

The Memory Flâneur in Teju Cole's *Open City*

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The city [...] is like an armature, a honeycomb in whose cells each of us can place the things he wants to remember.

— Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, 13

Unlike Rome, New York has never learned the art of growing old by playing on all its past. Its present invents itself, from hour to hour, in the act of throwing away its previous accomplishments and challenging the future. A city composed of paroxysmal places in monumental reliefs. The spectator can read in it a universe that is constantly exploding.

— Michel de Certeau, "Walking the City"

How do we imagine a monument to what was already a monument in the first place—a monument to corporate modernism?

— Andreas Huyssen, *Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*

Originally used to denote a particular style of street strolling popular among white men in nineteenth-century Paris, the idea of the 'flâneur' has now been expanded, decentered, and even reconstructed to include people with various identity formations. There are now scholarly and creative works on the Black flâneur (Cole 2012; Hill 2018; Hoover 2022), the female flâneur or the flâneuse (Wolff 1985; Tagwira 2006; Pfalzgraf 2021), the queer flâneur (Ivanchikova 2007; Shockey 2013; Turek 2021), the differently abled flâneur (Serlin, 2006) as well as the contre-flâneur (Valensi and Terni, 2022). What all of these reconstructions suggest is that our experience of, and relationship with, the city is always filtered through our subjectivity. In this essay, I introduce another kind of flânerie which I am referring to as the *memory flâneur* (or flâneuse). While memory flânerie, in the context of this essay, is not an identity formation *per se*, it allows for an understanding and a rethinking of memorialization through the lens of urban walking. The concept of the memory flâneur emerges from the idea that urban spectatorship is often suffused with 'commemorative meditations' and that the memory (infra)structures of a city often inform how mobility is experienced in that city (Huyssen 2003; Palmberger and Tosic, 2016). For the memory flâneur, the street is a goldmine of cultural memory, and the crowd a legible script on which a city's memory culture is inscribed. Therefore, what is peculiar about

memory flânerie is the flâneur's ability to closely observe and give attention to memory economies, politics, and infrastructures in urban spaces. Before elaborating on the concept of the memory flâneur, I want to set the stage with a brief discussion of the concept of the flâneur itself.

The flâneur, simply defined, is a person who leisurely wanders or strolls through a city. Flânerie (the act of being a flâneur) emerged from the works of Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Baudelaire, and Walter Benjamin. It was mostly developed in the works of Baudelaire and Benjamin (both of whom were actual flâneurs) as a way of giving expression to a specific ambulatory culture that was commonplace in the wake of the French Revolution in Paris. In the essay, "The Painter of Modern Life," Baudelaire (1863) draws from Edgar Allan Poe's (1840) short story, "The Man of the Crowd", to argue that the flâneur is an urban spectator for whom the modern city is a space of curiosity and investigation. Baudelaire's flâneur is a "gentleman stroller of the street" who loves solitude, especially when it is found in a crowd. His (the flâneur's) utmost joy is to observe and merge with the crowd *incognito*. Most importantly, instead of simply being a 'pure idler,' Baudelaire's (1963 [1970]) flâneur looks "for that undefinable something we may be allowed to call 'modernity'" (6). Walter Benjamin (2002) builds on Baudelaire's arguments about the flâneur's dis/engagement with modernity in his posthumous book, *Arcades Project*. He notes that the street is the dwelling place of the flâneur and that cafés, parks, and shops are an extension of the street for him (the flâneur). Benjamin also notes that the flâneur, like a roving soul, wanders through and eavesdrops on the city until it is laid bare before him. The flâneur, although aloof and emotionally detached, provides valuable insights into the physical and social anthropology of the modern city. To put it another way, the modern city, for the flâneur, is a readable space and a symbolic current of globalism.

