

Online Memorials

and the gendered, racialized body in the digital landscape

Yasmin Jiwani

Department of Communication Studies
Concordia University
Montreal, QC

With

Nicole Taylor
Bipasha Sultana
Shanice Bernicky
Maya Youngs-Zaleski



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



INTERSECTIONALITYHUB.CA



DIGITAL
GRAVEYARDS
PROJECT

Criteria



3 Digital Graveyards | 45 Memorials

WEBSITES	MEMORIAL PAGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital graveyards that reflect 3 major Western countries where there are sizeable diasporic population• Receive high amounts of visitor traffic each month• Offer an option to create an interactive memorial page for the deceased, not just an online obituary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where possible, we examined memorials where the deceased passed on between 2017-2018• Vernacular memorials, not those related to high profile traumatic events• Selected memorials that developed a posthumous narrative by either providing a substantive biography or utilizing several website features: profile photo, biography, photo gallery, “lifestories,” condolences, timeline

Digital Graveyards



Canada InMemoriam.ca

425,640 visits June 2018
123 Memorial Websites
6 POC Memorials

United Kingdom MuchLoved.com

135,780 visits June 2018
117 Memorial Websites in
Heaven's gateway
20 POC Memorials

United States MemorialWebsites.Legacy.com

*46.50 million visits June 2018
233 Memorial Websites
19 POC Memorials

*Note that this statistic is taken from Legacy.com, the main obituary website, and not from its vernacular memorial website as that information could not be obtained from SimilarWeb.com

Intersecting signifiers of race, gender & belonging



Tracing Race



- The technology of race (Chun) – the work race does:
- Using photographs and other signifiers
 - Places of birth
 - Names
 - Language
 - Culture
 - Migration
 - Religion
 - Occupation and class
 - References to political upheaval

Intersecting signifiers of race, gender & belonging



Tracing Gender



- Proved to be relatively easy because of the structure of each digital graveyard makes users identify this explicitly by choosing between a binary of male and female
- Familial Status: Mama, Tia, Papa, Brother, Sister, Aunt, Uncle
- Emphasis on heteronormativity

Example:

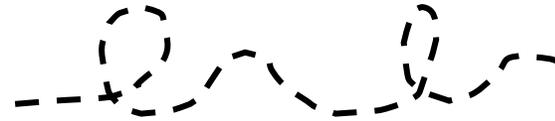
InMemoriam.ca genders the affordances of its memorial websites – “His legacy / His timeline”

About
Tributes and condolences
Photo album
Light a candle
His legacy
His timeline
Contact the site manager
Site manager login →

Intersecting signifiers of race, gender & belonging



Tracing Belonging



- Looking at what others had to say about the deceased and how they communicated a sense of belonging to this particular affective culture (Döveling et al; Hess) – a ‘community of practice’ – demonstrating connectivity.
- References to cultural homeland: How many times the deceased would go back to her/his country of origin; fondness for “cultural home,”; site of funerary rites /burial/ashes; occupation, struggles and achievements of the deceased; ways of creating place (Graham et al).

Fragmented Curation



The Post-Self – curated, front-stage (Goffman), idealized

- Through cohering of the different snapshots of the individual from distinct sections (biography, photo captions, stories, etc.) and the process of mediation and remediation (Christensen & Gotved).
- This also relates to the idea of the idea of “distributed personhood” (Meese et al).
- Temporal, spatial and social expansion on these pages (Brubaker et al).

Affordances— What is offered?



5 categories the affordances can be grouped under:

	Foundational Knowledge	Subjective Histories	Media	Expressions of Grief	Important Information
InMemoriam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About • Timeline • Legacy 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photo Album 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tributes & Condolences • Candles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donation to other charities
MuchLoved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedication • Timeline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifestories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photo gallery • Music and videos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughts • Candles • Journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donation • Funeral Service
Legacy Memorials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biography • Obituary • Timeline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Favorites • Memory Book 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photo gallery • Music and videos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory Book • Guestbook • Journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donation • Funeral Service

Affordances



- What makes it possible to weave these stories about the deceased?

