallels in other cultures (Park 1993; Baker-Fletcher 2006; M. J. Smith 2013). Haunting happens through the absence of the murdered (missing bodies, loss of their memories, irretrievability of their flesh), and the presence of loss prevails (records of violence, blood stains, bullet marks, wounded bodies, lingering trauma).

Check for updates

Academic Editor: John Bartkowski

Received: 23 February 2026
Revised: 24 March 2026
Accepted: 25 March 2026
Published: 24 April 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.

The transmission of *han* and traumatic memories causes haunting—the experience of being connected to something that has been lost, caused by systematic and structural violence that suppresses mourning and truth-telling, which are necessary steps in justice-building. The memory of this pro-democracy struggle has been transmitted to the United States, leading to the formation of the National Korean American Service & Education Consortium, a national-level grassroots network for community service and grassroots organizing that not only builds Korean and Asian American communities but also fosters solidarity and coalitions with other racial and ethnic communities for collective liberation.

My experience of haunting and my prior academic knowledge about hauntology had formed the assumption that the Korean American activists of the community organizing network NAKASEC would resonate with the phenomenon of haunting, as the network claimed its roots in the May 18 Uprising. However, one of the community organizers of NAKASEC, whom I interviewed, resisted my categorization. He replied to my question about whether he had ever related to the experience of haunting in light of the memory of the May 18 Uprising, "It is not haunting. They are alive" (NAKASEC activist 2025).[1] He did not experience the memory of the May 18 Uprising as if the past haunts the present; rather, he emphasized not the loss but the lived connection that continues to inform his activism. The interlocutor's refusal of my presumed interpretive framework of haunting (although hauntological methods mean something different) alerted me to methodological issues in working with memories in ethnographic research. The organizer's resistance points not only to the problem of representation but also to the broader dynamics of knowledge production that often operate under unspoken expectations and assumptions about what, whom, and how to interpret memories. Such methodological questions are not just practical but also philosophical and ethical considerations, which lie at the heart of this paper.

This paper presents 'memoriography' as a theo-ethical methodology for engaging with various sources of memories from the marginalized, aiming to draw, construct, and weave a narrative that provides context for theological ethics and religious studies. By drawing on womanist and Asian feminist approaches for working with memory, I aim to contribute to a growing discussion among Christian ethicists and theologians, who use ethnography to bridge our normative and constructive ethical proposals with the lived experiences of people, particularly by listening to the sites of social change (Snarr 2022, 2025; Stout 2013; Lambelet 2019; Marshall 2023; Bretherton 2014). Memoriography is intended to enhance our conversation with social movement studies that explore the role of memory in social change, such as how memory is mobilized for collective action or how the interpretation of meanings of a social movement is subject to politics (Doerr 2014; Neveu 2014; Scalmer et al. 2021). While exploring the social movement literature falls outside the scope of this research, it would be generative in the future to discuss memory politics in social movements with particular attention to religion and theology, as the field of religion offers rich traditions and resources to engage memories.

This methodological inquiry unfolds in the following stages. First, I will discuss the distinctive strengths and characteristics of memoriography conceptualized as a theo-ethical methodology by examining its post-positivist and hauntological underpinnings. The post-positivist research paradigm is a more appropriate philosophical basis for memoriography than positivist assumptions interwoven with colonial legacies in religious studies. This research paradigm allows us to employ hauntology as a method that enhances justice-orientation in memoriography, with particular attention to collective memories shaped by trauma, suffering, and social evil. Hauntological insights not only help us articulate the relationship between haunting and justice but also offer critical lenses to interrogate and resist the various mechanisms that objectify and suppress such memories. Second, I will examine three major hermeneutical implications of memoriography undergirded by

the post-positivist paradigm and hauntological insights: (1) the necessity of holding multiple temporalities in working with memories, (2) the significance of attending to paradox and aesthetics in resistance to essentialism, and (3) the importance of understanding the 'networked' nature of collective memory, which allows us to critically engage with experiences of haunting and spirituality as proper sites of inquiry and thus resist the colonial tendency to neglect diverse spirituality and specters who fall outside institutional Christianity. Through this analysis, I offer memoriography in order to enhance methodological capacity not only to work with the memories of marginalized people but also to advocate for the conditions for the marginalized memories to be heard, in the sites of scholar-activism.

2. Memoriography as Theo-Ethical Methodology: Exploring Its Theological-Philosophical and Hauntological Basis

2.1. Conceptualizing Memoriography as Theo-Ethical Methodology

While memoriography has been discussed across disciplines, I argue that approaching it from a theological ethics perspective can strengthen the ethical and normative grounds of the methodology compared to the descriptive focus in other disciplinary approaches. In recent years, a few memory scholars have begun to use the term 'memoriography' with different disciplinary purposes and analytical angles. Although I resonate with their emphasis on ideology and power in the construction of history, memoriography, conceptualized as a theo-ethical methodology, diverges from their approaches as it draws on womanist Asian and Asian American feminist theologies and ethics, which we will explore throughout this article.[2]

Historian Peter Carrier, who is commonly associated with the term, defines "Holocaust memoriography" as "a body of professional historical writings which deals with the way in which this event is recalled and understood in the present […] In other words, they reflect theoretically about techniques of representing memory, about historians' complex relation to their own and other people's memories, and about ethics, gender, and ideology" (Carrier 2014, pp. 199–208). Memoriography, for Carrier, is "a meta genre, one which reflects upon the relation between memory and history" by exploring how various layers of factors such as ideology, social norms and practices, and politics impact the recollection process and the work of historians (Carrier 2014, pp. 199–203). While he advocates for conceptualizing Holocaust memoriography broadly as a "response" to the Holocaust rather than a purely academic enterprise, the primary purpose of memoriography, for Carrier, is to complement historiography of the Holocaust, thereby helping historians to enter interdisciplinary discourses with attention to "epistemology, politics, religion, ethics and language" that shape historical writing (Carrier 2014, p. 200). In conversation with Carrier, media studies scholar Gitanjali Pyndiah defines memoriography as "the way that memory is memorized and the study of how memory is produced, in the same way that historiography is the writing of history and the study of the way history is written/interpreted in a specific context" (Pyndiah 2017, p. 118). Unlike Carrier, who uses memoriography to complement the historiography of the Holocaust, Pyndiah uses memoriography to analyze "counter-institutional creative instances," including both art performances such as "theatre, music, and contemporary art," and the artistic nature of performances that she describes as "forms of performative protest" (Pyndiah 2017, p. 119). Although I share with Carrier and Pyndiah the interest in social practices and power dynamics undergirding the construction of social memory, memoriography approached through a theo-ethical standpoint offers distinctive perspectives.

Memoriography as a theo-ethical methodology grapples with the spiritual, cultural, and political power of collective memory, given the centrality of memories of God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ in the life of Christian communities. This makes memori-

ography stand apart from that of Pyndiah or Carrier, specifically in its view of the relationship between history and counter-memory. Pyndiah argues that "a memoriography cannot encompass counter historical writings, nor contain counter memories as evidence. Memoriography asserts itself as a body of creative works which propels memory writings and a shift in historiographical works" (Pyndiah 2017, pp. 118–19). By defining memoriography as "a body of creative works" (Pyndiah 2017, pp. 118–19) and differentiating it from history writing, Pyndiah does not consider the role of counter-memory in historiography and further the role of arts as a communicative medium for expressing counter-memory. While Carrier, as a historian, treats it as supplementary to history, memoriography, as a theo-ethical methodology, acknowledges the potential role of memory playing a corrective role to dominant historiography, as it draws on, for example, Emilie Townes's challenge to binarism between history and memory (Townes 2006, p. 14).