Furthermore, Benjamin reads the architectural expansions, market forces, and the general pace of urban life in nineteenth-century Paris as a manifestation of the consumerist sensibility that is characteristic of capitalist modernity. Hence, for Benjamin, "the flâneur is the observer, the witness, and the stroller of the commodity-obsessed marketplace. He synchronizes himself with the shock experience of modern life" (Seal 2013). However, as some scholars (Seal 2013; Lauster 2007) have pointed out, Benjamin's flâneur is a self-contradictory figure, not only because he does not necessarily challenge the commodified urban system that he observes, but precisely because his high social standing is enabled by that same system. As I mentioned earlier, the definition of the flâneur is no longer limited to white male city strollers of nineteenth-century Paris. Flâneurs can literally be found in any city of the world today, and their common denominator is still that they lend valuable insights into the workings of urban spectatorship and experience. Flâneuring remains one of the best ways to assess the psychogeography and affective landscapes of any city. Through the mobility of his gaze, the flâneur is able to

uncover the zeitgeist of the city, and with his roving mind, he is able to unearth the unconscious of the city.

While observing and walking past cafés, shops, and parks are central in both Baudelaire and Benjamin's formulations of flânerie, there is a curious lack of an explicit reflection on—or a sustained reference to—the flâneur's visits to memorial sites. One might argue that strolling through a city's sites of memory is already implied in Baudelaire and Benjamin's formulations¹, but memorialization and flânerie constitute such distinct and important parts of city-making that it becomes imperative to study how they interconnect within global urbanism.²

The lack of sustained attention to memorial sites in Benjamin and Baudelaire's work on the flâneur could, perhaps, be attributed to the fact that they were writing in an era before the 'memory boom'³—an era in which memory, according to Andreas Huyssen (2003), had not become an industry and the world had not become musealized. Nevertheless, today's global cities have museums and monuments as indispensable parts of their built environments, which is why it has become conceivable that one can stroll through a city just to get a sense of its memory cultures and ventures. Similarly, Adrianna Gregory (2013) maintains that the street is capable of transporting the flâneur into the multilayered pasts of the city—that is, in the process of decoding the unconscious and the zeitgeist of a city, the flâneur accesses the city's memories also. This is how memory comes into play in the act of flânerie, or to put it in another way, this is how flânerie becomes a tool for interpreting memory. After all, mobility, broadly defined, is a "principal logic of memory"⁴ and, according to Astrid Erll (2012), "memory fundamentally means movement." Therefore, mobility within urban spaces often becomes an exercise in, and a rousing of, memory. Against this background, my concept of the memory flâneur borrows from—and repurposes – Benjamin and Baudelaire's originations of the idea of the flâneur with the aim of bringing mobility studies into dialogue with memory studies.⁵

The memory flâneur is, therefore, a mnemophile and a connoisseur of a city's memory culture. He strolls through the city just to observe its memorial sites. He frequents museums and monuments, interacts with memory arts, takes notes of urban epitaphs, and observes all kinds of heritage sites within the city. He can be trusted to provide the mnemonic anatomy of the city. To him, the entire city is a site of memory and a palimpsest of histories. On the surface, his walks through the city seem aimless, but it is actually his way of mapping the city's memory topographies. Walking, therefore, is a mnemonic act for the flâneur; it is a way of detecting memories hidden in plain sight within urban centres. Walking allows the flâneur to uncover the city's—as well as his own—pasts. One could even argue that the personal (autobiographical) memory of the flâneur is sometimes structured or patterned like the city's. Building on the foregoing arguments—while also paraphrasing Calvino (1972) who is cited in this essay's epigraph—one can then posit that the city is a pasteboard on which the flâneur's memories are projected. Put

somewhat differently, the city becomes a screen on which the flâneur's selective memories are inscribed.

The memory flâneur is not a tourist because he is, more often than not, a resident of the city. He, according to Huyssen (2003), is "a city dweller rather than a traveller from afar" (89). But even when he is not a denizen of the city, he dissociates himself from tourism; in fact, he is often very critical of how "tourist economies structure the daily lives of the people" who live in the city (Sturken, 2007). The memory flâneur possesses insider knowledge of memory sites within the city even when he is an outsider to the histories that produced those sites. That said, it is important to note that while the memory flâneur is careful to distance himself from the 'tourists of history,'⁶ and while he is not in any sense a commodifier of memory, he is not an empath either. He does not embody the "prosthetic memories"⁷ of the city. He simply observes the interior lives of the city's material memories from a reflective distance. Although he sets out to excavate buried memories within the metropole, the memory flâneur does not feel any sense of duty to change people's disposition toward memory. His frequent walks simply enable him to establish the connections between a city's memory culture and its general political economy. His urban odyssey allows him to uncover the underlying market forces that produce amnesiac geographies within the city. His walks help him map the totality of capitalist epistemologies and their influence on urban memory cultures.

