MUSEUMS AND SITES OF PERSUASION

POLITICS, MEMORY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

EDITED BY JOYCE APSEL
AND AMY SODARO

MUSEUM MEANINGS

MUSEUMS AND SITES OF PERSUASION

Museums and Sites of Persuasion examines the concept of museums and memory sites as locations that attempt to promote human rights, democracy and peace. Demonstrating that such sites have the potential to act as powerful spaces of persuasion or contestation, the book also shows that there are perils in the selective memory and history that they present.

Examining a range of museums, memorials and exhibits in places as varied as Burundi, Denmark, Georgia, Kosovo, Mexico, Peru, Vietnam and the US, this volume demonstrates how they represent and try to come to terms with difficult histories. As sites of persuasion, the contributors to this book argue, their public goal is to use memory and education about the past to provide moral lessons to visitors that will encourage a more democratic and peaceful future. However, the case studies also demonstrate how political, economic and social realities often undermine this lofty goal, raising questions about how these sites of persuasion actually function on a daily basis.

Straddling several interdisciplinary fields of research and study, *Museums and Sites of Persuasion* will be essential reading for those working in the fields of museum studies, memory studies and genocide studies. It will also be essential reading for museum practitioners and anyone engaged in the study of history, sociology, political science, anthropology and art history.

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Museum Meanings

Series Editors: Richard Sandell and Christina Kreps

Museums have undergone enormous changes in recent decades; an ongoing process of renewal and transformation bringing with it changes in priority, practice and role as well as new expectations, philosophies, imperatives and tensions that continue to attract attention from those working in, and drawing upon, wide-ranging disciplines.

Museum Meanings presents new research that explores diverse aspects of the shifting social, cultural and political significance of museums and their agency beyond, as well as within, the cultural sphere. Interdisciplinary, cross-cultural and international perspectives and empirical investigation are brought to bear on the exploration of museums' relationships with their various publics (and analysis of the ways in which museums shape – and are shaped by – such interactions).

Theoretical perspectives might be drawn from anthropology, cultural studies, art and art history, learning and communication, media studies, architecture and design and material culture studies, amongst others. Museums are understood very broadly – to include art galleries, historic sites and other cultural heritage institutions – as are their relationships with diverse constituencies.

The focus on the relationship of the museum to its publics shifts the emphasis from objects and collections and the study of museums as text, to studies grounded in the analysis of bodies and sites; identities and communities; ethics, moralities and politics.

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Edited by Joyce Apsel and Amy Sodaro

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This volume was put together against a continuing “state of emergency” reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s observation that “‘the state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule.” Speaking truth to power continues to be resisted by democratic and authoritarian governments, and we hope that this collection of essays contributes to ongoing initiatives to reveal the complicated nature and many layers of history, memory and politics. The sites of persuasion in this collection highlight the political, transnational and global character of memory sites; most purport to provide understanding of past and ongoing human harms in order to prevent their repetition and contribute to a future where rights and human dignity flourish. But contrary to such claims, these sites are not neutral and reflect deeply politicized geographies and memories and both the promise and peril of representations of the past.

We met at a conference on “Soul Wounds: Trauma and Healing across Generations” held at Stanford University in June 2015 and, after listening to each other’s papers, began a conversation that continues today on issues of memory, museums and politics in peace museums, memorial museums and other sites. As we discussed the meaning of “sites of persuasion” and creating a collection of global essays about the subject, we had the opportunity to present our ideas in a number of forums. These included “The Politics of Memory: Victimization, Violence and Contested Narratives of the Past” conference (2015) and the Association for the Studies of Nationalities Convention (2016), both held at Columbia University and the International Network of Museums for Peace Conference in Belfast, Ireland (2017). Along with Roy Tamashiro, a contributor to this volume, we extend our appreciation to Ellyn Toscano, Director at NYU Florence, and La Pietra Dialogues for the opportunity to present a panel in 2018 on “Museums, Memory and Politics: Educating About ‘Difficult Knowledge.’”

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Finally, we would like to thank our families for their support. This volume is dedicated to the next generation of children, including Stella and Eliana, Hannah, Max, Sam, Jeremy, and Amelia, with hope for a world of greater peace within and without.

Joyce Apsel and Amy Sodaro

PART I

Museums, politics and persuasion

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INTRODUCTION

Memory, politics and human rights

Joyce Apsel and Amy Sodaro

Museums and other memory sites are often charged today with more than simply collecting and displaying objects or symbolically representing the past. Rather, they also work to persuade visitors to change their thinking and behavior. While museums and memory sites have always played persuasive roles, like shaping national identity (Anderson 1991), many of today's memory sites claim to work to promote liberal ideals such as human rights, democracy and reconciliation by representing past violence and conflict. This volume examines a range of museums, memorials and exhibits in places as varied as Burundi, Denmark, Georgia, Kosovo, Mexico, Peru, Vietnam and the US, analyzing how they represent and try to come to terms with difficult histories. Through the use of history and memory, they act as sites of persuasion, working to educate visitors and provide moral lessons intended to contribute to a more democratic, peaceful present and future. However, political, economic and social realities undermine this lofty goal and raise questions of how these sites of persuasion actually function. Their persuasive role is often more rhetorical than real, limiting their purportedly transformational potential.

Some of the museums and sites examined in this volume are well-funded, prominent, state-sponsored institutions that use the authority of the museum form to persuade their visitors to take a particular moral and/or political stance vis-à-vis the past and present. Thus, their narratives often reflect the political agendas and ideologies of the regimes that create them and may reinforce dominant narratives in their efforts to persuade. Others are smaller sites that emerge from community and local initiatives. While these sites are less likely to take up official, hegemonic narratives and instead attempt to be spaces where local healing and reckoning with past and ongoing violence occur, they too are influenced by local politics. All of these sites hold promise in terms of fostering dialogue and educating about human rights and democratic culture; all attempt

to varying degrees to accomplish their goals by encouraging their visitors to interact with the past and its memory. Yet, despite their broad ambitions, there are also often perils in the selective memory and history that they represent.

Memory and human rights

The changing role of museums and other memory sites today is influenced by and contributes to a broader shift in how societies around the world relate to the past, moving from the triumphalist history of progress and the future—encapsulated in the achievements of the nation-state and its heroes—toward a more complicated understanding that often implicates the nation-state in violence committed against civilians. This new emphasis on the negative past is part of what has been described as a “memory boom” in academia and broader society, and reflects changes in historiography. In addition to moving away from a belief in the “objectivity” of history and toward an understanding of history as representations and interpretations of the past, replete with biases of the historian doing the writing (Jenkins 2006), historians have been working to “decenter history,” shifting from a Eurocentric, hegemonic narrative to a globalized perspective that recognizes the importance of local and cultural histories and includes the voices of those long silenced and oppressed (Davis 2011; Apsel 2016). Where the nation-state was once oriented toward the glorious future with past events as teleological prelude, today recognition of the fragmentation of experience and memory has made the past an important space for negotiating identity, recognition and legitimacy.

The memory boom and historiographical shifts of recent decades are linked to “seeing” the harm, in particular the enormous loss of life and suffering during two World Wars and, especially, the atrocities of the Holocaust. The reckoning with history that began in the second half of the 20th century has been selective and was initially driven by Western states grappling with the legacy of violence. However, this memory boom has since begun to travel the globe, picking up “memory momentum” with a series of global events, including recognition of the brutal impact of slavery and colonization and violent struggles for independence by former colonies; the demise of dictatorships in Latin America and other parts of the world; the end of communism in the Soviet Union and satellite countries; and in the aftermath of genocides and mass atrocities in Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and elsewhere. With these events, memory has become crucial in the larger project of transitional justice and democratic state building. Increasingly, confronting past violence is a normative demand for nations and groups wishing to attain international political legitimacy. Even states that previously denounced human rights violations elsewhere, like the US, have at times been pushed to acknowledge atrocities they carried out, though often it is easier to acknowledge past human rights violations with token, symbolic reparations, while ignoring present-day repercussions and current harms, as several of the case studies in this volume demonstrate.

This new “politics of regret” (Olick 2007) or “reparations politics” (Torpey 2006), focused on confronting and coming to terms with the past, has led to a global set of expectations and best practices attached to the memory of violence. With the Holocaust often referenced as a precedent, new commemorative forms—such as memorial museums, memorials and counter-monuments—and fields like memory studies and transitional justice have emerged and are often framed by the imperative of learning lessons of the past to create a better present and future. This global movement has led to the emergence of what has been theorized as a transnational (Erlil 2011; Inglis 2016) or cosmopolitan (Levy and Sznajder 2006) memory discourse. Modes and methods of remembering are posited to move across and beyond national borders, shaping how groups and nations around the world work to come to terms with their complicated histories. Infused with liberal, universal ideals like human rights, democracy, peace and tolerance, this transnational memory culture purports to provide a model through which divergent violent histories can be examined and addressed.

The centrality of memory focused on violence is part of the global spread of a powerful human rights discourse. Like the memory boom, the human rights movement arose in response to select violence during the first half of the 20th century. In 1948, the newly formed United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and introduced the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide for state ratification; recognition “that human rights and human wrongs are inherently linked” (Apsel 2013). This foundation began to lay the groundwork for a global human rights enterprise (Armaline et al. 2015), creating national, regional and international laws as well as institutions, NGOs and other mechanisms for promoting and protecting human rights. However, while human rights is meant as an all-encompassing promise of rights and equality, in practice “the idea of human rights accommodated itself to the reigning political economy, which it could humanize but not overthrow” (Moyn 2018, 9). Hence, the trope of human rights as it is used in sites of persuasion largely ignores systemic and structural violence and inequity, lest they threaten the existent economic and political structures that often support—at least purportedly—mainstream human rights ideals and organizations.

As memory has figured more prominently in the writing of history, at the same time, sites of atrocity have become a crucial part of the promotion and advocacy of this narrower understanding of human rights in the aftermath of atrocity and mass violence. Testimony, material remains—including the important role of forensics—and other memory traces are essential components of prosecutions and necessary tools for reparation, reconciliation and furthering justice. As Andreas Huyssen argues, “The continuing strength of memory politics remains essential for securing human rights in the future” (2011, 621). However, as the case studies in this book suggest, memory politics are always selective, limiting the role memory can play in advancing human rights. Nevertheless, memory and human rights have become parallel discourses (which sometimes commingle and overlap, and at other times are disparate and in tension with each other) that

purport to confront past violence and foster a range of liberal ideals including democratic culture and the rights and dignity of both individuals and groups.

Originally, the human rights discourse was part of Western countries' toolbox and focused on abuses carried out by non-democratic regimes, largely ignoring their own histories of colonialism, racism, and other violence. This has begun to change in recent decades when Western democracies, often faced with pressure from groups that are or have been oppressed, and in part pressured by the "success" of the human rights regime they played a crucial role in creating, have begun acknowledging their own severe human rights violations. For example, Canada established a truth and reconciliation commission to document violence against indigenous peoples, and in the US the two newest Smithsonian Museums on the National Mall in Washington, DC—the Museum of the American Indian and the Museum of African American History and Culture—suggest that the US might be beginning to address aspects of its violent history. These museums seem to adhere to what Richard Sandell describes as a museological trend in which the hegemonic, and purportedly objective, state narrative has been increasingly "decentered," meaning that issues of race, gender, class, disability and other factors should be taken into account in curating new exhibits and accessibility to diverse audiences (Sandell 2012).

Despite these developments, academic critiques and debates about the effectiveness of the human rights regime abound, and the "end of human rights" has been predicted by numerous scholars in recent years (e.g., Douzinas 2000; Hopgood 2013). These scholarly critiques appear to have gained a particular relevance today; as we write this Introduction, human rights protections and institutions are under attack in the US and around the globe with the growth of right-wing populism and its anti-immigration and nationalistic chauvinism. While globally states have taken up the mantle of liberal human rights norms, making these norms the rhetoric of both the status quo and hope for the future, anti-democratic and anti-rights discourse, actions and policies today remind us of the fragility of human rights as a paradigm and the difficulty of its realization. Further, the use of memory to fuel these populist movements (e.g., "Make America Great Again") suggests that just as memory can be used to strengthen human rights, so too can it be used to weaken them. However, the ongoing resistance to these political and social trends indicates that perhaps human rights ideals and the use of memory to uphold them have so firmly embedded themselves in today's societies and cultural landscapes that they cannot be so easily or permanently eliminated.

Museums and sites of memory

Museums and other memory sites have become important mechanisms in attempts to address past injustice and suffering within this universal human rights framework. When they emerged as public institutions in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, museums were intended to display the distinct, one-of-a-kind

collections that reflected the “high culture” of their time, “legislating” taste and excellence by displaying objects and art selected by elites and meant for social uplift (Casey 2005). This positioning of museums as elite institutions gave them a role in society as spaces of authority, objectivity and legitimacy, which many retain today.¹ But as their audiences expanded, their roles have changed; as they moved from being elite institutions to more inclusive public institutions over the course of the 20th century, many museums have faced pressure to diversify and democratize both their content and visitors. Thus there has been a proliferation of museums and other sites that work not only to attract as broad an audience as possible, but also to tell previously marginalized stories and histories in innovative and interactive ways.

This shift in the role of museums at the end of the 20th century marks a significant change in museology and a move toward what Valerie Casey describes as “performing museums” (2005): museums that use theatrical tropes to create interactive and experiential exhibits to draw visitors into the stories and histories that they tell. Such museological changes mark a move from an emphasis on collections and “valuable” objects to experiential storytelling, with a focus on ideas, concepts or narratives as museums strive to serve as “spaces belonging to the citizenry at large, expounding on ideas that inform and stir the population to contemplate and occasionally to act” (Gurian 1999, 46). This new performative function of museums relies upon experiential, affective exhibition strategies that encourage interaction and empathy, with the goal of teaching the lessons of the past in a way that will create a better present and future. It is thus no coincidence that several of the museums examined in this volume, including the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta, Georgia, and the Place of Memory, Tolerance and Social Inclusion in Lima, Peru, have theater professionals among their key creators.

While these new museological trends are evident in different categories of museums, like art, science and natural history museums, they are especially apparent in museums about the past and its history. Most museums and memory sites in the 19th and early 20th century depicted heroes and their achievements, like victory in battle, to bolster national glory and identity—what Benedict Anderson called “official nationalism” (1991). Today, not only have many museums’ methods for telling history become more experiential and interactive but, following historiographical shifts, many museums often also work to reveal previously untold histories, bringing in diverse voices and the experiences of groups that were previously silenced and/or victimized. With this effort to tell “history from below” has come a focus on the negative past: telling the stories of slavery, colonization, genocide and other atrocities, and uncovering the resistance to and struggles against racism, imperialism, war and other forms of oppression.

A range of new museums and exhibits, as well as other types of memory sites, have been developed to tell these difficult histories in innovative ways, including cultural heritage museums, history museums, memory museums (Arnold-de Simine 2013), memorial museums (Williams 2007; Sodaro 2018),

peace museums (Apsel 2016) and “sites of conscience,”² with much fluidity and overlap between and within these categories. Memorials and monuments have also changed, shifting from celebratory symbols of the nation-state and its heroes to more contemplative and interactive spaces for reflection. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, designed by Maya Lin, is one such example. While previous war memorials often depicted heroism in triumphant white arches, obelisks or figurative statues, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is a black gash in the ground that demands interaction of its visitors, who see themselves reflected in the black marble as they touch the victims’ names and contemplate the devastation of the war (e.g., Schwartz and Wagner-Pacifici 1993; Young 1993).

Like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, many sites and museums go further than simply telling the story of or representing the past; they often “explicitly propose to intervene in, and transform, the wider socio-political context in which they have emerged” (Andermann 2012). Most of the sites in this volume reflect this shift and invite interaction from their visitors, from groups holding rallies at Burundian monuments, to individuals writing messages on Kosovo’s NEWBORN monument and Mexico’s memorial and partaking in memorial ceremonies at the Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum in Vietnam. Their emphasis on interaction and storytelling, using experiential strategies, is intended to persuade visitors to embrace a particular ethical stance or learn a moral lesson. They work to act as counter-monuments that resist hegemonic narratives of the past, leaving space for individual interpretations and experiences, though they are of course constrained by the circumstances of their creation and location within their societies. And despite their being open to multiple interpretations, most counter-monuments are in fact “sites of persuasion”³ that work within the dominant memory and human rights discourses to encourage visitors to work toward a better present and future.

Sites of persuasion

While museums have always fulfilled some kind of persuasive role—from Tony Bennett’s exhibitionary complex that teaches visitors self-discipline (1991) to Carol Duncan’s art museums that teach visitors what it means to be a citizen (2012)—their persuasive function has changed in recent decades. Influenced to different degrees by the global imperative to confront the negative past within a human rights framework, many museums, exhibits and memory sites have been created to promote a set of values and norms that fit within this liberal, mainstream human rights discourse and to bestow legitimacy on the states and institutions that create them. These museums and sites work to make visitors experience past violence in a way intended to convince them to change the way that they view and act in the world.

It is useful to look back at the roots of the concept of persuasion in Aristotle’s writings on rhetoric. He identified the three key modes of persuasion: *ethos*, or the ethical appeal, which attempts to convince the audience of the credibility of

the author; *pathos*, the appeal to the audience's emotions; and *logos*, the appeal to logic or reason. We have already seen that museums as institutions have a well-established *ethos*; they are believed to be credible, authoritative sources of knowledge and information. Much of this credibility comes from their display of what Aristotle calls *logos*; that is, they display facts, evidence and history in a way that appeals to logic and reason. Thus, science museums work to convince their visitors of the validity of scientific research and knowledge, and art museums to convince their visitors of the value of a work of art. But it is their use of *pathos* that so clearly differentiates many of the museums and sites examined in this book. Many continue to rely on the *ethos* and *logos* of the museum form, but they combine this with an appeal to emotions—*pathos*—that is meant to persuade visitors to alter their ethical position in the world. And yet, visitors are “emancipated spectators” (Ranciere 2009) who come to these sites with their own backgrounds and experiences, meaning that the effect of the sites' *logos* and *pathos* is open to reinterpretation by visitors. While some may take up the intended moral message, other individuals and groups reshape the messages and meanings of the site for their own purposes.

One way many of these sites try to persuade using *logos* is through education. Pedagogical methods attempt to produce understandable narratives, and museum curators must construct exhibits and discourses that make complicated events decipherable and compelling. The “curatorial project,” with education at its core, is entangled in what Roger I. Simon describes as “the problem of the relation between remembrance and hope” (2014, 4); in other words, the difficulty of reconciling hope for a better future with remembrance of atrocities that defy the very humanity and empathy their remembrance is meant to inspire. This dilemma raises such questions as: how does learning about violent pasts foster civic engagement and human rights values? Does learning about the past in a museum or memorial contribute to empathy, and if so, how does this translate into everyday life for the individual and community? The contributions to this volume examine these kinds of questions in relation to the role of museums and other memory sites as spaces of remembrance, education and persuasion.

However important education is, in order to effect moral transformation cognitive learning is not enough. Though they can persuade through their *ethos* and *logos*, many of the sites analyzed here try to go further and reach not just the visitor's head through cognition, but also their heart through emotion, affect and *pathos*. They seek an emotional response and to get this they use experiential exhibits or interactive components that work to take the visitor back in time to have an encounter with the past and “put themselves in the shoes” of others in a way that will alter their attitudes and ethics. They tell stories with compelling plots in which there is a clear delineation between heroes (victims, survivors, rescuers) and villains (perpetrators, evil individuals). They rely on individual testimony to make visitors identify with the victims and survivors and they use multimedia effects like lighting, sound effects, architecture, photographs and videos to create a theatrical, performative experience for their visitors so that

they feel as if they themselves have in some way experienced the past that is displayed in the museum. Visitors are invited to sit in a slaveholder's plantation chair in a Danish exhibit or listen to racial epithets at a reconstructed lunch counter in Atlanta's Center for Civil and Human Rights in the effort to bring them a step closer to understanding the past.

Because of their interactive, experiential strategies and the kinds of history they tell, many of the museums and sites of memory analyzed in this volume leave a deep impression on visitors and raise important moral and ethical questions. But do these museums introduce visitors to new ideas that challenge popular and official discourses or do they instead simply reinforce preconceived ideas and attitudes? To what extent do they promote human rights and democratic ideals? It is the multidimensionality and tension between utopian goals and the practical and political constraints that museums as public institutions face that is an important part of this volume. While the museums seek to transform visitors to embrace particular ideals, it is highly unlikely that a visitor can be ethically transformed after just a few hours in an exhibit. Rather, as many of the cases in this volume demonstrate, the museums and sites provide visitors with a "comfortable horrible memory," reinforcing the visitors' own preconceived ideas as well as the values and norms of the existing power structures (Linenthal 1995).

Promises and perils of sites of persuasion

These case studies demonstrate how today's museums and other memory sites are influenced by international trends in museology and memorialization, to a significant degree reflecting the transnational human rights and memory discourses that have emerged. However, despite the influence of global trends and standards, these sites tend to be more shaped by their local and national histories and politics—sometimes blatantly, as in the case of Georgia's national museums or Mexico's memorial, and sometimes more subtly, as in Peru or Atlanta. In each of the cases examined, it is national and local political agendas, resources and power structures that ultimately shape the history or counter-history being told in the museum. Thus, the transnational becomes a screen, using universal norms and values, like democracy and human rights, to promote particular political agendas.

Since edited volumes are limited in the number of case studies that can be included, in this volume we have chosen to embrace that limitation by highlighting cases that are often not the most prominent, though they represent broad geographic diversity. For example, from the African continent the reader is introduced to lesser-known memory sites in Burundi instead of the much more commonly studied sites in Rwanda or South Africa; for Latin America, we have included institutions in Peru and Mexico rather than the well-known examples of memory sites in Argentina and Chile. And while recognizing the significant influence of Holocaust memorialization on memory sites, this volume examines sites commemorating a range of other violent histories, including

slavery, racial discrimination and ethnic cleansing, occupation and communist repression, and wartime massacres. By analyzing sites outside of the standard memory and museum studies repertoires, we are able to demonstrate how memory and human rights discourses travel the globe, influencing local commemorative practices. At the same time, these case studies reveal the impact of local and national politics, actors and contexts on the persuasive work and promise of these sites.

Most of the sites and museums in this book follow the “best practices” of memorials and museums today; they attempt, to varying degrees, to adhere to the new museology that has emerged in response to the memory boom and changes to history and historiography. They attempt to avoid hegemonic, one-sided national historical narratives and instead seek to focus on individual stories and experiences, moving history away from elite voices and putting it back into the hands of more individuals. To educate and inspire empathy, they seek to create comprehensible and engaging stories or interactive experiences that visitors can identify with. However, what this means is that they must strip much of the complicated, historical context from the past that they are representing. Museums and memorials can never tell the whole story, but the use of abstraction in memorials like those in Kosovo, Mexico and Burundi, and the fragmentation of memory and storytelling in museums like the 9/11 Museum or Peru’s Place of Memory, mean that little historical context is provided for visitors; they are necessarily spaces of selective memory and history. Stripping the past down to its drama and framing it in a way that encourages identification with those who have suffered is a curatorial strategy intended to inspire empathy in visitors that will alter their ethical stance in the world.

For at the heart of the intersection of human rights and the new trends in memorialization and museology is the conviction that prevention of future violence is possible. Despite humanity’s ongoing violent history, groups around the world hold firm to Santayana’s oft-repeated dictum that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Museums and other sites of persuasion are living monuments to how this prevention trope is being attempted. However, there is no evidence that these museums and sites actually contribute to the prevention of violence (e.g., Sodaro 2018). Even in the somewhat hopeful case of Burundi in this volume, Nimuraba and Irvin-Erickson argue that while the disparate and contested sites of persuasion throughout the country have helped to prevent mass ethnic conflict from recurring, they may also have contributed to the continuation of political violence. Thus, just as the gap between the ideal construct of human rights and their practical implementation persists, so too the ideal of sites of persuasion as preventive mechanisms clashes with the realpolitik of the societies in which they exist, where often structural violence and/or ongoing targeted state harms are carried out against individuals and marginalized groups. The hope of prevention and power of museums and sites of memory to serve as facilitators in this utopian preventive undertaking has become a reified part

of the global memory discourse, but the promise of prevention, like that of human rights, often rings hollow. Rather, the moral lessons embedded in the sites in this volume—good versus evil, the power of civic engagement and the liberal triumph of democracy and human rights—reflect how museums and memory sites serve as public platforms that largely support the status quo. To the extent that they do engage visitors to learn from the past and work for change, this change is carefully circumscribed within the parameters approved by existing political and economic structures. Meaningful moral and social transformation and effective resistance to hegemony and politics are in fact out of reach for most museums and sites of persuasion.

Outline of chapters

Amy Sodaro's chapter, "Selective memory," extends the theoretical framing of the volume by looking more closely at the relationship between human rights and the ethical dimensions of memory. Sodaro argues that memory of past violence is widely considered to be important both as a moral obligation to victims as well as a tool to prevent future violence. Framed within today's human rights discourse, memory as it is used in memorial museums focuses on the victims; while this is morally and politically the "right" thing to do, this "selective memory" is also problematic. Sodaro's examples of memorial museums in Rwanda, Chile and the US demonstrate that in avoiding confrontation with the perpetrators and their motivations, these sites of persuasion fail to convey the complexity of history and the causes of violence; instead they present to visitors the purity of victims stripped of political and historical context. But this apolitical and ahistorical approach in fact becomes highly political and the emphasis on the virtue of victims and the absence of perpetrators compromises their efforts as sites of persuasion and their promise of ethically transforming their visitors and promoting human rights.

Part II, "Writing national histories," looks at the ways in which national histories and memories are represented, challenged and shaped by sites of persuasion. The first essay, by Malkhaz Toria, examines the tensions within the National Museum of Georgia as it attempts to navigate recent shifts in museology. Museum curators are aware of contemporary museological trends that emphasize inclusion and resistance to hegemonic historical narratives and many want to represent a more complex, diverse version of Georgia's long history. However, because of Georgia's complicated, contested past, most notably the impact of over a half-century of Soviet rule, and current Georgian politics, Toria describes how the museum instead adheres to traditional museological approaches and the national historical narrative, mainly focusing on the ancient, primordial roots of Georgia and its teleological progress toward an independent Georgian nation.

The second essay in this section by Astrid Nonbo Andersen examines a challenge to national history and memory in Denmark's museums on the centennial of the transfer of the Danish West Indies (DWI) to the United States in 1917. Until 2017 the history of slavery and colonialism was rarely represented in

Denmark's museums and largely absent from Danish historical memory. The centennial began to change this as a number of museums across the country created exhibits to educate about colonization and slavery in the DWI and its impact. Drawing upon extensive interviews with curators, Andersen describes the careful consideration put into developing these exhibits for an audience that is generally uninformed about Denmark's participation in slavery and colonization, and runs counter to their knowledge of Danish history and identity. In a country where visitors expect little *pathos* in museum exhibits—what Andersen describes as a propensity to react with “coolness” or emotional distance to historical exhibitions—these special exhibits largely eschew the kinds of experiential and affective exhibits described in many other museums and sites in this volume. Nevertheless, the Danish exhibits challenge the dominant historiography and demonstrate an effort to both uncover Denmark's racial and colonial history and, in some cases at least, to make the connection to ongoing repercussions of slavery, colonialism and racial oppression.

The third essay in this section by Alissa Boguslaw focuses on a different type of site of persuasion: the large, public NEWBORN monument in Pristina that was created to celebrate Kosovo's independence in 2008. The monument was designed to be a dynamic public space: visitors are invited to write on it and since it was unveiled it has been frequently repainted to reflect politically and socially relevant themes. Boguslaw describes how NEWBORN has become an important site of persuasion as Kosovo seeks recognition as a nation and entry into the European Union; at the same time, it is a site where Kosovans negotiate their recent violent past. With each new coat of paint and inscription, the monument's meaning changes to reflect shifting memories and narratives as Kosovo writes its national history in the context of a fluctuating geopolitical landscape.

Part III, “Displaying difficult pasts,” describes three sites in the US, Vietnam and Peru where visitors learn about and experience simulations of past violence. In “Inspiration lives here” Joyce Apsel focuses on the permanent exhibit, *Rolls Down Like Water*, in Atlanta's National Center for Civil and Human Rights (CCHR). Apsel analyzes the exhibit's recurring themes of struggle, sacrifice and martyrdom and its dramatic staging and experiential displays providing visitors with a “visceral experience” of the civil rights struggle during the 1950s and 1960s in the US South. As a site of persuasion, the exhibit attempts to combine the *logos* of history with the *pathos* of individual storytelling in order to promote empathy and pass on the history and memories of the civil rights struggle to inspire future generations and diverse audiences “to do the right thing.” However, the exhibit largely reinforces the mainstream civil rights narrative, particularly in the amount of space dedicated to presenting Martin Luther King, Jr. as an iconic figure. It is a story framed through the politics of selective memory, presented as integral to the American historical narrative of progress and hope, largely avoiding confrontation with the setbacks and challenges that are part of the larger, ongoing struggle for justice and equality.

Roy Tamashiro's essay on the Son Mĩ Memorial and Museum examines how the Mĩ Lai Massacre is remembered and represented at the massacre site in Vietnam, which is framed as a site that bears witness in order to promote reconciliation and peace. The story of Mĩ Lai is narrated in a small museum, surrounded by memorial gardens, and the site is animated by tours given by survivors of the massacre and annual memorial ceremonies. Tamashiro traces the origins and development of the museum and memorial, describing how it invites contemplation in the visitor, through exhibitionary strategies like bullet-riddled trees and minimalist captioning of exhibit photos. Tamashiro uses Giorgio Agamben's concept of bearing witness to the inhuman to discuss how the Son Mĩ Memorial and Museum seeks to use the US soldiers' brutal killings of Vietnamese civilians to persuade visitors to adopt their own ethical stance vis-à-vis this massacre and those of other atrocities. To demonstrate the emotional challenges of trying to face such painful history and move toward reconciliation, Tamashiro draws upon compelling testimonies and accounts from survivors and visitors, including US veterans who visit the site seeking to confront a painful history that is largely ignored in the US.

The final piece in this section, by Joseph P. Feldman, focuses on memory as a tool of persuasion in Peru's Place of Memory, Tolerance, and Social Inclusion. In analyzing three critical moments in the creation of the Place of Memory, Feldman examines how its creators sought to come to terms with the complexity of Peru's civil war. To avoid a univocal, hegemonic narrative of a past that delineated between specific perpetrators and victims, the museum creators sought to instead present a diversity of perspectives, emphasizing plurality and inclusion. Ultimately, the decision was to focus on the fragmentation and diversity of memory instead of an "objective" chronological history promoting the museum's message of human rights and democracy. Of course, as this and other museums in this volume demonstrate, a potential danger of decontextualizing the past in this way is facilitating and heightening the manipulation of history for political ends.

The final section, "Resistance through memory," explores how memorial sites and artistic interventions in Mexico and Burundi attempt to resist hegemonic, state depictions and reclaim the past through multivocal interpretations and civil initiatives. The first essay by Benjamin Nienass and Alexandra Délano Alonso describes the contested, politicized history of the Memorial to the Victims of Violence, constructed by the government of President Calderón in Mexico City in 2012 to recognize the victims of the "War on Drugs." The authors examine how the site's claim to be one that is inclusive and participatory has been a façade from its beginning. Situated in an affluent neighborhood next to a military camp, the memorial is not easily accessible and has been largely shunned by survivors' families and victims' associations as a political gesture devoid of meaning. However, though the site's claim to be participatory is largely false, in responding to the creation of the memorial, victims' and social justice groups have used the site to challenge the state's version of the violent

war on drugs. Nienass and Délano Alonso describe one particularly potent intervention that, in transforming the memorial into a counter-monument, resists the dominant state narrative and instead productively injects agonistic memory into Mexico's past and present violence and political discourse.

In the final essay, Sixte Vigny Nimuraba and Douglas Irvin-Erickson analyze the varied and often conflicting narratives of ethnic and political conflict in a range of Burundian sites of persuasion. In contrast to the widely held view that a single, agreed-upon version of historical violence will help a nation come to terms with the past and avoid future conflict, the authors argue that Burundi's lack of a hegemonic, official narrative (in contrast to the state hegemonic narrative and memorials in neighboring Rwanda, for example) has allowed different viewpoints and sites to emerge that depict a range of actors carrying out past violence. The authors describe a series of sites, linking them to different interpretations of Hutu and Tutsi as victims and perpetrators, and perceived reciprocal cycles of violence, demonstrating that no singular narrative has come to dominate the national discourse. These conflicted, contentious sites and narratives allow for a diversity of memories among different groups to be expressed rather than allowing the state to effectively create totalizing ethnic identities that become officially reified categories of good and evil or victims and perpetrators.

Together these case studies suggest that sites of persuasion are generally limited in their persuasive and transformative powers, further undermining what are already utopian goals of contributing to the prevention of future violence and the construction of democratic culture and rights. However, this raises the question of what exactly it is that these sites of persuasion do. It is beyond the scope of this volume to thoroughly evaluate how visitors react to these sites and the ongoing impact that they might have. But we can see that, despite their limitations, sites of persuasion are not just political tools or fruitless endeavors but often do perform various important roles in their communities. At the broadest level, museums and other sites of persuasion act as a form of acknowledgment of suffering or victimization; though the victims and history may be selective, as Sodaro's essay reminds us, these sites are often important or even essential forms of recognition.

In the context of nations like Denmark, where the colonial past was rarely acknowledged, or the US, where knowledge of the Civil Rights Movement varies tremendously from extremely shallow to deep and personal, sites of persuasion can help to bring that history closer to the present, linking to current injustices by opening space for understanding of and reckoning with a past that may seem distant. In the context of places like Mexico and Burundi where the violence is ongoing or simmering just beneath the surface and where the line between perpetrators and victims is often blurred, the sites examined in this volume hold the potential to provide a space for confronting past and present violence—serving either as a kind of pressure valve for ethnic tensions, as in the case of Burundi, or a public space for contesting versions of the past, as in Mexico. In Peru and Vietnam, sites of persuasion are part of efforts to work

toward integration and reconciliation of difficult histories for diverse communities; Peru's museum serves as an acknowledgment of the many different versions of the past, and Vietnam's Mỹ Lai memorial works to promote peace and reconciliation by enabling visitors to bear witness to the massacre. In some cases, such as Georgia and Kosovo, both relatively "new" nations, the sites of persuasion fulfill the more traditional functions of nation-building and contributing to the creation of national identity, although in the case of Kosovo, the NEWBORN monument opens up space for debate about that identity.

All of these sites perform particular functions vis-à-vis past, present and future within their communities and nations, though they often do not play the persuasive and preventive role that they purport to. In each case, the existence of a site is a form of resistance to denial or forgetting the past, part of a globalized process of uncovering buried histories. But every form of remembering differs and is partial; something is forgotten and the selective memory of these sites is inevitably shaped by politics. While all of these sites have particular missions and goals built into them, it is essential to remember that no one can control how they will be used and interpreted by those who visit them. Visitors come to sites of persuasion with their own agency, experiences and presumptions, and groups use these sites as physical spaces at which to gather and rally for various causes. Hence, visitors play a constitutive role in the process of memory, shaping interpretations of the past even while sites of persuasion attempt to shape their understandings and feelings. Accordingly, sites of persuasion are dynamic and their meanings change over time; the Burundi and Kosovo monuments remind us of how changing political circumstances can alter the meanings of memorials. Sites of memory are powerful political tools, but once they are constructed, they are open to being interpreted and co-opted for political purposes. Thus, while sites of persuasion may manipulate or belie liberal ideals like democracy and human rights that have become a rhetorical foundation of memory sites today, they have the potential to serve as powerful spaces of persuasion and contestation.