The primary purpose of memoriography in this article is to strengthen the ethnographic research of Christian ethics and theology. Reckoning with the political power of memory, this methodology seeks not only theoretical approaches to memory but also the ways in which theologians and ethicists can contribute to the liberatory potential of counter-memory. This emphasis on methodology is grounded in the understanding that method and methodology themselves are political. Our methodology—the process in which we pursue knowledge and wisdom—matters. Womanists and Asian and Asian American feminists, along with other critical discourses, can strengthen the process of memoriography. Having examined how this methodology shares similarities with yet is distinct from the approaches in historiography and media studies, let us turn to the philosophical and hauntological underpinnings of memoriography.

2.2. Beyond Positivism

I argue that memoriography as a theo-ethical methodology must be grounded in the post-positivist research paradigm. Positivism is a mode of inquiry developed during the Enlightenment period (17th–18th centuries) that pursues objective knowledge through observation and experiment (Park et al. 2020, pp. 690–94). It stresses quantitative data collection, limiting the possibility of researchers' interpretation, and the separation of researchers from the social phenomenon or research participants in order to eliminate factors influencing the research (Park et al. 2020).

The positivist research paradigm in qualitative research developed in conjunction with the early 20th century's Western colonial expansion. Intersectional qualitative methodologists Jennifer Esposito and Venus E. Evans-Winters argue that the positivist epistemology of observing and analyzing the "Other" from a distance has allowed colonial power to effectively colonize the "Other" and further justify the physical, cultural, and spiritual violence (Esposito and Evans-Winters 2022, pp. 8–10). The general field of qualitative research gradually recognized the problems of pursuing the "objective" representation in the late 1980s, which facilitated the interrogation of social norms and the construction of truths that had once been viewed as objective and universal (Esposito and Evans-Winters 2022, pp. 10–13). With the expansion of postmodernism since the 1990s, critical thinkers and researchers have expanded the praxis of integrating research and scholar-activism by actively promoting intersectionality as an analytical lens in order to examine how not only the socio-political-cultural power structure but also the research process and outcome function within the larger hierarchy of power (Esposito and Evans-Winters 2022, pp. 10–13).

Despite the transformation in the field of qualitative research, theological studies still exhibits the colonial tendency to pursue the "Objective" truth and to underestimate contextual inquiries, though in a more subtle form these days. This tendency is easily identifiable in dominant academic discourse. For example, Kwok Pui-lan has pointed out that many

theological texts continue to employ a taxonomy that organizes them primarily around the typical 'traditional scholarly literatures,' followed by 'contextual' theologies which treat them as peripheral or "less important" (Kwok 2021). The tendency to depreciate 'contextual' theologies is rooted in the appeal to the abstracted form of universality, which again points to the inseparable relationship between the development of religious studies and colonialism. Tomoko Masuzawa has rightly noted that white Eurocentric Christianity has long been the driving force in religious studies, which has perpetuated multiple forms of Western colonialism: "Christianity alone was truly transhistorical and transnational in its import, hence universally valid and viable at any place anytime, whereas all other religions were particular, bound and shaped by geographical, ethnic, and other local contingencies" (Masuzawa 2005, p. 23). Eurocentric Christian hegemony has been and still is a driving force in hierarchical classification of language, religion, race, and theologies; these classifications also justified its hegemony. Even though such assumptions and racism have been challenged in intersectional qualitative research and religious studies, this hegemonic power remains both in religious communities and the field of theological and religious studies. Within this cultural-intellectual hierarchy erected by colonialism, theo-ethical studies that deal with memories of the oppressed and excluded are again marginalized even in a liberal democracy.

In order to privilege the stories of the marginalized for a more liberatory society, memoriography must be grounded in its refusal of a positivist philosophical paradigm and in its critical acknowledgement of the intersubjective and interdependent nature of truth-seeking—that a knowledge-seeker is always embedded in a social context and in webs of influence with others, including research participants. Post-positivist philosophy challenges the hegemonic objectivity in the positivist research paradigm by historically contextualizing the relationship between colonialism and the positivist appeal to universal truth (Esposito and Evans-Winters 2022). Instead of nullifying the influence of the researcher's positionality in research, post-positivism calls for critical reflection about how power dynamics, including the researcher's socio-political context, influence the process of research design, observation, and interpretation.

Although it is often mistakenly assumed that the responsibility for resisting positivism falls on the shoulders of scholars of color, all religious scholars should be concerned that the positivist framework promotes environments that are hostile to theology, ethics, and faith, as these beliefs and value-driven discourses and practices are often deemed not objectively provable (Townes 2006, p. 113). Emilie Townes has warned that the positivist framework prevailing in theological studies discredits emotions, bodies, and other contextual qualities that form the basis of knowing or critical hermeneutics:

> […] we often rely on positivist approaches that seek to create scientific descriptions through objective generalizations. This is accomplished by banishing (or attempting to banish) all other human characteristics except rationality and then decontextualizing (or attempting to decontextualize) ourselves to become detached observers. […] Distance and the absence of emotion become desired values in methodology and research. Ethics and values are not considered appropriate, and adversarial debates are the ruling discourse for determining truth. (Townes 2006, p. 113)

In other words, positivist epistemology is ultimately antithetical to theology and ethics that deal with values and meanings. Thus, it is the entire field of theology and religious studies, not just scholars of color, who must do the work to ethically steward the field, which is deeply embedded in thick colonial legacies.

2.3. Hauntology as a Method

A critical stance toward positivism allows us to discuss hauntology as a method. In this section, I will show how memoriography informed by the hauntological insights enhances the capacity to wrestle with absences and gaps in collective memory, particularly those who are structurally rendered silent by war, colonialism, slavery, racism, poverty, gender-based violence, and theological and cultural stigma shaped by colonial Christianity. By engaging hauntology as a method, I argue that memoriography calls theologians and ethicists to be more than distanced researchers by becoming advocates for cultivating the conditions for marginalized memories to be heard by interrogating politics and norms that perpetuate haunting. Listening to these voices, not only through speech but also through their absences, will help society move toward a justice-oriented society that does not forget the haunting presence of historical violence, suffering, and trauma.

While haunting and hauntology are interlinked, it is important to explore the distinctions in their meanings, avoiding conflating the phenomenon with the method, as we will discuss in more depth in the following section on hermeneutics. Haunting largely refers to the experiences of being connected to the presence of the repressed past. In Ghostly Matters, sociologist Avery Gordon describes haunting as a "socio-political-psychological state," where "a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely," and through which "we are notified that what's been concealed is very much alive and present […]" (Gordon 2008, p. xvi).[3] The phenomenon of haunting is prevalent in the sites of suppressed socio-political trauma across the globe. It is important to note that hegemony and the abuse of power structure haunting, which not only causes the original harm but also perpetuates ongoing collective trauma by repressing the memories (Derrida [1993] 2006, p. 46; Gordon 2008, p. 207; Rahimi 2021).