While I take a closer look at how Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011) provides raw materials for formulating the idea of the memory flâneur in the next section of this essay, it is important to mention that the flâneur, in general, is not only or always a literary figure. I am only turning to literature because of its ability to complicate and test the limits of ideas. It is also worth mentioning that Teju Cole's creative exploration of the idea of the flâneur did not actually begin with *Open City*. It began with his first novel, *Every Day is for the Thief* (2007) which, arguably, serves as a prequel to *Open City*. In this prequel, an unnamed biracial Nigerian man living in New York (who could be said to be the same narrator as in *Open City*) returns to his natal city, Lagos, as a flâneur. His detached but aesthetically attuned observations provide insights into the beautiful chaos of everyday life in Lagos. The unnamed narrator leaves no stone unturned in his detailing of Lagos' public parks, taxi ranks, street corners, residential areas as well as its gumptious populace. However, it is worth mentioning that even when the narrator of *Every Day is for the Thief* visits a place like the Nigerian National Museum in Lagos (the novel has an entire chapter on how the sorry situation of this museum is symptomatic of the general ambivalence toward collective remembering in Nigeria), he cannot be strictly read as a memory flâneur. This is because the city's insubstantial and unimpressive memorial sites constitute just a fraction of his interest. In essence, Cole's first novel, *Every Day is for the Thief*, is illustrative of a situation where an occasional visit to a memorial site is implied in the act of flânerie, while his second novel, *Open City*, intently

focuses on memory arts and memorial sites in a way that calls attention to the mnemonic dimensions of the act of *flânerie*. Hence, in what follows, I explore the complex relationship between urban walking and memorialization in Cole's *Open City*. I closely examine what Julius' (the novel's main character) strolls through New York City reveal about America's memory culture and, overall, I demonstrate how the novel illuminates—and is in turn illuminated by—the idea of the memory *flâneur*. In the concluding section, I point out the paradoxes and limits of reading Julius as a memory *flâneur* while at the same time conceding that the novel provides enough resources to think through and with the idea of the memory *flâneur*.

The Memory *Flâneur* in Teju Cole's *Open City*

Teju Cole's *Open City* (*OC*), often compared with some of the works of W.G. Sebald, is arguably one of the most studied contemporary literary texts. Along with classics such as Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), James Baldwin's *Another Country* (1962), E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1975), Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992), and Chang Rae Lee's *Native Speaker* (1992), *Open City* has been described by the *New York Times* as one of the most significant New York City novels of the last hundred years.⁸ One of the reasons why the novel garners so much critical acclaim is because of the monumental elusiveness of its main character, Julius: a biracial, Nigerian-German psychiatrist based in New York. Julius is a stoic who refuses to worship on the altar of nationalism and who, although he identifies as a Black person, rejects societal pressure to perform race. He forms the habit of “wandering aimlessly” (*OC*, 3) through different parts of New York City. The novel begins with him saying that “New York City worked itself into my life at walking pace” (*OC*, 3). To this end, Julius has been read by critics as an ‘Afropolitan *flâneur*’ (Leff, 2019), a ‘postcolonial *flâneur*’ (Hartwiger, 2016), and a ‘Black *flâneur*’ (Mózes, 2020). While all of these readings of Julius are very accurate in that they accentuate the ways in which his subjectivities (Black, Afropolitan, postcolonial) mediate his horizon of experience as a *flâneur*, they might have ignored the most important point, which is his gravitation toward memory arts and sites during his walks through the city. While scholars (Gleich 2020, Vermeulen 2013) have certainly read the novel through the lens of memory, most of such readings focus chiefly on Julius' negotiation of his personal past rather than the city's. Hence, in this essay, I attempt a meta-reading of *Open City*, which means that I read Julius' close readings of New York City's sites of memory—the kind of close readings that were made possible only through his incessant walks through the city.⁹ To put it another way, I investigate what Julius' interactions with New York City's pasts (which are inscribed on the city's buildings, streets, parks, landscapes, and even market dynamism) reveal about America's memory culture.