Notes

- 1 Several widely cited surveys of US museum visitors found that for the majority of those surveyed, museums were considered to be one of the most trustworthy sources of historical information, even more so than books or relatives (AMS 2001; Reach Advisors 2008). More recently, even as trust has diminished among the US public in many spheres of society like politics and media, another Reach Advisors poll of 7,000 participants found that museums ranked 6.4 on a scale of 1–10 for trustworthiness, above NPR and Wikipedia (Reach Advisors 2015).
- 2 The term "sites of conscience" has become popularized by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, which was established in 1999 and presently has 250 members in 65 countries, attesting to the ongoing memory boom. The ISC website (www.siteofconscience.org/en/home) describes itself as "the only global network of historic sites, museums and memory initiatives that connect past struggles to today's movements for human rights. We turn memory into action."

- 3 Howard Morphy used this term in a 2006 essay, "Sites of Persuasion: Yingapungapu at the National Museum of Australia," focused on the First Australians Gallery in the National Museum of Australia. He argues that museums are "sites of persuasion that people attempt to use to get their version of history and their regime of value acknowledged and disseminated to wider audiences" (472). We are using the concept somewhat more narrowly here to focus on the moral or ethical messages of museums and other memory sites that work to promote democratic ideals and human rights.

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1

SELECTIVE MEMORY

Memorial museums, human rights, and the politics of victimhood

Amy Sodaro

As the Introduction to this book reminds us, many museums today have moved beyond their historical function to collect and interpret and instead work to “persuade visitors to change their thinking and behavior,” as well as “promote liberal ideals such as human rights, democracy, peace and reconciliation” (p. 3). This is particularly true for memorial museums, a relatively new genre of museum created to remember past violence, genocide, or other atrocities by societies seeking to translate suffering into meaningful historical understanding and memory that will contribute to the prevention of future violence and the promotion of human rights (Sodaro 2018; Williams 2007). Memorial museums draw upon both memory and history, so that they do not just remember victims but also educate visitors in a way that imparts knowledge and comprehension about the causes and consequences of violence, with the goal of morally transforming them to embrace an ethic of “never again.”

As sites of memory, memorial museums focus their narratives and exhibitions on victims, displaying photographs and names, presenting the testimony of survivors, and incorporating memorials to the victims into their exhibits. The result is that victims are often presented as homogeneous and one-dimensional “pure victims” stripped of context and equated with virtue in the face of violence. But as sites of history, meant to provide historical context, memorial museums also need to confront the role of perpetrators and the complex causes and processes that contributed to the violence being remembered. This creates a significant tension in memorial museums; their focus on victims often helps to mask their deeper political motivations and can preclude serious engagement with the roots of violence and those who perpetrate it. In constructing a Manichean divide between pure, good victims and evil perpetrators, memorial museums overlook the complexity and dynamic nature of violence and ignore the “gray zone” between victim and perpetrator. Of course, all museums are limited in the

history they are able to tell; they are, after all, sites of interpretation and representation and never able to convey the full complexity of history. At the same time, they are considered to be accurate and reliable sources for historical understanding, making them particularly powerful moral messengers. As sites of persuasion, memorial museums' focus on victims, often at the expense of historical contextualization, compromises their authority and undermines efforts to promote ideals of human rights and democracy.

In this essay I trace memorial museums' emphasis on victims to a set of ethical dimensions and demands of memory that reflect the link between memory and human rights. Three necessarily very brief examples of how victims and perpetrators are represented in memorial museums in Rwanda, Chile, and the US illustrate the "selective memory" on display in these museums. These case studies allow me to draw some conclusions about the role of memory today; while it is purportedly used to promote human rights and peace, it is more often a powerful and persuasive political tool wielded by the regimes that create memorial museums to support their political agendas.

The ethics of remembrance

As the museums and sites in this volume suggest, at the heart of today's memory boom are efforts to come to terms with violence, conflict, and human rights abuses. Thus, much contemporary memory work takes the shape of apologies, reparations, truth commissions, memorials, museums, and other sites of persuasion aimed at righting past wrongs and promoting democratic culture and human rights in the present and future. It is today "taken for granted that states and societies need to remember political tragedies in order to heal" (Baer and Sznajder 2016, 181). While prosecutions or reparations may be viewed as among the most just and efficacious ways of righting past wrongs, they are also expensive, complicated, and often impossible because of practical reasons. Thus symbolic reparations like apologies, memorials, museums, and other memory projects are frequently used to demonstrate that a collective is confronting its difficult past. Of course, symbolic reparations are just that—symbolic—and are often compensatory mechanisms used by people and governments that are unable to more fully address the past.

The centrality of memory focused on past human rights abuses reflects the fact that today political legitimacy is often tied to the promotion of human rights—though, as noted in the Introduction to this volume, this may be changing. As Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder argue, in today's world "Memory politics of human rights has become a new form of political rationality and a prerequisite for state legitimacy" (2010, 3). Through legal and extra-legal testimony and other forms of individual and collective memory, human rights violations have been brought to light and, at least in some cases, punished and dealt with. At the same time, the human rights discourse has provided an international, cosmopolitan framework within which particular memories are

employed and articulated, often becoming a basis for collective identity and international legitimacy. Levy argues that “The accretion of political, cultural, and institutional capital through the human rights regime has resulted in a substantial reconfiguration of state sovereignty, an extension of political responsibilities and new forms of cosmopolitan solidarity” (2015, 216). Thus, the dominant forms of collective memory today focus on past human rights abuses within a global human rights discourse, and increasingly manifest in cosmopolitanized “modes of collective memory” like memorial museums (Levy and Sznajder 2010, 12).

There are two parallel, fundamental assumptions at the heart of this connection between memory and human rights that are well illustrated using the moral philosophy of Jeffrey Blustein and reflected in sites of persuasion like memorial museums. The first is what Blustein (2008, 2015) refers to as the “deontological ethic of memory”; that is, the idea that acknowledging human rights abuses and recognizing victims through memory is morally the correct and necessary response to violence, regardless of the outcome or utility of that memory. This ethic suggests that there is a duty to remember and that memory is owed to those who have suffered as a form of acknowledgment of their victimization. Memory is thus an end in itself and does not need to be employed for some larger goal like preventing violence or pursuing justice. Indeed, as we have seen around the globe, memory has become a central claim for recognition by silenced or oppressed groups and is increasingly considered to be a right for those who have suffered and a moral obligation on the part of those who have not. Even when memory is not connected to concrete action or change, memory in itself is considered a necessary, valued response to victimization. Thus, according to this deontological ethic, memory and the acknowledgment it entails are the correct and expected moral response to human rights abuses and should be an intrinsic part of any framework for addressing them. The global nature of this imperative to remember and recognize victims has contributed to the construction of “the traumatized individual [victim ... as] a universal category that cuts across all specific historical conflicts and epochs” (Baer and Sznajder 2016, 183).

The other assumption we can detect behind this link between memory and human rights goes further and is what Blustein (2008, 2015) refers to as the “utilitarian” function of memory. The memory of past human rights abuses is considered to have a practical function, as one of the surest inoculations against future abuses. Memory of violence thus provides the framework and standards for our understanding and promotion of human rights: remembering when those rights have been abused or denied is believed to be the key to preventing future abuse or denial. Baer and Sznajder refer to the “pervasive ‘Never again’ metanarrative, which projects criminal pasts unto the future as an avoidance imperative ... [but which] at the same time renders these pasts insurmountable, haunting, and always present” (2016, 181–182). The very existence of memorial museums reflects this “never again metanarrative” and demonstrates the

considerable trust placed in the memory of violence as the foundation of a more peaceful and just present and future, but also ensures that these pasts remain “haunting and always present.” Despite the fact that mass violence has recurred “ever again” rather than “never again,” this trope persists, fostering the belief that remembering is the key to prevention.

Thus, memory and human rights are deeply interconnected in our contemporary world, and are further linked to democratic culture and democracy as the political system *par excellence*. As both the deontological and utilitarian functions of memory suggest, memory in the form of “acknowledging past crimes is an essential element in the process of a country’s transition to democracy” (Misztal 2005, 1323). As a connection between past, present, and future, memory is a foundation for individual and collective responsibility, both of which “represent the cornerstone[s] upon which civic culture is built” (Leccardi 2016, 110). An essential part of transitioning from conflict to peace and democracy is an acknowledgment of responsibility for past abuses through the lens of historical memory. Thus we see states zealously confronting their negative pasts within a human rights discourse in order to be viewed as legitimate, democratic international players, though the very same states might be carrying out contemporary abuses.

Memorial museums as sites of persuasion

Memorial museums and other sites of persuasion emerge from this memory boom and hew to these ethical and normative expectations of memory. The memorial museum form comes out of efforts to remember the Holocaust at the sites of atrocities, where the dual impulse was to commemorate the victims and to preserve the evidence of what had happened (Sodaro 2018). Over the decades, and around the world, memorial museums have been created to meet these demands of memory and history, commemoration and preservation. The ultimate goal of memorial museums is to use the affective and experiential power of memory—its *pathos*—combined with history and education—*logos*—in a way that encourages visitors to identify with the victims and come away deeply emotionally moved with a new, personal understanding of the past and responsibility in the present. In this way they are sites of persuasion that work to morally transform visitors to embrace an ethic of never again.

Memorial museums serve as a form of symbolic reparation and acknowledgment of victims and survivors. Their emphasis is on remembering the victims as the correct ethical response to their victimization, and telling their stories as a means of conveying their moral messages. Because of this focus on victims, there is concern that to give too much space to perpetrators would in some way condone their actions or diminish the dignity, humanity, and memory of the victims that memorial museums seek to restore. As the examples below show, memorial museums often avoid the inclusion of perpetrators in the construction of their historical narratives and memory of the past. When perpetrators are

represented it tends to be limited and superficial, with a focus on individuals, adhering to the “great man” theory of history and fulfilling the desire of many of us to attribute violence and human rights abuses to the actions of a few “bad apples.” Victims and survivors tell the story since it is their memories that conform to the ideals of human rights, democratic culture, and the prevention of future violence that are foundational to today’s memory culture. And just as victims are essentialized as innocent, virtuous, and homogeneous in their purity, perpetrators—where they are present—are also often essentialized as uniquely evil individuals who are stripped of historical contextualization and complexity. As the categories of victim and perpetrator are reified and simplified in memorial museums, lost are the ambiguities between and within these categories, which would complicate the simple morality tale these museums tell.

However, because memorial museums rely on education as essential to the ethical transformation of visitors, avoiding or simplifying confrontation with perpetrators often compromises their goals of generating historical understanding that can contribute to peace and democracy. It is difficult to learn from the past without understanding its complexities, which are obscured when victims are collapsed into one homogeneous “victim” category and perpetrators are absent or similarly essentialized. In the rush to commemorate the violent, traumatic past in a way that adheres to contemporary ethics of memory, memorial museums risk the “museification of memory,” in which “events or people remembered are petrified in a single and separate time-space that does not connect past and present,” resulting in a “totalizing memory politics that assert absolutized identities,” such as victim or perpetrator (Leccardi 2016, 116–117). In removing the historical and political context of mass violence, memorial museums lose their persuasive powers, instead reifying a one-sided and often highly political codification of history. In each of the three examples that follow, memory and history are decontextualized in a way that reminds us that “public reconstructions of the past according to victim–perpetrator/good–evil absolutes often fail to take account of the rather more blurred dynamics behind oppressive state rule and acts of atrocity” (Dunnage 2010, 91). Instead, the attempt to avoid politicizing the past by focusing on remembering its victims shapes a highly politicized memory that is often incompatible with the complicated reality of working toward a realistic understanding of the nature of human rights, democracy, and peace.

Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre, Rwanda

The Kigali Centre opened in 2004, on the 10th anniversary of the genocide. At the request of the Rwandan government, the museum was created by the Aegis Trust, a British anti-genocide organization that grew out of the UK’s Beth Shalom Holocaust Memorial Centre when its founders, James and Stephen Smith,¹ became frustrated by the emptiness of the mantra “never again.” Witnessing genocide in Bosnia and Rwanda, the brothers formed the Aegis Trust in an effort to make a more significant connection between

Holocaust remembrance and subsequent genocides and atrocities by working toward genocide prevention. Their work in Africa on the Cape Town Holocaust Museum led them to Rwanda, where the UK Holocaust Centre was deemed a good model for an official, national Rwandan memorial. It was not just its modest size and intimate experience that Rwandan officials were attracted to, but they also understood the value—political, economic, and ethical—of connecting the Rwandan genocide to Holocaust remembrance. Thus, inspired by Holocaust memorialization, the Kigali Centre is very typical of a Western memorial museum, following many of the common tropes and working as a site of persuasion for its visitors. It is also one of the most popular tourist destinations in Rwanda and the first stop on any international visitor's itinerary.

On the grounds of the Kigali Centre are a museum with a permanent exhibit, memorial gardens, a Rwandan genocide archive, and mass graves holding the remains of approximately 250,000 people killed in and around Kigali during the genocide. A visit to the museum's permanent exhibit is introduced by a film that follows several genocide survivors as they recount their horrific experiences and discuss the importance of the museum as a form of recognition and place of peace and memory for them. This, coupled with the mass graves just outside, which are often adorned with large bouquets of flowers, clearly sets up the museum and the center as a memorial to the victims and a place of remembrance for survivors. And yet, the knowledge that the genocide occurred relatively recently and that as many as several hundred thousand Rwandan Hutu carried out the mass killings is a nagging reminder that genocide remembrance is not solely the domain of the victims and survivors.

While the permanent exhibit opens with an exhibit on other 20th-century genocides, which contextualizes the museum as a site of persuasion within global commemorative trends, the centerpiece of the museum is an exhibit on the Rwandan genocide, which is followed by a set of somber memorial rooms. The Rwandan genocide exhibit, combining *logos* and *pathos*, uses a range of photographs, videos, documents, information panels, and recordings of survivor testimony to tell the story of the terrible 100 days when hundreds of thousands of Tutsi and moderate Hutu were murdered, often by neighbors or acquaintances. To give the genocide context, the exhibit begins with the peaceful coexistence of Tutsi and Hutu before colonization by Germany and then Belgium, then moves through a 20th century in which ethnic differences hardened. Spurts of violence marked and then followed Rwanda's independence in 1962 as the ethnic categories so rigidly imposed by colonial powers drove deeper and deeper wedges into Rwandan society, until these differences erupted in the 1994 genocide. Images, videos, artifacts like machetes and other weapons, and heart-wrenching, emotional survivor testimony take the visitor through the genocide itself, emphasizing just how brutal and effective the extermination program was. The exhibit ends with a description of how individual survivors and the nation have attempted to piece themselves back together again and come to terms with such a terrible, violent past.

From here the visitor moves into the most affective parts of the museum, which are the memorials to the victims, where the museum's use of *pathos* is on full display. First, there is a darkened room of photographs. They are small, color photos, some candid and some posed, everyday snapshots that take on significance as the visitor realizes that they are the victims. They are hung loosely to line the walls, and are intended to be removed as a small memento for a survivor missing a loved one. The next memorial room is filled with clothing and personal artifacts. Western sweatshirts and jeans are hung next to traditional Rwandan garments, as if drying on a clothesline, but traces of dirt and blood belie such innocence. In display cases eyeglasses and wallets look strikingly like the visitor's own and again she is brutally reminded of the individual, human cost of genocide. But these rooms are simply preparation for the next two: the third memorial room is filled with skulls and bones, lined up and artfully lit in display cases. Bones and bodies are a common trope in Rwandan genocide remembrance, but they are usually piled at the sites where genocidal massacres occurred, not displayed like artifacts in a museum. It is evocative and deeply affective. The three rooms are dark and haunting and in each the victims' names are read out by a solemn, disembodied voice. The names go on and on, reminding the visitor of the magnitude of the destruction, while the individual photos, possessions, and bones remind the visitor of the individual human lives lost. Finally, there is a memorial to the children, where large photographs of children, some of them unbearably young, are accompanied by information plaques with the kind of personal information that might be collected in an elementary school yearbook: favorite food, favorite sport, best friend. But these plaques end with a short description of how the child was killed ("hacked to death by a machete," for example).

From the opening film, throughout the historical exhibit, and in the deeply affective memorial rooms, the museum's emphasis is clearly on the victims. They are everywhere and where their voices and memories are no longer accessible, survivors tell the story and carry their memory. This is to be expected, of course, as the center is both museum and memorial to the victims. Yet, throughout the exhibition, the perpetrators are almost nonexistent and there is strikingly little blame for the genocide ascribed to anyone. The roles of institutions, like the international community, media, and church in allowing the genocide, are minimized, and so are the individuals and groups that carried it out. The exhibition describes the *Interahamwe*, Hutu militias that were largely responsible for carrying out the genocide, and it names some of the most notorious individual leaders, such as Colonel Theoneste Bagasora, the head of the army, and the directors of Radio Mille Collines, which incited the genocide with hateful anti-Tutsi propaganda, suggesting that the genocide was the work of a few powerful, evil individuals. But, on the whole, there is a noticeable lack of blame ascribed to the Hutu—even extremists—or any other Rwandans. Rather, the exhibit depicts a collective victimization of a Rwandan people who were torn apart by colonial forces.

Though surprising in the contemporary context, where politics have been thoroughly Tutsified behind a screen of Rwandan unity,² this omission was deliberate. In the effort to ensure that the museum does not threaten the fragile peace and tightly enforced, though tenuous, unity among the Rwandan population, the agency behind the genocide was taken out of the hands of human perpetrators and instead, in the narrative of the museum, “genocide ideology” is to blame. On first glance, this appears to be a conciliatory gesture by the Tutsi-led government of Paul Kagame. It could be interpreted as an effort to depoliticize and “de-ethnicize” the past in order to put it behind Rwanda and move into the future, which the nation is fervently working to do. However, as is evident today, the concept of genocide ideology can be very easily manipulated for political ends. In 2008 Rwanda passed a law criminalizing “genocidal ideology,” but the description is vague enough that it can be easily manipulated by the government to the point where virtually any questioning of Kagame’s policies and government’s actions can be deemed genocide ideology. Kagame often gets rid of his enemies and detractors by accusing them of genocide ideology; there is virtually no opposition in Rwanda because the leaders of such parties have been imprisoned, exiled, or killed (Human Rights Watch 2009).³ Both in and outside the museum, in removing human agency and instead blaming genocide on an abstract and malleable “ideology,” anyone who says the wrong thing could potentially be deemed a *genocidaire*. Thus, in presenting the past in a way that appears to be devoid of the politics of ethnic identity and division, focusing instead on the memory of the genocide victims, the Kigali Centre opens the potential for manipulation of the past and its memory to serve the political agenda of an increasingly dictatorial Kagame regime.

Museum of Memory and Human Rights, Santiago, Chile

On the other side of the globe, six years later, the Museum of Memory and Human Rights (MMHR) opened in Santiago, Chile. Also greatly influenced by Holocaust memorialization, this museum was created by President Michele Bachelet to remember and educate about the human rights abuses of the brutal military dictatorship of 1973–1990. Bachelet was herself tortured by the junta and her father was killed, so she had a special stake in the museum which exists because of her political will. It is meant to be a form of symbolic reparation for victims as well as a space of learning to ensure that never again will such human rights abuses occur:

a museum where all Chileans could come together in the truth and in recognition of their history, as a new way to pass on these painful events to the future [...] aiding in the expression of values regarding human dignity and democracy.

(Sepulveda 2011, 16)

And yet, because Chile is still politically polarized, the creators of the MMHR chose to dramatically decontextualize Chile's recent history and focus solely on human rights abuses, which opens it up to the critique that it only tells a "partial" truth and history.

Though Chile has over 200 memorials to the victims of the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, many of them small, local sites, a museum was long desired to house the huge collection of documentary material collected by Chilean human rights groups and declared part of Memory of the World by UNESCO. Under President Ricardo Lagos, plans were underway for a Casa de La Memoria that was conceived and would be run by the human rights NGOs whose collections were to be displayed. When Bachelet was elected president in 2006, she took control of the project from the NGOs, and the MMHR was born as an official, state memory project. As such, the museum was developed relatively quickly—almost too quickly, some would say, as Bachelet rushed to complete it before leaving office in 2010⁴—considering that it had languished for almost two decades before Bachelet took it over (Hite and Collins 2009). But because the museum was an official, state project, its creators also had to carefully navigate Chile's complex contemporary politics. The museum does this by telling a narrow version of the recent history of Chile, from Pinochet's successful coup of 1973 until the 1988 plebiscite that removed him from power.

The permanent exhibit uses the impressive collection of film, photographs, documents, testimony, and other media to tell the story of the dictatorship, beginning at 6am on September 11, 1973, when the military coup d'état began. The beginning of the permanent exhibit centers on powerful documentary footage that shows the military attack on the presidential palace, La Moneda, which ousted the democratically elected Salvador Allende, who took his own life during the attacks. If the visitor can tear herself away from the arresting film, other documentation of the coup in newspapers, individual testimony, and radio reports—particularly moving is Allende's last address to the nation—is displayed, making the drama and terror of the day even more palpable. By the end of this section, so much has happened between 6am and 6pm, when the military curfew went into effect, it is difficult to remember that this story had no historical or political context and simply began with violent destruction.

Some context begins to be filled in as the exhibit moves through the next two decades. A section on the military junta's transformation of Chile's institutions describes the breakdown of democracy and the imposition of military rule. Videos, documents, and news clippings show the oppressive new policies instituted by the junta, with a focus on the victims—exiled Chileans, lists of prisoners, and a section on the use of the National Stadium as a detention and torture center. A section on international condemnation reminds visitors that there was both opposition to (such as exiled Chileans and various international human rights movements) and support for (such as the US-backed Operation Condor) the military dictatorship overseas, and gives way to a powerful set of rooms on their brutal torture tactics; the *logos* of the

historical exhibit shifts to *pathos*. A darkened room shows a montage of heart-wrenching testimony by those who were tortured. Beneath the testimonials is a re-creation of a favorite torture implement: the *parilla*, or grill—a bare bed frame hooked up to an electrical current. A black map of Chile with torture centers lit up in red demonstrates that the repression spanned the length of the country, pervasive and powerful. This section is followed by an equally moving one on the pain of the children, describing some of the youngest victims and those children who were left without mothers and fathers. Upstairs, the permanent exhibit continues with a more hopeful portrayal of resistance to the regime. A large section on Chile's internal resistance, led by churches and Chilean victims' and human rights organizations, demonstrates that the powerful struggle to resist the military dictatorship began right from the start. The exhibit goes on to show how this nascent movement coalesced throughout the 1980s, finally culminating with the triumph of the "NO" vote in the 1988 plebiscite removing Pinochet from office.

Inserted in these displays on resistance is the "heart of the exhibit": a glass box that is suspended over the first floor of the exhibit below. The box is lined with plexiglass "candles" meant to evoke the *velatonas*, or candlelit vigils held throughout Pinochet's dictatorship by those who had lost loved ones. It faces the massive outer wall of the museum, which is covered in photographs of the victims. This strikingly beautiful "Area of Absence and Remembrance" is the memorial to the victims. It is a space of quiet memory and contemplation, with benches for visitors to lose themselves in the somber beauty of the room and the overwhelming wall of photographs. But it is also a space of information; visitors can look up individuals in a database of victims and learn some details about them based on Chile's two truth commissions' reports. In this way, the victims are not simply a nameless mass, but can be differentiated and their individual stories told.

Like the Kigali Centre, however, throughout the MMHR exhibit the perpetrators are largely absent. There are photographs of Pinochet and his henchmen in the section on the junta's takeover of Chile's institutions. Their actions are present in the vicious attack on La Moneda and the painful memories recounted by survivors, but the focus throughout the exhibition is very much on the victims. One comes away realizing that she has learned little about the forces behind the human rights abuses depicted. For example, other than Pinochet, only the most dedicated and attentive visitor would be able to identify any other members of the military leadership and their motives are for the most part obscured by their methods, such as the terrible torture tactics that are described. The museum was created as a form of reparation for the victims, so it makes perfect sense that they are the focus; and yet, it feels that critical historical information is missing from the museum, despite its richness in detail and documentation.

This points to the larger criticism of the museum, which is the striking lack of context for events leading up to and following the coup d'état. For a museum that purports to "nurture critical reflection that goes beyond militant

reports and court records,” the scope of its narrative is strikingly narrow. As mentioned, the exhibit begins at 6am on September 11, 1973, with no context for the democratic election or violent removal of Allende, and ends with the 1988 plebiscite, providing scant information about Chile’s struggle with the transitional justice process.⁵ The emphasis is instead on the human rights abuses under the military regime and resistance to such abuses. This was a politically expedient decision. There are still those in Chilean society who support Pinochet’s rule and policies, and to avoid deepening political tensions, the museum’s creators chose to focus on human rights violations; after all, who—from the political right, left, or center—could argue that the violation of human rights is acceptable?

However, the MMHR’s emphasis on the victims leads to a one-sided story of the past that hinders deeper historical understanding of the events. As the director of the museum, Ricardo Brodsky, has acknowledged, the museum

includes only one vision of the period, that of the victims. This would mean that the narration is not as objective as it should be and, most of all, it would not allow us to know why the political crisis of 1973 took place.

(qtd. in Opatow 2015, 239)

This narrow context may further compromise its efforts to be a form of symbolic reparation. As Lorena Pizarro, former head of the Group of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared, argues, they are opposed to

that kind of memory that ultimately turns into an anti-memory, as it seeks to establish shared responsibilities and puts the accent on forgiveness and reconciliation. What we need to do is tell the truth about what happened during the dictatorship, how the coup d’état came about.

(qtd. in Opatow 2015, 238)

Without telling who the perpetrators were, what motivated them, and the historical, social, and political context that enabled their rise to power, the memory in the museum is very much decontextualized. Instead, the museum tells “a victim-centered narrative that lacks comprehensiveness or complexity by erasing the political history of the conflict and establishing a sharp distinction between the guilty perpetrators and passive, innocent, and non-political victims” (Baer and Sznajder 2016, 185). However, it is difficult to imagine how a strong democracy can be built upon a “partial memory” that does not more fully confront the perpetrators within a historical context. Without an understanding of those behind the human rights abuses the museum decries, its goal of preventing future abuses seems hollow.

National September 11 Memorial Museum, New York, USA

My final example is the National September 11 Memorial Museum, which opened in 2014 as a museum seeking to “explore the implications of 9/11,

documenting the impact of those events and exploring 9/11's continuing significance" (9/11 Memorial, "About the Museum"). This massive museum is located below the 9/11 Memorial, which consists of two huge fountains in the footprints of the twin towers with water cascading down their sides and which are lined with the names of the almost 3,000 individuals killed on September 11, 2001 and the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center (WTC). In the "architectural heart" of Ground Zero, the museum is intended to be both a memorial to the victims and a historical recounting of the attacks of 9/11. The permanent exhibit is divided accordingly into two exhibitionary spaces in the footprints of the towers. *In Memoriam* is the museum's memorial, and complements the one outside, filling in the names with photographs, artifacts, and a database of information. The walls of the room are lined with photos of the victims, much like the photos in the Kigali Centre and the MMHR, and display cases show objects that belonged to them: glasses and wallets, ID cards and rings, ear muffs and stuffed animals—reminders that the perpetrators did not discriminate in their murderous actions. In the center of the memorial is a darkened room where victim names are read, photos are projected, and memories are recalled by those who loved them. While the names on the memorial pools or the photos lining *In Memoriam*'s walls threaten to blur the victims into one homogeneous "Victim," this inner chamber seeks to differentiate the individuals who died on that day and in the 1993 attack.

As moving as *In Memoriam* is, the historical exhibit is the heart of the museum experience. Most of the historical exhibition follows a timeline of the events of 9/11: it takes visitors minute by minute through a multimedia cacophony that shows how the gorgeous late summer day was shattered by the horrific attacks, again combining *logos* and *pathos* to powerful effect. In minute detail about what was happening in the air and on the ground, the exhibit essentially starts at 8:46am when the first plane hit the north tower and focuses on the next 102 minutes, until the two towers collapsed. Accordingly, almost everywhere one looks is an image of destruction—the burning towers, a video on endless loop showing the second plane hitting the south tower, twisted rescue vehicles, pieces of the buildings and planes, and images and descriptions of people jumping to their deaths in discreet alcoves of "disturbing material." The dusty belongings of those who were in the towers are displayed—ordinary backpacks and high heels made extraordinary by their brush with complete destruction. And all around are the sounds of 9/11: sirens wail, people scream, survivors recall the fear and destruction in recorded testimony, and even the victims' voices are present in their voicemail messages to loved ones.

The excruciating pain and terror of the day depicted in the exhibit gives way to a few small rooms on the geopolitical context of "Before 9/11," including the 1993 attack on the WTC and the lead-up to 9/11. The heart of this section is an almost 7-minute film on the rise of Al Qaeda, which has been criticized, primarily by scholars and religious leaders, for not doing enough to distinguish Al Qaeda from the peaceful practice of Islam (Otterman 2014). Accompanying

the film are information panels about other Al Qaeda attacks and gaps in US intelligence, and two small rooms devoted to the perpetrators—how they came into the country and carried out their violent plan. There were significant concerns over how (or whether) to portray the hijackers in the museum. Some families and survivors believed that any inclusion of the perpetrators in the museum would “honor” them, allowing them a say in writing the history of 9/11 (Cohen 2012). On the other hand, and in the words of Joseph Daniels, CEO of the museum and memorial, “You don’t create a museum about the Holocaust and not say that it was the Nazis who did it” (Cohen 2012); to tell the history, the perpetrators had to be included. But the discomfort with this inclusion is evident in the small space given to this part of the history. The words, belongings, and images of the victims, witnesses, and survivors are present everywhere in the museum, but very little information about the perpetrators and their motivations is present. And while the hijackers are named and pictured, their photos oddly hang at knee level, placing them symbolically and physically below the status of victims. This historical contextualization is important; however, it comes after the long, intense, and emotional core of the exhibit and most visitors do not seem to have much energy invested in understanding the causes of 9/11.

The context of “After 9/11” is even more meager. The focus is on recovery and the redevelopment of the site. It is not until the final room that the lasting political consequences of 9/11 are addressed, and here the museum devotes very little space to what came after. Almost no mention is made of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US’s use of torture, the PATRIOT Act, rising Islamophobia, and other troubling consequences of 9/11. The miniscule discussion that the museum does provide about the wars—one anti-war flyer, a photograph of a bomb given the name “let’s roll”—and other questionable US policy actions and decisions appears to justify the actions taken after the horrors of that morning that were so clearly and effectively depicted in the bulk of the exhibit.

Ultimately, like the previous two museums, the 9/11 Museum, in focusing on the victims and avoiding meaningful confrontation with the perpetrators and the broader historical context in which they acted, compromises its stated mission of imparting historical understanding. The museum creators knew how politically contentious the museum had the potential to be and sought to remove political and historical context from the story to avoid a “codification of history” that could be read as political (Greenwald 2016, 15). Instead, they wanted to tell individual stories and allow for individual encounters with the past to encourage “self-reflection” and “moral understanding,” working to navigate the “tension between honoring the obligation to present authentic, historical documentation and the equal imperative to honor and memorialize the victims” (Greenwald 2016, 14, 27). However thoughtful and sensitive their approach was, it appears to have been short-sighted and counterproductive. In the end, the museum strips the historical and political from 9/11 in a way that leaves only the trauma of the day. Visitors come away with little understanding of why the attacks occurred, other

than the troubling mantra “they hate us for our freedom,” and less understanding of their ongoing consequences, in particular how the US’s response to 9/11 has, in large part, contributed to the rise of extremist terror around the globe. In decontextualizing 9/11 and focusing on the victims, survivors, and witnesses, the museum reinforces the disturbing Manichean worldview that has emerged since 9/11 in which the good US triumphs over evil, and it seems to suggest that the attacks of 9/11 justify the many acts taken by the US government that violate the ideals of democracy, peace, and human rights that the museum purports to promote.

The politics of victimhood

The emphasis in these three memorial museums, and many others, on the victims and their memory is not surprising. It is morally and politically easier to remember victims in the wake of atrocity, and it is widely believed to be imperative to do so. Memorial museums have become a privileged space for such work and increasingly important institutions for groups’ visibility and recognition. As Charles Maier writes, “The subtext of the memory museum is that by virtue of prior suffering, collective existence should be recognized and honored by the wider civic culture” (1993, 145). This is in accordance with Blustein’s deontological ethic of memory; it is believed to be morally correct—an obligation—to remember past pain and suffering regardless of the outcome of that remembering. The official memory and high status granted to victims in memorial museums, especially state-sponsored ones, becomes highly valued as a form of recognition and the grounds upon which to build or bolster collective identity. Thus, we often see what has been described as a hierarchy or competition of victims, in which memory of past suffering is often viewed and plays out as a “competitive, zero-sum logic in which various victim groups fight for recognition” (Skitolsky 2010). The value placed on victimhood is not limited to groups that have been victimized. As Arnold-de Simine argues, for visitors to these museums too,

the emotional investment in vicarious suffering is attractive, because a by-proxy position enables one to borrow the moral superiority with which the figure of the victim has been imbued without having to deal with any of the suffering of real survivors or any of the ambiguities involved in a historical approach.

(2013, 113)

For victimhood today is generally *de facto* equated with virtue (Barkan and Becerbasic 2015); and so remembering the victims demonstrates the virtues of the regime doing the remembering. Further, the focus on victims in these museums is also believed to reflect a moral high ground that is above politics: “Victimhood can be a prime way of suspending or attempting to suspend the

political through an appeal to something non-agentive and ‘beyond’ or ‘before’ politics [...] Victimhood thus makes a claim for a non-political space” (Jeffrey and Canadea 2006, 289). Memory today is viewed not only as an obligation to victims but also as a privileged mode for facing the past in a way that will promote ideals of democracy and human rights and the prevention of future violence, reflecting Blustein’s utilitarian ethic of remembrance. However, this perceived connection between memory, victimization, and democracy has the ability to simplify the complexities of violence and disguise political agendas, muting them under cover of moral correctness. As Laura Jeffrey argues, victimhood, as represented in memorial museums, can be likened to Ferguson’s “anti-politics machine”; the representation of victimhood is busy “depoliticizing everything it touches, everywhere whisking political realities out of sight, all the while performing, almost unnoticed, its own pre-eminently political operation” (qtd. in Jeffrey and Canadea 2006, 290). We may think that remembering the victims is above politics, but in each case there is a deeper political reality, in some cases a dangerous one, that is hidden by the focus of these museums on victims.