In such sites of political trauma, structural techniques and hegemonic forces promote collective amnesia about horrific injustice, often structured by dominant society, political party, or interest groups through repression, distortion, and downplaying the significance of the events, as we can see in ongoing memory politics of colonialism, slavery, and the Holocaust. The repressed trauma is transmitted to the next generation by creating ghostly figures and the experience of hauntings (Hirsch and Spitzer 2010, p. 31). As anthropologist Gabriele Schwab analyzes, historical violence such as colonialism, slavery, and the Holocaust, when repressed from mourning, "not only haunt the actual victims but also are passed on through the generations" (Schwab 2010, p. 1). Thus, the haunting phenomena indicate not only past violence but also the enduring structure of harm which constrains an emancipatory future (Rahimi 2021).

On the other hand, hauntology broadly refers to a mode of inquiry that interrogates the structural violence and mechanisms that lead to absence with attention to what is rendered absent or those in the liminal space between the past and the present, or even the impact of a lost hope for the future (Fisher 2012; Good et al. 2022). The portmanteau 'hauntology' is attributed to the Algerian-French philosopher Jacques Derrida, who developed this concept in his critique of the grand vision of liberal democracy. A year after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Derrida warned against Francis Fukuyama's confidence in liberal democracy, which proclaims that we have arrived in the "Promised Land of liberal democracy," where the injustices of each democratic state will naturally be resolved as society progresses toward the Hegelian "Universal History" (Derrida [1993] 2006, p. 75; Fukuyama 1992). As much as Fukuyama's optimistic proclamation of "the end of history" did not arrive, we all came to know that having a constitutional democracy is not sufficient to secure the belonging of each community member to political life. The hegemonic belief in liberal democracy nudges us to naively move forward while leaving behind all the subjugated and oppressed beings—including the living, the dead, human, and nature

(Derrida [1993] 2006, p. 106). Derrida rightly summons the specters of Marx that warn against "the euphoria of liberal democratic capitalism," which shifts the public attention away from the reality of international war, neoliberal economic war, inter-ethnic wars, and exclusion of citizens from democratic life (Derrida [1993] 2006, pp. 100–5). Beings who have been rendered ghostly by hegemony lurk behind the fantasy of Fukuyama's end of history. The hauntological refusal of the phantom of liberal democracy shows that listening to those who have been left out of the grand progress narrative is indispensable for a liberatory democracy.

It is worth noting that Derrida's hauntology has received critical engagement. Marxists have pointed out that Derrida, by treating Marxism as a specter, prematurely pronounced its death. They also problematized that Derrida's deconstructive approach does not provide tangible ways for social change toward his vision of the New International, especially when his theory does not fully grapple with class concerns. And finally, they argue that his ghosts lack revolutionary potential (Lewis 1996; Szeman 2000). These concerns are articulated by Tom Lewis, who writes: "This fundamental lack of commitment to Marxism as an alive body of concepts—not to mention to Marxism as a repertoire of activist strategies and tactics—gives rise to the main concerns of Specters of Marx: the repudiation of historical materialism, and the renunciation of social revolution" (Lewis 1996, p. 23). Lewis further contends that Derrida's theory remains in "an abstract concern with human rights," which resonates with Imre Szeman's question of "what I want to know is how this promise [of an emancipatory future] is to be cultivated and put to work—if not work of felling states and forming parties, then the political work of destabilizing every ontology, including and especially that of capitalism" (Lewis 1996, p. 34; Szeman 2000, p. 109). On the matter of abstraction, memory scholar Viet Thanh Nguyen also critiques Derrida's hauntology for being too abstract to discuss the specificity of specters and violence (Nguyen 2013). I think these points are fair. Abstracted discourse, though ideal, rarely leads to social change. Visions, values, and prophetic voices must be grounded in practices of people—whether they are faith communities, grassroots organizations, movement spaces, or political parties.

Theological ethics can help overcome some of these challenges posed to Derrida's hauntology in our exploration of using hauntology as a method for field research. Womanist and Asian and Asian American feminist theologies have emphasized grounding theological inquiries in specific contexts of lived experiences. Drawing on these methodological insights for ethnographic and qualitative research can resist the tendency of abstraction. This contextual grounding can prevent the risk of depoliticization caused by the idealistic abstraction. For example, the NAKASEC leader's resistance to the framework of haunting—which emphasizes the ongoing work of the Korean democracy tradition in the U.S.—parallels Lewis's resistance to Derrida's prescription of death on Marxism. This parallel points us to the importance of grounding our conversation in concrete communities to avoid the tendency to engage specters merely as a metaphor, which may lack political impact.

Despite the limitations examined above, Derrida's proposal of hauntology has made a proliferating impact on the theories and themes of haunting and spectrality in anthropology, ethnography, and broader cultural studies across the disciplines (Cho 2008; Fisher 2012; Fiddler 2019; Saleh-Hanna 2015; Good et al. 2022; Saltmarsh 2009). Because of its attention to structured absence, hauntology has been adapted by Black feminist studies and diaspora studies, such as African American diaspora studies' investigation of the ongoing impact of colonialism and racism, and Korean diaspora studies' exploration of the history of the Korean War and intergenerational trauma (Saleh-Hanna 2015; Lovelace 2021; Young 2006; Saltmarsh 2009; Cho 2008; Rhee 2020). This wide adoption of hauntology attests to its

strength in investigating political-psychological dynamics that create silencing and haunting, as well as both individual and intergenerational experience of trauma (Good et al. 2022, pp. 442–44). In other words, while hauntology can investigate specific experiences of haunting, as a mode of inquiry, it has wider utility in investigating the mechanisms of exclusion, suppression, and distortion of collective memory regardless of whether an individual relates to a past event as a form of haunting or not. In what follows, I will examine how memoriography, undergirded by post-positivist research paradigm and hauntology as a method, brings distinctive strengths in hermeneutics in working with collective memories, especially those shaped by historical violence.

3. Hermeneutical Problems

3.1. Temporalities and Trauma, in Memoriography

Haunting phenomena indicate not only the violence in the past but also the persisting structure of harm that places constraints on an emancipatory future (Rahimi 2021). In working with the type of memories that have been actively suppressed and culturally humiliated by socio-political and cultural violence, we need to grapple with multiple temporalities enacted by memories ridden with trauma. The nature of trauma challenges the linear progression of time, as trauma often causes temporal ruptures, gaps in cognitive memories, flashbacks, and repetitions. Peter Carrier contrasts the different temporalities between historical time and memorial time. While the former flows in a "linear and secular" form, the latter follows "non-linear" and "spiritual" time (Carrier 2014; Snarr 2011). I aim to show that memoriography, when developed within theological ethics—as it has traditions and resources for facilitating multiple temporalities and memories—can offer a richer understanding and critical reflection on the methodology of working with collective memory. Drawing on pastoral theology and trauma studies, I argue that there is an ethical value in the disruption of linear temporality to hold multiple temporalities for memoriography. After examining the colonial implications of the positivistic framework of time, I discuss how memoriography, undergirded by the post-positivist framework, helps us listen to ethical demands and emancipatory possibilities revealed through gaps, ruptures, and disruptions. Instead of dismissing collective memories as sources due to their ambiguous qualities, memoriography opens a more hospitable space to build relationships with these memories shaped by suffering and trauma, which are often rushed to be left behind by a dominant orientation toward progress and "moving on," or discredited for being unintelligible under the standards of the positivistic framework.