In a fashion similar to Randall Mason's (2019) assertion that New York has an extraordinary infrastructure of memory, *Open City* presents New York City as a city brimming with multifarious memories. For instance, on one of his earliest peripatetic exploits within the city, Julius talks about his visit to the American Folk Art Museum at Lincoln Square. He says about the museum:

The artifacts on display, most from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—weather vanes, ornaments, quilts, paintings—evoked the agrarian life of a new American country as well as the half-remembered traditions of the old European ones [...] the sense of having wandered into the past was complete once I reached the third floor of the museum (*OC*, 36).

In this excerpt, Julius “wanders into America’s past” through his peripatetic encounter with one of New York City’s museums. In addition to being transported into America’s past in this museum, Julius comments on what the exhibitions in the museum reveal about the birth of the American nation. Because Julius has a habit of gazing at and commenting on every monument and memorial in New York City, the monuments and memorials, in turn, come alive every time he passes by them. Some of such monuments that he passes by and comments on in the novel include that of Alexander Hamilton, George Templeton Strong, Robert Fulton among many other national heroes in the history of the United States. Beyond these national *lieux de mémoire*, the novel also pictures New York City as a site of global, cosmopolitan, and multidirectional memories¹⁰ by making several references (mostly through Julius’ reflections) to the relationships that the city and its inhabitants have with the memories of settler colonialism, chattel slavery, World War II, 9/11 among many others. An example of the relations of memory between the city and its inhabitants is that of Professor Saito, a queer, Japanese-American octogenarian who interacts with the city through his own embodied memories of internment during the Second World War. Additionally, in the spirit of showcasing New York City as a site of global memory, we catch a glimpse of Julius—on one of his walks through Chatham Square in Chinatown—as he stops to reflect on the statue of Lin Zexu, a Chinese antinarcotics activist who pioneered the war against drugs in the nineteenth century.

Open City presents New York City as the capital of American corporatization and the headquarters of global commodity culture. Put another way, the novel—to circle back to Huyssen’s statement in this essay’s epigraph—presents a portrait of New York City as a *monument* of corporate modernism. Through Julius’ odysseys, we witness the ways in which memory consumerism and urban capitalism feed into each other on the streets of New York City. On one of his wanderings through West Side Highway, he observes that:

In the rafters were brightly colored advertisements for various tourist sites in lower Manhattan. SHOW YOUR KIDS WHERE THE ALIENS LANDED, the one for Ellis Island read. The museum of American Finance was promoted with the words RELIVE THE DAY AMERICA'S TICKER STOPPED. The Police Museum, also entering the spirit of distasteful puns, invited people to visit New York's cell provider (OC, 58).

Here, Julius—in the spirit of the nineteenth-century flâneur's irritation with high capitalism—is not particularly delighted by the commodification of memory. He is critical of how memory is massaged for tourist needs, and how it is turned into “marketable stories” (OC, 58) as opposed to being an unsalable treasure. His observation correlates with Marita Sturken's (2007) conclusion that sites of memory in America have a long history of being designed for consumerist ends. In her book, *Tourist of History: Memory, Kitsch and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero*, Sturken (2007) argues that America has a tourist relationship with history and that at its sites of tourism, memory is often understood as something to be consumed and negotiated by the dictates of capital. In other words, Julius, through his seemingly aimless wanderings through New York City, observes and exposes American corporatization which, I argue, has a strong influence on its urban memory culture. In the same vein, Julius indicates how architectural re-designs in New York City enable a mercantilist relationship with memory. He says:

One Sunday morning in November, after a trek through the relatively quiet streets on the Upper West Side, I arrived at the large, sun-brightened plaza at Columbus circle. The area had changed recently. It had become a more commercial and tourist destination thanks to the pair of buildings erected for the Time Warner corporation on the site (OC, 8).