Hence, these museums are characterized by selective memory, wherein (certain) victims’ histories and memories are privileged at the cost of deeper historical contextualization and understanding. Of course, one of the punishments of perpetrators is that they are relegated to silence and not allowed to take part in writing the history of the past. But memorial museums are intended to be more than just memorials to the victims. They purport to be sites of persuasion—institutions that can help societies come to terms with past violence and contribute to the strengthening of democracy and the prevention of future violence. Of course, we can rightly question whether a museum can ever truly serve these functions; my own research suggests that memorial museums are highly political and better reflect and serve the politics of the present than meaningfully engage with the past (Sodaro 2018). Nevertheless, because memorial museums set themselves the mission to convey both memory and history in their efforts to persuade, as long as perpetrators and their motivations remain in the shadows, memorial museums cannot adequately confront the past in a way that contributes to the moral transformation that is their goal.

Notes

- 1 James Smith was a medical doctor and Stephen Smith had a PhD in theology when they were moved by a visit to Yad Vashem to open a Holocaust education center in the UK. They spent years raising funds and the center is housed in what was their family home.
- 2 Ethnic difference has been “abolished” in Rwanda under Kagame, but many believe that this is simply a means of hiding the “Tutsification” of the government and army (Reyntjens 2015).
- 3 This tactic is clearly effective; Kagame successfully changed Rwanda’s constitution in 2017 to allow him to run for a third term, which he won with over 90% of the vote,

- challenging notions of Rwanda as a democracy and suggesting that Kagame has become another African strongman. Kagame has been de facto leader of Rwanda since the genocide ended in 1994, being officially elected as president in 2000, and could now potentially be president until 2034.
- 4 One way that the hasty completion of the museum is evident is in the exhibit's awkward layout. The building was designed before the exhibition was planned and so the exhibits had to fit into the spaces that were available. At a number of different points in the exhibit, the visitor has trouble determining where the exhibit continues.
 - 5 The very first exhibit in the museum is one about truth commissions; a map made of photographs of human rights abuses and efforts to address those abuses adorns the wall and at the base are descriptions of 30 truth commissions around the world, situating Chile's two commissions within the global trend. The reports of Chile's two commissions are proudly displayed, suggesting that this important stage in reckoning with Chile's past will be more deeply addressed later in the museum, but it is not and the exhibit ends abruptly with the plebiscite.

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PART II

Writing national histories

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2

BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND MODERN MUSEOLOGY

Exhibiting national history in the Museum of Georgia

Malkhaz Toria

Introduction

Traditional museums, particularly those that emerged in the 19th century with the rise of nationalism, were largely designed to display the history, archaeology, ethnography, and art of the dominant ethnic or national group, representing the past as it is inscribed in official national historiography. In contrast, many contemporary museums reflect a fundamental shift from representing the nation's achievements to exhibiting a more complex past. In these new—or newly designed—museums, artifacts and history are more critically examined, and exhibits do not necessarily conform to national or state narratives. This critical approach can be employed in societies where, as Pierre Nora (1989) puts it, a critical examination or “history” of historiography has developed. Within such a society, memory is not exclusively the property of the nation and other, previously repressed and obscured memories and historical narratives can also come to the surface.

Contemporary Georgia continues the transition from Soviet totalitarianism to democracy and revision of its historical past, particularly the recent Soviet “difficult past,” is an integral part of this process. In this context, museums constitute one of the primary domains in which a post-Soviet re-conceptualization of history is reflected. However, in Georgia, these key memory institutions do not always fit the framework of contemporary museology and in fact maintain traditional, Soviet ways of representing history and displaying cultural heritage. One of the reasons for this is that there is still much to do to develop critical reflection about Georgia's national historiographical tradition, where historical research appears designed for the “automatic deepening” of the collective memory of the nation (Nora 1989, 9).

Given this reality, in this chapter I focus on how historiography and national historical narratives define conceptualizations of museology in contemporary Georgia. The case of inquiry is the Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia,

commonly referred to as the Museum of Georgia, which is part of the complex and large museum system called the Georgian National Museum (GNM). The Museum of Georgia also houses the Museum of Soviet Occupation that illustrates the peculiarities of dealing with the Soviet past in today's Georgia.

The Museum of Georgia continues to strictly adhere to national Georgian historiography in its collections and exhibitions. Descriptions of collections, object labels, and wall texts refer to ancient and medieval times and aim to evoke deeply rooted patriotic sentiments. These patriotic messages then become moralized in the exhibits documenting the Soviet occupation, where visitors are encouraged to experience and condemn the horrors of communist repressions.

Overall, the design and conceptual framework of the museum, which combines both traditional and innovative ways of displaying exhibits, mainly highlight key elements of the national narrative. Accordingly, the museum intends to persuade visitors that the exhibited collections represent the authentic cultural heritage of Georgia inherited through the ancient, continuous, and uninterrupted history of the nation.

History and museology in Georgia

Modern Georgian museology is an outcome of the complex historical experiences of the country. Since the second half of the 19th century different governments, institutions, and actors have undertaken initiatives to establish museums and other repositories of local cultural heritage, each with different motivations and interests to promote.

The Museum of the Caucasus was established in 1865 by the Tsarist regime and intended to display the imperial perspective on the history and culture of the newly absorbed Caucasus province. The museum fits a pattern seen in other “colonized” contexts, where museums essentially represented dominant imperial knowledge and employed heritage practices “exported” from the colonial metropole (Carman and Sørensen 2009, 16).

Almost simultaneously, alternative, counter-museum projects including the Archaeology Museum, Church Museum, and the Georgian Historical and Ethnographic Society (Babuadze 2002; Chkhaidze 2003; Shelegia 2015) were promoted by the *tergdaleulni* (literally “those who drank the water of the river Terek,” which is considered to be a border with Russia) group of Georgian intellectuals educated in the leading universities of the Russian empire. These “founding fathers” of modern Georgian nationalism—prominent public figures, historians, poets, writers, and publicists such as Ilia Chavchavadze, Akaki Tsireteli, Sergo Meskhi, Dimitri Bakradze, Ekvtime Takaishvili, and many others—worked to realize an all-encompassing national project that aimed at promoting a secular, standardized national Georgian language, laying claim to a territorial and symbolic realm of Georgian nationhood, and overturning the “old world of aristocratic patriotism with explosive concepts of nationalism, equal rights, realism, and scientific progress” (Jones 2005, 37). Strengthening the sense of

common national history became a crucial element of the *tergdaelulini*'s national project. Consequently, the creation of an "infrastructure" of Georgian collective memory, such as a museum, appeared as a key element of the national agenda.

In the wake of the Russian Revolution (1917), the short-lived First Republic of Georgia (1918–1921) took measures to "nationalize" the study and exhibition of the Georgian nation's past and the Caucasus Museum was renamed the Museum of Georgia (Babuadze 2002).

Simultaneously, Ivane Javakhishvili (1876–1840), who studied in Germany and brought the "Rankean"—that is, an objective and scientific—approach to the study of Georgia's history, became a true "father" of modern Georgian historiography. As elsewhere in Europe where history was a narration of the development of a nation, Javakhishvili aimed to trace the process of the Georgian nation's advancement. He also stressed the importance of professional, unbiased historical science, stating that historians must be against deliberately distorted, glorified, and biased representation of the historical past (Javakhishvili 1904, 4). For him, "cosmopolitan science is international in that it is built up from national contributions" (Cherchi and Manning 2002, 43).

However, the Soviet invasion and occupation of Georgia in 1921 heralded radical changes in Georgian historiography and museology. In the 1920s the Soviet Nationalities Policy—*Korenizatsiia* ("nativization" in Russian)—contributed to the development of national histories in Soviet republics within certain frames, as long as they did not challenge communist ideology. The dominant Marxist-Leninist political philosophy and historical materialist theory conceptualized class struggle, rather than ethnic or national struggle, as the driving force of the historical process. But the development of a national consciousness was a necessary step to the next stages in history. All people would proceed through the imagined stages on the historical timeline from feudalism and capitalism to socialism, and on to communism. Thus, the Soviet "state-sponsored evolutionism" (Hirsch 2005) intended "coming together" (*sbliizhenie*) and eventual "merging" (*sliianie*) of different nations of the communist state into one Soviet people (*Sovetski Narod*) (Smith 1996, 5).

Adhering to the Marxist-Leninist approach to history, in 1945 the high school history textbook *History of Georgia* by Ivane Javakhishvili, Simon Janashia (1900–1947), and Niko Berdzenishvili (1894–1965) came out, indicating a new era in historical science in Soviet Georgia. From then on, social and economic issues, workers, and class struggles became the center of historical inquiry along with the heroic history of the Georgian nation. Janashia and Berdzenishvili were the most prominent Soviet historians and they set the conceptual and structural historical framework for subsequent generations of Georgian historians; they were influenced by Soviet ideology and leadership in designing national narratives in accordance with the Soviet Nationalities Policy. Their orientation centered on a wide range of problematics fitting into the Soviet ethnocentric paradigm: the origins of Georgians and the problem of their indigenouness in the Caucasus, the development of feudalism and the medieval kingdom of

Georgia, struggles with foreign invaders (Mongols, Ottomans, Persians), the incorporation of Georgia into the Tsarist empire, and the Sovietization of Georgia.

Likewise, the museum was obliged to document the gradual and steady progression of the Georgian nation, within the boundaries of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic from antiquity to the final teleological end of the historical process: the establishment of communism and the creation of the united Soviet people.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and Georgia's renewed independence, both historiography and the museum became crucial tools for nation-building characterized by the intensification of Georgian ethnonationalism, and former Soviet Georgian historians quickly shifted to a nationalistic stance. Paradoxically, the legacy of Soviet ethnocentric and primordial historiography revealed itself in an extreme form in the post-Soviet period even though the practice of quoting Marx, Lenin, and Stalin disappeared from textbooks and studies and communist rule was officially recognized as an occupation. The monoethnic representation of the historical past became more radical and exclusive in the process of this renewed nation-building and contributed to the armed conflict with Abkhazian and Ossetian national minorities in the 1990s.¹ Conflicting parties referred to their past to establish territorial and other political rights by claiming historical priority vis-à-vis other groups.

The so-called "Rose Revolution" brought a new reformist government to power in 2003. President Mikheil Saakashvili (2003–2012) and his administration declared their readiness to build a new state "almost from scratch." Eviatar Zerubavel calls this kind of claim the "grandiose sociomnemonic practice of resetting a mnemonic community's historical 'chronometer' at zero" (Zerubavel 2003, 26). In the Georgian case, this meant destroying ties to the Soviet legacy, launching full-scale reforms at all levels (education, social care, police, army, etc.), and calling for a "mental revolution" alongside a political one. Integration into Western structures, in particular NATO and the EU, became the main geopolitical goal. As Saakashvili put it, he aimed to turn an

ancient European nation into a modern, democratic and European state; our past has brought us here and our future demands it from us. The Georgian people have always considered themselves as Europeans and they had always made their European decision. Christianity, as well as the alliance with the Byzantine Empire and social democracy against Bolshevism, were European choices.

(2011)

The 2004 museum reform in Georgia that changed the policies, administration, and conceptualization of the museum fits into the large-scale transformations aimed at moving beyond the post-Soviet crises. The Georgian National Museum (GNM) was created as a state institution comprising ten major museums, two research centers, the National Gallery, four house-museums, fourteen archaeological sites, and reserves and repositories scattered throughout

the country. The Ministry of Culture and Sports and the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation are its main authorities.

However, the Soviet legacy still clings to the GNM and, particularly, the Museum of Georgia. For instance, there is a tradition—or an “inertia” of tradition (Hobsbawm 1983)—of treating the Museum of Georgia as an “elitist” institution. In Soviet times, only an exceptional researcher or person with connections to high-ranking officials in the communist government had the opportunity to work at the museum. Alisa Datunashvili refers to the museum staff’s peculiar and deep sense of affiliation to the museum: being *museumeli* (in Georgian “from the museum”) means to belong to the inner circle of professionals bound by a long, rich experience of working together in the museum, following shared rules and values. Museum members who have “swallowed the dust of the museum” and therefore devoted themselves to it until the end of their lives are extremely insular, making it difficult for others, especially young professionals, to become a true *museumeli* (Datunashvili 2018, 56–58), or preventing them from doing so.

Undisputed acceptance of top-down decisions and the orders of authorities are additional indications of the legacy of Soviet hierarchy in today’s Museum of Georgia. Museum expert Salome Tsiskarishvili thinks that even today directors have absolute power over museum staff: “almost everything depends on personality, qualification, and goodwill of the director.” As for the state, according to her, it exercises “much more moral power than it should” because of the “Soviet mentality” (Tsiskarishvili 2017).

A major sign of the conservative approach in the museum is the primacy of the monoethnic Georgian perspective in representing the history and cultural heritage of the country. From this primordial perspective come the institutionalized claims of ethnic ownership of the material culture exhibited in the museum. However, displaying the collections as “genuine” and “authentic” national-cultural heritage makes it difficult to meet the criteria of modern, inclusive museums. Such modern museums offer a

new contemporary stage for negotiating and performing cultural citizenship; by granting a voice to what has been left out of the dominant discourses of history, diversified and sometimes even incompatible narratives have supposedly been granted a locus in a museal space no longer seen to aspire to any totalizing synthesis.

(Andermann and Arnold-de Simine 2012, 1–2)

Certain studies illustrate how GNM professionals see the function and role of national museums. On the one hand, they agree that museums should display plurality and diversity of the country and present Georgian culture as a part of the broader context. On the other hand, they also add that the museum should tell the story of the nation’s development in accordance with the official narrative. For them, a museum is a place where people meet their past. Hence, the

Georgian National Museum cannot be a cosmopolitan organization; it is a national institution (Shelegia 2015, 141–144, 155).

National narrative and persuasion in the Museum of Georgia

Georgian historiographical tradition informs the current national narrative and, more precisely, the narrative template that revolves around antiquity, primordiality, territorial integrity, Christianity, and European-ness. According to James V. Wertsch, “the idea of a template suggests that an underlying general story line is used repeatedly to make sense of multiple specific events” (Wertsch and Karumidze 2009, 380).

The Georgian national narrative template highlights key milestones and characteristics of Georgia’s history: Georgia exists as a small, independent nation with territorial integrity at a perilous crossroads of East and West, seeking to remain part of the European space. Powerful invaders incorporated the country into a larger empire and challenged its territorial integrity. Eventually, Georgia managed to fight back and preserve its independence, language, national identity, and religion, and reintegrated historic territories (Wertsch and Karumidze 2009, 385; Batiashvili 2012, 190).

The cultivation of the Georgian national narrative built on this type of template is a crucial part of the nation’s cultural memory that “reaches back into the past only so far as the past can be reclaimed as ‘ours’” (Assmann 2015, 334). Cultural memory requires material symbols, individual memory specialists, and institutional cultivation, distribution, and transmission across generations (Assmann 2008, 110–111; 2015, 331–332). Correspondingly, the Georgian national narrative written and fixed in textbooks or academic works contributes to establishing an “orthodoxy” of the text (Goody 1998) that defines all key aspects of cultural memory. Accordingly, this narrative influences the purpose, content, and design of the Museum of Georgia.

Displaying museum objects always “means placing a certain construction upon history” (Vergo 1989, 2–3). Moreover, “objects are not the heart of the museum” and cannot be used as “the definitional bedrock in the past”; instead, “It is the ownership of the story, rather than the object itself” that really matters (Gurian 1999, 165–166). Likewise, the official Georgian historical narrative imposes a single frame for visitors to interpret the museum objects as a documentation of the ancient and culturally rich history of the Georgian nation.

It should also be noted that the Museum of Georgia is designed for a particular audience, who bring predictable expectations and reactions to the museum (Hooper-Greenhill 1999, 5). Both museum staff and targeted visitors are part of what Hooper-Greenhill calls an “interpretive community” (1999). In democratic and pluralistic societies there are diverse types of “interpretative communities,” or segments of society that could have drastically different views about the past. Museums in such societies generally attempt to accommodate

and present a variety of perspectives. In contemporary Georgia, given the dominant role of the official national narrative, the museum mainly represents one “interpretive community” with characteristic “interpretive strategies.” That means museum staff and visitors are “furnished” with a particular form of reading strategies—language to describe objects, modes of classification, specialist knowledge, and categories of understandings that make presented objects meaningful, intelligible, and perceivable (Hooper-Greenhill 1999, 13). Staff and visitors of the Museum of Georgia are expected to perceive and interpret the museum collections in accordance with the national narrative and follow the represented plotline of Georgian national history.

Claiming antiquity: displaying pre-historic, ancient, and medieval Georgia

The exhibitions of the Museum of Georgia are “based on a rigidly linear chronology” (Silberman 2010, 198), displaying the long history and significant achievements of Georgian culture and statehood “from within” the real, current state borders or imagined, historically claimed boundaries of Georgia.

The story starts with “Stone Age Georgia,” which presents a variety of materials retrieved from Paleolithic sites dating from 500,000–8,000 years ago. The central part of this exposition is the display of early human (hominin) remains discovered in the Dmanisi archaeological site located 93 km southwest of Tbilisi in the Kvemo Kartli region. The typical description of the displays includes expressions like “rewriting human history and transforming our view of human evolution” as “Dmanisi represent the oldest evidence of humans discovered outside of Africa, dating back 1.8 million years” (GNM 2012).

A naturalistic reconstruction of the Dmanisi male and female by paleoartists displayed in the Museum of Georgia has become an iconic image of this discovery. The “couple” from Dmanisi are nicknamed Zezva and Mzia to sound authentically Georgian, which implies two meanings. On the one hand, the GNM uses such captions as “Dmanisi—crossroad of Africa, Asia, and Europe,” and “Dmanisi—cradle of first Eurasians or Europeans,” stressing the scientific importance of these discoveries that put Georgia at the center of the archaeological world as one of the hotspots of human history. On the other hand, the discovery of the hominins “sent Georgians into a frenzy” (Jones 2013, 5), but not because people actually believe they (hominins) were the “first Europeans.” Rather, these words, which are firmly fixed in politicians’ repertoires, add a pre-historic touch to Georgia’s “primordial” pro-European aspirations. For instance, politicians, including former president Saakashvili, frequently referred to these discoveries as proof that Georgia was the key route through which humans settled in Europe.

Clearly, utilizing Dmanisi hominins in this way is a purely rhetorical and metaphorical strategy to persuade a local and global audience in keeping with

Georgia's contemporary political agenda. However, national sentiments are even greater when it comes to links between Georgian identity and the history of wine and winemaking. The Georgian National Museum is one of the main state institutions that promotes winemaking as Georgian heritage, and among its tasks is to persuade visitors that Georgia is a homeland of winemaking. The GNM regularly organizes archaeological excavations conducted by teams of local and international archaeologists that reveal evidence of the ancient winemaking tradition in Georgia, including traditional vessels and biofacts (seeds of a variety of endemic grapes). The Museum of Georgia occasionally organizes temporary exhibitions to display the country as a place where thousands of years ago people "not only learned the art of fermentation but were apparently improving, breeding, and harvesting *Vitis vinifera*, the European grape" (National Geographic 2017).

In Georgian society, tradition has tremendous importance in political and cultural discourse (Voell and Kaliszewska 2015). Tradition generally refers to peculiarities of ethnic identity expressed in cultural practices. Therefore, one can feel emotional overtones while reading the typical description of archaic and unique methods of winemaking "lost" in other wine-producing areas, but kept by Georgians in the tradition of making, maintaining, and consuming of wine. As the collections and underlying texts imply, these deep connections of Georgian culture to winemaking are reflected in the rich, original, and ancient viticulture terminology of Georgian language,² customs, traditions, mythology, cults, art, and folklore.

In this regard, it was an important occasion for Georgians when *Qvevri* (an egg-shaped earthenware vessel used for making, aging, and storing wine) wine-making was recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO (UNESCO 2013). It is symbolic that right before visitors get into the main exhibition hall titled "Archaeological Treasury," they encounter a huge *Qvevri* dated to the third century BC and discovered in Mtskheta, the historical capital of the ancient Eastern-Georgian kingdom of Kartli during the Hellenistic period (fourth to second centuries BC). It depicts the "scenes of a deer hunt with figures of animals and birds painted in red ochre over an englobed and polished surface" (Object label, Museum of Georgia, 2018).

The permanent exhibition, *Archaeological Treasury*, is the central section of the Museum of Georgia and houses gold and silver items discovered in Georgia. The artifacts of goldsmithery belong to the period from the third millennium BC to the fourth century AD up to the emergence of Georgian Christian culture. The focus is on two ancient kingdoms: the Colchis (Kolkheti in Georgian, 12th to second centuries BC) and Kartli-Iberia (third century BC to sixth century AD), where modern Georgians see the origin of their statehood. Therefore, the museum aims to display artifacts related to these "cradles" of Georgian culture, statehood, and nationhood, reinforcing the national narrative that depicts Georgian culture as a unique realm situated between the East and West. Part of this recurrent theme of Georgian historical imaginaries is stressing the intense

relationships between original Georgian culture and civilizations of the ancient world, including Sumerians, Hittites, Urartians, Greeks, Romans, and Persians. For instance, one of the descriptions in the museum illustrates how the kingdom of Colchis was both unique and closely linked to ancient civilizations:

Colchian goldsmithery—coming under the influence of the two world cultures: Western (Greek) and Eastern (Achaemenid/Persian)—preserved its originality and systemic wholeness; adopted, but digested the new elements in its own way, gaining its own place beside Greek and Achaemenid (Persian) goldsmithery.

(Wall text, Museum of Georgia, 2018b)

The exhibition of the medieval period focuses on the introduction of Christianity, the invention of the distinct and unique Georgian alphabet, and the development of medieval literature and art in the so-called “Golden Age” (12th century). The exhibition includes medieval manuscripts, icons, stelae, mosaics, and other artifacts associated with Christianity. Before entering the exhibition hall, a visitor reads these words, written by the Georgian art historian Giorgi Chubinashvili (1885–1973):

Christianity must have significantly contributed to the fast development of the national literary tradition in Georgia. On the basis of this religion, new Georgian culture and literature were created contributing to the formation of the perception of the national unity of Georgia.

This text reflects most of the central elements of the Georgian national narrative and in many ways is a conceptual grounding for the whole exhibition. In particular, the description focuses on the exceptional role of Christianity in forming Georgian national identity, culture, and statehood.³ The Medieval Christian “phase” was a defining, decisive period when the Georgian nation strengthened and acquired its final shape. The rich collections presented in the museum stand as monuments illuminating the gradual development of the nation “continuously connected with a chain of evolutionary movements from century to century, from one era to another” (Chubinashvili, wall text, Museum of Georgia). Both the genealogy and history of Georgia past and present are described as the “crossroad of East and West [...] By adopting Christianity, recognizing it as its state religion, Georgia strengthened its general position in the progressive ranks of the world’s cultured nations. It established an eternal connection with Europe’s culture” (Chubinashvili, wall text, Museum of Georgia).

Dealing with the difficult past: the Museum of Soviet Occupation

The Museum of Soviet Occupation (also referred to as the Soviet Occupation Exposition Hall) opened in 2006 and exhibits the history of Soviet rule in Georgia (1921–1991). It is a subdivision of the Museum of Georgia rather than

a separate museum since it occupies two halls in the museum building and technically exhibits another page of the country's story. However, the museum's depiction of the Soviet past is charged with contemporary political meaning and motives. Therefore, it is not solely a historical museum depicting the decades of the Soviet occupation, but also a site of persuasion, conveying moral messages about Georgia's past, present, and future.

In very broad and universal characteristics, the Museum of Soviet Occupation resembles such museums as the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, the Museum of Occupations in Estonia, the House of Terror in Hungary, and the Museum of Victims of Communism in Romania. These types of museums have been conceptualized and categorized as memorial museums, which are designed primarily to memorialize and educate about mass atrocities, violence, and human rights abuses (Williams 2007; Sodaro 2018). They have complex agendas including historical truth-telling via documentation and preservation of evidence and knowledge about past atrocities and commemoration of victims, but the main intention of memorial museums is the moral education of the public. Deriving lessons from the terrors of the past is believed to be crucial to avoiding similar occurrences in the future. "Never again" is the key ethical imperative of such memorial museums and they aim to reach visitors' hearts and make them experience or empathize with past sufferings. However, behind these declared goals of transnational memorial museums, in many cases the states that create the museums remain "hegemonic narrators" mainly focusing on past sufferings of the present dominant group in a way that advances their political agendas (Sodaro 2018).

Georgia's Museum of Soviet Occupation in Tbilisi is characterized by some key elements of the above-mentioned memorial museums. It displays the suffering of one victim group—Georgians under Soviet rule—and is framed mainly by the "official" Georgian historical narrative structure. This museum emerged out of the political atmosphere of "total rebirth" of the country that required the clear symbolic act of breaking links with the "difficult" Soviet past and providing a negative assessment of its legacy. It was also an important part of the pro-Western government's complex agenda to claim Georgia's primordial European essence. Therefore, the museum as a "mnemonic device" was imported from other post-totalitarian societies to serve as a geopolitical symbol of a fundamental break with Russia and return to Europe where it belongs historically and culturally (Batiashvili 2015, 9). This central message, aimed at both a local and global audience, is demonstrated in the dichotomy the museum establishes between occupant (Soviet and modern Russia) and occupied. Its "narrative plotline" fits into the Georgian national narrative that stresses Georgia's "perennial struggle" for freedom against numerous foreign invaders (Persians, Arabs, Seljuks, Mongols, Ottomans, and, of course, Russians) (Batiashvili 2012).

The Museum of Soviet Occupation concentrates on key events and periods that are meant to reveal the horrors of the Soviet Occupation of Georgia: the Soviet invasion and annexation in February 1921; national uprisings against

Soviet rule in 1924; Soviet repressions, mass killings, and extermination in the 1920s and 30s; and the Georgian national movement starting in the 1960s and intensifying throughout the 1980s.

The museum has the clear intention to persuade the audience to correctly assess, remember, and “never forget” the negative role of the Soviet regime in Georgia’s history. This is a central aspect of the exhibit’s conception that elevates the issue of remembrance of Georgian–Russian past and present conflicts to moral and ethical categories.

In the beginning visitors encounter a quote from the Chairman of the government of the First Republic of Georgia, Noe Zhordania (1918–1921), that sets the tone for the exhibit:

What do we have to offer to the cultural treasure of the European nations? A two-thousand-year-old national culture, democratic system and natural wealth. Soviet Russia offered us a military alliance which we rejected. They are heading for the East, we, for the West ... We would like to yell at Russian Bolsheviks: turn to the West to make a contemporary European nation.

Two different maps depict political and symbolic imaginaries of the landscape of Georgia before and after the Sovietization of the country. On the one hand, there is a map from the beginning of the 20th century illustrating the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918–1921) and pointing out that these borders were recognized by the League of Nations. In contrast, a more contemporary map pictures a war-torn country where the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are marked in red. The bloody color symbolizes conflict, violence, and wounds that “do not heal” until territorial integrity is restored (Kabachnik 2012). Generally, in the Georgian national narrative minorities are seen as *casus belli*, traditionally used by Russia to justify its aggression against Georgia. That was the case both in 1921 and in the 2008 events. Visitors get the clear message that these historical and ongoing problems with separatist regions are in fact part of the recurrent struggles with Russia. Another map shows the geography of suffering with red dots indicating the gulags in various places of the Soviet empire. Stalin’s portrait and quotes around it clearly designate him as the mastermind of the Soviet terror (Batiashvili 2015, 14).⁴

The Museum of the Soviet Occupation focuses on remembrance of victims of the regime, consisting of Georgian intellectuals, clergy, nobles, soldiers, and cadets, all of whom are presented as the gifted sons and daughters of Georgia. Therefore, among the central elements of the museum that introduce the exhibition and characterize the bloody Soviet regime are the list of the victims of occupation and a huge photograph of Georgian cadets shot by Russian soldiers.

Objects and collections of the exhibit (archival documents, newspapers, photos, videos, etc.) serve as affective triggers intended to make visitors emotionally experience the horrors committed by the occupying regime. For

instance, one of the particularly moving exhibits is a reproduction of the train carriage in which Soviet soldiers shot participants of the anti-Bolshevik uprising in August 1924. Bullet holes serve as a vivid portrayal of the tragedy of the event and national heroism of fallen patriots. Another reconstructed space of terror is the iron doors of Soviet security prison cells, which suggest the terrifying torture of innocent people.

In the repertoire of the museum's affective strategies is the always-playing video installation showing moments of the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008. Visitors can see fighter jets hovering over Gori and bombing civilians; the video footage also shows a massive gathering of Georgian citizens protesting Russian aggression. The dramaturgy of the installation is intensified when it shows the Georgian president and other European leaders, including the presidents of Poland, Ukraine, and Estonia, appearing in front of the crowd gathered in the main avenue of Tbilisi. These recordings are clearly intended to reach visitors' hearts and trigger their empathy for the victims of aggression.

The Museum of Soviet Occupation is an example of how societies in transition deal with "difficult heritage" (Macdonald 2009, 1). Museums like this one are sites of contention, where "national histories and personal memories are often at odds [...] when members of publics find that their memories of the past or their expectations for museum experiences are not being met, a kind of 'distortion' occurs" (Crane 1997, 45). For instance, the Museum of Soviet Occupation has received critical feedback since it displays only the narrative of victims and is completely silent about bystanders, collaborators, and perpetrators. As Georgian historian Lasha Bakradze argues, Georgians struggle with confronting and accepting the painful Soviet past. They refuse to take any responsibility for their own history and blame only external actors for the horrible actions of the Soviet regime. Georgia was occupied during the Soviet period, but the occupation was just one aspect of a complex period that lasted seven decades. Accordingly, Bakradze argues, it would be appropriate to choose a more neutral name for the museum like the "museum of the Soviet period," which would reflect the multifaceted nature of the Soviet regime and policies in Georgia (Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2010).

Conclusion

The Museum of Georgia in its current shape does not conform to many important new standards or "best practices" of contemporary museums. The "new museology" emphasizes democratic culture, diversity, and human rights, which includes broadening museums' educational function, making museums more interactive spaces by means of modern technologies, and transforming museums into inclusive institutions where different perspectives from various segments of society (dominant or marginal) are brought together and previously silenced voices are heard. In Georgia, on the other hand, any innovation in museology primarily refers to technological and infrastructure renovations. Conceptual

innovations, such as presenting “other” (ethnic or religious minority) voices together with dominant perspectives, are hardly observable.

Therefore, we can see more “totalizing” than pluralizing efforts in exhibiting cultural heritage in the Museum of Georgia. One can feel and observe in the museum the orthodoxy of the text; that is, the official historiography that requires representing, interpreting, and exhibiting the history of the Georgian nation as a single story from antiquity to modern times. Accordingly, the Museum of Georgia, as a site of persuasion, intends to convince visitors of the reliability of the story told in the museum. Archaeological findings or medieval manuscripts are exhibited as proof, verifying the exclusiveness, uniqueness, and antiquity of Georgian culture; these artifacts are an appeal to the *logos* of visitors. The messages become moral in the Museum of Soviet Occupation where exhibitions with affective multimedia effects are designed to influence visitors’ feelings and ethics—*pathos* on display. People are expected to be emotionally moved while going through collections displaying purges, terrors, ethnic cleansings in separatist regions, loss of territorial integrity, and other forms of terrible repression orchestrated by Moscow since the forced Sovietization of Georgia in 1921. Therefore, visitors become morally primed to distinguish and see clearly who victims and perpetrators or occupied and occupier are. The rigidity of the narrative makes it difficult to revise or reinterpret this *pathos* according to one’s background or point of view. Instead, the entire story fully corresponds to the official narrative, foreclosing other possible interpretations about perpetrators, victims, collaborators, or bystanders under the Soviet regime. Thus, the Museum of Georgia, together with its semi-constituent Museum of Soviet Occupation, combines aspects of traditional exhibitions and seemingly innovative use of affect and *pathos*. However, these methods are designed to deliver and underline the primordial, national (traditional) historical narrative of Georgia’s past. Such a mixed museology reflects how problematic and complex Georgia’s national museum’s transformation into a modern, inclusive, and democratic institution remains.

This stunted shift in museology mirrors essential challenges contemporary Georgian historiography faces. It is still a priority to ground historical research within the primordial framework, even though there are signs of an emerging historical scholarship “out and away from the shadow of dogmatic Soviet historiography” (Genté 2018). A handful of historians aim to expand on the traditional framework and employ various conceptual constructs while focusing on a broad range of topics regarding identity and culture in historical Georgia (e.g., Pataridze 2009). However, there is still a lot to do to fundamentally transform Georgian historiography and adjust it to the principles of modern historical science. In this context, it is crucial to have an awareness of history as “an unending dialogue between the present and the past” (Carr 1961, 24) and a constant process of challenging, testing, and deconstructing of fixed assumptions, hypotheses, and even historical myths which very often fit into the contemporary political agenda. Without all these, it is hardly imaginable to transform museums into modern public spaces where objects

and collections are treated as historical sources which may undergo complex and plural interpretations rather than one-sided, hegemonic explanations.

Notes

- 1 In the 1990s Georgia witnessed one civil war between “pro-government” forces and supporters of ousted president Zviad Gamsakhurdia (1991), and two armed conflicts with secessionists in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali/South Ossetia regions. As a result, Tbilisi lost control over these regions and thousands of ethnic Georgians were forced to leave their homeland. After the brief Russian–Georgian war in August 2008, again over the Tskhinvali/South Ossetia region, the situation became even more problematic. The Russian Federation recognized the independence of these breakaway regions. In response to this political move, Georgia broke diplomatic relations with Russia.
- 2 GNM promotes a linguistic assumption about the etymology of the word “wine”: that it “has entered various languages from the Georgian language” (CNM 2011). The Georgian term for wine is *Ghvino*.
- 3 Christianity was propagated in the Eastern–Georgian kingdom of Iberia in the early fourth century. St. Nino, a woman from Cappadocia, is considered to be a prophet in Georgia. There is also a traditional belief that Apostles Saint Andrew and Simon the Canaanite preached in Colchis (Western Georgia) in the first century AD. But the history of the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church itself goes back to the fifth century AD which makes it one of the oldest churches in the Christian world. The Catholicos–Patriarch of All Georgia is the head of the Georgian church. Certain scholars also note that the whole post-Soviet period has been witnessing the gradual rise of religious nationalism that considers Orthodox Christianity as a pillar of its “Georgian-ness.” The embodiment of this new era of religious nationalism came in 1987 when the Georgian Orthodox Church canonized Ilia Chavchavadze (1837–1907), the leader of the *tergdaleulni* group discussed above. “This is a remarkable development since Georgian nationalism developed in a thoroughly secular context in the middle of the 19th century” characterized by a “complete absence of religious motives” (Reisner 2004; Zedania 2011, 123).
- 4 Here I should also note that alternative narratives on the Soviet past and the glorification of Stalin as a national hero continue to challenge the dominant nationalist historical discourse in certain segments of Georgian society, especially among the older generation who are nostalgic about the Soviet period. Another locus is the Stalin Museum in his hometown Gori (opened in 1957) where many locals are proud of him. The museum is supposed to follow the official narrative, but museum staff do not hide their sentiments toward Stalin and provide visitors with stories almost identical to the Soviet narrative that worshipped him (see Krzyszstan 2015).