Construction of time is not a neutral enterprise. Critical scholarship has argued that the understanding of a linear progression of time has historically been used for creating intellectual and cultural hierarchies that justify colonial and racial domination, which excluded and marginalized non-whites from European Western civilization. Anti-colonial and Black studies scholar Katherine McKittrick critiques the positivist framework of biocentrism and scientific racism, undergirded by colonial epistemology, which categorizes humans into different species by measuring their "evolutionary advancement" in "singular linear-teleological temporality" (McKittrick 2021, p. 126). Such paradigms risk classifying diverse memories that carry plural cultures and traditions according to an evolutionary framework. As a result, such collective memories of those who are perceived to have fallen out of the march of progress are again marginalized both in public education and thus popular consciousness, leading the suppressed memories to haunt the present. For society as a whole, the sense of linear time and progress will lead us to a hasty vision of progressive democracy, thereby diminishing our pastoral capacity to bear witness to people navigating multiple temporalities shaped by trauma. It can rush society into forgetfulness and again stigmatize people living with memories of

trauma as burdens to progress. Thus, the linear temporality, when the political implications are taken into account, needs ethical disruption.

The disruption of linear temporal order allows us to create a more hospitable methodology for memory intertwined with traumatic experiences. Pastoral theologian Shelly Rambo explains that trauma includes not only the traumatic event itself but also the recurring and returning of the event through flashbacks, memories, and bodily responses that are often beyond logical comprehension or linguistic explanation (Rambo 2010, pp. 7, 18–21). In other words, trauma disorients the linear temporal orders as the past keeps returning to the present: "the past does not stay, so to speak, in the past. Instead, it invades the present, returning in such a way that the present becomes not only an enactment of the past but an enactment about what was not fully known or grasped" (Rambo 2010, p. 19). Her argument that theology must bear witness to trauma by enhancing its capacity to stand with the people who experience trauma in the gap between "death and life" helps us resist the colonial temporal order that McKittrick describes and further the tendency to gloss over the in-between which can become the sites for testimony and divine mystery although it is beyond cognitive comprehension (Rambo 2010, pp. 6, 26). Bearing witness to trauma is a necessity for the healing process (Rambo 2010). In short, memoriography acknowledges the ethical value of disrupting and resisting the dominant temporal framework that pathologizes or leaves behind the recurrences of collective memory, especially those ridden with trauma. Instead, it should embrace the repetitive and fragmental nature of collective memories.

As theologians and ethicists work with people's memories that intersect with violence and harm, we should position ourselves as interpreters in a meaning-making process with interlocutors, rather than detached observers, creating spaces for memories that might lack factual evidence and leave uncertainty. Rambo's proposal for thick witness provides helpful insights for working with collective memory for political theology. She argues that the traditional juridical witness, which is about "getting at the truth," is an insufficient model for bearing witness to trauma because of its disorienting nature and difficulty in recollection of what exactly has happened (Rambo 2010, p. 23). Thus, she argues, "To be witness, […] is to stand in a place where you cannot see clearly and where the evidence of what took place is not fully available to you. It is an unwitnessable witness" (Rambo 2010, p. 23). While there are contextual and pragmatic differences between pastoral theology or counseling and political theology and social ethics, the thick-witness model teaches us important methodological insights for the collective memory of the marginalized, which are often marked by trauma. While not everyone who shares collective memories shaped by traumatic events, such as systematic injustices and large-scale violence, experiences trauma defined in clinical terms, traumatic events experienced at a collective level often leave disorientation, gaps in recollection, ambiguity, and demands for different modes of memorial practices. These complexities of collective memories, if one holds such a juridical witness model, would be discredited as sources. In contrast, Rambo's thick witness model argues for the value of standing in the midst of ambiguity and uncertainty.

Once this nature of trauma is embraced, we can not only validate collective memories as appropriate sources with their gaps, repetition, and uncertainty, but also understand the importance of the role of the researcher as an interpreter in the meaning-making process with interlocutors. In other words, memoriography, undergirded by the post-positivist paradigm, positions a researcher not as an objective observer but as an interpreter who works through the complexities of collective memories, especially those embedded in trauma, rather than overlooking the complexities or disregarding memories that cannot be validated by a positivistic framework.

Embracing the disorienting and ambiguous qualities of the collective memories shaped by trauma and suffering echoes a biblical form of testimony to Jesus' passion and

resurrection. Rambo's reading of the Johannine text, employing the lens of trauma, highlights the enigmatic nature of the witness to Jesus' post-resurrection by Mary Magdalene and the beloved disciple. In other words, they bear witness to Jesus when they cannot fully see or understand what is going on. Rambo argues that their role was more than a mere recipient or a reporter:

> The text tells us that Mary recognizes Jesus; the beloved is designated as the one who believes. But in both cases, distance and disruption exist in their testimonies. They see, but never directly, and with persistent obstructions. They locate Jesus, but even then, they do so at a distance. Their witness tells us something important about the events being witnessed. The events themselves are ungraspable in any straightforward way. Their witness speaks to a truth about the passion: that it cannot be so neatly contained in the past but continues on, marking life in ways that cannot be cognitively grasped. The event of death is known precisely for the ways that it escapes cognition. The witness to death points repeatedly to the ways in which Jesus is neither dead nor alive, neither absent nor present. (Rambo 2010, p. 97)

Instead, their witness involves discerning and standing in the space shaped by death and trauma, wherein the sense of linear temporality is disrupted, and the limit of language to explain prevails (Rambo 2010, p. 98). Even though there is no clear path forward immediately graspable by Mary and the beloved disciple, the divine love continues through their witness: "It is the persisting and remaining presence of divine love figured in and through their movements of witness" (Rambo 2010, p. 99). This trauma-informed reading of the Johannine gospel tells us that persistently dwelling in stories shaped by suffering and trauma, even when we cannot easily obtain the truth, is a way of participating in divine love and testifying to the good news. Informed by these theologies of trauma, memoriography acknowledges the value of holding spaces for rupture and disorientation that create gaps and interpretive possibilities for collective memory.

Resisting the dominant tendency to move on is an expression of and generates a political and moral agency for a more liberatory democracy. Snarr, in her ethnographic research on the anti-gun activism in Tennessee in the aftermath of a mass shooting at an elementary school, analyzes how religion helps the emotion of moral shock—which does not automatically lead to collective action—to be transformed into activism (Snarr 2025). By offering resources such as public prayer, vigils, songs, symbols, and spiritual authority, religion helps people create time and space for collective lament and "metabolize moral shocks," moving from "private grief to public lament" toward political action (Snarr 2025, pp. 3, 15). By doing so, religion supports people in combating the "privatization of grief," which promotes apathy and forms society in a way that cannot collectively grieve, channel—or perhaps feel—adequate anger toward injustices (Snarr 2025, pp. 8–9). For the facilitation of public grief and political community, she points to Christian liturgies of mourning and Townes' womanist poetic lament to show how the Christian liturgical and prophetic traditions can help us to challenge "the breadth and depth of social, political, and spiritual devastation" in a more embodied and communal way (Snarr 2022, p. 12). Snarr's studies on the role of religion in public grief suggest that religious resources not only help people hold multiple temporalities but also influence the ways in which we engage these temporalities and grapple with the ethical demands of haunting. Listening to the spaces of spiritual engagement with temporality is again the strength of theological ethics for memoriography.