Apart from the fact that this statement above establishes the connection between memory, tourism, and consumerism, it also shows how, in the city, new buildings are always being erected as old ones are demolished.

This point about new and demolished (old) buildings in the city is important because a city remembers through its buildings.¹¹ As I will show in a moment, the architectural renewals in New York City render the city as a palimpsest, but before I get to that, it is important to reiterate that the traces of the memories of any city can also be found in its market dynamism. A city's market economy is often produced and negotiated within its built environment. Therefore, a city's buildings constitute an important part of its assets and market forces. In *Open City*, Julius points to this relationship between a city's building and its market in his observation of how in New York City, new “buildings, constructed at great speed, had just opened and were filled with shops” (OC, 19). In addition to that, he expresses shock at how “businesses that had seemed unshakable a few years previously had disappeared in the span of a few

weeks,” and how quickly the role that these disappeared businesses played was “passed on to other hands, hands that would feel briefly invincible and would, in their turn, be defeated by unforeseen changes. These survivors would also be forgotten” (OC, 19). There are many layers of issues that these observations by Julius bring to the fore. The first is that the demands of fast capitalism and the culture of obsolescence have turned America into a nation of “disposable urbanism”¹² where buildings are not necessarily meant to last, and edifices are essentially not supposed to be permanent. On the flip side, these “new constructions, transitional spaces, and buildings with conflicting and disharmonious imprints of history which are at first inimical to the idea of commemoration” altogether constitute an “unintentional memorial” in the city (Boym, 2001). Unlike total or permanent reconstructions, the construction sites which Julius makes reference to in the novel “allow one to experience historicity as a place for reflection on the passage of time” (Boym 2001, 56). Put differently, a city’s construction sites may, on the surface, look like they have nothing to do with the city’s processes of memory-making, but on a closer look, they play a part in the construction of the memory as well as the heritage and commemorative practices of the city. My overall claim here is, therefore, that Julius’ flâneur provides insights into the ways in which the buildings and market dynamism of New York City are intricately woven into its mnemonic life.

As Julius continues strolling through New York City, he gets to the site of the events of 9/11 (six years after the attack) and wonders why everything seems to have returned to business as usual. He marvels at the indifference of hurrying passersby and wonders why this heavily traumatic event seems to have faded into the background as daily commuters in the area do not stop to reflect at the site. These instances where Julius marvels at the briskness of the crowd are important because they provide insights into the city’s haste to move on from its past. In other words, Julius gets a glimpse of the memory culture of the city through the attitude of its crowd and daily commuters. He also notices the new construction sites sprouting up in the area and comments on how they overlap with the complex deposits of memories already emplaced in that same area. He says about the construction site at the World Financial Center:

This was not the first erasure on the site. Before the towers had gone up, there had been a bustling network of little streets traversing this part of the town. Robinson Street, Laurens Street, College Place: all of them had been obliterated in the 1960s to make way for the World Trade buildings and, all were forgotten now. Gone, too was Washington Market, the active piers, the fishwaves, the Christian Syrian enclaves that were established here in the late 1800s. The Syrians, the Lebanese, and other people from Levant had pushed across the river to Brooklyn, where they’d set down roots on Atlantic Avenue and in Brooklyn Heights. And before that? What Lenape paths lay buried beneath the rubble? *The site was a palimpsest, as well as the*

city, written, erased and rewritten. There had been communities here before Columbus ever set sail. (OC, 59).