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3

CURATING ENSLAVEMENT AND THE COLONIAL HISTORY OF DENMARK

The 2017 centennial¹

Astrid Nonbo Andersen

March 31, 2017 marked the centennial of the transfer² of the Danish West Indies (DWI) to the United States, since then known as the US Virgin Islands (USVI). The centennial resulted in nearly 30 special exhibitions around the country on various aspects of the history of the Danish West Indies (DWI).³ The history of enslavement and colonialism is global; their legacies have produced a range of different effects around the world, engaging a global audience in discussions on how to properly memorialize this past and present its ongoing impact. This chapter explores how curators at Danish museums involved in the centennial commemoration responded to challenges both from engaged audiences often directly touched by repercussions of colonialism and enslavement, as well as their efforts to persuade an ethnic Danish audience with little or no prior knowledge of the DWI to adopt new understandings of the colonial past and present.

As noted in this volume's Introduction and elsewhere, Holocaust memorial culture has come to play referential roles in other commemorative contexts, tacitly serving as a guide for how to introduce mass violence. This type of commemoration often combines two parallel approaches: on the one hand, to document and expose the nature and scale of violence—*logos*—and on the other, to create identification and empathy with victims—*pathos*. Both strategies are fundamental to sites of persuasion in their work to change the attitudes and behaviors of their visitors.

When translated into the context of enslavement, however, these two strategies raise new questions. Erica Lehrer and Cynthia E. Milton pose a critical question that many museums and sites of persuasion must address: how “to bear witness, to give space to absent people, objects and cultures, to present violent conflict without perpetuating its logic?” (2011, 4). Translated into the Danish context, the question becomes: how can exhibits deal with the painful history of

slavery and colonialism in a way that bridges divides, creates empathy, and shapes attitudes and ethics, without perpetuating the representation of people of African descent as dehumanized commodities? This was among the questions relevant for many museums wanting to challenge dominant national narratives in Denmark. Hence, this chapter explores the curatorial deliberations behind the special exhibitions on the DWI, focusing on three of the largest, which all worked to identify a connection between past and present. However, interviews with curators of other centennial exhibitions also inform my discussion. I collected this data through formal semi-structured interviews and informal talks with 26 curators, and visits to 19 exhibitions.

The background

When the treaty of sale was ratified on August 4, 1916, the decision to let go of the DWI sparked intense debate in Denmark, but interest dwindled after the islands were transferred to the US on March 31, 1917. Nevertheless, cultural remnants lingered in a nostalgic narrative of an innocent colonialism dominated by a melancholic longing after a tropical paradise lost, ignoring the mass violence of slavery and taking cues from patronizing ideas of a benevolent civilizing mission in Greenland (Andersen 2013a, 2013b; Andersen & Thisted forthcoming). Even before 1917, Danish historians relegated African-Caribbean experiences to the narrative margins (Andersen 2014). As mentioned in the Introduction to this book (p. 4–5), the end of the Cold War contributed to a memory boom that provided space for a new human rights discourse in the 1990s, as well as a new reparations politics (Barkan 2000). Since the late 1990s, politicians and NGOs from the USVI have demanded reparations from Denmark, but every Danish government, regardless of political orientation, has turned the demand down. However, the demand coincided with renewed interest in the DWI, particularly among Danish scholars inspired by postcolonial and subaltern studies. Taken together, these currents have created a growing historic awareness of Danish colonial history over the past 20 years, culminating in 2017 with the centennial (Andersen 2013a, 2017, 2018).

Reflecting and contributing to a more general lack of public knowledge about this aspect of Denmark's history, the history of enslavement in the DWI was not part of any permanent museum exhibition in Denmark before 2001. The Royal Library, the National Museum, and the Danish West Indian Society occasionally organized special exhibitions on the DWI (Olwig 2003), but the majority largely omitted the violence of enslavement and racism. For example, the exhibition at the Danish National Museum marking the 50th anniversary of Transfer Day in 1967, entitled *West Indian Living Rooms*, mainly displayed mahogany furniture historically belonging to the white plantation elites in the DWI (Andersen 2017).

In 2001, the Danish National Museum opened its permanent exhibition, *Histories of Denmark 1660–2000*, which dedicated one room to the history of

Danish colonies in the Caribbean, West Africa, and India under the heading “World Trade and Colonies.” This was the first time slavery was included in a permanent museum exhibition in Denmark. One exhibition box documents the cruelty of slavery in a historical, unemotional way, relying upon *logos*. The cruelty of enslavement is not hidden here, but while the overarching ambition of the exhibit is to show a plurality of perspectives on modern Danish history—including those of lower classes and immigrants—the same plurality does not characterize this room, which mainly presents colonial history from an elite experience with a focus on trade companies.

An identical approach also dominates the exhibition *Tea Time—the First Globalization* at the Maritime Museum of Denmark in Elsinore, produced in 2013. This exhibition makes less use of the kinds of affective strategies that are used in the rest of the museum. In *Tea Time*, large exhibition boxes containing historical objects serve as geographical markers representing Denmark’s former colonies, trading posts, and overseas trade with China. Each box is decorated with one of the most important goods from the location in question. The box representing the African Gold Coast features plastic black hands and feet arranged in a tight grid, articulating bodies as they were packed into ships, and thus showing Africans as commodities. Throughout this exhibit visitors are encouraged to play a trading game, which effectively turns them into merchants. Since it opened, the exhibition has been criticized for dismissing social history, limiting agency to white elites and reducing colonialism to a matter of trade (Halberg 2016; Nielsen 2017).

Ongoing criticisms influenced by the contemporary museological perspective that works to incorporate social and cultural history, bringing in diverse voices that were previously silenced (see Introduction) contributed to the National Museum’s decision in 2010 to take a new look at the DWI. The museum began to prepare a large special exhibition, *The West Indians*, that would open in conjunction with the centennial. The exhibition planned to incorporate recent research on the Danish West Indies inspired by subaltern studies and a history-from-the-margins approach, to give voice to the enslaved people and the colonized. This material was not entirely new for the National Museum, which had addressed different aspects of the slave trade and the DWI in two smaller special exhibitions shown in 2010 and 2011. The first focused on archeological excavations of the plantation Frederiksgave in Ghana, dealing with the contested history that the slave trade presents in Ghana today (Brichet 2017),⁴ and the second explored the first 150 years of the history of the DWI, including various aspects of the life of enslaved Africans.⁵ But the exhibition planned for the centennial was intended to be much larger and more prominent.

Accordingly, there was public outrage both in Denmark and museum circles in Europe when the director of the National Museum announced that the museum was forced to cancel the special exhibition after a general budget cut to state museums in 2015. While seemingly a significant setback to addressing the difficult past of slavery and colonialism, the cancellation prompted many smaller museums—including *ad hoc* museum activities outside of the established

museums—to take on the subject, often in frustration with the cancellation. On a practical level, this meant that the timeframe of most museums was short, with the centennial looming in just two years' time impacting the scope of projects developed. At the same time, it also made it possible for smaller museums to borrow objects from the large colonial collections at the National Museum—a window of opportunity that closed again when the National Museum later decided to go through with a smaller permanent exhibition on the topic, *Voices from the Colonies*, which opened in October 2017.

Public debate in the run-up to transfer day

The editors of this volume argue that state-sponsored institutions often reinforce dominant state narratives, because of political, economic, and social pressures, whereas local institutions are often less likely to take up official hegemonic narratives (p. 3). However, this dynamic does not seem to completely hold in Denmark's case. Most museums involved in the 2017 centennial exhibitions receive public funding either directly from the state or through local municipalities. Some received additional funding from special funds allocated by the Danish Parliament in response to the cancellation at the National Museum.

Since the 1960s, Danish state cultural policies have been guided by the principle that politicians should refrain from micromanagement of cultural institutions, known as the “arm's-length principle.” The principle has been under persistent pressure in recent years but seems to have held, with some exceptions which I will return to; most curators indicated that they felt no pressure to conform to a dominant state or government narrative. A smaller group already aligned with dominant narratives: that of an “innocent” colonialism (Andersen 2013a, 2017) or—more often—narratives similar to what Edward Linenthal calls a “comfortable horrible memory,” which does nothing more than confirm what we already think and feel (1995, 267). These museums briefly addressed slavery as cruel, but with no ambition to discuss the legacies of either enslavement or colonialism. However, another group of curators indicated that their exhibitions were planned to challenge what they saw as the ongoing consequences of slavery and colonialism both in Denmark and abroad, such as racism, anti-immigration policies, and global injustice. These curatorial choices did not reflect a divide between larger state institutions and smaller private or local museums, but rather the profile of each museum and choices of individual curators.

The centennial sparked protracted discussions and debates about the past and its aftereffects. These debates took place both in the media and in the many seminars, workshops, and public talks held in the years and months prior to March 31, 2017, including several seminars on colonial curatorial challenges and museum practice.⁶ These museological seminars seemed to be particularly influential for those curators who attended, as is evidenced in many of the dilemmas, choices, and solutions that they grappled with. Furthering the curatorial challenges, the public debates were split along different political lines: one inspired

by right-wing populism and another by critical discourses, particularly decolonial critiques, postcolonial studies, and black feminism.

In the summer of 2016, the National Gallery announced that it had removed words such as “neger” (“Negro”) and “hottentot” from its registers of work titles—not original titles of artworks, but titles that had been assigned over time. Conservatives and popular right-wing politicians protested loudly against this “political correctness,” arguing that many older Danes still consider the term “neger” a neutral term.⁷ Similarly, Museum Vestsjælland in Holbæk—before its exhibition *Vestindien/Vestsjælland* (*West Indies/Western Sjælland*) opened—was criticized intensely by the political right, which believed the museum had removed from display a little group of black dolls, thus giving in to what were called “politically correct” sensitivities. The controversy was in fact built on a misunderstanding and the museum kept to its original plan: exhibiting the dolls to invite the audience to reflect on whether the dolls and the word “Negerdukke” (“Negro doll”) often used to denote these dolls was racist.⁸

The criticism from the right was stressful for the museum staff to experience but had uneven effects on how other museums prepared for 2017. One curator at a larger museum noted that museums that wanted to challenge the dominant narratives had to prepare themselves for these kinds of crises “and for demands from right-winged, influential and democratically well-supported political parties that funding will be reduced for museums that act politically correct.” Hence, some institutions found it necessary to set up a damage control strategy to handle the political pressure and were reluctant to use provocative issues in promoting their exhibitions in the press. Other curators with a critical approach stated that they did not feel such constraints in the curatorial process and seemed little concerned with the political pressure. This difference suggests that the arm’s-length principle is indeed under pressure, but seemingly intact to the degree that museum directors and curators still react unevenly to it—and that some museums with a critical approach chose to fly under the media radar.

A different strand of debate and critique came from a range of interested groups including artists, students, academics, curators, activists working with refugees, civil society organizations problematizing transnational adoption, writers, and publishers. Some were Virgin Islanders or belonged to the African or African-Caribbean diaspora in Denmark, others not. Common to most was a focus on the present-day consequences of colonialism such as racism, racialization, capitalist globalization, and global injustice. Some were less occupied with the colonial past itself but took the lack of general awareness about it as a starting point for their critique of ongoing repercussions in Denmark and abroad. Others emphasized previous representations of the colonial past, focusing on the lack of voice of the enslaved and colonized subjects.

The museum as an institution is deeply embedded in the history of colonialism. The troubled history of the collection, uprooting, and display of exoticized artifacts—and people—inescapably reverberates today. Hence, the museum context in and of itself is deeply disturbing to many descendants of

colonized peoples. Moreover, the prevalence given to existing objects and written documents—if not interpreted through a lens inspired by a subaltern or history-from-the-margins approach—tends to silence the voice of those enslaved and colonized, who often did not produce texts and whose objects were stolen or destroyed (Barringer & Flynn 1998; Kaplan & Oldfield 2010; Karp et al. 2006). Consequently, the curators faced a number of representational and ethical dilemmas like those Ross Wilson (2011) identifies as the curatorial complex.

There were curators who had been inspired by history-from-the-margins, subaltern, postcolonial, and, to a lesser degree, decolonial approaches. However, this group was sometimes challenged by criticism from decolonial activists, which they found particularly frustrating. One formulated it this way: “There’s this demand that you deal with race, but at the same time you should, as a white person, expect to be thrashed when doing it.” The fear of being accused of merely reproducing racist institutional approaches even when actively attempting to counter them was pronounced. Curators reacted differently to these types of provocations. Some saw the public debate—right- or left-leaning and however intense—as a sign of success that they had been able to engage a wider audience. Some described the curatorial process as a steep learning curve. As one stated: “I think we made a fine exhibition, but with the knowledge I have now, I probably would have started somewhere else.” Others experienced the multisided critique as highly stressful, or as one expressed it: “As if dealing with death threats from maniac right-wings isn’t bad enough.” Some found that the experience had been so stressful that they were not sure they would take on similar subjects again. Others found that although some provocations had been unfair and transgressive, the critique in general had made them reconsider their curatorial practice. The Workers Museum even embraced it publicly, when—one month before the exhibition closed—the museum invited academics, activists, and artists to intervene in the exhibition and correct phrases directly onto the exhibition texts with red ink, corrections which then became part of the display.⁹

Challenging a distanced audience

Sensitizing a primarily ethnic Danish audience that is not descended from enslaved Africans to the lingering effects of colonialism and slavery was a central goal of several special exhibitions. Some curators explained to me that connecting past and present was the *raison d’être* of all their exhibitions. Others indicated that in this case, because the consequences of slavery and colonization are often unknown to the Danish audience, they had a special obligation to expose them. A limited number of museums openly aimed at addressing consumer habits of the visitors both to highlight and fight present-day slavery.

Explorations of the consequences of slavery and colonialism differed between exhibits. Some museums addressed issues like contemporary forms of slavery and

exploitation of workers, environmental damages, neocolonialism, racism and racial stereotypes, and socioeconomic inequality—both in the USVI and globally. Other themes included citizenship, national identity, and a biased perspective on or lack of sensitivity to the past. Yet another approach was to leave the questions unanswered, encouraging the visitor to reflect on these dilemmas for themselves.

All state-funded Danish museums have specific audiences they are obligated to reach as part of their public responsibilities. However, many curators agreed that their target audience in the context of the centennial was largely a Danish audience with no or only little prior knowledge of colonial history, or a prior interest influenced by ideas of a gentler colonialism or nostalgia. Based on my interviews, most curators agreed that the task of the museum is to catch the attention of the audience with something they might know, challenge this knowledge, and bring the audience to a new—and perhaps unexpected—understanding of the topic. However, curators differed on how explicitly a museum should try to persuade the visitor to embrace a message, echoing Rancière's notion of the “emancipated spectator” (2009).

In an interview conducted for an earlier research project, one museum curator argued that the typical Danish audience tends to resist directly imposed messages—especially if moralizing or overtly emotional. This observation might be correct, but to date there are no comparative studies that verify the claim that Danish audiences react in a more emotionally distanced way than museum visitors of other nationalities. A large audience segmentation study by the Government Agency of Culture (*Kulturarvsstyrelsen*) from 2010 showed that the typical museum visitor was a middle-class, well-educated, liberal, middle-aged woman, usually living in the capital area. According to the evidence, older men frequent museums more than both younger men and women; women prefer art exhibitions and men natural history, while the visitor profile of cultural history museums is gender neutral.¹⁰ This data could indicate a predominance of visitors viewing history as neutral and objective, which would mirror the typical school education of older generations, and translate into their being more comfortable with exhibitions guided more by *logos* than *pathos*. However, this pattern probably reflects age, class, and political orientation more than a particular “Danish” sentiment.

The very emotional approach to colonial history found among many descendants of enslaved Africans in the Caribbean is unquestionably rare among most Danes. This has to do with the fact that this history was, until recently, ignored in Denmark. It also reflects how family history and personal experiences of the visitor often influence his/her emotional response to the exhibition in question. Danes generally have a more emotional attachment to other parts of their history. For example, the German occupation of Denmark during 1940–45 or the lost war against Prussia-Austria in 1864 (which led to high losses of life among Danish commoners, economic ruin, and huge territorial losses only partly regained in 1920) both play major roles in Danish national memory cultures.

They never fail to stir high emotions if dominant narratives are questioned, as these pasts link intrinsically to the formation of the modern Danish nation-state and reside in many family narratives. In comparison, the history of the Danish West Indies is often considered marginal to the history of the Danish nation-state, and while it does reside in a limited number of Danish family narratives, these are much less common than those of 1864 or 1940–45 (Andersen 2013a, 2014).

Curious about the observation by the above-mentioned curator about the “coolness” of Danish audiences, I subsequently asked all curators interviewed for this project if they thought that their audience in this case was simply too cool and detached for emotional approaches used by museums such as the International Museum of Slavery in Liverpool or the Jewish Museum in Berlin, which both make use of highly affective designs. The responses differed, often reflecting the “typical visitor” to their museums or the visitor profile they wanted to target with the special exhibition, especially in terms of professional background, political orientation, class, and region.

Some conceded that a certain anti-political correctness and negative attitude vis-à-vis moralizing or emotional approaches to the past often dominates the Danish public discourse, not least when it comes to the colonial past. This group found it necessary to design their exhibitions in ways that were not too explicit in conveying a strong, direct moral message. They argued that it was more effective to invite the audience to reflect on the topics themselves, thereby leaving the conclusion open to the visitor. As one explained:

if you just expose the rude facts and numbers, some visitors will respond with a “that’s a lie” or decline it as left-winged rubbish [...] So it’s more effective to poke the visitor in a subtler way without pointing fingers directly at him.

Other curators were not afraid of using affective approaches in designs and guided tours and did not agree that the Danish audience in general was more distanced than others. They explained that Western museums historically have created expectations of distance among frequent museum visitors, but also that this expectation can be and is being challenged.

Respecting victims and descendants

Although not initially afraid of employing affective tools, some curators who advocated for being more provocative ended up with exhibition designs more downplayed than originally intended, particularly after attending some of the curatorial seminars and workshops in the run-up to the centennial. In terms of directly exposing the violence of enslavement, some curators paid particular attention to a talk given by Mary Nicole Elliott, curator at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC, in

which she explained that there is no way a museum can make the audience truly understand the horrors of the middle passage or life on a plantation.¹¹ They also listened to the concerns presented in workshops and mixed-media interventions created by British-Nigerian art historian Temi Odumosu, who was based in Copenhagen. She advocated for a sensitive, careful approach to very loaded historical representations, revealing how racist logics encoded in mutilated or grotesque images of Africans as commodities are perpetuated in the present day (e.g., Odumosu 2016, 2015; Odumosu & Schroeder 2015).¹²

The curatorial workshops prompted some curators to look for more subtle ways of representing the atrocities—often by featuring text excerpts from eye-witness depictions of punishments or the middle passage rather than visual representations. One curator explained that, inspired by the Jewish Museum in Berlin where visitors walk on abstract steel faces, she initially had envisioned that visitors would similarly walk on faces while passing through a mock-up of a slave ship. During the preparation process, however, the curator changed her mind, fearing that this type of design might be offensive and settled on a subtler expression. Interestingly, the first idea was somewhat similar to that employed in a centennial special exhibition at the Maritime Museum in Flensburg, Germany,¹³ which was guest-curated by Jamaican curator Imani Tafari-Ama. On the floor, human silhouettes painted in white reminded the visitor of both a crime scene but also the silhouettes of enslaved Africans onboard the iconic etching of the slave ship *Brookes*. Visitors had to walk on the silhouettes to get to the different showcases. The examples attest to the fact that the background of the individual curator often influenced her level of certainty about what would be appropriate.

One way to approach this uncertainty could be to invite stake-holding communities to co-create or respond to the exhibition designs or invite guest curators of African descent to lead the curatorial process as the Maritime Museum in Flensburg did. Several curators visited one or more museums abroad to gain inspiration, such as the International Museum of Slavery in Liverpool, the Museum of London Docklands, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, and the Jewish Museum in Berlin, which have all worked to include minority communities. Examples from the UK show that identifying community representatives has proven extremely complex (Smith et al. 2011). The situation is not qualitatively different in Denmark. However, almost all curators agreed that the international models were not easily transferable to a Danish context. Unlike the UK, the Netherlands, and France, which all have larger African and African-Caribbean communities from former colonies, immigrants, refugees, and adoptees of African descent only make up a small part of the Danish population. Moreover, very few African-Caribbean people from the DWI migrated or were brought to Denmark before and after the transfer in 1917, and do not make up a distinct group.¹⁴

Some left the matter there. Others operated with a wider definition of stake-holders, which created another problem, namely that most Danes of African descent have no direct ties to the DWI/USVI and do not necessarily represent the

perspectives of Virgin Islanders. On the other hand, museums focusing exclusively on the binary relationship between Denmark and the Virgin Islands/DWI were criticized for overlooking the problems people of African descent suffered in terms of racism in Denmark. Several curators struggled with these dilemmas. Some chose to invite artists from the USVI¹⁵ and/or activists of African descent to contribute to the exhibitions. With a single exception, however, none of the curators involved were of African descent.

The Workers Museum (Arbejdermuseet): Stop Slavery!

Past and present slavery and the resistance to it was the overarching theme chosen by the Workers Museum, curated by historian Rikke Halberg with guest curators from the Danish branch of the Fairtrade Foundation, the NGO Dan-watch, and secondary school students, among others. Reflecting the dilemma of whether to choose a specific Danish-Virgin Islands perspective or a broader, more encompassing story, the museum chose to divide the exhibition into two related themes: one dealing with the specific history of slavery in the DWI, the other with contemporary forms of enslavement. Illustrated by a circular exhibition structure, the visitor started and ended in the same room. This was meant to encourage visitors to identify with the past and present victims of slavery. The room was dominated by a huge screen showing images of people of various ages and complexions accompanied by excerpts from Article 4 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights banning slavery.

The exhibit used several strategies in its effort to sensitively and persuasively represent the violence of slavery. The section “At the Gold Coast” featured excerpts of historic texts describing the horrifying punishment for resistance issued by the administrators in Danish forts. A rolling projection of enslaved Africans’ names, including their age, gender, and height, revealed the limited archival evidence available to construct a view of them as individual human beings, but also gave the visitor a glimpse of their humanity—their African names. In the following section “The Danish West Indies 1672–1917,” the first list was followed by a second in which the African names were replaced by European names, some of which were highly demeaning, such as “Skidenøje” (“Shitty eye”) and “Benrad” (“Skeleton”), attesting to the dehumanization of Africans. The violence became more personalized when the visitor passed through a tunnel representing the middle passage, while listening to a reading from *The Interesting Narrative* ([1789] 1995) by Olaudah Equiano, in which he describes his experiences of enslavement and the ordeal onboard a slave ship.

The exhibit employed several experiential features meant to disorient the visitor: instead of passing directly to the slave market after passing through the tunnel, the visitor encountered a planter’s chair. The chair was one of the most hated objects on the plantations and among the first objects destroyed during revolts. Visitors could sit in it; however, a sign warned of what it means to take that position. The visitor choosing to sit experienced an embodied, highly

gendered, power pose with legs elevated and spread. At the same time, the visitor was surrounded by documents in the exhibition space depicting how enslaved Africans used plants to poison plantation overseers and a work of art on that very topic, *Maroon Mountain*.¹⁶ Also, the chair looked directly back at a photograph of a contemporary African mine-worker. This linked past and present, provoking the visitor to reflect on contemporary labor conditions of miners for rare minerals in Africa, used in commodities that are treasured as much by the affluent parts of today's world as colonial commodities were in the 17th and 18th centuries.

The specific Virgin Islands–Danish history ended in 1917 and was followed by a room dedicated to forms of modern-day slavery. According to the curator, many react with skepticism when presented with the fact that an estimated 40 million people live in contemporary forms of slavery.¹⁷ For this reason, the section documented contemporary slavery with facts, figures, and documentation, appealing to the *logos*, rather than the *pathos*, of the audience. Different panels motivating the audience to act accompanied the documentation. Finally, the museum invited NGOs working on related issues to guest curate a corner of this room on a rolling basis. When I visited, the Fairtrade Foundation had decorated the corner with purses hanging from the ceiling encouraging visitors to use their power as consumers. Another panel encourages visitors to visit the website <http://slaveryfootprint.org>, where details of consumer habits give an approximation of how many people living under slavery have probably produced those everyday goods.

The Royal Library (Det Kgl. Bibliotek): Blind Spots—images of the Danish West Indies Colony

Drawing on its vast collection of visual material from the DWI, this exhibition curated by art historians Mette Kia Krabbe, Mathias Danbolt, and research librarian Sarah Giersing, with sound-installations by art historian Temi Odu-mosu, aimed to sensitize the audience to the hidden power structures and racial stereotypes guiding historical and contemporary visual representations of the DWI/USVI. Exhibited items included historic maps, engravings, books, paintings, porcelain, family albums, and postcards, as well as recent artworks by Danish–Caribbean artist Jeanette Ehlers, St. Croix artist La Vaughn Belle, and Danish artist Nanna Debois Buhl. The exhibition followed a strict chronological structure starting with the early colonization of the islands and ending in the 21st century, with discussions on the lingering effects of racism and colonial nostalgia in contemporary visual material.

The exhibition employed several strategies to represent the violence of slavery in a respectful way and bring in input from representatives of the diaspora and descendants of the enslaved. A video documentation of Ehlers' performance "Whip it good," in which the artist comments on colonial amnesia by lashing a white canvas with a whip immersed in charcoal, dominated the room

dedicated to enslavement titled “The Unfree Bodies of Colonial Life.”¹⁸ The room’s only direct visual representation of violence on an enslaved body was an engraving by William Blake depicting an African woman hanging by her hands from a tree. The picture is from 1793 and was published in the Dutch-British colonial soldier John Gabriel Stedman’s eyewitness account (1796), and the image was displayed next to the engraving, opened to a page describing terrifying scenes of punishment the author witnessed in the Dutch colony Suriname. Moreover, this room and two others in the exhibition feature counter-archival artworks by Belle inspired by, among other events, the resistance of St. Croix workers to unjust working conditions during the Fire-burn in 1878.¹⁹

In collaboration with the special exhibition at the National Gallery, the Royal Library invited Temi Odumosu to intervene in parts of their exhibitions with alternative perspectives, resulting in the participatory sound-project *What Lies Unspoken*.²⁰ The intervention was based on a series of workshops with activists, artists, scholars, and students, who were invited to respond and comment on artifacts in the National Gallery and the Royal Library. The recorded discussions were edited into a soundscape accompanying the artifacts exhibited. The project simultaneously aimed at providing new and alternative readings to an audience with a pre-established knowledge of the works in question, but also to create openings to representations of colonial imagery stemming from distant times that often appear enigmatic to modern-day viewers.²¹

The exhibition concluded with a section titled “After Images” on present-day manifestations of neo-colonial imagery and racial stereotypes, namely a Danish video game on the slave trade and nostalgic exoticism in advertisements for “the Danish West Indies” by the Danish tourist industry (also see Andersen 2013b).²² The video game “Playing History: The Slave Trade,” produced as an educational game, caused international furor a few years back. Commentators were offended by black-faced figures and a scene where the player loads a ship with Africans in a Tetris game.²³ Projected onto two large canvases, Danish-African actor Anna Neye discusses the game with a game designer, who explains that his team members designed the dolls mimicking a well-established tradition of Danish TV-dolls.²⁴ Blackfacing also has a history in Denmark,²⁵ but the team reportedly did not realize what the dolls ended up looking like to people who know this phenomenon all too well. This fact again reflects the broader ignorance in Danish society of words, visual styles, and behavior that is offensive to people of African descent.

This exhibition did not include features that motivated the visitor to take direct action, but rather served as a reminder to the visitor of how different people approach the colonial past, aiming at creating a new awareness in the visitor that could potentially hinder repetitions of similar forms of oppression.

The Maritime Museum: Vestindien Revisited

While most of the other special centennial exhibitions primarily focused on the period before 1917, the exhibition at the Maritime Museum in Elsinore, curated by anthropologist Nathalia Brichet, artist Camilla Nørgaard, and head-of-exhibition Marie Ørstedholm, concentrated on the period after 1917, zooming in on St. Thomas harbor and the physical traces of Danish colonialism today. Guided by the idea that to be colonized then and now is (also) to be subjected to dreams and plans dreamt up elsewhere, the exhibition juxtaposed the glossy images of the tourist paradise (as the islands are branded) with tourism's detrimental socioeconomic and environmental side-effects. The exhibition was based on fieldwork among different stakeholders in St. Thomas harbor. Consequently, it paid close attention to a story that figures prominently in local St. Thomas narratives on Danish colonialism but is rarely mentioned in Danish accounts of the history. This account emphasizes how Danish enterprises, driven by a mix of commercial interests and patriotism, negotiated certain advantages in relation to the treaty of the transfer that prolonged the Danish colonial infrastructure up until 1993. It was only then that the Danish-owned company WICO, which owned the major part of the harbor, after years of local discontent was finally bought by the local government. Moreover, the cruise-ship industry was to a large extent developed by the former Danish company, who profited greatly from the growing industry (Hansen 2016).

Tacitly pointing to the concept of dark tourism, which usually refers to tourist excursions to sites of danger, mass violence, or catastrophe, the curators were inspired by Anthropocene theory and interpreted the harbor as a landscape destroyed by people. Simultaneously, the fragile economy of the islands is almost entirely dependent on mass tourism, which was part of the reason the curators felt they had to proceed carefully with a one-sided critique. However, to emphasize the downside of this industry, the exhibition employed a raw and unfinished aesthetic with plywood showcases and exhibited discarded items they had collected such as sunglasses, flip-flops, straws, sun lotion, and towels forgotten by tourists at local beaches and dead corals. The tourist images of crystal-clear water, wedding photos, white beaches, and tax-free diamonds were juxtaposed with plastic bags turned into "gems" by Nørgaard. Signs explained how chemicals such as *tributyltin*, used in paint for boats, and *oxybenzone*, used in sunscreen, have devastating effects on the local marine ecosystems.

The focus on environmental destruction and preoccupation with scrap was thus created to surprise, disorient, and provoke visitors with a pre-established, often positive, if not vested interest in the maritime sector and holiday aspects of the USVI—as the typical visitor profile of the museum includes stakeholders in the Danish maritime industry. They were asked to reconsider the problematic side of this industry and its Danish roots. The guiding texts were very short, leaving a lot of analytical work to the visitor, but the museum also produced a booklet with more thorough explanations sold at a low price (Brichet et al. 2017).

Did the museums move the audience?

“Are we preaching for the already converted?” asked Jamaican guest-curator Imani Tafari-Ama from the Maritime Museum in Flensburg during a seminar in Copenhagen,²⁶ raising a question also dealt with in this volume: did the museums effectively persuade their audience?

As the editors of this volume point out, visitors are “emancipated spectators” and “the effect of the sites’ *pathos* is open to reinterpretation by visitors” (p. 9). The few visitor responses I have sampled are anecdotal and not conclusive. A general pattern among visitors based on observation and conversations was that visitors without much prior knowledge of the topic and teachers taking students on museum visits preferred exhibitions with a broad, chronological, and book-like approach. Some from this group also found exhibitions focusing in on a single aspect of the colonial history harder to follow and exhibitions featuring many artworks distracting. Visitors who already had a solid knowledge of the subject and its problematics reacted more favorably to this kind of intervention, although they differed on which exhibitions they preferred. The hesitancy to expose the public more directly to the violence of slavery was sometimes a point of critique. Moreover, while having ambitions to portray West Indians/Virgin Islanders in nuanced ways, some exhibitions ended up portraying both historic and living Danes as rather one-dimensional, which made some visitors reject the exhibition as un-nuanced. Virgin Islanders also reacted differently to the same exhibitions. One group of Virgin Islanders commended the Maritime Museum for telling an often-hidden aspect of the history of St. Thomas, while other Virgin Islanders found it problematic, in part because it did not deal with race and positionality, but also because it overlooked the positive role the beaches also play in local narratives of the Virgin Island cultural history.

Because there were nearly 30 programmed special exhibitions, each museum had to carve out a very specific approach. The fact that many exhibitions supplemented each other allowed the audience to view them as an unintentional *Gesamtwerk* offering a variety of approaches to the same past. It is unclear, however, how many visitors visited more than one or two exhibitions.

Some curators reported that in their guided tours they used affective approaches, highlighting the traumatic dimensions of the topic, and received positive visitor responses, attesting both to the fact that not all visitors were “too cool” to this type of approach and that the message taken home by visitors is influenced by more than the exhibition design. Much depended on the background of the individual visitors, the number and type of museum(s) they visited, and how they visited and related what they saw to the massive media coverage of the event in 2017. Hence, the impact of a single museum on public interpretations is difficult to pinpoint.

However, several museums reported an unusually high number of visitors, including many school groups, suggesting that the museums undoubtedly contributed to raising the general level of awareness of the colonial past in

Denmark. Compared to the previous neglect of this history in Danish museums, the 2017 special exhibitions in this regard represented a major leap forward.

It remains an open question if the new insights into curating colonial history gained by some curators and museums during 2017 will have a lasting impact on museum practices in relation to the Danish colonial past. So much depended on individual curators and how they—and their directors—experienced the process. As noted, curators were divided on several key curatorial questions, especially in terms of affect and the inclusion of non-curators. Some curators became keen to employ their new insights into other related projects, while others stated that it had been much too stressful and the personal consequences too high. Additionally, Danish museums have been forced to cut back on staff because of annual state reductions to culture and research, so it is also uncertain if the curators involved will be available to take on new projects again. 2020 marks the 400th anniversary of Danish colonialism in India and 2021 the 300th in Greenland. It will be interesting to follow how the 2017 experiences will be translated into these upcoming centennials.

Notes

- 1 This work forms part of the ECHOES project, which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under grant agreement No. 770248.
- 2 The islands were sold to the US in 1916 and possession was transferred in 1917; hence, March 31 has since been marked as "Transfer Day" in the USVI. The word has no Danish equivalent. On the ambivalent meaning of this event to USVI local identity and memory cultures see Bastian (2003).
- 3 The exhibitions were hosted by The National Gallery, The Royal Library, Horsens Prison Museum, Vejle Museum, The Workers Museum, the Maritime Museum, Christiansborg Palace, The Police Museum, Vestsjællands Museum, Øregaard, Odrupgaard, Gl. Holtegaard, Frilandsmuseet, and The Women's Museum. Smaller museums included Humlemagasinet, Museum Mors, Assistens Churchyard, Kongeåmuseet, Danmarks Sukkermuseum i Nakskov, Samsø Museum, Svendborg Museum, and Flynderupgård. Small exhibitions were also hosted by Borreby Gods, Solyst, Ballerup Library, Copenhagen Town Hall, Rudersdal libraries, The State Archives and the pop-up museum and cultural centre *Den Vestindiske Kulturambassade*, the Gallery meter, and the Gallery SixtyEight Art Institute. A small traveling exhibition created by the Danish West Indian Association was hosted by several public schools and libraries throughout the country.
- 4 "Dangerous Forts," The National Museum of Denmark September–October 2010.
- 5 <http://den-vestindiske-arv.dk/en/the-project-and-the-website>.
- 6 Notably "Curatorial Challenges," Copenhagen University, May 26–27, 2016; "Troublesome Pictures Representing the Colonial Past," Gentofte, June 2, 2016; "Representing History through Data: Datasprint series," October 10, November 12, December 10, 2016; "Workshop Nordic Connections 2017," December 7, 2016, Copenhagen.
- 7 See, e.g., "DF kalder det 'dumt' at fjerne ordet 'neger' fra værker på Statens Museum for Kunst," Politiken, June 7, 2017.
- 8 Also see <http://pov.international/de-sorte-dukke-fra-vestsjaelland>.
- 9 I took part in this intervention.