In our discussion on working with memories shaped by traumatic events and social evils that create and perpetuate haunting, Rambo's theology of trauma and Snarr's ethnographic investigation of metabolizing moral shock reveal both the theological and empirical values in disrupting the positivist structure of linear temporal order. Informed by their

insights, memoriography acknowledges the value of holding spaces for rupture and disorientation that create gaps and interpretive possibilities for collective memory. Cultivating ethical relationships with collective memory may open a new possibility of encountering God eternally coming to us through the past, present, and future.

So, what does it look like to acknowledge the ambiguity in collective memory in ethnographic inquiry? In my fieldwork, including collecting archival resources and artifacts as well as conducting participant observation and interviews, I found that ruptures and gaps in such memories are frequent phenomena. We can see them in the time gaps of the archival resources, the possibility of different interpretations of an event, and the voluntary absence of activists from public recognition (e.g., a prominent interlocutor refused to become a formal participant in the interview but provided valuable insights for the network). If I were to fit my ethnographic research into the positivist framework of time, these gaps, discontinuities, and ruptures in collective memories would be disqualified as proper sources for scholarship. The ability to perform within a linear framework is an asymmetrical privilege; the privilege to record histories and institutionalize them to preserve and protect them has historically belonged to those with power (Hartman 2008). By resisting linear temporality, this methodology of memoriography aims to validate ruptures and gaps in time as an inevitable feature of working with the collective memories of those who have been oppressed and marginalized. Embracing this rupture and absence will further enable both the researcher and conversation partners to listen to the absences and cultivate the space for speculative inquiry and engagement rather than objectifying and fossilizing the collective memories.

Furthermore, the emphasis on attending to multiple temporalities entails social implications, such as how to allocate public resources and space to cultivate hospitality for marginalized memories. The temporal ethos of capitalism toward 'progress' and 'advancement' often suppresses marginalized people's memories, operating in conjunction with the unnamed power dynamics. For example, political geography scholar HaeRan Shin provides empirical research in the context of an urban renewal project in Gwangju, where the May 18 Uprising happened (Shin 2016). Shin argues that the politics of respectability marginalized 5.18 organizations, associations of survivors and family members in the urban renewal project on the historical landmark of the May 18 Uprising, based on interviews and participant observation.

The voices of the martyrs, survivors, and bereaved families have often been excluded from the dominant narrative of the "Miracle on the Han River," which highlights rapid South Korean economic development from the 1960s to the 1990s. To avoid social stigma and political retaliation, many of these survivors lived in the shadows of society. The denial of opportunities and access to resources rendered them vulnerable to another exclusion from contemporary respectability politics present in various projects regarding the May 18 Uprising. During the urban renewal project, the city government planned to destroy a portion of the old South Jeolla provincial hall, which is known as the last battleground for the protesters in the massacre in 1980, in order to build the Cultural Hall of Asia for the Hub City of Asian Culture project launched in 2003. Throughout the process of discussing the construction plan, the power difference between experts and laity "forced" these 5.18 organizations to "voluntarily, choose not to speak out, and instead simply agree with others," to the extent that they agreed to the plan without actually understanding the proposed demolition (Shin 2016, p. 3569). This case study demonstrates that mechanisms of marginalization operate even in the spaces designed to listen to the marginalized voices. Hauntologically informed memoriography invites us to interrogate the capitalist ethos of advancement and the power dynamics undergirding various projects related to

collective memory, whether in public projects involving monuments and landmarks or in ethnographic research.

3.2. The Significance of Paradox and Aesthetics in Resistance to Essentialism

While attending to haunting helps us better listen to the silenced, our interpretive frameworks can sometimes hinder our ability to fully listen to the lived experiences of the people. The pushback from the NAKASEC activist against the experience of haunting, while subtle, was resistance to the interpretive framework imposed on the meaning of his activism. Although there are gaps and unknowns associated with the May 18 Uprising, which is identified as the root of NAKASEC's origin story, the activist self-account emphasizes the ongoing legacy of the pro-democracy uprising and the experience of joy. This resistance alerts us to a major interpretive problem—the tendency to essentialize people's experience with a framework. In this section, Victor Anderson's critiques of hermeneutical violence of "ontological blackness," and minjung theologian Hyun Young-hak's emphasis on paradox and aesthetics advance our discussion on ethics in hermeneutics for interpreting memories.

Relevant to the NAKASEC community organizer's refusal of haunting is the category of "ontological blackness," which Anderson defines as "a covering term that connotes categorical, essentialist, and representational languages depicting black life and experience" (Anderson 2018, pp. 11, 87). Anderson describes the practice of imposing interpretation on their interlocutors to solidify scholarly legitimacy as "hermeneutical violence" (Anderson 2018, pp. 97–98). Although this discussion on the concept of ontological blackness was born in the context of Black theology, it is pertinent to other branches of theology that deal with stories of the marginalized and oppressed people.

If this interpretive framework is uncritically accepted by Black theology, it ultimately renders Blackness as "an alienated being whose mode of existence is determined by crisis, struggle, resistance, and survival—not thriving, flourishing, or fulfillment" (Anderson 2018, pp. 11, 87). In particular, defining Blackness solely in opposition to Whiteness limits one's existence to a mere antagonistic role. Anderson warns that such essentialism "fails to show how cultural transcendence over white racism is possible," ultimately stifling the potential for Black liberation theology to welcome plurality and the varied identities of Black individuals (Anderson 2018, p. 104). The problem is that the essentialist framework assumes conformity, which again marginalizes subjectivity that deviates from the storyline. When a theologian or researcher interprets meanings based on various sources of memories, one must consider the extent to which our prior theologies become a script that we may force the narratives of the people into.

Our methodological attention to haunting should be pursued in critical consideration of the hegemonic tendency to maintain the marginalized subject in the realm of suffering rather than liberation. Both Anderson's critiques of "ontological blackness" and the NAKASEC leader's resistance to "haunting" speak to the prevailing practice in academia that only lets subalterns speak for their suffering and pain in the status of powerlessness, not for resistance or subversion (hooks 1990, p. 343; Tuck and Yang 2014, p. 228). Decolonial scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue that such an academic tendency to exploit suffering reinforces the "settler colonial ideology," which legitimizes one's authenticity in proportion to one's degree of pain and scars. These stories of pain are then used for the researcher's "self-aggrandizing" (Tuck and Yang 2014, pp. 226, 229; hooks 1992; Spivak 2010). Such critiques are not to nullify the rich contributions made by liberation theologies, but rather to strengthen our capacity to embody our commitments to justice, liberation, and human flourishing by attending to possibilities for thriving, aesthetics, and joy in life.