Features	Style of Website
<p>The features that include the most significant information about the deceased:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Biography or obituary• Memory book / “lifestories”• Candles	<p>InMemoriam.ca: Conservative. MuchLoved.com: Colourful and intuitive design. Legacy Memorial Websites: Balance between formal memorial service and creative web platform.</p>
<p>Features that are most used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Biography or dedication)• Photo gallery• Guestbook/Thoughts/Tributes• Candles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• InMemoriam’s Memorial websites seem like an extension of it’s obituary service.• MuchLoved’s Tributes echo a personal website.• Legacy’s Memorial Websites are a combination of the two.

Cultural literacy?



Cultural Literacy

Semantic labels or rhetorical invitations (Hess):

- Memory Book vs “Lifestories”
- Guestbook vs Thoughts vs Tributes & Condolences – leads to different interpretations resulting in the kind of stories that were shared

Two features that were often misused across all platforms:

- Journal
- Timeline
- Issue of cultural literacy?

Examples



Migration: Born in Tewksbury, MA

Ancestry: Adopted, mixed race.

Career: Educated and practiced as a nurse.
Oldest living heart transplant recipient

Struggle: She lived in several foster homes in Boston until Pearl S. Buck heard of her story and brought her to Welcome House in Doylestown, PA. Helen and Henry Ruth, of Lansdale, PA, adopted Mary Anne when she was 11 years old.

Community: Website features an image of Pearl S. Buck at her wedding and a donation request to the Pearl S. Buck Foundation.

Mary Anne Doheny – Legacy.com

The screenshot shows the Legacy.com memorial website for Mary Anne Doheny. The page has a purple header with the Legacy.com logo and a search bar. The main content area is white with a light blue background. On the left, there is a navigation menu with links for Home, Biography, Favorites, Donate, Memory Book, and Photo Gallery. Below the menu, there are several informational boxes: one stating the website will remain online until February 21, 2019; another stating the site is sponsored by the Doheny family; and a third stating the site was created and hosted by Heidi Doheny. The main content area features a large, dark placeholder for a photo. To the right of the placeholder, the name "Mary Anne Doheny" is displayed in red, followed by her dates "June 21, 1941 - January 16, 2018" and her birthplace "Tewksbury, MA". Below this, there is a paragraph of text about her life, including her adoption and career as a nurse. A "Read More" link is provided. Below the text, there is a "Favorites" section with a yellow star icon and two items: "Favorite Vacation: The River" and "Favorite Color: Blue". A "Read More" link is also present. Below the favorites, there is a "Photo Gallery" section with a dark placeholder. To the right of the photo gallery, there is a "Donate" section with a small image of a donation and the text "Pearl S. Buck Foundation" and "Donate Now".

Examples



Migration: Born in Chile and emigrated to Canada

Class: Employed as a truck driver at 15 in Chile and owned taxis and trucks in his older years.

Political Upheaval: Left Chile in 1875 due to dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Trucks were confiscated during Salvador Allende era and his wife was put in the Pinochet jails.

Struggle: Left for Canada by himself and said to struggle “to make a start in Canada.” His wife was a nurse in Chile, but had to redo her credentials once she came to Canada.

Language: Obituary written in English and in Spanish

Community: Very active in Chilean community and “instrumental in the Chilean-Canadian community to end the oppression in Chile. Member of Centro para la gente que habla hispana (Center for Hispanic Speaking People)