- 10 “National brugerundersøgelse på de statslige og statsanerkendte museer i Danmark—2009”, Kulturarvsstyrelsen April 19, 2010.
- 11 Elliott, Mary Nicole: “Presenting the Story of Slavery and Freedom in the National Museum.” Talk given at *Workshop Nordic Connections December 7, 2017*, 2016, Copenhagen. I was not present. The indirect quotation is formulated from curators interviewed for this project.
- 12 Also see <http://todu1.theimageofblack.com/projects>.
- 13 Up until 1864, the city of Flensburg was part of the Danish colonial trade system. The Maritime Museum in Flensburg thus also decided to commemorate the centennial.
- 14 Danish censuses make use of the category “country of origin” and distinguish between “immigrants” and “descendants” but do not use the category “race.” US Virgin Islanders of African descent thus fall under the category “from the US,” while descendants of Danish West Indians register as Danes. This is also the case for other European citizens of African descent.
- 15 This was the case for Vestsjællands Museum, the Royal Library, Gl. Holtegaard, Christiansborg Palace, and Gallery meter. Also see www.lavaughnbelle.com/news. Vestindisk Kulturambassade hosted the exhibition “Invisible Heritage” featuring USVI artists including David Berg, Janet Cook-Rutnik, Edgar Endress, Jon Euwema, and Gerville Larsen.
- 16 <http://nannadeboisbuhl.net/maroon>.
- 17 According to recent research developed jointly by the International Labour Organization and the Walk Free Foundation, in partnership with the International Organization for Migration. www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_574717/lang-en/index.htm, visited March 22, 2018.
- 18 www.jeannetteehlers.dk.
- 19 The works are from the series *Chaney, Cuts and Burns*, and the *Photomontage Series*, www.lavaughnbelle.com/#/infinite.
- 20 <http://livingarchives.mah.se>.
- 21 I participated in the workshop used in the sound installation at the National Gallery.
- 22 I took part in this installation.
- 23 www.playinghistory.eu. The tetris feature was later removed.
- 24 The dolls mimic TV productions such as Jullerup Færgeby (1974) and Vinterby Øster (1973).
- 25 The popular comedy “Styrmand Karlsen” from 1958 filmed partly at former Danish colonial forts in Ghana is an example of this.
- 26 Lecture by Dr. Imani Tafari-Ama. Den Vestindiske Kulturambassade. February 25, 2017.

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4

KOSOVO'S NEWBORN MONUMENT

Persuasion, contestation, and the narrative constructions of past and future

Alissa Boguslaw

In downtown Pristina,¹ the capital city of Kosovo, just steps from the national football stadium, a shopping mall, and a Yugoslav-era Youth Palace,² stands an eighty-foot steel sculpture spelling out the English word N-E-W-B-O-R-N. Originally painted yellow, as a metaphor for “sunrise after darkness,” NEWBORN was built to celebrate Kosovo’s first independence day on February 17, 2008, signifying the former Yugoslav province’s birth as a liberal, multi-ethnic democracy, as well as its future as a potential member of the European Union (Marku 2014). For the past nine years, Kosovo, once part of Serbia during the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, was under the aegis of a United Nations-led interim administration, following the conclusion of the NATO-led war in June 1999. NATO’s three-month bombing campaign against the Serbian government was the result of escalating ethnic conflict between Kosovo’s Albanians and Serbs, and when it ended, Kosovo became the site of an international political effort to build a stable, multi-ethnic democracy with a market economy. After nearly a decade of international administration, on the afternoon of February 17, 2008, the Kosovo Assembly voted to unilaterally declare independence, and Europe’s youngest republic was born.

Later that evening, NEWBORN was unveiled as a part of the independence celebrations. City officials passed around black permanent markers, inviting the president, prime minister, and all of the new citizens to sign their names on the sculpture’s surface. That night, hundreds of thousands of citizens signed their names, and citizens living abroad called in to have family and friends sign their names for them (Marku 2014). Financed by the government of Kosovo, NEWBORN was conceived by Kosovo artist and politician, Fisnik Ismaili, with the international creative agency, Ogilvy Pristina. “We chose the word NEWBORN to encapsulate in one word everything that the independence was going to bring to the country. We intentionally used English to globally pass on the

message of the 'newest' country being born," Ismaili explained (NEWBORN Monument 2008).

Today, NEWBORN has come to symbolize "youthful optimism" and "orientation towards the future" (Ströhle 2012, 245)—specifically a future wherein Kosovo is a member of the European Union and the international community. It also remains an interactive sculpture, as citizens and tourists maintain the tradition of signing their names on the façade. NEWBORN "was meant to be written on from day one," Ismaili explains, "whether with a pencil, a permanent marker or [spray paint], people are free to express themselves" ("Newborn Architect Fisnik Ismaili on the Latest Addition" 2014). A dynamic fixture in Pristina's urban landscape, visitors and tourists come to NEWBORN to sign their names on the surface and take selfies. Children climb on the letters and the letter O provides a shady place to sit and enjoy an ice cream cone on a hot summer's day. Beginning in 2013, each year on the anniversary of Kosovo's independence, NEWBORN is repainted to express a new theme chosen by the designer (Morina 2017). These varying themes reflect contemporary debates, with messaging directed at an internal, Kosovo audience, as well as at an international public.

Because of its emphasis on the future and annually changing façades, NEWBORN is critiqued for creating a rupture with the past and rendering collective memory irrelevant (Ströhle 2012; B. Luci 2016a, 2016b). As Isabel Ströhle argues, NEWBORN looks toward the future and neglects the past in order to communicate Kosovo's political goals of international recognition and legitimization in the present (2012, 228). However, in 2014, NEWBORN was repainted in camouflage to commemorate the 1999 war, illuminating the ways in which the monument—and the new Kosovo identity—keep alive a certain legacy of the past, the legacy of Albanian military struggle against Serb forces (Ingimundarson 2007, 95). In fact, NEWBORN and the orientation toward the future do not break with the past, but reinforce it, echoing the rhetorical strategy used by ruling political elites to appeal to Kosovo-Albanians' sense of a shared past, while simultaneously presenting a future image of Kosovo to the international community (2007, 104). This narrative integration of past and future repositions Kosovo's new symbols into the dominant cultural frameworks with which people already identify. At the same time, NEWBORN differs from traditional national monuments that tend to depict hegemonic state narratives; its interactive character and changing façades make it a site open to both persuasion and contestation, demonstrated by anonymous pranks and other local interventions.

Background

Kosovo is the seventh and last state to gain independence after the collapse of the former Yugoslavia. Like many of its neighbors in the Western Balkans, Kosovo is composed of ethnically, religiously, and linguistically diverse groups, including a majority community of Albanians, who constitute 90% of the population, and minority communities of Serbs, Roma, Turks, Bosniaks,

Gorani, and other South Slavs (CIA World Factbook 2016). Kosovo has also been the site of deep ethnic divisions, especially between Albanians and Serbs, who each have their own claims to the land, dating back to antiquity (Judah 2008, 4–8). The end of World War II saw the birth of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and Kosovo was made part of Serbia within this new configuration. In 1974, Kosovo gained the status of Socialist Autonomous Province, and enjoyed relative sovereignty until 1989, when Slobodan Milošević, President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and its successor, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, revoked Kosovo's autonomous status and stripped Kosovo's Albanians of their rights, creating apartheid-like conditions and reinforcing the divisions between Albanians and Serbs (Judah 2008, 49–68).

In 1991, Kosovo's Albanian leaders organized a referendum to declare Kosovo's *de facto* independence, creating an unofficial "parallel" state called the Republic of Kosova, led by Ibrahim Rugova (Pula 2004). While Rugova advocated peaceful resistance, the divisions among political elites contributed to the formation of a guerrilla army called the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), which carried out a series of small insurgencies against Milošević's regime and the Serbian government (Judah 2008, 68–99). The escalation of ethnic conflict culminated in the NATO intervention in March 1999; when it ended three months later, the United Nations Security Council established an interim administration, placing Kosovo under the aegis of the international community.

In order to determine Kosovo's final status, UN Special Envoy and former president of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari, was appointed in 2005 to facilitate a series of negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia. Serbia, however, would not accept any agreement with the prospect of an independent Kosovo on the table, claiming that the province was integral to the Serbian nation, and Kosovo's Albanian leaders would not accept anything short of statehood, citing the history of ethnic cleansing directed against Albanians (Weller 2009, 23–41). In March 2007, when no agreement could be reached, Ahtisaari and his team crafted the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement, known as the "Ahtisaari Plan." The Ahtisaari Plan provided Kosovo with a complete framework for state-building according to the requirements for EU membership—emphasizing liberal democratic values such as universal human rights, protections for minorities, and a market economy, with the expectation that Kosovo would someday join the EU.

Though Serbia rejected Ahtisaari's proposal, Kosovo's Albanians struck a deal: in return for abiding by the plan, Kosovo could declare independence and receive recognition and funding from the majority of Western and European countries, international civil society organizations, and NGOs (Judah 2008, 115). In February 2008, Kosovo unilaterally declared independence and welcomed the international presence. Kosovo is now recognized by over one hundred countries and twenty-three European Union member countries, but its independent status remains contested by Serbia and Russia, blocking Kosovo's membership in the UN, EU, and NATO.

Breaking with the past? Kosovo's new symbolic landscape

In order to state-build according to European and international norms, part of Kosovo's task was to construct a new national identity, equipped with a new repertoire of national symbols, images, and icons. The new identity would not be tied to an ethno-nationalist conception of statehood, but to the post-nationalist vision for Kosovo elaborated in the Ahtisaari Plan, promoting universal values and norms, such as cosmopolitanism and multi-ethnicity. According to the Ahtisaari Plan, official state symbols, like the flag and national anthem, cannot refer to a specific ethnicity or nationality, or to another state, like Albania or Serbia (Comprehensive Proposal, Article 6.1). As a result, the new state flag has a blue field with a yellow map of Kosovo encircled by five white stars in the center, bearing striking resemblance to the flag of the European Union. The national anthem is called *Europe* and, in order to "respect the multi-ethnic nature of Kosovo," it has no official lyrics ("Kosovo Approves Anthem" 2008). In addition to the official state symbols, upon driving through the main gateway to Pristina, one is greeted by an oversized bronze statue of Bill Clinton. Streets are named for Clinton, as well as for George H.W. Bush, Bob Dole, Tony Blair, Madeline Albright, and other Western leaders canonized as heroes and friends of Kosovo.

Although the newly constructed symbolic landscape is devoted to serving the postwar goal of Euro-Atlantic integration (Ermolin 2014, 160), the past is not absent in Kosovo. From national museums to public monuments, the overall commemorative strategy in the new state accentuates certain versions of the past, like ancient Illyria (Illyrians are the purported ancestors of Kosovo's Albanians) and the period of Ottoman rule. But the legacy of Albanian armed struggle against the Milošević regime and the 1999 war dominate the commemorative landscape (Ermolin 2014, 160). Tropes of Albanian military sacrifice and martyrdom serve as a key part of the political foundation for the new state (Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006, 514). At the same time, the strategy erases most periods of Serb rule. There is a visible absence of socialist and Yugoslav memory, and most partisan monuments have been destroyed, though period architecture and remnants do remain (Schwandner-Sievers 2010, 96). In fact, the Youth Palace NEWBORN stands in front of is a site of memory, built in 1977 to commemorate two partisans from World War II, representing Yugoslav values of "brotherhood and unity" (Schwandner-Sievers 2010, 100–101). Mounted on the roof of the Youth Palace and hanging above NEWBORN is an oversized poster of the late KLA commander, Adem Jashari, wearing military fatigues, illustrating the broader commemorative strategy.

The newborn narrative and the vision for the future

Symbolizing hope and the future, as a giant English word, NEWBORN is part of a larger marketing strategy for the new country which aims to rebrand Kosovo for the 21st century and persuade the international community to

recognize the new state and its legitimacy. In 2009, the government of Kosovo launched a 5.7 million Euro branding campaign called *Kosovo—The Young Europeans*, created by the Israeli branch of the international advertising firm, Saatchi and Saatchi, to transform the country's image of war, ethnic violence, and socialism into an image of a young, multi-ethnic, neoliberal democracy committed to a European future (Ströhle 2012, 246). Spotlighting the country's youthful population, *The Young Europeans* campaign consisted of a promotional video and a series of billboards and print ads, all stamped with the *Young Europeans* slogan, which features the word "Kosovo" in playful, multicolor typography above the tagline "the young europeans" in lowercase letters. The billboards and print ads show young people and their different identities, such as a young man in a black leather jacket playing electric guitar or a young woman in a blazer and plaid skirt holding a stack of books (Wählich and Xharra 2010, 16). This campaign further cultivates the NEWBORN monument's message of youth and optimism, "communicat[ing] that the country is a fountain of youth and that Kosov[o] people have something special to bring to the European continent by taking a younger, fresher perspective to everything they do" (Saatchi and Saatchi 2010).

This overall messaging contributes to a collective master-narrative, what I call the "newborn narrative": the storyline for Europe's youngest democracy, commemorating Kosovo's new beginning as a state, its independence from Serbia, and its future as a member of the EU. Mobilized by political elites such as current president, Hashim Thaçi, and based on the international community's vision for a multi-ethnic state anchored in "Euro-Atlantic structures" (Ingimundarson 2007, 95), the newborn narrative depicts the re-emergence of Kosovo following the NATO intervention and the postwar reconstruction administered by international actors. As Kosovo's median age is twenty-six (CIA World Factbook 2016), the newborn narrative reinforces the image of a young society that is now "free of any ethnic or confessional discrimination," and "where integration into the Western-oriented cultural and political discourse is willingly accepted" (Ermolin 2014, 170). Presenting Kosovo in a "new light," as former president Fatmir Sejdiu puts it (Collaku 2009), the newborn narrative breaks with the past image of ethnic violence, mobilizing the rhetoric of youth, entrepreneurialism, and the future. These "discourses on a 'European future for Kosovo' have accompanied the post-war reconstruction processes and the state-building ideologies, instilling hopes among Kosovars for a 'European' future for their country," Vjollca Krasniqi writes (2014, 143).

However, "many see [NEWBORN] as a representation of Kosovo's infancy, where Kosovo sees itself as a child, is treated as a child and in essence needs to be educated as a child" (B. Luci 2016b). Whereas the language of "infantilization and invalidation feature[s] prominently in the policy discourse on post-conflict and post-colonial societies," Ströhle explains, in the Kosovo case international political and economic support is tied to Kosovo's willingness to "play by the rules of the club" and its "unquestioned acceptance" of the Ahtisaari Plan and its prescriptions (2012, 232, 236). The irony is that no matter how willing Kosovo

is to “play by the rules,” its contested status continues to prevent membership in the EU and other international organizations such as the UN and NATO (Bieber 2011, 1793). Strict and incoherent visa policies also make it difficult for Kosovo's citizens to leave the country or even visit the very Europe they aspire to be part of (Shaini 2016). Ultimately, the construction of this new social imaginary appears to be a mere social fantasy.

The tradition of repainting NEWBORN each year on the anniversary of Kosovo's independence officially began in 2013, but in 2012, NEWBORN underwent its first public makeover, further illuminating the chasm between Kosovo's political aspirations and its present reality. In a prank, anonymous individuals covered the bottom of letter B in black spray paint, respelling the words “NEW PORN,” just as the monument was to appear in a *Young Europeans* spot called “Join the Celebration—Happy Birthday Republic of Kosovo” on CNN. As the fifteen-second video commemorating Kosovo's fourth independence aired across the world, in the eleventh second NEWBORN appears with the vandalized letter B (“Kosovo Remakes Promotion Ad” 2012). When asked about the prank, Ismaili replied, “I took my hat off to them” (“New-born Architect Fisnik Ismaili on the Latest Addition” 2014). “This was expected [to happen], sooner or later” (“Kosovo Remakes Promotion Ad” 2012). Of course, respelling NEW PORN was nothing more than a prank, but it can also be read as a playful challenge to ideological strategies employed to rebrand the state and reinvent the image of Kosovo (Ströhle 2012, 227–228).

In 2012, just as Kosovo was about to celebrate its fifth anniversary of independence, a government committee decided to repaint the monument yellow, covering the graffiti and all of the original signatures without consulting the public (Marku 2014). In response, Ismaili used Facebook to call for volunteers to come repaint the monument, this time in a motif with the flags of those countries who recognize Kosovo's independence. “NEWBORN [was] built to be written on and drawn on by every citizen of the world,” he wrote (“New-born Kosova” 2008). Over the next several days, more than one hundred and fifty volunteers showed up to help cover NEWBORN in international flags. On the backside of the sculpture, five spaces were left blank, with the names of the five EU countries who do not recognize Kosovo's independence written in black letters: Spain, Slovakia, Cyprus, Greece, and Romania (Marku 2014).

For the next year, NEWBORN stood as an international political expression, visually anchoring the country within the world community and projecting Kosovo's new image as a multicultural, cosmopolitan democracy. At the same time, the five blank spaces provided a clear statement to the European countries who have not yet recognized Kosovo as a state. This iteration also sent a message to the government of Kosovo about who NEWBORN really belonged to; though the monument purports to be in the name of Kosovo's citizens, it is really the designer, Fisnik Ismaili, who has the creative and proprietary authority over the unofficial monument.

The legacy of the past: the pan-Albanian narrative

Given the emphasis on the future, NEWBORN has been critiqued for creating a rupture with the past. Kosovo journalist Besa Luci argues that the image of “Kosovo as a ‘newborn’ country [...] tries to erase any relation to past memories and experiences” (B. Luci 2016a), and Ströhle asserts that NEWBORN “propagates the beginning of a new era and the irrelevance of the past” (Ströhle 2012, 248). Challenging these claims, the next year Ismaili called for volunteers to come repaint the monument in a camouflage motif—as a double-tribute to NATO and the KLA who fought for Kosovo’s independence in the 1999 war. Ismaili, also a former soldier, wrote in his invitation on social media, “this year’s dedication goes to those who gave their lives, so NEWBORN could live” (“Time To Start Painting Again” 2014). After the volunteers finished painting, news articles, commentary, and editorials ranged “from exclamations of excitement to those of horror,” Kosovo journalist Hana Marku explains. Supporters celebrated the double-tribute, while opponents were concerned with the monument’s new “martial character” (Marku 2014).

To the international audience, this iteration reinforced the newborn narrative which brands Kosovo as a country embedded within international organizations. To the Kosovo audience, the camouflage also signified something else, what Anna Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers (2006) call the “pan-Albanian master-narrative.” The pan-Albanian narrative is the commemorative master-narrative of the 1999 war and the foundation for the postwar construction of Kosovo-Albanian identity (Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006, 513). As a commemorative master-narrative, it is an account of the past which offers a “moral message” (Zerubavel 1995, 6), providing Kosovo-Albanians with a persuasive framework to interpret their past, and by implication, their present and future.

The pan-Albanian narrative is based on a single event which took place in March 1998, just weeks before the NATO intervention: the slaughter of KLA founding commander, Adem Jashari, and his entire family by Serbian forces in the rural village of Prekaz, Kosovo. The death of Jashari made him an immediate “rallying point” for the KLA to recruit new soldiers both in Kosovo and abroad (Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006, 516). Different versions of the narrative—myths of Jashari’s miraculous escape, for example—spread to the local press and to international journalists covering the war, and the “campaign [...] began—in the media, literature, arts, historiography and public ceremonies—to produce meanings and memories of the massacre as a symbol of Albanian national liberation” (2006, 516, 514). Today, representations of the narrative are everywhere in Kosovo, especially the image of Jashari carrying an automatic weapon and wearing military fatigues, such as the one that hangs above NEWBORN on the roof of the Youth Palace. Streets, public squares, and national theaters are named for him (Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006, 517). Jashari is immortalized as the “Legendary Commander,” symbolizing Albanian heroism and military sacrifice in the face of Serbian oppression—the central

tropes of the Kosovo independence struggle which captivate the postwar construction of identity (Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006, 514). The narrative “give[s] meaning to the collective trauma of the more recent war experience,” offering Kosovo-Albanians the “shared self-understanding as an oppressed nation looking for political and psychological deliverance” (Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006, 514).

“Adem Jashari is not only commemorated as a hero,” Vjollca Krasniqi explains; the legend has become an ethno-national founding narrative, providing a “vision of the nation’s imagined past” and a “view of the nation’s future” which “renders war impossible to forget” (Krasniqi, n.d.). In 2005, the Kosovo Assembly adopted the law on the Memorial Complex Adem Jashari, turning the family compound in the village of Prekaz into the only official state memorial complex (N. Luci 2014, 163). “The meaning conveyed by the [memorial] is that of a background for staging the nation,” Krasniqi writes; “valorizing Jashari and the armed struggle for independence legitimizes the state and the authority of the political elites in power” (V. Krasniqi, n.d.).

Providing a plot structure for Kosovo-Albanians’ struggle from political “oppression to freedom” (Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006, 516), the commemorative narrative’s emphasis on ethnic difference would appear to clash with a future-oriented, post-nationalist vision of a multi-ethnic Kosovo contained in the newborn narrative. However, both the pan-Albanian and newborn narratives have been integrated and instrumentalized by political elites such as Hashim Thaçi, Ramush Haradinaj, and Agim Çeku former, KLA soldiers turned politicians who are today in power. These leaders used and reproduced the pan-Albanian narrative in order to legitimize their own role in the political reconstruction, merging it with the newborn narrative when it became clear that Kosovo’s only viable path to independent statehood would mean complying with the international community and adhering to the Ahtisaari Plan (Ingimundarson 2007, 104). Therefore, these two narratives are not counter-narratives, but are mobilized together by political elites who derive “their political legitimization from the past,” while “insisting on a new beginning” (Ströhle 2012, 246).

Creating a trajectory from Jashari’s death in 1998 to the declaration of independence in 2008 when the new Kosovo was born, the integration of these narratives “build[s] a particular linear rendition of the national experience through the interplay between history and memory” (V. Krasniqi, n.d.). The overall messaging appeals to the past in order to persuade the Kosovo audience to accept the vision for the future. Hashim Thaçi and his party, the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), have been especially successful in coordinating the two narratives, deploying what Valur Ingimundarson calls a “double strategy,” a rhetorical strategy which aims at “winning the ‘hearts and minds’ of Kosovo’s Albanians through memory,” while “placating the ‘international community’ by projecting a [...] future image of itself” (2007, 104). As Thaçi remarked in a 2008 address, Kosovo’s independence is the “natural epilogue to our long, painful and historical journey [...] and our future is certain under the common

roof: European Union and NATO” (“One Year—The Government of the Independence of Kosovo” 2009, 176). Thus, when covered in camouflage, the NEWBORN monument reinforces this linear rendition from past to future, triggering semantic connections to the image of Jashari in his fatigues, and to the themes of military sacrifice and heroism which gave birth to the new country and its European future.

Reframing the future to fit the legacy of the past, the pan-Albanian narrative saturates the internal conversation about the memory of the 1999 war, condensing the collective wartime experience into a single narrative of Albanian martyrdom and blood sacrifice. The ubiquity of the Jashari legend and its tropes of militarism “leav[e] no room for [other] painful stories and experiences of war,” Nita Luci explains (2014, 177). Two groups whose experiences of the Kosovo war have been especially suppressed by the dominance of the Jashari legend include participants in the peaceful resistance during the 1990s and the survivors of the Serbian regime’s practice of widespread, systematic rape during the war (Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006, 520–522).

During the 1990s, prior to the emergence of the Kosovo Liberation Army, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), led by Ibrahim Rugova, was the leading political party and social movement in Kosovo. Rugova and the LDK advocated a strategy of nonviolent, civil resistance to the Milošević regime through the creation of a “parallel state” in 1991 called the Republic of Kosova. The “parallel state” was not a state in the “Weberian sense,” Besnik Pula explains, but a “national movement” made up of loosely coordinated civil and political institutions (2004, 797). The aim was to resist the Serbian government and elicit international support for succession (Pula 2004, 798). By the late 1990s, however, most Kosovo-Albanians no longer saw peaceful resistance as a viable option (N. Luci 2014, 232). Following the formation of the KLA, Rugova refused to support or associate with the KLA, and after the war, the power play between these two factions “became a question of deciding who had the moral authority to lead Kosovo toward independence and to its final destination of Western/European integration” (Ingimundarson 2007, 100). Rugova also “had an uneasy relationship with the Jasharis” (Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006, 525–526), and while his political rivals, Hashim Thaçi and PDK, were able to capitalize on the Jashari massacre, effectively shaping the postwar Kosovo-Albanian imaginary, Rugova and his legacy of civil resistance were virtually erased from the narrative (N. Luci 2014, 246).

Secondly, though most cases remain unreported, international human rights organizations estimate that thousands of Albanian women were raped by Serbian forces during the war (N. Luci 2014, 69). “Women who suffered sexual abuse during the war seem to have been mostly forgotten,” Nita Luci explains (2014, 232). According to Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers, they “have no significant place in the official and private memorials dedicated to martyrs of the struggle,” and “the issue of rape as a war crime has

disappeared from political discourse altogether, leaving the victims to deal with their tragedy in private" (2006, 522).

In March 2013, one year prior to NEWBORN's commemorative edition, Kosovo's parliament passed an amendment to the Law on The Status and The Rights of the Martyrs, Invalids, Veterans, Members of the Kosovo Liberation Army, Civilian Victims of War and Their Families. This amendment was the first legal document to assign special status to victims of sexual violence, as well as the first public acknowledgment of the wartime rapes (N. Luci 2014, 233). Its passage was not without heated debate and opposition from different members of parliament who argued, for example, that such recognition would be a financial burden for the state and that it would be impossible to confirm the accuracy of rape claims or administer rape kits twelve years later (2014, 233–234). Despite what was ultimately a political victory for this community of memory, the pan-Albanian narrative continues to monopolize the representations of the 1999 war, positioning these women as victims, not survivors, and diminishing their experiences because they do not coincide with the ideals of military heroism and victory.

The "marginalization of other experiences is often claimed as a necessity" by political elites "in order to build reconciliatory relations and promote a strategy of 'forgive and forget,'" Luci continues (2014, 177). This signals to the international community that Kosovo-Albanians have "move[d] beyond the conflicts of the past" to realize "the full democratic potential of our society," as the preamble to the country's declaration of independence asserts (Kosovo Declaration of Independence 2008). However, these other groups must vie for their place in the commemorative landscape because "there is no space for public disagreement" with the Jashari legend, and "any public criticism of the legendary commander amounts to blasphemy" (Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006, 514, 521). While the pan-Albanian narrative does generate quiet criticism from "sub-narratives and contestations that do not embrace the 'mythical aspects of war and resistance,'" Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers argue, "all these voices remain strictly private" (2006, 514, 523).

Reproducing the pan-Albanian narrative and the dominant tropes of military sacrifice, NEWBORN's camouflage theme served to persuade Kosovo's citizens to accept this as the only version of the past, covering up the marginalized memories and experiences of the 1999 war. At the same time, the camouflage stirred controversy, especially in light of recent debates over Kosovo's grim economic situation, disenfranchisement, and political corruption. This includes the flourishing of organized crime syndicates involving drug trafficking, human trafficking, organ trafficking, and migrant trafficking—tied to the very same political elites (former military) who instrumentalize the legacy of the past in order to proclaim Kosovo's new beginning (Xhymshiti 2016).

In his 2016 article on organized crime and corruption in Kosovo, Vedat Xhymshiti explains that recently revealed NATO files and WikiLeaks documents suggest how today, Kosovo's government is "led by crime fugitives

with names such as the ‘Butchers,’ ‘Balkan Mafia Boss’ as well as organ harvesters” (Xhymshiti 2016). Xhymshiti names as the ringleaders current president and former military leader Hashim Thaçi, and other former KLA members who now run the government or rule political parties, such as Ramush Haradinaj, Kadri Veseli, and Isa Mustafa. Xhymshiti further suggests that the US and European states that support the government of Kosovo “have had extensive knowledge for several years of criminal ties to [... Thaçi], including the whole structure of political parties in the country, without exception” (2016). As Besa Luci puts it, “the camouflaged NEWBORN [...] ends up serving as a cover for incompetent political actors [...] dressing Kosovo’s youngsters in military uniforms” (2014).

It is within this context that in May 2014, two months after NEWBORN was repainted in camouflage, it again became a site of contestation. First, guerrilla artists painted pink hearts on top of the camouflage (“Pristina’s ‘NEWBORN’ Monument Gets Second Makeover” 2014). Responding to the hearts, Ismaili—a former KLA soldier himself—opined, “if you ask me about the creativity of the ‘intervention,’ I found it quite tasteless. Hearts/flowers over army/police uniforms are a cliché, but that’s my personal opinion” (“Newborn Architect Fisnik Ismaili on the Latest Addition” 2014). Others felt that the hearts were “a direct disrespect to the war veterans who abandoned their families in order to create the state of Kosovo” (“Newborn Architect Fisnik Ismaili on the Latest Addition” 2014).

That same week, anonymous pranksters covered the pink hearts with stickers of bullet holes (“NEWBORN Is Stripped of Its Bullet Holes” 2014). The stickers were torn off after a few days, and no one has ever claimed responsibility. When asked about the stickers, Ismaili claimed he had no connection to the prank, adding that he also “had a good laugh,” because he thought the hearts were “crap” and did not “find anything creative” in an act which “brings out an emotion worth nothing” (“Newborn Architect Fisnik Ismaili on the Latest Addition” 2014).

The 2014 commemorative edition shows how the monument is indeed part of the past, shedding light on the ways in which NEWBORN’s orientation toward the future sustains the legacy of Albanian military struggle in the new state. The legend of Jashari is only one version of Kosovo’s past, and there is nothing new about a national narrative which emphasizes military struggle and minimizes the experience of women and members of the political opposition (or leaves out the current government’s criminal activities). As is the case in other post-conflict and transitional societies, confronting the past is an ongoing conversation and it will be up to the members of this society to recognize the voices of others.

Conclusion: present realities

Both the narrative constructions of past and future must still contend with the realities of Kosovo’s present. Kosovo is plagued by poor economic conditions; with a population just under two million, its poverty level is 30%, and youth

unemployment over 60% (CIA World Factbook 2016), diminishing the entrepreneurial spirit of the *Young Europeans* brand. A 2016 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) survey reports that 78% of Kosovo's citizens feel that the biggest challenges facing the country are socio-economic conditions, with unemployment, poverty, and political corruption as the three factors which most negatively impact social well-being (UNDP 2016, 10). Despite the emphasis on a future anchored in international organizations, because of its contested status the country will not be joining the EU, UN, or NATO any time soon (Bieber 2011, 1793). Challenging the hopeful image NEWBORN was originally intended to project, the monument's façades in 2015, 2016, and 2017 depict Kosovo's grim, present reality instead.

In 2015, after 40,000 citizens fled Kosovo, seeking economic asylum in Germany and other EU countries (Ristic 2016 and "Asylum Statistics" 2016), Ismaili handed the repainting of NEWBORN over to the people. He invited artists, school children, and ordinary citizens to paint whatever they wanted, covering every inch of the sculpture in colorful designs and individual expressions—except the letter "E," which was painted black. For Ismaili, the black "E" represented "the reality of Kosovo," standing for the "Exodus," "Europe," and the poor "Economy" (Butcher 2015). In 2016, responding to the stringent policies which prevent Kosovo citizens from traveling without a visa, NEWBORN was repainted sky blue with white clouds, and wrapped in a barbed-wire fence pattern. The blue sky was to symbolize "freedom," while the barbed wire was to reflect the frustration and isolation felt by Kosovo's citizens, and the overall "bad situation of the country" ("Kosovo Celebrates Its Independence Day" 2016).

In 2017, Ismaili redesigned the surface in metal and exposed brick, laying the letters "N" and "E" on the ground to spell out the words "NO WALLS" in white paint, responding to local debates about the building of a wall in the ethnically divided city of Mitrovica, and to Donald Trump's intention to build a wall along the US–Mexico border (Morina 2017). Ismaili explains, "in a world where walls are being built every day, and freedom of movement is becoming ever more limited by narrow minds," and "while a wall here continuously harms Kosovo's sovereignty, NEWBORN wants to bring those walls down, for the sake of humanity" (Morina 2017).

While NEWBORN's message changes each year, it is continually directed at two audiences, echoing the "double strategy" used by political elites. To the international audience, the monument reiterates the newborn narrative, reflecting Kosovo's new brand as a multi-ethnic, liberal democracy bound for the EU. To the internal audience, this future-oriented, newborn narrative emerges in response to the past, reproducing the pan-Albanian narrative, and keeping the past alive, instead of rendering it irrelevant. In many ways, there is nothing "new" about NEWBORN or the elites who instrumentalize the narrative constructions of past and future, but unlike traditional monuments and other static sites of persuasion, NEWBORN is unique. It is dynamic and interactive, demonstrating a capacity to foster important conversations and inspire creative contestation.

Notes

- 1 The two official languages of Kosovo are Albanian and Serbian. The English convention is to spell the capital city, “Pristina,” whereas the city is spelled “Prishtinë/Prishtina” in Albanian and “Pristina” in Serbian. I also use the English spelling for the country name, “Kosovo” (spelled “Kosovë/Kosova” in Albanian and “Kosovo/Kosovo i Metohija” in Serbian).
- 2 The building serves as a multipurpose hall and sports complex.

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PART III

Displaying difficult pasts

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5

“INSPIRATION LIVES HERE”

Struggle, martyrdom, and redemption in Atlanta’s National Center for Civil and Human Rights

Joyce Apsel

“Inspiration Lives Here” is the official motto of the National Center for Civil and Human Rights (CCHR) which opened in June 2014, in Atlanta, Georgia; their website promises “exhibits that inspire.” How does a museum tell the history of US racism and segregation alongside the past and ongoing struggle for civil and human rights? This telling and re-telling, interpretation and reinterpretation of “difficult knowledge” is the focus of its largest permanent exhibit, “Rolls Down Like Water,” which traces the US Civil Rights Movement and is the focus of this chapter.¹ As a site of persuasion, the exhibit describes particular stories about the cruelty and injustice of US racism and highlights the resistance, sacrifice, and martyrdom of those who participated in the civil rights struggle during the 1950s and 1960s. The exhibit uses interactive, experiential displays and theatrical staging, inviting visitors to participate in a re-creation of experiences and events.

This chapter explores some of the specific ways that key figures and events in the Civil Rights Movement in the South are situated in the museum.² The exhibit’s emphasis is on themes of non-violence and martyrdom of innocents, and it reinforces popular narratives about sacrifice and achievement; fostering *pathos* and empathy is integral to its design and educational goals. However, the CCHR faces challenges of how to reconcile its social activist, liberal message—at the core of which is staging the civil rights struggle as a progressive movement and part of the history of American democracy—with the reality of racism and physical and structural violence that continues today.