As we critically engage the problem of essentialism undergirded by colonialism and racism, minjung theologian Hyun Young-hak helps us hold paradox and aesthetics by accentuating Anderson's emphasis on the possibility of critical transcendence. As he participated in the anti-authoritarian struggle, Hyun paid attention to how South Korean activists, particularly university students during the 1970s and 1980s, used Korean traditional minjung arts such as the Korean traditional mask dance and drumming to raise critical consciousness among people and cultivate spirit within the democracy movement (Hyun 1997). In particular, the Korean traditional mask dance dramatizes social contradiction and satirizes the hypocrisy of the ruling class. As this dance was popularized by ordinary people in a former Korean dynastic society with a social hierarchy and a slavery system, it carried the social memories of the underprivileged and oppressed, not only their suffering but also their agency. Through this mask dance during the pro-democracy movement, activists turned their *han* into collective power by cultivating laughter, a sense of joy, and critical consciousness. This tradition reflects the paradoxical agency of minjung to critically transcend their suffering by relativizing what is deemed absolute, such as political authority, class system, and religious hierarchy, through satire and humor (Hyun 1997, p. 66). In short, the power of political satire of minjung art lies in this paradox—that holds joy, pain, and ambiguity together. This paradox shows the ontological refusal to subject our collective status of being to the realm of suffering and pain and again draws our attention to aesthetics without fetishizing or romanticizing the subject. I argue that while hauntology as a method helps the researcher to be attentive to structural absence and silence, this approach is different from using haunting as an interpretive theme, especially when the colonial practice of academia measures the "powerfulness" of one's scholarship based on the severity of the sufferings that the scholar "represents."

The emphasis on paradox is not only an important enhancement to hauntology but also theologically relevant to my fieldwork, particularly where it intersects with the minjung aesthetic tradition. Returning to my field note, even while some activists of NAKASEC relate to the experience of *han* and trauma in the Korean diaspora, most also recall abundant moments of joy in their activism and movement. Applying Anderson's cultural criticism and Hyun's theology of the mask dance calls for examining to what extent a theology, even though well-intended, can function as an ideological framework into which a researcher attempts to force the complexities and opacities of people's lives. To avoid hermeneutical violence, a theologian must be able to hold paradoxes and ambiguities emerging from the stories of the people. As memories are always embedded in culture, the listener also needs to pay attention to unspoken or spoken ideologies and religious worldviews that shape one's way of recollection of the past. Moreover, this analysis puts a cautionary note about the academic writing practice of performing representation without talking with and building relationships with the people, and not acknowledging the differences between the researcher and the interlocutors. Such a collapse leads to the misappropriation of people's suffering for one's academic advancement. Ethical methodology for working with memories of the marginalized calls for clarity about the researcher's positionality and one's hermeneutical choices for the interpretation of artifacts and various sites of memories.

3.3. Networked Nature of Collective Memory: Interpretation and Experience in Pursuit of Truth

The hauntological notion of "networked agency" invites us to understand the moments of encountering spectrality as experiences that create certain affects, effects, and possibilities. Mark Fisher and Sadeq Rahimi, who use hauntology for cultural theory and anthropology, respectively, highlight that while specters lack physical existence, they make impacts through their networks with humans. Building upon Fisher's concept of

"the agency of the virtual," Rahimi proposes "networked subjectivity" to describe the interaction and the resulting effects between humans and non-human presence in virtual spaces (Rahimi 2021, pp. 24, 39; Fisher 2013). I use this concept of networked agency to open up a space for inquiry and reflection based on the liminal space of encountering spectrality, which includes rich and diverse spiritual traditions and practices.

The analysis of the 'networked' nature of subjectivity and agency indicates that haunting involves our participation. Agency of the specters cannot be exercised independently; rather, they must always be perceived to appear to humans through various mediations. It also involves our capacity to experience through reckoning, feeling, and grappling. The ways in which we experience or form relationships with spirits or spectrality reflect much about ourselves and the socio-historical contexts that we are embedded in. In a traditional Korean folktale, a han-ridden ghost who died unjustly (e.g., a woman who was murdered by her family as she deviated from the expectations of patriarchal society) will haunt the living, by signifying, telling, or sometimes bringing bad fortunes. Their *han* persist until the truths are revealed and justice is done. These specters might not be friendly, but can reveal what is absent when it is supposed to be present or the persisting structure of injustices. The haunting of such specters entails ethical possibilities: What if we listen to the sites of haunting and to the stories of diverse expressions of spirituality that have been dismissed by colonial ideology? What ethical possibilities can be revealed as we grapple with the ambiguity and uncertainty of haunting? What would such experiences teach us about ourselves and our relationships with the specters?

If we pay attention to the experience of haunting as a site of interpretation, we may articulate the effects of cancellation, the persistence of the erased and suppressed by hegemony. As a methodological example, among many possibilities, I want to highlight that this interpretivism at the site of haunting helps religious and theological studies to better resist the colonial tendency to undermine indigenous spiritualities.

This interpretive mode of inquiry, focusing on the networked nature of collective memory, allows memoriography to engage specters more than as metaphors in order to overcome a major hermeneutical tendency among theological studies to privilege Christianity over diverse indigenous spiritual practices and religions. The tendency to neglect and essentialize diverse religious and spiritual traditions has been problematized both by Victor Anderson and SueJeanne Koh. Anderson has problematized the hermeneutical return to African traditions as a method in Black liberation theology, which is an interpretative attempt to utilize "African traditional religions and slave narratives, autobiography, and folklore to assure the vitality of the black church (church theology) and the cultural solidarities that transcend the individualism that drives our market culture and morality, and rob the black community of moral vitality" (Anderson 2018, p. 93). According to Anderson, this hermeneutical trend leads to several issues. This interpretive mode reduces diverse African religions to a singular category of slave religion in order to develop the correlation between the God of liberation theology and "the Hebrew God of slave religions," and by doing so, anachronistically identifies "the legitimacy of black liberation theology" as "coterminous with slave religion," when the former is "indebted" to the latter (Anderson 2018, pp. 97–98). These critiques of essentialism are echoed by Koh, who has challenged the tendency among theologians of Asian descent to give epistemic privilege to Christian identity over Asian cultural and religious heritage, with the conceptualization of Christianity as a Western religion (Koh 2020).

Hauntological emphasis on the 'networked' or intersubjective nature of collective memory can help us engage specters more than as a metaphor, when combined with decolonial and postcolonial approaches within theological and religious studies. This approach is distinct from Derrida's engagement with specters that often remain at an

abstracted level of raising concerns for human rights. Again, undergirded by the post-positivist research paradigm, this approach to hauntology does not attempt to scientifically prove the existence of ghosts. Rather, it acknowledges our experiences of encountering what has been absented as sites of unrest and wrestling that contain possibilities of moments of revelation in the non-linear process of seeking and experiencing truths.

To demonstrate the liberative potential of engaging specters, I turn to womanist and Asian feminist theologians, who have resisted the colonial ideologies in theology and the church that have invalidated the theo-political status of the spirits, ancestors, and souls of victims, as well as those forgotten by dominant historiography in the work of theology and ethics. Although these scholars do not theorize about hauntology, their works on postcolonial and decolonial spirituality already provide rich ground for incorporating hauntology into theo-political ethics, seeking emancipation from colonial suppression of diverse religious, cultural, and spiritual heritages.

At the 1991 World Council of Churches, a Salimist (Korean eco-feminist) theologian, Chung Hyun Kyung, performed the shamanistic ritual by summoning those who had been rendered absent by power. She called for the spirits of Black Egyptian Hagar, the Hebrew boys murdered by King Herod's soldiers in the New Testament, and numerous souls of both humans and nature that have been destroyed by wars, colonialism, and all forms of domination. Chung's political ritual represents what Kwok Pui-lan describes as a postcolonial methodology—the presenting of the voices of people under intersectional oppression to "challenge dominant religious imaginaries and imperialist social and political orders" (Kwok 2021, pp. 14–15). In typical colonial Christian theology among contemporary South Korean evangelicals, anything that falls outside Christianity is depreciated, such as ancestors who died not as Christians and thus are widely condemned to be in "hell." Chung's ritual was a disruption of the dominant theological norms. The postcolonial and indigenous spirituality that Chung embodies challenged the colonial Christian theology and practices. She illustrated the power of liberatory spirituality in creating a welcoming space for the spirits, freeing them from the positivist view of the past. In particular, she turned a female shaman, one of the most condemned figures in colonial Korean Christianity, into a pastor of han. Not surprisingly, Chung's liturgical protest provoked backlash among many Korean churches, which deemed such liturgy sacrilegious.