Jorge Garretton D. – inmemoriam.com

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ALWAYS IN OUR HEARTS

About
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About him

Jorge Garretton D.
Born: February 25th, 1935
Passed on: November 7th, 2014

(En español sigue después)**** It is with sadness that we say goodbye to Jorge Garretton D. He passed away on November 7, 2014 at 8:00am in Concepción, Chile at the age of 79. He leaves behind his wife, Brunilda and 5 children, Jorge Fernando, José Luis, Gonzalo Eduardo, Patricio Ricardo, and Marcela Alejandra; daughter's in-law, Verónica (Jorge), Arnette (Jose) and Carmen (Gonzalo), son-in-law Michael (Patricio). His 8 grandchildren, Liza, David, Christopher, Gonzalo Andrés, Daniel, Jennifer, Jorge Andrés, and Catalina; His step grandchildren Miguel (Sara) and Tian and step great-granddaughter Luahen. Jorge was a virtuous man for most of his life until a stroke took his spark 9 years ago. Although he was ill for the last years of his life, he never stopped smiling and trying to do too much (never could get him to realize the limitations that come with age). Jorge left his homeland of Chile in 1975, escaping the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in search of a better future for his family. He struggled to make a start in Canada and after 17 long months, he was finally able to bring his family to join him in Canada. During his years in Chile, he was very well travelled as he was a truck driver for many years. In fact, his first job, at the age of 15, was as a truck driver, even though he didn't even have a driver's license yet. As he matured, he became a truck owner as well as a fleet of taxis. Unfortunately, his truck owning days came to a screeching halt when his last trucks, which were purchased during the last days of the Salvador Allende era, were confiscated by the Pinochet regime, forcing him to shut down his fledgling fleet and face the grim future of unemployment that followed. After his wife, Brunilda, was free from the Pinochet jails, they made the hard decision to seek a new life in Canada. The second stage of his life in Canada, he worked very hard, initially to bring his family to be with him and later, to keep the family afloat while his wife regained her nursing degree that she had in Chile. During his spare time, he was very active with the Chilean community and was an instrumental leader in the Chilean-Canadian community to end the oppression in Chile, as well as being an active member of the Centro para la gente que habla hispana (Center for Hispanic Speaking People). He loved to sing (he would do it very boisterously in the shower), and had been a long-time member of the Coro Los Andes until its end. He was an avid fisherman, even though he never caught that dream fish. Unfortunately, the one hobby that he could never regain while in Canada was being a glider pilot which he enjoyed so passionately in Chile. He loved the opera and would conduct masterpieces with the great tenors as he listened intently. We celebrate his life and we smile in knowing that he died in his beloved homeland of Chile. Although we have lost a shining star, he will live on in all the lives that he has touched. He will be cremated in Chile on Sunday November 9, 2014. For those of us who are in the Canada or the United States, there will be a service at a future date, upon Brunilda's return from Chile.

Photo album

Examples



Place of birth: Ghana

Culture: Referred to as mama, 'Atta Maame' due to giving birth to twin daughters, occasionally mum, and mother.

Religion: Considerable stress is placed on her Catholic faith and relationship with God. "...knew no limits of worshipping God", "Her zeal to serve and worship the Lord never ended."

Struggle: Could not read or write, but said to greatly value education for her children.

Occupation: Described as being a housewife and a petty trader/amateur pastry baker to boost family income

Language: various phrases in a language native to Central Ghana are scattered among the memorial

Agnes Hope – MuchLoved.com

Memorial to Agnes Hope, 1940 - 2017.

Home Lifestories Gallery Timeline Contribute

- Visit the Gallery
- Candles
- Thoughts
- Pictures
- Music
- Read Stories
- View the Timeline
- Contribute

Dedicated to the memory of Mama

This site is a tribute to Mama, who was born in Abura Edumfa, Central Region, Ghana on June 09, 1940. She is much loved and will always be remembered.

Glorious Call Home - Mama Hope

A story was added called "BIOGRAPHY OF THE LATE MRS AGNES ARABA APIAWAA HOPE (A.K.A ATTA MAAME)"
05/02/2017 12:20 AM

Alexander...your son lit a Memories Candle
05/02/2017 12:18 AM

The picture "sam's 147" was added
05/02/2017 12:17 AM

The picture "Mama in UK" was added
05/02/2017 12:16 AM

The picture "Mama in Egland" was added
05/02/2017 12:15 AM

A story was added

muchloved | About us | Remembrance Gardens Login

Discourses



- Discourses of success and transcendence and resilience (Hume)
- Biological immortality – through kinship networks (Bennett & Huberman)
- Symbolic immortality – idealized construction of the post-self
- Similar to the discourses found in obituaries, but here the difference is in the geographic mobility – the diasporic element + the mention of re-education, restarting, suggesting resilience and perseverance.
- Memorials also reference broad social patterns, e.g. deskilling, adoption of mixed race children, as well as hegemonic gender codes.

Conclusion



- These little histories stand in isolation – abstracted
- They are micro level testimonials to lives lived (Savoie).
- Political or economic context rarely mentioned in detail – it is taken for granted by the community of practice that coheres around the particular memorial.
- UK site (Muchloved.com) shows the highest numbers with the most detail. Given that there are Canadian and US memorials on these sites, it suggests that the site itself is more user friendly. It is also free as compared to the other two offer paid services and are more formulaic.