Situating the CCHR within the emergence of African American museums and sites

As underlined in the Introduction to this volume, there is a global memory boom evident in museums, public history, and literature. This memory boom

includes a series of museums and sites in the US linked to African American history and culture as well as those about slavery, apartheid, and other racial violence worldwide. The CCHR is situated within the trajectory of African American museums that began with local community history, and was influenced by the 1970s Black Power Movement's call to challenge hegemonic White and European public narratives and create initiatives that reflect pride in Black history and heritage (Burns 2013). A number of museums were established about individuals and events in the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta, Birmingham, Memphis, Selma, and elsewhere; many of the original museums have been updated and are part of what is now viewed as civil rights tourism including civil rights trails (<http://civilrightstrail.com/discover-thetrail2018>). Throughout the US, the naming of streets and schools and erecting of monuments in honor of civil rights leaders and events also took place, sometimes over considerable opposition (Dwyer and Alderman 2008).

In 2016, the significance of African American history was finally given official recognition with the opening of the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture (MAAHC) on the Washington, DC Mall. The MAAHC displays the broad trajectory of African American history and culture, beginning by tracing slavery as an integral part of US history and the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s as part of the longer history of fighting against racism. In 2018, with the goal of publicly ending the silence about lynching and racial terror and highlighting continuing injustice in the US, the Equal Justice Initiative opened The National Memorial for Peace and Justice and The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration in Montgomery, Alabama. Other recent projects include re-telling the history of Southern plantation sites to include the stories of slaves and slavery (Balgoooy 2015). Various initiatives continue to remove monuments, flags, and other symbols of the Confederacy estimated at 1,740 in public spaces, with 100 removed in recent years (Southern Poverty Law Center 2018). There have been legislation and public protests against and for removal with some statues being toppled or vandalized and occasional violence breaking out. The highly publicized, contentious protest in 2017 by various White supremacist and other "Unite the Right" supporters and counter-protestors in Charlottesville, Virginia was in part sparked by the ongoing legal and political battles over the proposed removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee; three people died and over 30 were injured (Fortin 2017). Subsequent comments by President Trump, other officials, and extensive media coverage added to the controversy. Hence, memorials, museums, and other memory work reflect the politics and ongoing debates and tensions about race, representation, and memory.

This chapter looks at how a series of themes—activism, sacrifice, and martyrdom—are highlighted at the CCHR to engage different audiences and convey the struggles and human cost of working for racial justice in the US. What techniques and narratives are used, and how effective are they in creating a public history to tell the complicated stories that make up civil rights history? Figures

such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks have become icons, and a sanitized version of civil rights history coopted as part of a national success story of the ongoing march toward American equality and democracy (Theoharis 2018). To what degree are these depictions picked up on and/or how are they challenged? What is featured and what is left out? How does the exhibit attempt to balance victimization alongside achievement, resilience, and redemption? In order to effectively persuade its broad audience through *pathos* and *logos*, does the CCHR have to temper the movement's radicalism by framing its achievements as part of the ongoing story of American democracy?

Beginnings: inspiration lives here!

The National Center for Civil and Human Rights (CCHR) is also part of the growing number of museums and sites focused on themes or ideas rather than the more traditional emphasis on a special collection or original artifacts. The choice of the term "center" reflects the founders' commitment to living history and to serving as a cultural and social space for dialogue and community activities; and the term "national" reflects its positioning within American history. After attending the center's opening, journalist and Atlanta resident Chuck Reece wrote how the CCHR inspires and challenges visitors to see

what doing the right thing really means [...] You could call the place a museum, and you'd be right but not wholly right. You could call it a tourist attraction, and you'd be right but not wholly right. To me, it almost feels like a temple, in the larger, secular sense [...] Maybe we should just call it the High Church of Doing the Right Thing.

(Reece, 2014)

A number of factors helped push forward the idea for a new museum in downtown Atlanta commemorating the civil rights and global human rights movements. Georgia has a series of streets, sites, and other spaces named after civil rights figures and events; Atlanta has both national and private sites dedicated to King (the King National Historic Site, his birth home and family residence, the Ebenezer Baptist Church, and the private King Center for Non-Violent Change).³ Dwyer and Alderman in *Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory* describe the civil rights memorial landscape as originally characterized by exhibits such as "Freedom Road" at the King National Historic Site, depicting how "the vast majority of the Movement's participants—both men and women—stand in powerful but silent testimony to the heroic qualities of Movement leaders, such as Dr. King" (2008, 48). The CCHR was envisioned as an updated, more interactive site to broaden and deepen an understanding of the role that "unsung soldiers" played, especially young activists. To some extent, it certainly does so; but, in its final form, the iconic figure of King predominates.

As civil right activists were becoming older, a small group of African Americans in Atlanta, including Evelyn G. Lowery, Juanita Abernathy, and Andrew Young (Bailey 2016),⁴ initiated conversations about a new site where their generation's legacy could be passed on through a public history that provided a deeper understanding of the Civil Rights Movement. There was a sense of urgency to create a site that would effectively convey the struggles and stories to a younger generation who had not lived through these times and to connect the struggle to contemporary human rights issues. This included capturing activists' memories through oral histories while they were still alive.

Over a decade, timing, location, economics, and politics were key to completing the project at a cost of \$75 million. In 1996, the summer Olympics were held in Atlanta, displacing poor people, including African Americans living in the area, and a new initiative to revive Atlanta's downtown took off. Pemberton Place, the 20-acre park named after John S. Pemberton, the pharmacist who invented Coca-Cola in Atlanta in 1886, was the location of two major attractions, the Georgia Aquarium (2005) and The World of Coca-Cola (2007); the CCHR (2014) became the third leg of this tourist triangle.

The Coca-Cola Company land donation of 2.5 acres for the new center in 2006 was crucial. Another key to moving the project forward was the support and connections of Mayor Shirley Franklin⁵ and businessman, A.J. Robinson, as well as the decision to hire Doug Shipman, a young charismatic organizer from the Boston Consulting Group. Shipman served as Founding CEO, leading the project through its many phases, from working with a range of Atlanta constituencies to funding challenges during economic downturns, which resulted in scaling the project down from 93,000 to 42,000 square feet.⁶ The center's *Working Group Report* (made up of 22 members including Lowery, Robinson, and Shipman) proposed

to commemorate the groundbreaking contributions of Atlantans and Georgians to the historic struggle for African-American freedom and equality, and also serve as a space for ongoing dialogue, study, and contributions to the resolution of current and future freedom struggles of all people at the local, national and international level.

(2006)

Beside significant public financial support,⁷ private donors (primarily from Atlanta and Georgia) included major banks and corporations as well as individual philanthropists and foundations.

Tony award-winning theatrical director and playwright George C. Wolfe was asked to curate the civil rights exhibit and holds the title of CCHR creative director. Though Wolfe had never created a museum exhibit, he combined a successful career in theater (from director to playwright) and a background in African American culture and history.⁸ Wolfe once remarked, "It's not that the

Civil Rights story isn't dramatic, it's that nobody has told it with all of its drama" (Shipman, <https://vimeo.com>).

"Rolls Down Like Water" is designed to stage the drama and intensity of the Civil Rights Movement for its museum audience. This is in keeping with what Wolfe calls a "living newspaper phenomenon, using the visceral intimacy of theatre, the intellectual rigor of a museum and the intimacy of a documentary" (quoted in Kompanek 2014). Wolfe brought in theater experts on the exhibition script, the narration of the audio segments, the musical background, and the exhibition design.⁹ Interactive exhibits (sometimes described as theatrical exhibits), original documentaries, and historical news footage all provide information, but also a "visceral experience" for visitors. Compelling individual stories and an emphasis on the courage and discipline of non-violent protestors framed in terms of struggle, sacrifice, martyrdom, and redemption are central themes of the exhibit. Not surprisingly, given the funding sources and location, the center's exhibits convey a largely mainstream narrative of well-known events in the Civil Rights Movement, emphasizing leadership and activism alongside the depth of segregation and racism. Another focus is on White supremacy and the abuse of power by authorities during segregation; but this portrayal does not directly confront ongoing state and institutional racism in the US.

CCHR visitors range from tourists who may have little or no historic background and drop by on their way to visiting the nearby zoo and Coca-Cola World (both have much higher attendance rates), to individuals and groups (including African American family reunions) whose lives and those of their families are deeply involved in or affected by the history told at the center. Student and Teacher Field Guides (www.civilandhumanrights.org/teacher-guides) can be downloaded linking to exhibit themes with assignments tailored to curriculum standards in Georgia and other Southern states from third grade through high school. While visitors can view background information or access an app to the exhibit, the center still does not have an official guide book to its exhibitions.

"The high church of doing the right thing": inspiration and taking action

The exterior building, designed by a collaborative team, is impressive; its two curved walls are made of panels of varying size, transparency, and color, reflecting human diversity (Figures 5.1 and 5.2). The façade has "interlocking arms that cradle the central space symbolizing unity and harmony."¹⁰ A 32-foot water sculpture, *Passage*, designed by David Kirkland and made of two upwardly sweeping arc panels is at the back of the center. Quotes on each arc include "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world," by Margaret Mead, and "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of

FIGURE 5.1 Front exterior of the CCHR on Pemberton Place. Photo credit: © Albert Vecerka/Esto.

FIGURE 5.2 Side and back view of the CCHR. Photo credit: © Albert Vecerka/Esto.

others," by Nelson Mandela. A large banner of King's image hangs outside the front of the building.¹¹

As one enters the building, the first image greeting the visitor is a large, colorful mural of a raised, outstretched hand symbolizing protest and hope, surrounded by faces and slogans from protest posters around the world for justice, democracy, and human rights. This montage is also reproduced on items sold in the bookstore, from tote bags to bookmarks. When I visited the museum, a number of visitors took up the invitation to put their hand up on the mural; some just for fun and others heeding the call to work to overcome racism and injustice and toward civil and human rights.

The visitor then enters the first of three major exhibit areas, "Rolls Down Like Water: The American Civil Rights Movement," which is the largest, most visited gallery and the focus of this chapter. Above it on the third floor is "The Spark of Conviction: The Global Human Rights Movement," which examines human rights around the world. Below it, on the first floor, is the more specific and smaller "Voice to the Voiceless: The Morehouse College Martin Luther King, Jr. Collection Gallery," which features a large image of King on the wall and rotating exhibits from his manuscripts and memorabilia, displaying some of the only original artifacts in the entire museum. There is also temporary exhibition space on changing civil and human rights topics, and an event space used for lectures and discussions, local meetings, and special events.

"Rolls Down Like Water": the American Civil Rights Movement

The title "Rolls Down Like Water" comes from the Old Testament verse Amos 5:24, "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream," a version of which was frequently quoted by King in his speeches. Chronological and thematic sections describe key episodes, figures, and images of the Civil Rights Movement from 1954–1968. The exhibition spaces are divided for the viewer into: Introduction to the 1950s/Urban South, The Movement Catches Fire, Freedom Riders Theater, March on Washington, Three Hymns, Martyrs, Requiem, and On That Day (The King Assassination), and Requiem. Newspaper articles and photos along with square boxed television sets from the time provide contemporary images and voices, and remind visitors of the growing popularity of television and role the media played in bringing these events to a national and international audience.

Setting the scene—segregationists: true stories

The permanent exhibit opens with an entry tunnel featuring two walls labeled "white" and "colored," filled with contrasting images of Whites and African Americans in the 1950s South when segregation was both legal and pervasive. The photos on the walls show that communities took up similar activities—displayed are images of school groups, weddings, and sports—but that these took

place completely separated. Despite the upbeat music in the background, this social history sends out a clear message of the walls that separated communities in everyday life.

The next section, "Crossroads of Change," examines how, in the face of economic development in the South, especially in cities like Atlanta and Birmingham, there remained widespread opposition to overturning segregation. In a big square titled SEGREGATIONISTS, with the words "true stories" to make visitors aware that these events did actually take place, there are faces, comments, and a label of "claim to fame," citing statements and actions taken by elected officials to keep segregation in place. For example:

Lester Maddox, Georgia Governor, "Inequality I think breeds freedom and gives a man opportunity." Claim to Fame: Refusal to accept integration and commitment to keeping African Americans segregated.

Theodophilus Eugene "Bull" Connor, Birmingham, Alabama Commissioner of Public Safety, Claim to Fame: Directed the use of fire hoses and attack dogs in 1963 against peaceful protestors including children. Quote: "Send the dogs forth."

A television features live footage, including Alabama Governor George Wallace's famous speech declaring proudly: "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow and segregation forever."

In another section of this room, there is a map and replica of an old train information board with the names of states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia) where laws popularly referred to as Jim Crow were passed, resulting in *de jure* segregation. Visitors can move the dials to find out about specific laws enacted in each state. From education, transportation, employment, and business to personal relationships and use of parks and other public facilities, the visitor sees the degree of rigid separation subject to strict enforcement and penalties.

On the opposite side of the room is a display with a map, photos, and audio recordings about the "Sweet Auburn" area in Atlanta, described by *Fortune* magazine in 1956 as "the richest Negro street in the world." African American families built their own cultural, social, and economic life; they were forced to create "separate, vibrant neighborhoods."¹² Sites include businesses and clubs, civic groups, and churches. On my visits to the CCHR, this exhibit appeared to be popular, with local visitors recalling various landmarks such as Paschal's restaurant or the Butler YMCA. Ironically, in Atlanta, Birmingham, and elsewhere, African American business districts went into "accelerated decline in the wake of desegregation" (Dwyer and Alderman 2008, 20–21). Another panel titled "Paving the Way: 'Firsts' and Court Cases" features African American political, cultural, and historic milestones.

The next section, "A Movement Catches Fire," opens with a quote from King: "You know my friends there comes a time when people get tired of

being trampled by the iron fist of oppression." This room covers a range of individual stories and non-violent tactics recording successes and setbacks of civil rights activists. A series of panels describe legal cases brought to overturn segregation, with photos and detailed evidence from the best-known case, *Brown v. Board of Education*. There is a revealing video in which psychologist Kenneth Clark talks about how his experiment with black and white dolls demonstrated the harmful impact of segregation on Negro children, a finding that was part of the evidence in the court case. The 1954 US Supreme Court ruling that "separate but equal does not apply to public schools" overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and became a landmark case of the Civil Rights Movement.

Violence against African Americans appears in photos and on the TV screens with scenes of fire hoses, beatings, and bombings, and individual stories are highlighted. There is a large, moving photo of a young Emmett Till with his mother Mamie Till Mobley, describing how in 1955, while visiting family in Mississippi, he was kidnapped, beaten to death, and his weighted body was dumped in a river. The crime was carried out by the husband and brother-in-law of a White woman after she accused 14-year-old Emmett Till of flirting with her in the family grocery store. After being found not guilty by an all-White jury, the accused (the woman's husband and brother-in-law) stated publicly they had killed Emmett Till. Mamie Till refused to be silent, and fought to publicize what happened to her son, insisting on an open casket when he was brought home to Chicago and speaking out around the county. The publicity around Emmett Till's brutal death was an important milestone in raising awareness of the cruelty of White supremacy. Wolfe comments that enlarging the photo of Emmett and his mother, rather than his brutalized dead body, was intended to emphasize the loss of a young person in his prime. A smaller image of his mutilated face in an open casket bespeaks the violence of White supremacy as well as the culture of impunity and failure to get justice, recurrent themes in "Rolls Down Like Water."

The courage displayed by young and old, men and women is conveyed in a series of touchscreens and panels. For example, there is a panel about the Little Rock Nine, teenagers who in 1957 attempted to integrate Arkansas Central High and were stopped by segregationist Governor Orville Faubus. President Eisenhower sent in troops to carry out federal law mandating integrated schooling. Another two-sided panel tells the story of six-year-old African American Ruby Bridges in what became an iconic image of her entering a New Orleans public school accompanied by towering US Marshals. When she arrived, she was the subject of verbal abuse and intimidation; White parents pulled their children out of classes, and teachers refused to teach her. For one year Ruby and her teacher, Barbara Henry, sat alone in a classroom. On display is an image of Norman Rockwell's painting "The Problem We All Live With," inspired by Ruby Bridges, that appeared in *Look Magazine* in 1964. Rockwell had a wide following among conservatives, and his critique of US racism and depiction of its brutality helped to educate the public about the ongoing injustices of segregation.

The resistance to segregation and stories of the brave struggles of young people on the front lines of integrating schools are highlighted; this provides *logos* and *pathos*. However, both elements would be enhanced for the visitor if there were explicit links between these landmark cases and the ongoing gaps and failures in the six decades afterward to achieve equal access to quality education. Hence, while these panels provide a series of important landmarks in dismantling Jim Crow laws, ongoing enforcement has remained an uphill battle.

The room is crowded with panels and touchscreens, including one about the Montgomery Bus Boycott, with a photo of Rosa Parks, whose refusal to give up her seat to a White passenger in December 1955 served as a catalyst to ignite the protest. The photos of her being arrested were widely publicized, and Parks became an iconic figure, described as “the mother” of the civil rights struggle because of this event. What is left out is that Rosa Parks was a lifetime activist committed to racial and economic equality—a rebel and a persistent, radical voice for social justice for over half a century (Theoharis 2013).¹³ Another section describes how high school student Claudette Colvin refused to give up her seat to a White person 10 months earlier in Montgomery, stating that “It is my constitutional right” to have a seat, and was arrested. The Teacher and Student Field Guides ask why Claudette’s act of defiance was not well known and provide details about her life (such as her speaking back to authorities and soon becoming a single mother) to reflect on why we traditionally learn about one protest and not another.

Throughout the galleries, I observed people taking selfies and photos of exhibits, especially those depicting King’s activism as head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) during boycotts and other protests and in a later section about his assassination and legacy. The depiction of King’s role largely overlooks the grassroots organizing that went ahead of most protests that King became the spokesman for. There are images of his arrests, and a set of iron bars with a screen displaying sections from “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” in his own handwriting. As with the depiction of Rosa Parks, the panels primarily convey well-known events, but don’t give much context, such as how and why the letter came to be written and the difficulty of getting it published (Rieder 2013; Apsel 2015). There is another image of King receiving the Nobel Peace Prize and selections from his acceptance speech. Here, visitors are told about how when King returned to Atlanta, a city which declared itself “too busy to hate,” members of the business community refused to attend a dinner in his honor until the CEO of Coca-Cola stepped in announcing that the company would pull out of Atlanta if the dinner was not supported. This anecdote reflects the hostility and suspicion toward King and opposition to the civil rights struggle.

A popular exhibit is a reconstructed side of a Greyhound bus that was bombed in Anniston, Alabama in 1961, covered with the mug shots of Freedom Riders arrested throughout the South (Figure 5.3). The Freedom Riders (pairs of White and Black volunteers) boarded buses together heading to Southern states to test the Supreme Court ruling outlawing segregated seating on interstate buses. Visitors learn of the mob violence they encountered and listen to oral

FIGURE 5.3 Interactive exhibits: lunch counter sit-in model and side of Greyhound bus with mug shots of arrested Freedom Riders and oral histories. Photo credit: © Albert Vecerka/Esto.

histories of people who took part in the protests, including their reflections today. Visitors are invited to sit on old school benches, and view a compelling, original documentary about the Freedom Riders, showing pairs entering buses, and the angry crowds and violence they faced with footage of local authorities looking the other way.

The most widely commented-upon interactive exhibit is a replica of a Woolworth lunch counter intended to re-enact the sit-ins that took place to integrate public facilities.¹⁴ Visitors sit on stools and put their hands on the counter; through headphones, they hear epithets hurled at them to partially replicate the experience of non-violent protestors, and the stools shake. There is a warning sign to alert visitors “that this may be disturbing to listen to,” as well as a timer to see how long they are able to last. An enlarged photo of an actual sit-in showing protestors having food thrown at them and being screamed at by angry onlookers is on the wall.

In all the student and teacher online guides, there are questions about reactions to sitting at the lunch counter, such as: “Did you feel like you were able to get a sense of the discipline and courage necessary for protestors to maintain composure at sit-ins?” As a site of persuasion and inspiration, fostering empathy is repeatedly emphasized as integral to the CCHR’s purpose. Dina Bailey, an educator who worked at the center, writes that empathy has been central to “the Center since its beginning,” and this exhibit is designed to deepen such empathy (2016, 134). Interestingly, Bailey maintains that the interactive sit-in

experience, in contrast to a more traditional museum setting, “is enough for many (visitors) to more deeply respect the courageous activists of the past and to ponder what actions they might be courageous enough to take today” (2016, 135). However, to what extent this actually occurs is difficult to know. Feedback from people on visits to the museum, discussions with docents, and hundreds of comments on social media describe the experience as “emotional,” “powerful,” and “meaningful.”

Heritage scholar Diana Walters observes that during her 2015 visit to the CCHR she found herself “deeply disturbed” by the simulation of the counter sit-in, which “creat[es] a short but profound emotional and embodied experience” (2017, 48). Walters argues that, “The danger of simulations such [as this one] is that the embodied experience, though emotional, is not truly empathetic. The ‘affect’ may be profound, but is also short-lived and effectively purposeless” (Walters 2017, 48). Part of what Walters’ remarks may be picking up on is how much the visitor’s experience varies dependent on race, gender, age, and other personal background. And, indeed, for some visitors the simulation may be one of a brief, forgettable, and comfortable experience of “uncomfortable/difficult” history. Meanwhile, for others, and Walters refers to an elderly African American visitor who she describes as appearing “traumatized” (2017, 48), sitting at the lunch counter triggers deep personal experiences with racism. However, visitors in hundreds of social media comments describe the interactive, multisensory experience as impactful. This is in keeping with the larger process of staging civil rights as a moral drama and engaging the audience emotionally. Part of the performative experience of the sit-in counter exhibit is enabling visitors, who come from different backgrounds with different sensibilities, to make that experience their own, and clearly some will do that more deeply than others. However, if the goal is to persuade, educate, and inspire, then trying to further design what Walters calls “authentic” empathy may ironically end up intruding on the visitor’s capacity to genuinely make the encounter his/her own.

Another section describes the history of the Southern Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) influenced by Ella Baker’s belief in community organizing and egalitarian structure; SNCC consisted largely of students and other young people. Photos, oral histories on headsets, and panels describe experiences and recollections from civil rights activism over half a century ago alongside contemporary comments from Diane Nash, Marion Berry, Eleanor Norton Jones, Julian Bond, John Lewis, Stokely Carmichael, Marian Wright Edelman, and others. There is a panel on Reverend James Lawson, an important figure whose contribution training King and scores of “foot soldiers” in non-violent methods of protest is not popularly known. Lawson’s message preparing activists to meet resistance and violence states: “Do unto others as you would want them to do unto you—not as they do unto you, which is rather a powerful ethic for personal relationships, family, schools, community or nation.” These exhibits are designed to inform and inspire by sharing stories of how a vanguard of young men and women (and writing in the contributions of women activists is an

important aspect of the exhibit) committed themselves to the cause of racial justice, and their varied paths afterward, a number continuing in activism, education, and public service. This section is packed with information and panels and sometimes appears crowded and/or noisy; the next gallery opens up a large theater-like space for visitors to view the March on Washington as a spectacle of hope.

March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom: a display of hope and unity

The third gallery focuses on the August 28, 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, where 250,000 people gathered in what has become an iconic event in the struggle for civil rights but also hailed as a milestone in the story of American democracy (a contrast to its widespread disapproval when it happened). Visitors enter a large room with a 30-foot-wide video created of the march from original footage. The opposite wall has a quote from King's speech across the top, and there are panels (many interactive) allowing visitors to hear the speeches and memories of participants and organizers as well as musical performances, telling the story through the experiences of those who were there (Figure 5.4).

The exhibit deepens the visitor's appreciation for the planning that contributed to its effectiveness, and the politics involved, such as getting the disparate civil rights groups to coordinate the day's schedule and negotiate with local officials about permits and conducting the protest. For example, next to what has become a famous photo of President Kennedy congratulating a group of civil right leaders (all male), the visitor reads that only after the march was peacefully carried out and realizing

FIGURE 5.4 Visitors viewing panorama of film in March on Washington room and additional exhibits. Photo credit: © Albert Vecerka/Esto.

the extent of media coverage did Kennedy decide it would be politically beneficial to take the photo in the Oval Office. Other panels display images of key individuals who helped with organization and logistics, including: A. Philip Randolph (who tried to organize a march in 1941 that was abandoned largely under political pressure), Dorothy Height (who organized female activists the next day to discuss their marginalization when male leaders of civil rights organizations ignored their requests to march in front and speak at the march), and Bayard Rustin (a photo shows him in a small office in Harlem organizing the demonstration for months ahead of time and points out that because he was gay and leftist, his contribution as key organizer was not acknowledged at the time).

Visitors are invited to sit on long, white benches to view a film created for the museum with original archival footage highlighting key aspects of the day. There are aerial views of the march and footage of Bayard Rustin telling marchers to maintain order as they get off buses, assemble, and begin walking. There is footage of people distributing signs for protestors to carry and people of different ages pouring out of buses and from Union Station. Segments from speakers reflect the broad goals of the march: both racial and economic equality. Along with what later became King's famous "I have a dream" speech, there are speeches by labor leader, Walter Reuther of the AFL-CIO, and 23-year-old John Lewis stating, "To those who have said, 'be patient and wait' we must say that we cannot be patient. We do not want our freedom gradually but we want to be free now." The integration of music, including live performances of Mahalia Jackson, Odetta, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and Peter, Paul, and Mary, is very effective in the video and listening to through headphones. Despite the march subsequently achieving iconic status in US history, the exhibit does not explain that immediately afterward its lack of concrete results made it appear to many of "those most closely involved in its organizing [...] less a model for influencing the United States people and politics than an example of what *not* to do" (Barber 2002, 174). Having visited the room numerous times, I seem at some point to always suspend any reservations about the march's effectiveness, and feel a sense of re-living history and of the possibilities and hope of the moment.

In trying to have visitors "experience" and "feel" some of the emotional turmoil and unexpectedness of what unfolded, the next rooms return to themes of violence, martyrdom, and tragedy. The violent history of racism was the context for the struggle for equality and justice playing out and, in fact, the majority of Americans at the time did not support the march, its leaders, or the Civil Rights Movement.

Requiem

The name and staging of the next room mark a shift to somberness and tragedy after the hope and unity symbolized by the march, and also reflects the influence of African American churches and faith. Only 18 days later, four African American school girls were killed and 22 people injured on Sunday September 15, 1963, while attending the 16th Street Baptist Church, the largest African

McNair, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley, who were between 11 and 14 years old when they were killed in church that Sunday (Figure 5.5).

The visitor has to look up to see the images—each girl in an all-blue choir robe with red background and her name. The black backdrop of the memorial is reminiscent of a church, where images of Christ's sacrifice serve as inspiration. A mound of rubble on the ground replicates the debris left from the dynamite bomb placed in the basement by members of the Ku Klux Klan. News coverage about the bombing appears on a TV screen and the visitor can listen to King's eulogy, describing them as "martyred heroines of a holy crusade for freedom and human dignity." In the background is choir music and Bessie Smith singing, "when it thunders and lightnin' and the wind begins to blow there's thousands of people ain't got nowhere to go."

"Martyr" is the title of the next section; a term used throughout the larger exhibit to describe individuals targeted by racism and killed fighting for racial equality. This entire room is filled with images and history of the violence and sacrifices made. Their martyrdom underlines the themes of ongoing sacrifice and "slaughter of the innocents" as integral to civil rights history. A series of white poles display the faces of murdered people of different backgrounds and ages, some of whose stories appear in the exhibit and are well known including King, but others less known such as that of bricklayer Clarence Triggs, shot in the head in 1966 shortly after attending a civil rights meeting in Bogalusa, Louisiana. Visitors are able to turn each photo for more information about the individual's life and how they died, and whether and when their killers were found and tried. In the case of Clarence Triggs and many others, those charged were acquitted. On another wall there is a list of civil rights legislation enacted.

Freedom Summer 1964 and the initiative to register African Americans to vote highlights how SNCC, Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and other organizations provided training sessions on non-violence preparing volunteers "for the intimidation and violence they could meet in 'anti-integrationist Mississippi'" (Panel, Mississippi Summer). White volunteers were recruited to travel South, and one panel focuses on three civil rights workers: African American James Chaney, and White activists Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman who disappeared after meeting with members of the Mt. Zion Church in Neshoba County, Mississippi, where individuals were assaulted and the church burnt to the ground by Ku Klux Klan members. The search for the missing civil rights workers continued for 44 days, and gained national media attention. The exhibit includes a newspaper headline declaring "Rights trio found dead in Mississippi Delta" with photos of their bodies and car. The case highlighted the ongoing attacks to thwart desegregation and contributed to President Lyndon Johnson signing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 during the 44-day search.

Another panel focuses on Selma, Alabama, where a campaign to register African Americans to vote culminated in what became the iconic event called Bloody Sunday, March 7, 1965. The panel depicts hundreds of individuals beginning a protest march from Selma to Montgomery led by Hosea Williams (SCLC) and

John Lewis (SNCC), sparked by state troopers killing Jimmy Lee Jackson while he was trying to protect his grandfather and mother. The exhibit describes how, as the group began to walk across the Edmund Pettus bridge, protestors were met with "hundreds of policemen and mounted troopers blocking their path, carrying tear gas, guns and clubs." Images of the police charge, beatings, and violence can be seen on one of the TV sets, and the violence was widely publicized and condemned. Reverend James Reeb, a White Unitarian minister from Boston volunteering in Selma, was beaten and later died of his injuries as part of a second attempt to march. "The Alabama courts finally ruled that the police had to protect not attack protestors," and on the third attempt, protestors were allowed to finally march across the bridge and complete the Selma to Montgomery protest despite harassment along the way (CCHR Exhibit, Bloody Sunday). President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law on August 7, 1965. However, the exhibit does not point out that Selma's "triumphal legacy of voting rights" ignores how White supremacists and economic development combined "to keep African Americans from the full citizenship they had fought for" (Forner 2017, 4).

"On That Day" is the final, large section on the April 4, 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis, Tennessee, where he had gone to support sanitation strikers in their six-week-long strike. This large panorama of images and narratives describes King's life, death, and legacy as central to the drama of sacrifice and struggle that the exhibit highlights. On a television monitor, the emotional voice and image of Walter Cronkite, CBS evening news anchor, informs the American public that

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the apostle of non-violence of the Civil Rights Movement, was shot to death in Memphis, Tennessee. Police have issued an all-points bulletin for a well-dressed, young White man seen running from the scene. Dr. King was standing on the balcony of a second-floor hotel room tonight when, according to a companion, a shot was fired from across the street. In the friend's words, the bullet exploded in his face.

The depiction of King as the ultimate martyr is reflected in the amount of space given to this final section; there are large, iconic, black-and-white photos of his assassination and funeral. Many of these well-known photos, such as King's body on the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel, images of the open-casket viewing and Coretta Scott King and children, and the funeral and procession, including the casket in a mule-drawn wagon as a symbolic reminder of King's commitment to the Poor People's Campaign, duplicate images at the nearby King National Historic Site and the King Center for Non-Violent Change. It is not by chance that the visitor walks upstairs, ascending to hear King's voice in the background and be a spectator to the tragic images of his martyrdom. King represents the fallen hero of the Civil Rights Movement, a Christ-like figure of sacrifice and non-violence with a prophetic vision of racial, economic, and social justice.

There is a wanted poster with the face of the accused James Earl Ray who was captured two months later, confessed, and was convicted. He later recanted his confession and, according to the panel description, “questions remained about the circumstances of King’s death.”

Here, the breadth of King’s vision is described in this concluding section:

King had an increasingly holistic vision: linking racism and the civil rights struggle for African Americans with issues of social justice broadly connected to poverty and jobs for all and an anti-war message. Becoming more outspoken as well to the economic inequity in the US, King launched the Poor People’s Campaign.

There follow descriptions of riots, arson, and widespread looting “mainly in predominantly African American neighborhoods” after the news of King’s murder. Sixty thousand members of the National Guard were called up “in the largest domestic military mobilization since the Civil War”; 43 people died and 20,000 were arrested (“On That Day”). Across three large screens is a montage of images and sounds including scenes of rubble in neighborhoods, sirens sounding the alarms, fire engulfing city streets and buildings, and photos of the National Guard troops with guns sent in to restore order. On the floor is a carpet with images of orange flames and in yellow the names of cities where riots took place from Newark, New Jersey to Oakland, California, and a quote from King spoken after the LA Watts riots: “A riot is the language of the unheard.”

Varied reactions are depicted, including Lester Maddox, Governor of Georgia, stating he condemned the killing, but that King’s civil disobedience “builds the foundation for disorder and lawlessness,” and Stokely Carmichael, an advocate of Black Power, saying: “White America killed Dr. King last night. They made it a whole lot easier for a whole lot of black people today. There no longer needs to be intellectual discussions, black people know that they have to get guns.”

“And So They Came ...” is the title of the panels describing the tens of thousands of people who came to Atlanta. A centerpiece of this section is a video created for the museum and images from King’s funeral and procession on April 9, 1968, where an invitation-only gathering of 1,200 people at the overflowing Ebenezer Baptist Church included dignitaries from all over the world and major US political and cultural figures. “Those in attendance heard a recording of King’s last sermon, in which he eerily provided his own eulogy, causing many in the audience to weep openly” (“In Memoriam”). After the service many joined the larger crowd of people for the four-mile procession to Morehouse College where there was a second service followed by burial. There was “the clip-clop of the mules’ hooves” and the singing of “We Shall Overcome” and other songs (“In Memoriam”). A panel underlines King’s stature and the global news coverage: an estimated 120 million people in the US alone watched these events on television, over half the US population at the time (“In

Memoriam"). The space and details covering the assassination and funeral highlight King's significance and the "purity" of his victimhood. King's portrayal is that of the ultimate martyr whose dedication and sacrifice are an inspiration to continue the non-violent struggle for social and economic justice.

The next room is a contrast and features a series of flashing screens with a range of images of individuals and groups protesting against injustice, meant to serve as a bridge to the third-floor exhibit on human rights. In a hallway is a small room where visitors are invited to record their own memories of civil rights and reactions to the exhibit. Most visitors go upstairs to the human rights gallery; others head downstairs to view the "Voice to the Voiceless Gallery" with a replica of King's library and additional images and quotes as well as rotating thematic displays from King's writings and memorabilia from the Morehouse Archival Collection.

A site of persuasion: staging public history of the Civil Rights Movement

How effectively does the center navigate the difficult history it is telling? In *Curating Difficult Knowledge*, Roger I. Simon discusses public exhibitions of violence and suffering, using the *Without Sanctuary* exhibit on lynching to analyze the dangers of creating "a voyeuristic spectacle of suffering." He points out that such exhibits may "re-activate past conflicts" and increase resentment; "in fact, a re-traumatization may occur" (Simon 2014, 198). In a number of significant ways, "Rolls Down Like Water" tries to avoid such "re-traumatization" and instead to stage a panorama of dramatic stories and events about the violence, setbacks, and achievements of the Civil Rights Movement. Visitors are invited to "be part of" this history through what the CCHR promises as an "interactive and multi-sensory experience" intended to provide visitors with a range of ways to feel the rollercoaster experiences that made up the Civil Rights Movement. Learning about the events through information-packed panels as well as seeing, hearing, and feeling through recreations creates a multidimensional experience which allows the visitor to have an experiential encounter that is not voyeuristic but enriching.