Julius' statement here provides insights into the relationship between memory and "urban palimpsest."¹³ The World Trade Center (WTC) becomes not simply a site of the memory of 9/11, but a place with shifting layers of overwritten memories. This architectural palimpsest is representative of the larger history of New York City which can also be said to be a history of palimpsests. In view of this, Julius' walks through and around the city become a kind of "palimpsestic exercise that exposes histories that have been erased and written over" (Hartwiger, 2016). Julius even goes as far as concluding that New York City in its entirety is a palimpsest. In light of that (and in the excerpt above), he notes that if we searched deeper, we would find traces of Lenape people (the Indigenous inhabitants of the city) in this history of erasures that characterize present-day New York City. In another instance in the novel, he submits that "there are no Native Americans in New York City and very few in all of North East. It is not right that people are not terrified by this because this is a terrifying thing that happened to a vast population. And it is not in the past, it is still with us today" (OC, 27). The point here is that urban memory is always partial because of its proclivity to spatially erase certain memories while elevating others.¹⁴ In addition to having a partial memory, New York City also has a settler memory formation, and the thing about settler memory is that it disavows indigenous memory and erases traces of indigenous lives in order to assert itself.¹⁵

Apart from pointing out the spatial erasures of indigenous memories that contribute to the making of New York City, Julius also exposes the ways in which the city participated in and benefitted from the transatlantic slave trade but tries to cover it up. For example, while passing through Bowling Green in Lower Manhattan, he explains that the place was used for the executions of slaves in the seventeenth century. Likewise, on his trek through Battery Park (now called The Battery), he sees children playing under the watchful gaze of their mothers and notes that the park

had been a busy mercantile part of the city in the middle of the nineteenth century. Trading in slaves had become a capital offence in the United States in 1820, but New York long remained the most important port for the building, outfitting, insuring, and launching of slavers' ships. (OC, 207)

He explains how some of the corporations and businesses in the city (Citibank especially) benefited from slavery. In light of this, Alexander Hartwiger writes that "if New York is reputedly the top global city of the FIRE economic sector—finance, insurance, and real estate—then the novel makes a case that the capital for this current economic success was extracted from forced labour practices like slavery" (2016, 07). What is

even more striking is Julius' description of the long-lost and under-recognized seventeenth-century African burial ground for which a monument was built in 2010. Julius catches a glimpse of this monument on one of his walks through Duane Street and says:

An inscription on the monument, for that is what it turned out to be, identified it as a memorial site of an African burial ground. The tiny plot was what had been set aside now to indicate the spot, but in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the site had been large, some six acres, as far north as the present-day Duane Street, and as far south as City Hall Park. Along Chambers Street and in the park itself, human remains were still routinely uncovered. But most of the burial ground was now under office buildings, shops, streets, diners, pharmacies, all the endless hum of quotidian commerce and government. Into this earth had been interred the bodies of some fifteen to twenty thousand blacks, most of them slaves, but then the land had been built over and the people of the city had forgotten that it was a burial ground (*OC*, 220)

The transformation of Duane Street—which originally served as the African burial ground—into a business district does not only reveal the “skeleton in the closet of America’s modernity,”¹⁶ it is also a testament to the gentrification of the memory of enslaved Africans in New York City. The fact that the remains of these enslaved Africans are still “routinely uncovered” points to the specters of slavery that refuse to vanish despite America’s efforts to exorcise itself of the memories. It also suggests that New York City is a haunted city. This haunting mutates into some kind of ‘corporatized haunting’ as most of the burial ground is now beneath office buildings and shops. Moreover, the fact that most people have forgotten that Duane Street used to be a burial ground is indicative of the ways in which American capitalist urbanism fosters amnesia. It also reveals the nature of American corporatization as a mnemocidal¹⁷ machine. However, as Hartwiger notes, *Open City*, in a way, reads these marginalized and forgotten memories back into the city through Julius’ wanderings. In other words, Julius’ flânerie becomes a tool for uncovering repressed histories that contributed to making New York City what it is today.