This mode of turning to the spirits who fall outside the institutional church for liberatory potential is echoed by Womanist practical theologian Phillis Isabella Sheppard's retrieval of Audre Lorde's story and Lorde's postcolonial turn to Pan-African spirituality for the liberation and recovery of "the community's 'self'," which emphasizes the integrity of holding the self and the community without dismissing one over the other (Sheppard 2022, p. 9). Sheppard captures the significance of ghosts in Lorde's writings, particularly in Lorde's essay "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger" and her poem "Call." Sheppard explains, "These ghosts are imagoes—the internal vestiges of relational dynamics with important early figures in one's life and the affects integral to them. Part of the complexity of Lorde's writing is that these ghosts are of the past, and of the ancient Spirit forces who are guiding her home" (Sheppard 2022, p. 9). There is a radical affirmation when Lorde calls upon "the Holy Ghost Mother" in "Call", because it reclaims the sacredness of Black women who have resisted cultural humiliation and systematic violence. Lorde's turn to the spirits of "her mother and Black girls and women who did not survive the traumas of their lives," and Black ancestors and goddesses—guides her through her recovery of self, culture, and community as she wrestles with the multiple ghosts of Whiteness, sexism, and racism (Sheppard 2022, pp. 9, 43). The spiritual practice of turning to lost ancestors and spirits facilitated her psychological, political, and spiritual liberation (Sheppard 2022). Lorde expanded a liminal space in resistance to intersectional oppres-

sion and the mind-body dualism as she "stitched together Black lesbian spirituality that reestablished her tie to her religious, spiritual, woman-centered cultural roots" (Sheppard 2022, p. 22). This example demonstrates a core concern of memoriography: liberatory and ethical possibilities as we engage marginalized memory. That is, staying attuned to these spirits was vital for the positive reclamation of the power of the erotic and the significance of the body for the liberation of the collective self and ongoing activism. This generational practice of embracing various African spiritual traditions and ancestral spirits showcases the liberating potential of engaging with the memories of the past condemned and hidden by colonial ideologies and power.

As Sheppard and Chung show us, I argue that retrieving and reclaiming spiritual practices and ancestors outside "Christian" boundaries, often imagined through institutional Christianity, is vital for widening our capacity to listen to, sit through, and grapple with rich sources of justice and ethical recovery of the collective. Memoriography informed by hauntological emphasis on interpretivism invites researchers, especially those who are teaching in seminary or divinity schools, to transform the relationships between Christian theology and the multiple religious and spiritual traditions as sources of moral agency in political life, seeking emancipation from the interlocking racism, sexism, and colonialism that have invalidated these traditions.

Yet, as we grapple with the question of what it means to encounter stories of ghosts or hauntings methodologically, pedagogically, and pastorally, we must also consider common resistances. Perhaps the most common response to such "ghost" stories is "Are they real?" This opens a conversation about how one measures the validity and truth. Nor do we have measures to assess their "realness" according to the positivist scientific paradigm. However, memoriography informed by hauntology invites us to slow down the tendency to move on or to attempt to prove objective facts historically. Rather, we are called to pay attention to the experience and the effects of haunting and spectrality.

4. Discussion

This paper has foregrounded the methodology of memoriography from a theological ethics perspective. Perhaps we could see this approach as also grounded in Pentecost in Acts 2, which reverses the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis. Toni Morrison suggests that the Tower of Babel story shows how people's inability to communicate through different languages in their pursuit of a monolithic imagination of heaven leads to destruction (Morrison 1993). In contrast, during Pentecost, people are empowered by the Holy Spirit to communicate through different languages, which features the coming of the Reign of God in this world. No single language dominates. Rather, the Reign of God is featured by the plural languages upon which their attendant culture and stories thrive. But most of all, the capacity to listen to and understand one another is embodied by the presence of what some Christians call the Holy Ghost. Might the practice of engaging with memories that have been silenced be a way to live out the call from the Holy Spirit at Pentacost? Might these practices cultivate an emancipatory vision of heaven on earth? This theological reflection points again to the major argument of this project: that the ways in which we remember and work with collective memories are vital theo-ethical and political faculties that impact our social relations, actions, and imaginaries for the future.

Many of us are already doing the memory work. Theologians, ethicists, religious scholars, and especially those who use qualitative research are already part of the collective efforts to lift the stories and voices from the margins, whose visions might have been excluded from the dominant language in pursuit of the Tower of Babel. This scholar-activism is happening in faith-based community organizing spaces, faith communities, denominational initiatives, research projects, and classrooms. As we navigate various spaces

intersecting with politics of memory, my proposal of memoriography aims to cultivate academic discourse on methodology for working with collective memory in scholarship *and* also to foster conversation about scholar-activism in advocating for conditions to be heard. This paper has examined how post-positivist and hauntological underpinnings of memoriography disrupt colonial and hegemonic assumptions about memory and how this methodology enhances our discussion on the hermeneutical issue of temporality and paradox. Memoriography, conceptualized as a theo-ethical methodology, can strengthen our ethical reflection and practices in engaging these stories from the margins as crucial voices of the *demos* in the long journey toward an emancipatory democracy. Theological ethics and religious studies offer rich resources to this process.

Funding: This research was funded by the James Lawson Institute at Vanderbilt University and the Louisville Institute's Dissertation Fellowship (Grant number: 2025059).

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Vanderbilt University (protocol code 222021 and 13 March 2023) for studies involving humans.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data is contained within the article.

Acknowledgments: This article is a revised and expanded version of a paper titled "Hauntology as a Method and Its Limit in Fieldwork: Ethics of Memoriography," which was presented at a working group session, "Methodological and Ethical Opportunities and Challenges in Fieldwork," at the Society of Christian Ethics, 10 January 2026 (Lee 2026).

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

[1] Interview with a community leader, by the author, online, 2 July 2025. The paper's methodological inquiry was developed through the ethnographically informed fieldwork conducted from 2023 to 2025, during which I studied the intersection of religion and memory-based activism by tracing the transnational and intergenerational movement trajectory from the May 18 Uprising in South Korea to NAKASEC in the U.S., by using archival research, participant observation, and in-depth individual interviews with community leaders.

[2] I anticipate this work on memoriography can be expanded through dialogue with other scholars across diverse cultures who have worked on memory.

[3] For critiques on Gordon's work, see (D. E. Smith 1999, pp. 120–21).

References

Anderson, Victor. 2018. *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. [CrossRef]

Baker-Fletcher, Karen. 2006. *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective*. Des Peres: Chalice Press.

Bretherton, Luke. 2014. *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life*. Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion and Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [CrossRef]

Carrier, Peter. 2014. Holocaust Memoriography and the Impact of Memory on the Historiography of the Holocaust. In *Writing the History of Memory*. Edited by Stefan Berger and Bill Niven. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, pp. 199–218.