Simon also points out that "difficult knowledge" can be situated "within a redemptive, reparative narrative and consequently pain and death can be partially redeemed as memories that might function to secure more progressive, less violent futures" (2014, 198). The CCHR clearly positions itself as a moral drama, recording past, systemic crimes by individuals and the state, and the martyrdom and valiant struggle by activists and leaders for justice and rights. This portrayal aims to create a public memory of the civil rights struggle that persuades visitors to take up the mantle of activism and to be informed by the CCHR's "exhibits that inspire." It follows that designing and staging a "redemptive reparative narrative" means leaving out historical complexity and controversy in emphasizing the "purity" and righteousness of the martyrs and their cause.

The degree to which visitors found the exhibit “compelling” and “informative” came through strongly in talks with docents and visitors during my three extended visits and in the many positive comments on social media websites. Not surprisingly, expectations and experiences vary depending on visitors’ backgrounds and knowledge base. Local visitors make connections to places and events in Atlanta. For African Americans and others who experience or remember past discrimination, the CCHR can be a space to reflect on past and present-day injustice; and for different generations a place to share stories and histories. For foreign visitors, a number of whom comment on how surprised they are by the degree of US racism and segregation, the exhibit provides an accessible introduction. The few critiques on social media sites are telling and sometimes anonymously removed, such as the young man who wrote on Yelp that he “was more of a Huey Newton kind of guy,” and the exhibit did not speak to him. The experiential exhibits add a dimension that engages visitors by encounters, experiencing a living history that may appeal to emotions and empathy. This speaks to George C. Wolfe’s idea of staging the drama of the Civil Rights Movement in a way that both engages and “entertains.” The “difficult history” and amount of space given to racism and martyrdom make this a site of persuasion that emphasizes sacrifice and struggle alongside tragedy and redemption.

Despite original plans to include slavery and other aspects of African American history, issues of funding, space, and politics resulted in the final exhibition’s relatively narrow context, beginning with segregation in the 1950s and ending with King’s assassination. It is no small matter that there is a lack of specific information about the crucial connections between slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the emergence of Jim Crow laws and segregation. A number of visitors will not know this background, which is critical to understanding the depth of racism in the past and present. Further, this limited time frame has been revised over the last decade by a series of historians describing a “long civil rights movement” (Hall 2005), beginning much earlier and continuing until today; these historians examine the role of grassroots organizing as well as traditional African American organizations struggling for economic, sexual, social, as well as political rights (Forner 2017). Taking the notion of a long civil rights movement further, others, following Michelle Alexander (2012), argue that slavery and Jim Crow never really ended, but have morphed into today’s mass incarceration. Challenges to King’s non-violent leadership and movements like Black Power or figures such as Malcolm X or Huey Newton are largely absent in the center’s telling.

The focus on iconic images and events stages the civil rights struggle as a dramatic story with a beginning, middle—filled with victories, setbacks, and martyrdom—and redemptive end, which serves to represent landmark images and events in the civil rights struggle. Yet, the concept of hope is largely at odds with the reality of racial and economic inequality that characterizes the lives of African Americans in post-segregation America. Further, while the exhibit elicits *pathos* in the visitor, the more complicated, historical trajectory is absent. One telling example is the images and description of the 1968 riots following Martin

Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. The narrative conveyed is that "riots erupted" once the non-violent savior was killed. Absent is the historical context that riots in protest against various forms of injustice are a recurrent feature of both African American and American history. The narrative traces the struggles and achievement of the legal dismantling of segregation through legislation like the Voting Rights and Fair Housing Acts; however, it stops there and does not critically examine obstacles to enforcement that continue to the present time. Another focus is on White supremacy and the abuse of power by authorities during segregation; but this portrayal does not directly link, much less confront, ongoing state and institutional racism in the US. Discrimination, systemic racism, and poverty continue, but these links are not explicit in "Rolls Down Like Water."

From the initial Working Group Report, public engagement was a goal for establishing the center, and the CCHR has created a series of public programs on past and present civil and human rights issues. Through speakers and cultural and political events, the center has contributed to providing a site for dialogues, meetings, and rallies as well as temporary exhibits. Anniversaries and special events range from commemoration of MLK Day to the anniversary of the passage of the Fair Housing Act to forums on police brutality and mass incarceration. It is here that the links to current racism and other inequities are made explicit.

One of the dilemmas of trying to effectively persuade such a range of people and to inspire is how to stage a dramatic story of the civil rights struggle that does not overtly challenge the existing power structure in the city or country. Corporate financial backing as well as middle- and upper-class visitors would likely be alienated by emphasizing the radical aspects of racial and economic inequities, and their systemic, ongoing nature. In fact, one docent pointed out to me how courageous the museum and Atlanta were to have such a new, "liberal museum." Given the rise of hate groups and the current rhetoric and policies of the Trump administration, this comment gives pause for thought. The exhibit's emphasis is on the 1950s and 1960s struggle, sacrifice, and redemption; it stages these events as a moral drama, framing the painful, uncomfortable past within the larger setting of the inevitable progress characteristic of American democracy. In presenting the civil rights struggle in this way, however, the more complicated, contested history is largely left out, as is the crucial connection between the past that is on display, earlier events, and the present; unfortunately, the human rights exhibit, the "Spark of Conviction," does not effectively make links with the content of the "Rolls Down Like Water" exhibit. Given such limitations, in the end, the CCHR has created a space and exhibit that highlights important aspects of the American civil rights struggle to a mainstream audience. What has been missed is the opportunity to use that past in a way that goes more deeply into the deep-seated, complicated factors that continue to characterize racial and economic injustice today. Hence, as a site of persuasion, its goals and the reach of its persuasion are limited.

Notes

- 1 The explicit linkage between the US Civil Rights Movement and the international human rights movement is one of the distinct features of the center, reflected in its goal “to inspire” activism. In fact, in terms of size and effectiveness, the civil rights gallery gives a significantly deeper historical analysis and more compelling interactive exhibits. “The Spark of Conviction” is the global human rights exhibit on the second floor and relies on a good versus bad man theory of history and oversimplifies the complicated history and dynamics of human rights. See Edward Rothstein’s early critique in “The Harmony of Liberty,” www.nytimes.com/2014/05/23/arts/design/national-center-for-civil-and-human-rights/; accessed 6/22/2016; also my article, “Staging Human Rights and Wrongs at the CCHR,” forthcoming. Criticisms of the human rights exhibit have led to discussions of the need to make changes.
- 2 This emphasis on the South reflects the popularized narrative of the South as the exclusive site of racism and segregation, which fits into liberal, northern rhetoric and was reinforced by the media’s focus. For further discussion see Jeanne Theoharis, *A More Beautiful and Terrible History: The Uses and Misuses of Civil Rights History* (2018).
- 3 The earlier sites are located in the “blighted landscape” of Atlanta’s formerly thriving middle-class “Negro” neighborhoods (Dwyer and Alderman, 2008, 20-21). Also, family, political, and financial difficulties have characterized the King Center for Non-Violence whose exhibits need updating; however, a key feature for visitors is the crypt of M.L. King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King.
- 4 Evelyn G. Lowery (1925–2013) was the founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference for Women in 1979. Juanita Abernathy is also a long-time civil rights activist and wife of Ralph Abernathy (1926–1990); he co-founded the SCLC and worked closely alongside King originally as his mentor. The significance of Abernathy’s role has been largely overshadowed by that of King. Subsequent schisms within the Civil Rights Movement, including debates on the effectiveness of Abernathy’s leadership as head of the SCLC following King’s assassination, and Abernathy’s book on the movement which included details about King’s personal life, have added to the controversy. Andrew Young as a young activist worked closely with King and SNCC, was appointed Ambassador to the UN under President Carter, and was former mayor of Atlanta.
- 5 For example, when a collection of King’s writings and memorabilia was auctioned in 2006, Franklin helped raise funds for the collection to be kept in Atlanta. What is now known as the Morehouse College Martin Luther King Jr. Collection was purchased for \$32 million; and the CCHR raised \$12 million of that sum and received “exclusive display rights for the collection” (Rothstein, 2).
- 6 Doug Shipman discusses how his background as the White son of a minister and interest in civil rights history and King served him well in overseeing the project including fundraising. See “Doug Shipman: Activist & Executive Director at The National Center for Civil and Human Rights,” Plywood People 2013. <https://vimeo.com/56637991>. I met Doug Shipman in 2009 when I was invited to Atlanta to be part of a group of community members and academics discussing the center. The YouTube talk gives a flavor of Shipman’s charismatic leadership. Since his resignation less than a year after the center’s opening (and it is unclear why and how that happened), Dr. Dereck Kayongo, a refugee from Idi Amin’s Uganda and NGO founder, served as CEO for two years; following his resignation, Brian Tollesman, a board member and Leader/Founder of the Center’s LGBT Institute, was appointed Interim CEO and served during the year-long nation-wide search. In January 2019, the board announced that Jill Savitt, curator of the CCHR’s human rights gallery, the “Spark of Conviction,” a human rights activist and founder of an NGO, was appointed the CEO and

President. This turnover in leadership and other staff in five years reflects the ongoing politics and challenges that the CCHR faces.

- 7 The Atlanta City Council approved a \$40 million allocation from the Westside Tax Allocation District Public Purpose Fund, which according to one report made up around 30 percent of the center's proposed budget. Again, this underscores how important a role Shirley Franklin (Atlanta mayor, 2002–2008) and A.J. Robinson, head of Central Atlanta Progress (both are still on the Center's board), and other local political and business figures played in the establishment of the CCHR. See *Downtown Atlanta News*, "Center for Civil & Human Rights," www.atlantadowntown.com/initiatives/center-for-civil-and-human-rights accessed 6/22/2016.
- 8 Wolfe served as artistic director of New York City's Public Theater from 1993–2003; the two-time Tony award winner's work ranges from an early play of satirical sketches, *The Colored Museum*, to hit shows *Bring in 'da Noise, Bring in 'da Funk*, and *Harlem Song*. In discussing influences and ideas, Wolfe mentions that the March on Washington exhibit was initially inspired by the Spirit of America exhibit at Disneyland (Kompaeck 2014).
- 9 Ibid. From performers such as Felicia Rashid and Patrick White to David Rockwell, the architect who designed the exhibit space and who collaborated with Wolfe on earlier theater projects, this interview describes how Wolfe researched and envisioned the exhibit and brought together a diverse, talented group. In contrast to the much larger MAAHC in Washington, DC, there is no extensive listing of archivists, historians, and other specialists in African American history, and this may be one factor in why the civil rights narrative does not incorporate much of the re-evaluations and re-interpretations by historians over the last decades.
- 10 The HOK and Freelon Group collaborated; and Phil Freelon is often cited and photographed as architect on record. The design has received a series of awards (www.hok.com/design/service/landscape-architecture/national-center-for-civil-and-human-rights/).
- 11 Beside information and images about King's leadership, assassination and funeral, his portrait is on the Gallery of Human Rights Heroes wall on the third floor; a photo image hangs from the ceiling as one walks from the second to the first floor. The first floor includes an entire room devoted to King; this "Voice to the Voiceless Gallery" includes rotating archival material from his writings and artifacts; his large image on a wall and that of his library, and quotations including "I have a dream" in various languages as well as writings, biographies, and quotations on postcards available at the bookstore.
- 12 Kompanek, Christopher, "George C. Wolfe: From 'The Colored Museum' to an Actual Museum" in *American Theatre*, www.americantheatre.org/2014/10/21/George-c-wolfe-from-the-colored-museum.
- 13 See Jeanne Theoharis (2016), describing the earlier organizing in Montgomery, the details of protest and boycott, and how Rosa Parks was a life-long activist for equality and justice.
- 14 The first sit-in at a Woolworth's lunch counter took place in Greensboro, North Carolina and the counter was donated to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC; subsequently groups of activists conducted similar protests in Atlanta and throughout the South. George C. Wolfe originally envisioned an entire room to set the stage for the interactive exhibit; but for financial reasons it was scaled back.

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6

THE SƠN MỸ MEMORIAL AND MUSEUM

A continuous memorial service to
remember and bear witness to the
1968 Mỹ Lai Massacre

Roy Tamashiro

Introduction

On the morning of March 16, 2018, over a thousand Vietnamese and international visitors arrived at the Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum¹ for a solemn memorial service to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1968 Mỹ Lai Massacre. It was a sunny morning, like it was 50 years ago in this quaint, tropical countryside village in Quang Ngai Province in central Vietnam, when US soldiers helicoptered into Mỹ Lai and several surrounding hamlets. Here the soldiers tortured and killed over 500 unarmed civilians in the largest massacre the US military² committed against civilians in the American–Vietnam War³ (Hoang 2008; Oliver 2006). On the present day, the visitors queued up at several shrines around the memorial park, and took their turns to give flower offerings, burn incense, and pray for the victims and the recovering community (Figure 6.1).

According to the museum's guidebook, the Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum aims to preserve the memory of the massacre (Hoang 2008, 7) and to showcase Sơn Mỹ as a gentle, cultured village now revitalized after the war (Hoang 2008, 3, 23). This essay explores how the Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum has exercised its role as a site of persuasion. How has the museum shaped its audiences' learning about the massacre and its aftermath? How has the memorial museum redefined Sơn Mỹ and Vietnam's local, national, and global identity, and promoted collective healing and reconciliation in post-war Vietnamese society? Although the Sơn Mỹ Memorial's primary persuasive vehicles are its exhibits, monuments, and preserved artifacts and vestiges on the massacre site, its persuasive reach has been extended into the pedagogy and presentations of the museum's tour guides, print and video publications, and museum-sponsored programs and events like the 50th anniversary memorial service.

FIGURE 6.1 Visitors offer flowers at the 50th anniversary memorial service for the Mỹ Lai Massacre at the Sơn Mỹ Memorial. Photo credit: Roy Tamashiro

The Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum is situated in the place where most of the killing occurred, and stands as a *continuous memorial service* for visitors to bear witness to the experiences and memories of the massacre and its aftermath. I postulate that the *mindset of bearing witness* functions as a thematic guide for the museum to realize its goals to inform, persuade, and educate its audiences about the historic event. This witness-bearing approach is a priority among memorial museums which aim to give diverse audiences the space to confront, ponder, and freely debate the historical, ethical, political, and philosophical issues associated with atrocities.

The Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum fits the genre of contemporary memorial museums that commemorate atrocities (Sodaro 2018; Williams 2007). Memorial museums play a “central role in building a coherent historical, national discourse that reinforces a collective identity and social cohesion through common understandings of order, aesthetics, and symbols” (Rivera-Orraca 2009, 32). Williams defines memorial museums as “a specific kind of museum dedicated to a historic event commemorating mass suffering of some kind” (Williams 2007, 8).

In their mission to preserve the memory and to commemorate historical events involving atrocities, memorial museums emphasize transnational concerns and values in their persuasive repertoire. For the Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum, these transnational themes include listening to silenced and suppressed voices and memories of what happened and how the massacre impacted lives, searching for ways to heal and reconcile, and promoting the “never again” resolve for the future (Introduction to this volume, pp. 9–10; Sodaro 2018).

In examining the philosophical and ethical questions raised by the testimony of Auschwitz survivors, Giorgio Agamben observed, “Human beings are human insofar as they bear witness to the inhuman” (2002, 212). Agamben’s statement

describes a line of persuasion for memorial museums to inspire audiences to value witnessing, meaning-making, and memory preservation. By emphasizing witness-bearing for retrieving memories and coming to know what happened, the museums and their audiences can construct symbols and values based on transnational, non-sectarian, and pluralistic themes.

The Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum: origins and development

The Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum was established in 1976 by the newly reunified Vietnam⁴ government's Ministry of Culture and Information, one year after the end of the American–Vietnam War, and eight years after the massacre. Although the government's budget for the Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum was modest during Vietnam's early post-war recovery and development period, the funding for the museum was supplemented from international sources, including US-based NGOs and private foundations. For example, a Quaker-affiliated community development center, located in Quang Ngai Province and staffed by American volunteers and US Vietnam War veterans, supported post-war rebuilding projects in the Sơn Mỹ Commune including early efforts to develop the memorial museum.

External funding and other resources for the Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum, and for community development, social and educational services, and infrastructure, increased throughout the following decades, but especially after diplomatic relations with the United States were reestablished in 1995. Although the US government has not participated in development projects or funding for the Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum, US-based NGOs, foundations, groups such as Veterans for Peace, the Vietnam Peace Commemoration Committee, and other philanthropic interests have contributed to or collaborated in the memorial museum's development.

The increased funding and resources over the years coincides with greater professionalism and adherence to new museological trends in the museum's design and curation of its exhibits. For example, there seems to be less curatorial intervention, particularly in the museum's use of minimal captions or explanation for photographs and artifacts in the exhibits. This criterion allows audiences to "see" the evidence and the photographic records, and to make their own meanings or interpretations about what happened. Barbie Zelizer argues that without detailed captions or interpretation in words, viewers must take responsibility for what they see, wherein "bearing witness moves individuals from the personal act of 'seeing' to the adoption of a public stance by which they become part of a collective working through trauma together" (2002, 698).

Since 1998, the Sơn Mỹ Vestige Site Management Board, under the government's Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, has been responsible for the direction, administration, and management of Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum. In 2003, this Board initiated a major upgrade to the memorial and revisions in

the museum seeking to increase the effectiveness and appeal to Vietnamese and international audiences (Tamashiro 2018a, 71).⁵

In 2018, the Quang Ngai Provincial People's Committee announced a \$15.8 million (VND 348 billion) investment by the local Mỹ Lai Peace Foundation and the provincial budget to expand the Sơn Mỹ Memorial to a park complex including a square, a memorial, a museum, and a cultural services area (*Vietnam Times* 2018). The Mỹ Lai Peace Foundation and its 101-acre Peace Park expansion project will be funded by private sponsors in Vietnam and from overseas. The local Quang Ngai government has pledged to help with site clearance and relocation of some of the vestiges, sculptures, and monuments (Pham 2018).

The newly announced project continues to focus on education for local Vietnamese, as “a place for young people who want to learn about the country's pains and losses during wartime,” according to Dang Ngoc Dung, the province's vice chairman (Pham 2018). But critics, including a Vietnamese journalist and civic leaders associated with NGO projects in the province, have questioned the Mỹ Lai Peace Foundation's project. They point out that the emulation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as tourist attractions, positioning the Sơn Mỹ Memorial to “serve as an icon for Quang Ngai and a global destination for peace seekers and anti-war activists” (Pham 2018), detracts from the museum's mission to preserve the memory of the massacre by keeping the remains of the destruction visible. They also observed that the priority on international tourism takes away from the local need for a protected space to pay homage to the victims and the community.⁶

Bearing witness at the scene of the massacre

The Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum encompasses a section of the hamlet of Mỹ Lai 4 in the Sơn Mỹ Commune (also called Tĩnh Khê). The memorial grounds include a garden, several sculptures, and a large monument, shrines, and a building that houses the museum and administrative offices. The tropical countryside grounds of the Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum are beautiful and tranquil. There are “rice paddies, cassava patches and vegetable gardens shaded by casuarinas and eucalyptus trees. However, if you look closely you can still make out the odd bomb crater, and the bare hilltops” (Stewart et al. 2015). The garden includes trees with bullet holes, outline foundation marks where homes and sheds stood, and remnants of the bombed-out shelters. Identification plaques with the names and ages of the family members who perished are placed where their homes stood.

Alongside the irrigation ditch where a mass killing of 170 villagers occurred, there is a color-tile mural depicting the bloody slaughter.⁷ The dirt paths alongside the ditch are cemented over with recreated imprints of G.I. boots, and the bare footprints of fleeing children and adults. Visitors' comments on blogs and other social media indicate how fully the museum has approached its goal, in the words of the editors of this volume, to “reach not just the visitor's head

through cognition, but also their heart through emotion, affect and *pathos*” (Introduction, p. 9). The following post, for example, illustrates how the museum’s aim to persuade through emotion has affected the visitor, who reports how the scene evoked personal memories and strong emotions while standing at the irrigation ditch.

I was only seven years old when the Mỹ Lai massacre occurred, but I still remember seeing disturbing photos of it in *Life* magazine. Now I was standing at the irrigation ditch where over one hundred of the bodies were found. Mỹ Lai is an emotionally tough place for anyone to visit ... Standing there I tried to contemplate the madness that occurred on this peaceful spot. Roosters crowed in the distance and the pungent smell of burning brush wafted over the village ... Then I looked down and noticed hundreds of bare footprints along the path, many of them the tiny footprints of young children. They were interspersed randomly with imprints of army boots.

(Michael 2012)

The museum tour guides also model the witness-bearing process and evoke emotional responses and a sense of connection with Mỹ Lai victims, thereby advancing this track of persuasion on behalf of the museum. For example, Kiều Phan, who was the guide on my tour in 2013, walked our group along the irrigation ditch where 170 villagers were executed. She stopped. Then she lowered her head in a silent tribute. Holding back tears, she revealed that her mother, then age 17, was among those in the ditch, but survived because she was left for dead in the pile of bodies. Kiều’s quiet prayer-tribute was a witness-bearing ritual, not only for herself, but also for many of us on her tour. Standing alongside Kiều in her tribute created a connection with her. And now, it was our bearing witness together – *in communitas* – with Kiều and her mother to what happened at this very location (Tamashiro 2018a) (Figure 6.2).

The largest sculpture on the grounds is a stylized depiction of a woman with one hand raised in a clenched fist, holding a baby with the other, and dead family members at her feet. The emotionally evocative sculpture is based on a photograph of a survivor in a similar pose, with an intense facial expression of grief, fury, and defiance.

The names and ages of the 504 Vietnamese civilians killed during the four-hour episode are listed on a giant marble plaque at the entrance to the museum. This memorial plaque is reminiscent of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, which was built in 1982 and lists the 57,939 American soldiers who died during the war. Maya Lin, the 18-year-old Yale University architecture student whose design was selected for the memorial, was inspired by Yale University’s Memorial Rotunda, where “she couldn’t resist passing her fingers over the marble walls engraved with the names of those alumni who died in service of their country” (Klein 2015). Lin recognized “the lasting

FIGURE 6.2 Tour guide pausing for a silent tribute to her mother who survived the slaughter of 170 villagers at the irrigation ditch. The path has been cemented over with imprints of G.I. boots, and the bare-feet imprints of the fleeing villagers. Photo credit: Roy Tamashiro

impression on me ... the sense of the power of a name” (Klein 2015). The practice of listing names on a memorial has become a transnational trend among memorial museums (Introduction to this volume). Both the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington and the memorial plaque at the Sơn Mỹ Museum “proved to be pilgrimage sites” for citizens in their respective countries. Although it was initially intensely controversial, the memorial in Washington “became a sacred place of healing and reverence as [Lin] intended” (Klein 2015). Within three years of the memorial’s opening, the *New York Times* reported it was “something of a surprise ... how quickly America has overcome the divisions caused by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial” (*New York Times* 1985).⁸

Inside the museum building, the account of the 1968 massacre and its aftermath is presented using the photographs taken by Sgt. Ron Haeberle, a US military photographer. Haeberle’s photos, which are also included in the museum’s guidebook, reveal the gruesome scene: villagers in terror, charred bodies, and corpses covered with blood or intestines spilling out. The 25-page bilingual (Vietnamese and English) museum guidebook explains that Haeberle and Jay Roberts were both US Army reporters who accompanied Company C to Sơn Mỹ. Haeberle took black-and-white photos on an army-issued camera but used color film in two of his own cameras. He sold his photographs for

publication over a year later when investigative reporter Seymour Hersh broke the story of the massacre (Hersh 1969; Eszterhas and Haeberle 1969; Hoang 2008).

The sparse captions accompanying the photographs are insufficient for chronicling the events on the day of the massacre. Zelizer's (2002) rationale for the minimal captioning is consistent with the museum's aim to persuade audiences by appealing to emotional and ethical channels as well as to the cognitive and rational: "Photos offer a vehicle by which individuals can see and continue to see until the shock and trauma associated with disbelieving can be worked through" (698). The freedom of seeing the images without meanings or interpretations being imposed by others, constructing meaning about them, and then taking responsibility for the horrors depicted in the images "helps the collective move on, its boundaries gradually reinstated" (Zelizer 2002, 711).

To learn about what happened, museum visitors must go beyond the minimally captioned exhibits and artifacts. For this they can refer to the narrative in the museum's guidebook or the museum's 65-page historical review (Hoang 2008, 2009), which are published in several languages. Visitors can also join an hour-long guided tour in English, Vietnamese, or French, or watch one of the documentaries about the massacre in the museum's video screening room. The museum's guidebook describes how US Army Lieutenant William L. Calley led a "kill all, burn all and destroy all" mission on the morning of March 16, 1968, to invade the village. The unit of 105 men in Charlie Company, of the 11th Infantry Brigade, 23rd Infantry Division, had been incorrectly told that a contingent of main force Viet Cong was waiting for them in the village. There are photos showing the soldiers throwing hand grenades into the bunkers, killing villagers inside and setting houses on fire (Cookman 2007). Even though they did not encounter any enemy soldiers, Calley and his men murdered almost the entire village: 504 men, women, and children, including the elderly and infants. Many women and girls were raped before they were shot (Oliver 2006, 192). In addition, there were "274 houses burned down and thousands of livestock killed" (Hoang 2008, 7).

The museum's historical review, *A Look Back Upon Sơn Mỹ* (Hoang 2009), recaps the 15-month military court martial trial, in which Calley was the only one convicted for his role in directing the killings at Mỹ Lai. The museum's publication reports the public condemnation of Calley as a murderer and US President Richard Nixon's intervention to remove him from prison. Calley received a life sentence but ended up serving three years under house arrest, and was paroled in 1974 (Hoang 2009). In the museum's photo exhibit, the caption for Calley's photograph at his court martial appearance is strikingly understated: "Lieut. Calley, who took a lot of lives, at Fort Benning, Georgia in November 1969."

The first gallery in the museum, informally called "Heroes of Mỹ Lai," includes portraits of US Army helicopter pilot Hugh Thompson and his crew, who were on a separate reconnaissance mission. Thompson evacuated several wounded villagers to where they could receive medical care. After Thompson made repeated radio calls to his superiors to report that a massacre was

occurring, he landed his aircraft between the advancing US troops and the retreating villagers. The massacre ended only when Thompson threatened to open fire on the American troops if they continued their attacks (Oliver 2006; Hoang 2008; Tamashiro 2018b).

The entire helicopter crew, Thompson, Colburn, and Glenn Andreotta, is now deceased,⁹ but the men are regarded as the heroes of Mỹ Lai. “Although they are no longer living,” said Kiều Phan, vice-director of the Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum, “they left for us, for our future, the stories of their heroism in saving civilians.”¹⁰ Through museum tour guides retelling Colburn’s and Thompson’s narratives, the museum advances another aim in its persuasive repertoire: that present and future museum visitors can come to know how further killing and brutality were averted in this massacre.

In addition to the photographic exhibition, the museum exhibits include artifacts, such as the villagers’ clothing and personal effects, tattered, burned, or riddled with bullet holes, as well as household items, cookware, and other everyday objects. The museum also features life-size, three-dimensional dioramas, consistent with scenes in Haeberle’s photographs. Together, the artifacts, dioramas, and photo exhibits in the museum and the preserved and recreated remnants on the memorial grounds enable the museum visitor to have an experiential walk-through of the massacre site, as though the visitor were surveying the site in 1968. Experientially, the visitors come to know, or at least begin to imagine, what happened.

In a corner gallery in the museum, several large binders are filled with visitor comments about touring the Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum. The handwritten comments in English are translated and typed in Vietnamese alongside the original on the same page. Conversely, the handwritten comments in Vietnamese are not translated into English. While the captions in the museum photo exhibits are brief and dispassionate, the visitor comments chosen to be displayed are intense, personal, and heartfelt. They are reflective and philosophical. They further illustrate the museum’s agenda to reach audiences through emotional and ethical sensitivities. Writes one visitor:

What I have seen here today, I think, will haunt me forever. I feel such sadness that we as human beings are capable of causing each other so much pain both physically and emotionally. We are all, in our own ways, innocent and vulnerable, yet often we don’t realize this until it is too late. It’s too late for the people of Mỹ Lai and the many people around the world who have been scarred & killed by fellow human beings – but may it be a lesson – a poignant reminder to us all that we too are human & we too are capable of hurting each other. Life is precious, the individual is precious, we must all help to nurture each other and spread only happiness, love & understanding. I will not forget, but I will never understand.¹¹

Visitor comments from former American soldiers who fought in Vietnam are likewise pained, poignant, and emotional.

I am an American combat veteran. Son Mỹ will always be a lasting memory to the insanity of war – all war. I have too many feelings even to begin to write here – I could easily fill this book and many more. When I returned to America after the war, it followed me – I took it home with me. It has been with me each and every day since. By returning here to attempt to pay back what my Country [sic] took from Vietnam, I have begun to find peace at last. There were no victors of this war. I ask for and offer three important things: acceptance, forgiveness, and unconditional love. *Hòa Bình*.¹²

Since the visitor comments in the binders are chosen by the museum staff to be displayed publicly, they reflect the impact the museum wants to effect on its audience. The selected visitor comments are meant to show that the museum has realized its goals to evoke strong emotional responses, to inspire reflection about political, ethical, or existential issues, and to persuade audiences to take responsibility for what happened (e.g., “pay back what my Country took”).

Memories of first-hand witness bearers

Some of the first-hand witness accounts are included in the museum’s guide-book (Hoang 2008), the museum’s historical review (Hoang 2009), and in videos screened at the museum. First-hand witnesses in the Mỹ Lai Massacre include the villagers, the soldiers who committed the atrocities, and others like Thompson and his helicopter crew, and Haeberle, the photographer. The oral history accounts of first-hand experiencers clarify how *bearing witness* extends beyond just describing the event. The accounts include emotions and thoughts in the experience being remembered, as well as the sense of taking responsibility for the validity of memories being retrieved (Tait 2011; Zelizer 2002).

The *Four Hours in Mỹ Lai* video (Sim 1989) is regularly requested to play in the museum’s video screening room. This documentary includes accounts of Mỹ Lai survivor-witnesses, and several American soldiers who took part in the massacre. Pham Thi Thuan, age 35 then, vividly recalls:

I was getting ready to work in the field when the helicopters flew in and started firing. People didn’t know where to hide. They shot some people and rounded up others. They told us to sit down – so we sat down. Stand up – so we stood up. We thought they would let us go but they pushed us into the ditch and shot everybody dead. My children and I were in with the dead people. Their dead bodies weighed down on me ...¹³

Thuan’s narrative remained unchanged in a 2008 interview. She was still haunted by the memory, and reported, “I cannot forget it as long as I live. I even remember the shooting of my people in the ditch in my dreams” (Rushing 2008). In 2018, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the massacre,

Thuan describes her hopeful sense of reconciliation: “Today, the Vietnamese and Americans people cooperate to make friendship ... As we do that, we try to make sure there are no more massacres” (Aljazeera.com 2018).

Pham Thanh Cong, the 61-year old retired director of Sơn Mỹ Memorial, exemplifies the long and difficult journey to reconciliation. His story is also documented in a video (Rushing 2008) frequently screened at the museum and written in his memoir (Cong 2016). Cong lost his mother, three sisters, and a six-year-old brother when the soldiers threw a grenade into the thatch-roofed home where the family was huddled. Cong survived because the bodies of his dead family members shielded him. Throughout the decades, Cong continues to ponder why the soldiers followed the orders, and as he still repeats, “I will never forget the pain” (Cong 2016; Hersh 2015, 52).

In 2008, Cong met US veteran Kenneth Schiel, who participated in the massacre. Schiel traveled to Vietnam on a solo pilgrimage to revisit the massacre site and to apologize to the people of Mỹ Lai. But Cong could not accept Schiel’s apology when he realized Schiel had been in the midst of the slaughter. Cong came to an angry conclusion. “So maybe *you* came to my house and killed my relatives,” he says (Cong 2016; Rushing 2008).

With Vietnam’s mandatory retirement for males at age 60, Cong left his position as director of the Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum in 2018, two months before the 50th anniversary of the massacre. He now says, “We love them [the American people]. Thanks to them we have liberation today because they protested against the war ... I cannot forget they killed people here, but we try to forgive them and look forward to the future” (Aljazeera.com 2018).

Private Vernado Simpson was able to bear witness to his own memories of the atrocities he committed in Mỹ Lai:

I didn’t want to shoot a woman. But I was getting orders to shoot ... I am thinking that she had a weapon, running. So when I shot and turned her over, it was a baby. I shot about four times ... The bullets just went right through her and shot the baby too ... I saw the baby’s face. It was half gone ... I just blanked. I just went ... [Pause] That day in Mỹ Lai, I was personally responsible for killing between twenty and twenty-five people ... From shooting them, to cutting their throats, to scalping them, to cutting off their hands, and cutting out their tongues, I did that ... I just lost all sense of direction or purpose. I just start killing any kind of way I could kill. It just came. I didn’t know I had it in me ... after I killed the child, my whole mind just went ... Once you kill, it becomes easy to kill the next person, and the next one, and the next one, because I had no feelings, no emotions, no nothing ... No direction. I just killed.¹⁴

Simpson’s account illustrates how unbearable it can be to bear witness to the inhuman in oneself. Simpson had already attempted suicide three times before this interview and did kill himself less than a year after this interview (Sim

FIGURE 6.3 Portrait photos in the museum of Pham Thanh Cong (left) at age 11 when he survived the massacre, and Pvt. Vernado Simpson (right), who described his thoughts and feelings when he killed civilians on March 16, 1968. Photo credit: Composite photo of portraits in Sơn Mỹ Museum by Roy Tamashiro

1989). Simpson's photo is displayed in the museum, as if to recognize Simpson's courage to face the darkest and most horrific part of his life and to share his struggle with it in public interviews (Figure 6.3).

Several soldiers did have the presence of mind to refuse to shoot in spite of the orders. In a video interview (Sim 1989), Harry Stanley described his reaction to the orders:

Lt. Calley ordered certain people to shoot these people. And I was one of them, and I refused to shoot. He told me that he was going to have me court-martialed when we got back to base camp. I told him what was on my mind at that time: ordering me to shoot down innocent people. That is not an order. That's craziness to me. So I don't feel like I had to obey that. If you want to court-martial me, do that. If you can get away with it ...¹⁵

Witness-bearing at the massacre anniversary memorial services

The memorial service held on the grounds of the Sơn Mỹ Memorial on March 16 every year serves as a witness-bearing ritual. The 50th anniversary service in 2018 drew over 1,000 participants, including several massacre survivors

and their families, provincial and local dignitaries, and media, Vietnamese citizens, as well as several hundred international delegates. American participants included Vietnam veteran groups, NGO workers, peace activists, and journalists. The event included incense offerings, group prayers, and tributes by local and international speakers.