Toward the end of the novel, a little more depth is added to the life of Julius. Like a blast from the past, he bumps into Moji, an old acquaintance from Nigeria, on the street of New York City. Moji accuses Julius of “forcing himself on her” at a party in Lagos eighteen years earlier. Julius remembers the party, and he remembers seeing Moji there, but he fails to respond to Moji’s accusation. While he does not explicitly deny the accusation, he does not accept or apologize for it either. Readers are left with the impression that he actually did force himself on Moji, which is why, as a kind of avoidance, he refrains from commenting on the issue. Pieter Vermeulen (2013) interprets Julius’ equivocation in this scene as a failure of memory. He notes that Julius’ incessant walking –

when considered along with his failure of memory – is symptomatic of a dissociative fugue. Hence, according to Vermeulen, Julius is more of a *fugueur* than a *flâneur*. While Vermeulen might be right about Julius' failure of memory, I am hesitant to read Julius as a *fugueur*. Apart from the fact that this reading pathologizes Julius, it also misses the main point of the novel which is that memory is selective forgetting: to remember one thing is to misremember (or repress the memory of) another. Therefore, contrary to Vermeulen, Julius is not psychologically unstable; he is an intelligent (but unreliable) narrator who instrumentalizes the fallibility of memory for his own good. At many points in the novel, he tries to sell to his readers the impression that his recall sometimes fails him ("I could not trust my memory...", *OC*, 4). Of course, he vividly remembers aspects of his past where he is a victim but only forgets (or is indifferent about) aspects where he is a perpetrator. The situation becomes clear to discerning readers when, in another instance, he says about his past in Nigeria:

The past, if there is such a thing is mostly empty space, great expanses of nothing, in which significant persons and events float. Nigeria was like that for me: mostly forgotten, except for those few things that I remembered with an outsize intensity. These were the things that had been solidified in my mind by reiteration.... [They] represented a secure version of the past that I had been constructing since 1992. (*OC*, 91)

The point here, again, is that Julius is playing a selective memory game – that is, he remembers only what he 'chooses' to remember. Hartwiger (2016) elaborates on Julius' selective memory as he writes that

[t]he idea of the selectivity of memory in one's narrative about oneself, and consequently and conversely the denial of memory for others, provides the central tenor of the novel at both personal and cultural levels [...] the novel argues that we, consciously or unconsciously select the moments, events and details that make us heroes in our own stories (12).

In addition to Hartwiger's point, the irony in Julius' situation is that, as a memory *flâneur*, he is aware and even critical of New York City's selectivity of memory but quite uncritical of – or blind to – his own selective memory. It is as if the city has incarnated his unconscious – or, rather, it is almost as if he is exploiting the city's partial memory as a kind of cover for his own calculated forgetting. In essence, just as the memory landscape of New York City is said to be selective because of the way it erases Indigenous and Black peoples' memories, Julius's memory is also selective because of the way he remembers everything but his sexual assault on Moji.

Conclusion

As many critics have argued, Julius is, without question, a flâneur but my essay advances the argument by proposing that Julius is a specific kind of flâneur, a memory flâneur. But, with all things considered, one question still lingers: If memory is differentiated from history by its affective forces, how does one make sense of Julius' emotionally detached and yet cogitative engagements with New York City's sites of memory? The challenge, of course, is not that Julius does not engage reflectively with the city's memorial sites but that he devotes less energy to interacting reflexively with them. This intimate observation without personal investments in the city's memorial sites traces back to the self-contradictory nature of the flâneur. Moreover, I concede that a plausible argument can be made about Julius having other interests beyond exploring memorial sites of New York City (as a flâneur). This argument actually gets to the heart of my conclusion, which is that there is so much more to discover and theorize about the memory flâneur outside of the character of Julius, a literary invention. That notwithstanding, his character foregrounds the prospect of encountering a city's memory culture through the art and act of walking. Julius, in the fashion of classical flâneurs, is critical of the geographies of capitalism and is also cognizant of how such geographies affect New York City's memory culture.