Cho, Grace M. 2008. *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 2006. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. With an Introduction by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg. New York: Routledge. First Published 1993. [CrossRef]

Doerr, Nicole. 2014. Memory and Culture in Social Movements. In *Conceptualizing Culture in Social Movement Research*. Edited by Britta Baumgarten, Priska Daphi and Peter Ullrich. Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 206–26.

Esposito, Jennifer, and Venus E. Evans-Winters. 2022. *Introduction to Intersectional Qualitative Research*, 1st ed. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Fiddler, Michael. 2019. Ghosts of Other Stories: A Synthesis of Hauntology, Crime and Space. *Crime, Media, Culture* 15: 463–77. [CrossRef]

Fisher, Mark. 2012. What Is Hauntology? *Film Quarterly* 66: 16–24. [CrossRef]
Fisher, Mark. 2013. *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. Winchester: Zero Books.
Fukuyama, Francis. 1992. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press.
Good, Byron J., Andrea Chiovenda, and Sadeq Rahimi. 2022. The Anthropology of Being Haunted: On the Emergence of an Anthropological Hauntology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 51: 437–53. [CrossRef]
Gordon, Avery. 2008. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Hartman, Saidiya. 2008. Venus in Two Acts. *Small Axe* 12: 1–14. [CrossRef]
Hirsch, Marianne, and Leo Spitzer. 2010. *Ghosts of Home: The Afterlife of Czernowitz in Jewish Memory*. Berkeley: University of California Press. [CrossRef]
hooks, bell. 1990. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End Press.
hooks, bell. 1992. Marginality as a Site of Resistance. In *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*. Edited by Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-Ha and Cornel West. Cambridge: MIT Press, pp. 341–43.
Hyun, Younghak. 1997. *Yesu ŭi t'alch'um: Han'guk kidokkyo sahoe yulli* 예수의탈춤: 한국 그리스도교의 사회윤리 [Jesus' Mask Dance: Korean Christian Social Ethics]. Seoul: Han'guk Sinhak Yŏn'guso 한국신학연구소 [Korea Theological Study Institute].
Koh, SueJeanne. 2020. Asian American Christian Theology: Topographies, Trajectories, and Possibilities. *Religion Compass* 14: e12373. [CrossRef]
Kwok, Pui-lan. 2021. *Postcolonial Politics and Theology: Unraveling Empire for a Global World*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
Lambelet, Kyle Brent Thompson. 2019. *¡Presente! Nonviolent Politics and the Resurrection of the Dead*. Washington: Georgetown University Press.
Lee, Seulbin. 2026. Hauntology as a Method and Its Limit in Fieldwork: Ethics of Memoriography. In *Methodological and Ethical Opportunities and Challenges in Fieldwork*. Paper presented at the Society of Christian Ethics, Washington, DC, USA, January 10.
Lewis, Tom. 1996. The Politics of 'Hauntology' in Derrida's Specters of Marx. *Rethinking Marxism* 9: 19–39. [CrossRef]
Lovelace, Vanessa Lynn. 2021. The Rememory and Re-Membering of Nat Turner: Black Feminist Hauntology in the Geography of Southampton County, VA. *Southeastern Geographer* 61: 130–45. [CrossRef]
Marshall, Ellen Ott. 2023. Christian Arguments for Gun Violence Prevention: Reflections on Moral Claims in the Context of Advocacy. *Journal of Moral Theology* 12: 133–57. [CrossRef]
Masuzawa, Tomoko. 2005. *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
McKittrick, Katherine. 2021. *Dear Science and Other Stories*. Durham: Duke University Press.
Morrison, Toni. 1993. "Nobel Lecture." Nobel Prize. December 7. Available online: https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1993/morrison/lecture/ (accessed on 24 March 2026).
Neveu, Erik. 2014. Memory Battles over Mai 68: Interpretative Struggles as a Cultural Re-Play of Social Movements. In *Conceptualizing Culture in Social Movement Research*. Edited by Britta Baumgarten, Priska Daphi and Peter Ullrich. London: Palgrave Macmillan. [CrossRef]
Nguyen, Viet Thanh. 2013. Just Memory: War and the Ethics of Remembrance. *American Literary History* 25: 144–63. [CrossRef]
Park, Andrew Sung. 1993. *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
Park, Yoon Soo, Lars Konge, and Anthony R. Artino. 2020. The Positivism Paradigm of Research. *Academic Medicine* 95: 690–94. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
Pyndiah, Gitanjali. 2017. Memoriography and the Anarchival Impulse. In *In Search of Transcultural Memory in Europe*. Edited by Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, Niklas Bernsand and Marco La Rosa. Lund: Centre for European Studies, Lund University, pp. 117–23.
Rahimi, Sadeq. 2021. *The Hauntology of Everyday Life*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. [CrossRef]
Rambo, Shelly. 2010. *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
Rhee, Jeong-eun. 2020. *Decolonial Feminist Research: Haunting, Rememory and Mothers*. New York: Routledge.
Saleh-Hanna, Viviane. 2015. Black Feminist Hauntology. *Champ Pénal/Penal Field* XII. [CrossRef]
Saltmarsh, Sue. 2009. Haunting Concepts in Social Research. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 30: 539–46. [CrossRef]
Scalmer, Sean, Christian Wicke, and Stefan Berger. 2021. *Remembering Social Movements: Activism and Memory*, 1st ed. Remembering the Modern World. London: Routledge.
Schwab, Gabriele. 2010. *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Sheppard, Phillis Isabella. 2022. *Tilling Sacred Grounds: Interiority, Black Women, and Religious Experience*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
Shin, HaeRan. 2016. Re-Making a Place-of-Memory: The Competition between Representativeness and Place-Making Knowledge in Gwangju, South Korea. *Urban Studies* 53: 3566–83. [CrossRef]
Smith, Dorothy E. 1999. Review of Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination, by Avery F. Gordon. *Contemporary Sociology* 28: 120–21. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Smith, Mitzi J. 2013. Minjung, the Black Masses, and the Global Imperative. In *Reading Minjung Theology in the Twenty-First Century: Selected Writings by Ahn Byung-Mu and Modern Critical Responses*. Edited by Yung Suk Kim and Chin-ho Kim. Eugene: Pickwick Publications, pp. 110–19.

Snarr, C. Melissa. 2011. *All You That Labor: Religion and Ethics in the Living Wage Movement*. Religion and Social Transformation. New York: New York University Press.

Snarr, C. Melissa. 2022. Formative Political Grief. *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 42: 7–13. [CrossRef]

Snarr, C. Melissa. 2025. Metabolizing Moral Shocks for Social Change: School Shooting, Religion, and Activism. *Religions* 16: 615. [CrossRef]

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 2010. *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*. Edited by Rosalind C. Morris. New York: Columbia University Press.

Stout, Jeffrey. 2013. *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Szeman, Imre. 2000. Ghostly Matters: On Derrida's *Specters*. *Rethinking Marxism* 12: 104–16. [CrossRef]

Townes, Emilie Maureen. 2006. *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. Black Religion, Womanist Thought, Social Justice. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. [CrossRef]

Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. 2014. R-Words: Refusing Research. In *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities*. Edited by Maisha T. Winn and Django Paris. London: SAGE Publications, Inc., pp. 223–47. [CrossRef]

Young, Hershini Bhana. 2006. *Haunting Capital: Memory, Text and the Black Diasporic Body*. Hanover: University Press of New England.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.