Additionally, *Open City* proves that there is a stark difference between a memory tourist and a memory flâneur. While the tourist is more visible in the crowd, the memory flâneur is less so. The memory flâneur is often very quick to differentiate himself from the tourist and, as we see in the character of Julius, is often very disapproving of the ways in which urban memory landscapes are recalibrated for tourist purposes. If anything, Julius' urban walking challenges the 'tourist gaze' which, according to John Urry (1990), is often carefully curated and socially constructed for consumerist needs. That said, Julius' ability to make the interior life of a city's memory legible does not become an occasion for empathetic identification. Put differently, the fact that the memory flâneur exposes repressed pasts in urban memoryscapes does not make him a hero, nor does it prove anything about his moral standing. Julius' opacity and standoffishness certainly do not make him the most likable character in contemporary literature. Most importantly, as I have shown in my analysis, his suppression of incriminating memories in his personal life follows the same logic behind New York City's suppression of its atrocious pasts. In other words, as we see in Julius' case, the memory flâneur is himself a remembering subject and, on his many urban odysseys, his past often (re)surfaces in a way that is in congruence with the memory (infra)structures of his city.

Notes

1. It is important to make clear that Benjamin's iterations provide a lot of insights on the flaneur's relationship with the public space which, no doubt, includes public memorials.
2. There are hundreds of scholarly works on urbanism and memorialization. A few of such include Andreas Huyssen's (2003) *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Elias Khoury's (1995) "The Memory of the City," Christine Boyer's (1995) *The City of Collective Memory* and Simon Sleight's (2018) "Memory and the City."
3. I am referring here to the context of the 1980s which most memory scholars describe as the period of the "memory boom." For example, Jay Winter (2001), in his essay, "Reflections of Memory Boom in Contemporary Historical Studies" describes it as "the memory boom of the late twentieth century." Also, Astrid Erll (2011) writes that while every era and every society has its reasons for perceived memory boom, it was "not until the 1980s that the topic of memory again elicited interest in the humanities and social sciences, in the context of what may be call the "new cultural memory studies" (11).
4. Astrid Erll's (2011).
5. While works such as Stef Craps, Lucy Bond, and Pieter Vermeulen's (2017) *Memory Unbound*, Astrid Erll's (2011) "Travelling Memory," Ann Rigney's (2012) *Memory on the Move*, Andreas Kitzmann and Julia Creet's (2014) *Memory and Migration*, and even Michael Rothberg's (2009) *Multidirectional Memory* all gesture toward the idea of mobile memory and invite us to think, albeit in different ways, about memory and migration, I am thinking of mobility (in relation to memory) differently. I am not thinking of mobility in terms of national border-crossing or movement of populations. I am thinking of mobility, in the context of the essay, as ambulation. I am thinking particularly about walking as an exercise in, or an activation of, memory. For more on this kind on this kind of mobility and its relationship with memory, see Monika Palmberger and Jelena Tomic's (2016) *Memory on the Move: Experiencing Mobility, Rethinking the Past*.
6. "Tourist of history" is a term that Marita Sturken (2007) uses to describe a form of tourism that has as its goal a cathartic experience of history. Sturken defines the term as a particular mode through which the (American) public "experiences itself as the subject of history through consumerism, media images, souvenir, popular culture, and museum and architectural re-enactments."
7. Alison Landsberg argues that technologies of mass culture make it possible for anyone, regardless of race, ethnicity and gender, to share collective memories of others, to assimilate as personal experience historical events that they themselves have no direct historical connection to and to take on other people's memories prosthetically. See Alison Landsberg, 2004.

8. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/22/t-magazine/new-york-city-novels-books.html>
9. Julius also walks through the city of Brussels in the novel and visits memorial sites in the city. But, for the purpose of this essay, I am only focusing on his walks through New York City which covers the largest chunk of the book.
10. For more on global memory, see Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad's (2010) *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories*. On cosmopolitan memory, see Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznajder's (2002) "The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory." For more on multidirectional memory, see Michael Rothberg's (2009) *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*.
11. Aldo Rossi's (1965) *The Architecture of the City*.
12. Andres De Wet (2019).
13. Andreas Huyssen (2003).
14. See Simon Sleight (2018).
15. For more on settler memories, see Kevin Bruyneel (2021).
16. Simon Gikandi (2011).
17. In the essay, "Forms of Forgetting," Aleida Assmann describes mnemocide as the act of "killing" the memory of an individual or a collective. Assman, "Forms of Forgetting," 2016.

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