Former US Army officer Lawrence Colburn, who was one of Hugh Thompson's helicopter crew that intervened to stop the killing, participated in the 40th anniversary commemoration. There, he was reunited with Do Ba, an eight-year-old boy the crew rescued from the irrigation ditch where the boy was clinging to his mother's corpse. In his emotional testimony at the memorial service, Colburn said: "Today I see Do Ba with a wife and a baby ... He's transformed himself from being a broken, lonely man. Now he's complete. He's a perfect example of the human spirit, of the will to survive" (Stocking 2008, 1). Colburn's testimony is a declaration that dignity and wholeness has been restored following profound trauma for Do Ba (Tamashiro 2018a, 67). Since Do Ba does not make a public statement about his transformation, it is not known whether he also interprets his survival as Colburn does. Coburn's statement fits the self-image which the Son Mĩ Memorial aims to advance, as "revitalized ... indicating the immortal vitality after the agony of wartime" (Hoang 2008, 23).

The role of bearing witness for sites of persuasion

Observing sites of persuasion which memorialize profound mass suffering, such as the Son Mĩ Memorial, provides an opportunity to explore – in effect, bear witness to – a historical event that is morally chaotic and unbearable. Some museum visitors may reflect not only on the dark and dreadful parts of human nature, but also on the subsequent processes of personal and collective healing and reconciliation, and the rebuilding of the community. As such, for some, the Son Mĩ Memorial and Museum is regarded as a globally distinctive peace memorial museum; both a haunting place of mass suffering, and a spiritual and sacred site (Tamashiro 2014; *The Voice of Vietnam* 2012; Tick 2014).

In this reframing of thought, the identification as victims is deemphasized. At Son Mĩ and throughout Vietnam, movements to seek formal apologies or reparations from the US government are largely absent. This may be in keeping with Son Mĩ's self-identification as a sacred space, and moving forward as a "revitalized ... gentle, poetic and cultured village" (Hoang 2008). This idealized self-characterization is also a political assertion and declaration of self-identification. By this statement, Son Mĩ eschews and censors other self-concepts, such as one of a victimized, devastated village still awaiting meaningful apologies, justice, and dignity to be restored, and reparations for the massacre.

Museums exercise their function as sites of persuasion through value creation processes, which result from the selective building of collections and the display, curation, and interpretation of those collections to the public (Morphy 2000, 129). We can observe the extent to which the Son Mĩ Memorial and Museum

has created an environment which facilitates witness-bearing by analyzing the various public presentations including physical structures (the museum, the memorial grounds, and the monuments), but also the anniversary memorial services, the publications (print, video, multimedia, and social media), the public interface with museum personnel, and the ongoing research, education, and public relations activities.

Inevitably, museum visitors experience and respond to the interpretations and meanings which are projected by the museum exhibits and narratives differently. Some visitors will be unconscious of or unaffected by the museums' values and interpretations. For others, the museum will influence or change how they think about the history and meanings of the massacre and its aftermath, or about the lessons to be learned for the present and the future. For still others, the value-laden narratives and interpretations will evoke doubt, objections, or criticisms.

The Sơn Mỹ Memorial and Museum, like other memorial sites of atrocity and mass suffering, is challenged in how it documents the historical event, and divergent memories and interpretations. Memorial sites like Sơn Mỹ try to navigate ideological and political contestations; unsettled ethical, human rights, and legal questions and violations; shifting meanings of cultural, national, and global values, identity and citizenship; and continuing emotional and psychic wounds and trauma which persist in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and intergenerational traumas.

By postulating that the bearing-witness mindset is the Sơn Mỹ Memorial's guiding theme in its role as a site of persuasion, it may be possible to negotiate this challenging terrain of complicated questions and competing needs. Bearing witness to an extraordinary event like the Mỹ Lai Massacre is an existential pilgrimage into fundamental questions of the nature of humanity, especially what it means to know the human capacity for unimaginable violence, atrocities, and cruelties upon fellow humans. It is a philosophical, epistemological, and psychological search into questions like: what does it mean to be human? How can we discern the truths we deny, and see through the lies we believe? Bearing witness means allowing oneself to hear and acknowledge the voices and experiences of the witnesses, the participants and stakeholders, as unbelievable and unbearable or unconscionable as those accounts may be. By promoting the witness-bearing process and mindset, the museum endeavors to make space for different memories and narratives to be heard. Opposing ideologies and claims for staking the moral high ground or dominating the cultural, political, and religious agendas are witnessed. Ideally, by cultivating the bearing-witness mindset, memorial museums may be able to achieve broader credibility with diverse local, national, and international audiences.

The process of bearing witness brings a sense of connection to the family of humankind and to the history of civilization. This witness consciousness means taking ownership of one's responsibilities in the role of a global citizen (Tamashiro 2018a). It propels individuals and the collective to restore connection to community, to humanity, and to the eternal.

The Son Mỹ Memorial and Museum has created an environment that encourages audiences to engage in the witness-bearing process. By preserving the site to appear as it did after the massacre, and emphasizing a minimally captioned photo exhibit, this invitation to bear witness acknowledges the visitors' autonomy and freedom of thought and of meaning-making with regard to the contested (and contestable) political, ethical, legal, and human rights questions and issues. On the one hand, bearing witness can lead to fulfillment of Agamben's call to "bear witness to the inhuman" as a means to claim one's humanness and to bring about healing and reconciliation. On the other hand, the process can also result in "bearing false witness," and the failure to find meaning, wholeness, and healing (Lifton 1998). As a public institution, the Son Mỹ Memorial and Museum carries authority and the weight of persuasion across local, national, and international audiences. With bearing witness as its mission, the Son Mỹ Memorial creates value and influences the meanings we collectively make of the Mỹ Lai Massacre, of our own lives, and of what it means to be human.

Notes

- 1 In Vietnamese, the Son Mỹ Memorial and Museum is *Bảo tàng và Di tích Sơn Mỹ*, translated to Son Mỹ Vestige and Museum. It is also called the Son Mỹ Vestige Area (Hoang 2008).
- 2 Other documented massacres committed by the US military were the Thuy Bo massacre (145 deaths) by the US Marine Corps on January 31 to February 1, 1967; Thanh Phong massacre (21 deaths) by the US Navy on February 25, 1969 (Vistica 2001), and the Son Thang massacre (16 deaths) by the US Marine Corps on February 19, 1970 (Solis 1997).
- 3 The war known as the Vietnam War (1956–1975) in the West is known in Vietnam as the "Second Indochina War," as the "Resistance War Against America," and as the "American War" (*Chiến tranh Mỹ, Kháng chiến chống Mỹ*).
- 4 North Vietnam, officially the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and South Vietnam, officially the Republic of Vietnam, RVN, were unified into the Socialist Republic of Vietnam upon the conclusion of the American–Vietnam War.
- 5 Pham Thanh Cong, director of the Son Mỹ Memorial and Museum, summarized these upgrades and revisions in an address to the Seventh International Conference of Museums for Peace, Kyoto, Japan, October 2008 (Tamashiro 2018a, 71).
- 6 Remarks in author's conversation on March 16, 2018, with a journalist and two local civic leaders associated with NGO projects in Quang Ngai Province, who requested anonymity. While the Son Mỹ Memorial does not publicize visitor/attendance statistics, the proportion of local and international visitors seems to fluctuate widely, as inferred from Internet blogs and my several visits. There are no "counters" at the entrances to the memorial grounds or to the museum building. Apart from the annual memorial service, international visitor attendance is small (compared to Hiroshima, for example) in part because its location is remote. The critics observe that the Mỹ Lai Peace Foundation's vision is based on an uncertain and wishful expectation that "if you build it, they will come," i.e. that the new Peace Park will draw more international visitors.
- 7 The mural is reminiscent of Picasso's *Guernica*: both abstract and symbolic, yet unmistakable in its depiction of the brutal violence and suffering.
- 8 Whether memorials listing names unite or divide citizens varies from one memorial to the next, and changes with the passage of time and with the changing social and

- political climates. The cited articles (Klein 2015; *New York Times* 1985) emphasize this point in noting the dramatic shift in the public's attitudes about the VVM within three years of its construction.
- 9 Glenn Andreotta was killed in combat three weeks after the massacre. Hugh Thompson died in 2006, and Lawrence Colburn died in December 2016 (Roberts 2016).
 - 10 Comment by Kiêu Phan on a private tour of the museum and grounds of the Son Mỹ Memorial for a delegation of American peace activists, and the Veterans for Peace on March 16, 2018, following the 50th anniversary memorial service at the Son Mỹ Memorial.
 - 11 This visitor comment in the binder-album at the Sơn Mỹ Museum is signed "Emma Colby, England."
 - 12 *Hòa Bình* is the Vietnamese expression for "peace." This visitor comment in the binder-album at the Son Mỹ Museum is signed "Seth Nicholls."
 - 13 Captioned translation from Vietnamese, in *Four Hours in Mỹ Lai: Anatomy of a Massacre* (Sim 1989).
 - 14 Excerpts from an interview with Vernado Simpson in *Four Hours in Mỹ Lai: Anatomy of a Massacre* (Sim 1989).
 - 15 Excerpts from an interview with Harry Stanley in *Four Hours in Mỹ Lai: Anatomy of a Massacre* (Sim 1989).

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7

MEMORY AS PERSUASION

Historical discourse and moral messages at Peru's Place of Memory, Tolerance, and Social Inclusion

Joseph P. Feldman

The Place of Memory, Tolerance, and Social Inclusion (*Lugar de la Memoria, la Tolerancia y la Inclusión Social*) was inaugurated in Lima on December 17, 2015, and depicts the history of an internal armed conflict that took place in Peru during the 1980s and 1990s.¹ This war centered on a conflict involving the Peruvian state and Shining Path (*Partido Comunista del Perú-Sendero Luminoso*), a Maoist insurgent group that initiated the violence in 1980. In most of Peru, levels of violence declined significantly following the 1992 capture of Shining Path's leader, Abimael Guzmán; however, throughout the 1990s the country experienced human rights violations perpetrated by the authoritarian government of Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000).

The Place of Memory is a state-sponsored institution and the circumstances surrounding its creation resulted in many viewing the museum as an historical accident or, more critically, an “imposed” project. In February 2009, one of Peru's national newspapers reported that President Alan García had rejected Germany's offer of a two-million-dollar donation to construct this museum. García, himself the subject of criticism for human rights abuses committed during his first presidential term (1985–1990), claimed that this money would be better spent on reparations for victims of the war. The government ultimately reversed its decision following political pressure, with García appointing the novelist Mario Vargas Llosa to head a commission to oversee the creation of this new memorial museum.² What began as a high-profile controversy quickly receded from the headlines, however, as the institution faced numerous delays and leadership changes in the following years. And those who expected García's government to rapidly assemble an “official” display of the violence that would “set the record straight” (according to the perspective of the president and his political party) became witness to institutional positions and strategies similar to those found at other memorialization initiatives that take globalized concepts of

democracy, human rights, and social inclusion as organizing principles for representing past violence.

This chapter examines memory discourse as a form of persuasion in the context of this national museum project in Peru. From its beginnings, the Place of Memory, Tolerance, and Social Inclusion was presented as a museum that would avoid seeking a comprehensive, univocal account of Peru's internal armed conflict. Instead, the project's representatives and supporters positioned the museum as a site for presenting and debating diverse memories of war. While this strategy is consistent with global trends in museology, I discuss how an emphasis on memory might be understood within the specific context of post-conflict Peru, taking "persuasion" to refer to the goal of promoting human rights-oriented understandings of the violence in a political climate that is often hostile to such perspectives. Drawing on analysis of three moments in the Place of Memory's development—early debates about the institution's purpose and goals, a consultation process involving representatives from various sectors, and the museum's inauguration and permanent exhibition—I demonstrate how the national memorial museum has legitimized itself largely through a retreat from "history," an approach that responds, in part, to the initiative's political fragility. I conclude by assessing the ways in which the Place of Memory's narrative strategies position it as an educational institution, focusing on the progressive potential of elements of the exhibition that direct attention to the unfinished work of addressing Peru's violent past.

My investigation of this case is informed by a literature that critically analyzes the emergence of the memorial museum as a global form (Sodaro 2018; Williams 2007), but also scholarship that draws attention to the growing importance of "memory" as a discourse through which museum planners and practitioners conceptualize their work. Silke Arnold-de Simine (2013) has recently examined the phenomenon of "memory museums," a category that includes but is not limited to sites focused on violent or traumatic histories. What characterizes these museums, according to Arnold-de Simine (2013, 10), is the way in which "they relate to the past through the framework of 'memory,'" a mode of engagement that privileges empathy and the acknowledgment of diverse experiences while viewing the interpretation of historical events as a means of rethinking the present and future.³ Arnold-de Simine understands the rise of memory museums as emblematic of a "postmodern shift from 'history' as the authoritative master discourse on the past to the paradigm of memory" (2013, 10), a transition identifiable in academic scholarship and other domains of social life (e.g., Huyssen 2000).⁴ Particularly in the case of museums dealing with past human rights abuses, the move toward polyvocality may reflect institutions' recognition of the limitations of representing traumatic histories and planners' desires to avoid triumphalist or hegemonic accounts that celebrate the glorious victories or defeats of nations (more pragmatically, institutions may also be aware that visitors are less likely to be persuaded by such accounts). At the same time, the "never again" logic found at many memorials and museums entails a pedagogical commitment, with the rationale for memorialization

typically relying “(implicitly) on a theory of change concerning democratic learning and the very modern belief that an accumulation of knowledge can help to shape a better future” (Bickford and Sodaro 2010, 68).⁵ As Apsel and Sodaro note in their Introduction to this volume, the use of *pathos* is often crucial to such sites’ persuasive work.

While a number of features shape Peru’s participation in a “new commemorative paradigm” (Bickford and Sodaro 2010), it is worth highlighting two that are especially relevant for this discussion. First, Peru’s experience of war and post-conflict transition has reflected, and elaborated on, legacies of exclusion in the country. Shining Path originated in the impoverished Andean region of Ayacucho, and the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2001–2003) estimated that 75 percent of the war dead and disappeared spoke Quechua or another indigenous language (CVR 2003). Although the coastal capital of Lima increasingly became the scene of insurgent attacks and state forces’ “dirty war” tactics during the late 1980s and into the 1990s, the differential impact of the war frames discussions about how it should be memorialized.

Second, human rights-oriented representations of the Peruvian armed conflict that link the violence to unresolved social divides are often politically contentious. This is largely due to the way in which such depictions question a “salvation memory” of the war (Milton 2014, 9–10) that emphasizes the defeat of criminal “terrorists” by a triumphant state (see also Drinot 2009). Where the main protagonist in this narrative was once the authoritarian government of Alberto Fujimori—whose daughter, Keiko Fujimori, nearly won the 2016 presidential elections—greater stress is now placed on the role of the armed forces as an historical actor (Degregori 2009, 7). The Place of Memory followed other memorialization initiatives in Lima such as Yuyanapaq (the photo exhibit of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission) and the Ojo que Llorá (Eye that Cries) memorial, both of which were met with political opposition that threatened their long-term survival (Milton 2011; Portugal 2015; Ulfe 2013). Further, although the governments of Alan García and Ollanta Humala (2011–2016) accepted the national museum project in principle, their support for the Place of Memory was tepid at best, with the majority of the institution’s funding coming from foreign donors such as the German government, the European Union, and the United Nations Development Programme. This lack of political support—which can be contrasted with other examples from the region such as the development of Chile’s Museum of Memory and Human Rights during Michele Bachelet’s first government (Hite and Collins 2009)—is a key variable when considering how representatives came to talk about the Place of Memory and its goals.

Museum, “place,” and the problem of inclusion

Early debates surrounding the museum positioned the institution as a mediator of diverse perspectives about the violence, with officials rarely offering specific plans or visions for what the site would display. These initial exchanges

involving the museum project and various publics were marked by social and political divisions outlined above.

Following the donation controversy, Vargas Llosa and other project representatives made efforts to present the Museum of Memory (the initiative's original name) as a politically neutral "museum of victims." Sensitive to the perception that the human rights-focused project was anti-military in orientation, officials regularly spoke of the need to establish a perspective that would be inclusive toward "all victims" of the violence. In December 2009, for instance, Vargas Llosa stated,

I want to reassure soldiers that [...] in this museum, the sacrifice and heroism of the Armed Forces will be present in its rooms, in the same way as the suffering of the victims, since this place will be the house of all of the victims.

(*El Comercio* 2009; see also Ulfe and Milton 2010)

The sporadic meetings and events the museum carried out with representatives from different sectors (human rights NGOs, victims' organizations, intellectuals, artists) during its early stages did not assuage fears that the museum's fate remained in the hands of a small group of individuals, however. Victims' organizations and members of the armed forces alike expressed concern over the absence of representatives from these sectors on the museum's High Level Commission. Meanwhile, commentators within and outside of Peru noted the way in which war victims seemed to be left on the sidelines in discussions about the Lima-based national museum (Rodrigo Gonzales 2010; Ulfe and Milton 2010).

In April 2010, a statement from the national congress of CONAVIP (*Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones de Afectados por la Violencia Política*), a national consortium of victims' organizations, expressed approval of the government's decision to accept the German funds and proceed with the initiative, but urged

the members of the Commission of this important work to gather the voices of every blood [*todas las sangres*, a common phrase for referencing Peru's ethnic diversity] in order for the place of memory to help us toward the process of reconciliation.

(CONAVIP 2010a)

Later that year, CONAVIP issued a longer pronouncement following the Place of Memory's laying of the first stone ceremony. The statement critiqued, among other things, President García's lack of mention of state-perpetrated atrocities in his speech at the event, but drew attention also to the project's tendency to locate victim-survivors as passive observers as opposed to decision-makers in the process of creating the museum (CONAVIP 2010b).

Indeed, for all the museum's rhetoric of inclusion, the composition of the project's first High Level Commission (all male, and made up largely of artists and intellectuals from coastal backgrounds) did little to counter the notion that

the project was an elite, Lima-centric endeavor. Vargas Llosa himself, though recognized as a national icon and a long-time critic of authoritarianism, was a polarizing figure in this regard, not only for his right-wing politics, but also because of his tendency to align himself with high culture and western values. Further, Vargas Llosa's experience heading the investigation of the 1983 Uchuraccay massacre—controversial for its depiction of Andean peasants as out of step with the modern world (del Pino 2017; Mayer 1991)—was another factor that caused some to feel uneasy about his heading the museum project.⁶ Adding to the institution's elitist image was the Commission's decision to construct the memorial museum in Miraflores, a wealthy, upscale district in Lima.

In what can be read as an attempt to “open up” the project, in January 2010, Vargas Llosa announced that the Museum of Memory would from then on be referred to as the “Place of Memory.” The name change, Vargas Llosa suggested, was meant to demonstrate that the violence in Peru was not merely a “thing of the past.”

The word museum is associated with an institution that preserves the past. We don't want the Place of Memory to be a reconstruction of the violence in Peru, giving a perfect, most just, most exact vision of the historical occurrence.

(La República 2010)

Even before the official change, Vargas Llosa had stated, “the Museum of Memory will not be an archaeological institution dedicated to preserving the past, but rather something living and current, a place of exhibition, study, dialogue, and reflection” (El Comercio 2009). The “museum-to-place” shift also might have been considered as a way to unmoor the institution from urban, elite ideals. As scholars who closely followed the situation during this period (Ulfe and Milton 2010) report:

By December of 2009 it was being discussed if it was appropriate to maintain the Museum idea due to its being reminiscent of spaces of “lettered” knowledge. If the idea was to open up a space for memory and commemoration, perhaps it was appropriate to present the proposal as a Space or Place.

Paloma Rodrigo Gonzales (2010), analyzing the name change and other discursive strategies employed in discussions surrounding the museum, argues that “objectivity” (embodied by figures such as Vargas Llosa) and “inclusion” (considered as a willingness to incorporate diverse perspectives) became two dominant concepts through which Place of Memory representatives legitimized their efforts. Somewhat paradoxically, cultivating an institutional image of evenhandedness and inclusivity often entailed praising the character and credentials of those involved in the project. For instance, in an interview with Peru's state

media outlet shortly after the High Level Commission was formed, commissioner Juan Ossio “highlighted the trajectory and professionalism of each one of the commission’s members, who ... are sensible people and aware of the responsibility they have” (paraphrased quote in Agencia Andina 2009). As Rodrigo notes, one of the lasting consequences of early discussions about the project—and the name change in particular—was that the Place of Memory became established firmly as a “memory” project (2010, 85). “History” and the “museum” became concepts that were, at best, essential starting points for the proposed project and, at worst, antithetical to its stated objectives.

This apparent openness had a way of obscuring the fact that the actual workings of the project remained largely an elite affair. “All of the victims” might be consulted, but the management of their perspectives, it seemed, was best left to experts.

A consultation process

An additional manifestation of the “museum as mediator” logic, albeit under quite different circumstances, can be identified in a consultation process the Place of Memory undertook during 2013 and 2014.⁷ There were significant changes to the national museum project during the period following the German donation polemic. Mario Vargas Llosa resigned as president in September 2010. The Ollanta Humala administration (2011–2016) installed a new High Level Commission led by Diego García-Sayán, who served as president of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights between 2010 and 2013, and the project received a second name change, officially becoming the Place of Memory, Tolerance, and Social Inclusion. The “participatory process” that began in late 2013 was one of the main initiatives spearheaded by Denise Ledgard during the first months of her tenure as national director of the museum project.

Still, the public image of the Place of Memory remained more or less unchanged over the years. The project had experienced numerous delays and, as of mid-2013, had given few clues as to what its permanent exhibition might look like. Further, although Place of Memory representatives had organized various meetings and public events during the first few years of the project, the average Peruvian observer had little reason to believe that the national museum would be anything other than an elite, Limeño production that would move forward with limited input from civil society.

Research for the participatory process took place mainly during November and December of 2013, with several national news outlets reporting on the initiative as it unfolded. Meetings were carried out in Lima, Ayacucho, and Satipo (located in the region of Junín) and counted on the participation of various “interest groups,” including victims’ organizations, the police and armed forces, artists, human rights organizations, and journalists. The Place of Memory had hired two social scientists from the Institute of Peruvian Studies (IEP) “Memory

Group,” Ponciano del Pino and José Carlos Agüero, to direct the effort to “open up” the script and submit a report based on their findings.

Transparency became the dominant idiom through which planners described the collaborative effort, with a focus on “listening” and documentation, signaling a kind of ethnographic turn for the project. As del Pino and Agüero would eventually state in their final report, the process

had, as its premise, the idea that the construction of the Place of Memory can only gain legitimacy if it receives the contributions of different interest groups that are most directly tied to the process of political violence that the country experienced.

(2014, 30)

Place of Memory officials, along with members of the curatorial team and the High Level Commission, were cognizant of the effort’s potential to give “a solidity and a legitimacy to whatever proposal [they] might make” (Denise Ledgard, interview with author, December 2013).

The script distributed to meeting participants was authored by Miguel Rubio, the long-time director of Yuyachkani, an internationally renowned theatre collective based in Lima, with the assistance of Karen Bernedo, a visual anthropologist and founding member of the activist Itinerant Museum of Art for Memory.⁸ Bernedo, Rubio, and other members of the curatorial team sought to navigate, and respond to, established institutional limits while situating their work within an increasingly consistent set of discourses about what the Place of Memory should be: not a museum but a place, a facilitator of encounters and debate rather than an institution that projects an official memory, a site that would display the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its photo exhibit as “historical milestones” (rather than as foundational sources), and an initiative that was no longer “victim-centered” as such, but would take victim-survivors as an “ethical point of enunciation” while stressing the importance of representing “all Peruvians.”⁹

These foci were evident in public rhetoric as well as in the participatory-process workshops. “We want the museum to become a living, dynamic public place, that is not just a repository of objects or photographs that give an account of a determined period,” Ledgard told one interviewer (Felices 2013). Individuals attending the workshops learned that the Place of Memory “was not just a museum,” or that it would “go beyond” being a museum. Workshop facilitators described the exhibition script as “only a proposal,” a working document meant to be a “point of departure.” Participants were sometimes reminded that the permanent exhibition “is not going to tell us everything,” and researchers or Place of Memory staff would often mention that 30 percent of the museum’s total exhibition space would be used for temporary exhibits. Elements other than the permanent exhibition, including (yet-to-be-determined) temporary exhibits, the museum’s digital archive, and the Place of Memory auditorium,

increasingly became talking points in declarations to the news media. An open space of encounter and debate—more a cultural center than a museum, according to established Limeño taxonomies of institutions—was what Ledgard and others advocated.

“Museum” again became a guiding model to be avoided, as did conventional notions of history, reconciliation, and even collective memory. “It won’t be a singular ‘cathedral of memory,’” Place of Memory president Diego García-Sayán noted, mentioning the existence of other memorial sites and museums in the country. “We don’t have a monopoly on anything there” (interview with author, September 13, 2013). Place of Memory workers similarly described the institution’s goals as being inconsistent with the promotion of “rigid” memories or historical accounts and offered reminders that “there is not just one truth.” Event attendees and inquiring interviewers were told that a “collective memory” of the violence did not exist and that no consensus was going to be reached through the participatory process or, later, in the Place of Memory’s permanent exhibition. Presenting the institution as a site that could reveal or produce unifying truths about the violence would not have been persuasive, even if not all Peruvians dismissed such goals as impossible.

Participatory-process researchers later expressed this sentiment in their final report, a document that presents findings from the various workshops and surveys relevant scholarly areas to put forth a “conceptual foundation” for the national museum (del Pino and Agüero 2014). The Place of Memory would not seek to “bring different memories into agreement,” del Pino and Agüero assert (2014, 17). Rather, the museum would introduce contrasting and sometimes conflicting historical memories as a “point of departure.” The state could be a “facilitator” of encounters between bearers of different memories rather than a “broadcaster” of its own, dominant narrative (del Pino and Agüero 2014, 80); doing otherwise, one could assume, would result in a less than authentic and hence unconvincing exhibit.

From a public perception standpoint, there were a variety of ways in which the participatory process bolstered the Place of Memory’s claim to being an institution that could arrive at an “appropriate representation” of Peru’s internal conflict. First, the research design for the participatory process demonstrated the museum’s desire (and capacity) to include a plurality of victim experiences. In addition to the geographical diversity surveyed in the multi-site investigation, the research team held separate workshops in Lima with victims’ organizations associated with rights abuses perpetrated against civil society and with military and police-affiliated victims’ groups. For the Ayacucho meetings, specifically, the researchers emphasized that the participatory process would not simply be a matter of “talking with ANFASEP” (the iconic relatives-of-victims organization based in the region) and would involve groups with different ideological orientations, along with lesser-known organizations not based in the city of Ayacucho.¹⁰ There was also a consensus among researchers, the curatorial team,

and administrators that soldiers and police should be included in the Place of Memory's representation of victimhood and wartime suffering.

An additional legitimizing feature of the participatory process related to the workshops' documentation. The team audio recorded every meeting and a project assistant produced a detailed, stenographer-like log (*relatoría*) of all relevant interventions. Researchers took their own extensive field notes as well. Condensed versions of the meeting logs would eventually appear in the researchers' final report as appendices (del Pino and Agüero 2014). While the copious amounts of data produced from each meeting were processed and synthesized—in a hermeneutic fashion similar to that which predominates in fields such as history and cultural anthropology—recording such material also had the performative function of showing participants that their voices were being heard by the national museum project.

Further, there were important ways in which the information and perspectives registered at workshops circulated beyond their main intended audience (the museum's staff and the curatorial team in particular). A Place of Memory worker posted excerpts from the sessions on the museum project's Facebook page ("Tito Bracamonte from MHOL [The Homosexual Movement of Lima] mentioned the importance of presenting the history of the LGBT population during the armed conflict").¹¹ In interviews, project representatives could highlight diverse groups' willingness to volunteer their ideas for the script. Especially powerful were researchers' acts of referencing perspectives gleaned from one group during a session with a different group. Human rights activists in Lima, for instance, heard about Ayacuchano victim-survivors' critiques of a display meant to reflect regional cultural traditions, or the importance that participants in those meetings placed on depicting peasant civil defense patrols (*rondas campesinas*) as perpetrators. Other groups might learn that their reading of a particular aspect of the script was "totally different" from that of another sector. By citing such information, researchers and staff demonstrated awareness of potential critiques and, implicitly, the validity of the process they were carrying out. Findings that were particularly useful for Place of Memory representatives to emphasize for a broader audience related to perceptions of the museum among members of the armed forces. The participatory process report, for instance, describes "the fact that [the armed forces] participated in the process and accepted the rules of the game, and that they recognized that there were disappearances that were their responsibility, is a sign of a change" (del Pino and Agüero 2014, 49).

How, and to what extent, the participatory process contributed to the Place of Memory's permanent exhibition remains the subject of some debate. For example, in 2014, the museum's planners decided to move forward with a new script and curatorial team rather than overhaul the proposal authored by Rubio and Bernedo. There was not an equivalent "participatory process" for this subsequent draft, though dialogue and consultation with various groups continued during the process of making the script.¹² Less ambiguous was the place the

consultation effort came to occupy within the memorial museum's institutional narrative. References to the outreach initiative—and principles of dialogue and transparency in the making of the exhibition script—become common in the lead-up to the museum's inauguration in December 2015. In a speech at that event, Place of Memory president Diego García-Sayán explicitly referred to the participatory process's importance for the exhibition's development.

Memory as persuasion in the permanent exhibition

In this concluding section I offer some preliminary observations on the Place of Memory's permanent exhibition, with particular attention to the use of "memory" as a framework for educating future generations about Peru's internal armed conflict. While a comprehensive review of the exhibition's content (to say nothing of an assessment of how visitors receive the museum's information and messages) is beyond the scope of this discussion, I draw attention to certain aspects of the exhibition that correspond with, and depart from, the patterns I describe above.¹³

An emphasis on plurality is apparent in the thematic organization of the Place of Memory's permanent exhibit. The two main sections of the museum's first floor, for instance, are "One Town, Many Towns" and "One Person, All People." The former focuses on the experiences of four individual communities (Putis and Uchuracay in the Andean region of Ayacucho and the Amazonian towns of Puerto Ocopa [Junín] and Puerto Bermúdez [Pasco]), which the visitor encounters after a minimalist overview of the armed conflict's main actors and chronology. The latter is a room with 18 video-recorded testimonies that visitors view on screens that project life-sized images of the individuals narrating their stories. These first-person accounts range from the founder of a well-known victims' association (Angélica Mendoza) declaring in Quechua, "What I want to know is why they disappeared my son," to a widow of a military official killed in a Shining Path attack (María Nelly González) speaking of the systemic "ingratitude" visited upon relatives of soldiers seeking pensions and recognition for their loss.

The second floor of the permanent exhibition, described as "Actions," includes spaces devoted to "Responses to the Violence from Civil Society," "The Violence Shakes the Capital," "Responses to the Violence from the State," "The Disappeared," and "Looking for Hope: Democracy and Justice." A final section includes photos and information about various memorial sites and museums in the country. On the third level, just before concluding the ascending tour, the visitor encounters *La Ofrenda* (The Offering), a space featuring colorful murals that represent Peru's coastal, highland, and Amazonian regions. In an enclosed cylindrical structure there, the names of victims are projected, accompanied by video footage of scenes from cultural events and everyday life from around the country.

In places, exhibition texts at the Place of Memory evince a certain reluctance to offer an authoritative account of the violence. One of the first pieces

of information visitors find as they enter the exhibit, for example, comes in the form of an acknowledgment of diverse perspectives on the total number of casualties the war produced. “No consensus exists” regarding this figure, the visitor is told, and the text presents the estimate of the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (69,280) alongside the number of cases documented in the National Victims Registry (*Registro Único de Víctimas*) (31,972 as of 2015).¹⁴ There are other instances where the Place of Memory avoids taking a stand on controversial subjects, such as the exhibition’s stating that the “interpretations and responsibilities” concerning the 1983 killing of eight journalists in Uchuraccay “have always been diverse and controversial.” From a more symbolic standpoint, the extensive use of images of newspaper articles from the years of the violence—potentially effective in countering notions that Limeños did not “see” the violence as it unfolded (Poole and Rojas-Pérez 2010)—arguably highlights the absence of an effort to offer a definitive historical synthesis. Considering such techniques, it is unsurprising that one reviewer comments (approvingly) on how the Place of Memory “offers us not a place of certainties or that official truth that some require,” but rather a representation in which

we only find premises to confirm that the divergences in ways of seeing and giving meaning [to the war] are part of today’s reality and that one cannot claim the uniformity of all memories or try to generate a univocal one.

(Jáuregui 2016)

Where a student might find few bold interventions in the historiography of the conflict, there are a number of places where the exhibition offers declarative messages concerning the importance of democracy, human rights, and nonviolence—liberal ideals that animate the persuasive work of many museums surveyed in this volume. On the second floor of the Place of Memory, which addresses topics such as civil society resistance, the corruption of Alberto Fujimori’s government, and the country’s experience of transitional justice, one finds the following passage:

Democracy is the political system that offers us the best channels for building a just society. Respect for the law and human rights should be assumed by all. In that sense, our Constitution establishes that the State has, as an ultimate end, guaranteeing human rights, protecting the population, and promoting social well-being.

Violence can never be justified because of economic inequality or because of deficiencies in education, health, or access to justice. Life should always be defended against death and terror.

Other representations link the history of the internal armed conflict to the present. A section on forced displacement, for example, notes that this phenomenon “changed the face of the country” and led to a “new cultural identity”

that is “more aware of [Peruvian society’s] diversity, its cultural difference, and of the necessity of better communication between everyone.” Information on sexual violence during the war references high rates of violence against women (and impunity for these crimes) in contemporary Peruvian society.

An especially vivid example of this integration of commentary on Peru’s present into the historical display is found in a short, three-minute video clip produced by artist Isabel Guzmán that appears in the exhibition’s “Violence and the Educational Sphere” section on the first floor. Entitled “Zero Investment,” the video includes a series of black-and-white drawings of rural schools, government buildings, and scenes of children laboring accompanied by a voice-over that critically assesses Peru’s education system at the time of the Place of Memory’s inauguration. Despite the country experiencing significant economic growth during the past decade, Peru invests the smallest percentage of its GDP in education in comparison to other Latin American nations, the video informs the viewer. Half of Peru’s public schools lack water, electricity, or plumbing, and funding gaps between rural and urban districts are particularly pronounced. “Opting for a quality education is beginning with the poorest populations ... Opting for a quality education is beginning with the youngest children,” the female voice declares. The screen that shows the video is adjacent to texts describing Shining Path’s use of higher education institutions to spread their message of violent revolution as well as images documenting the insurgent group’s presence at Peruvian universities during the 1980s and 1990s.

Crucially, the Place of Memory’s permanent exhibition also reminds visitors of the unfinished work of transitional justice in the country and of the state’s pending obligations to citizens affected by war. This theme is evident in areas such as the museum’s depiction of exhumations (“The exhumation, identification, and turning in of the remains of disappeared people is still a pending issue in the country”), the country’s reparations program (described as a “duty of the State” that “today is being executed slowly”), and the prosecution of criminal cases (with a text emphasizing the low percentage of cases that have been processed).

A fascinating example of a community’s ongoing struggle for post-conflict reconstruction is depicted in the Place of Memory’s section on Putis (one of the communities profiled in the aforementioned “One Town, Many Towns” space). Putis suffered violence at the hands of Shining Path and the state, with the most notorious incident being the mass killing of at least 123 residents of the area by members of the Peruvian armed forces on December 13, 1984. The museum’s representation chronicles this tragic history, but also documents community members’ return to the Ayacucho town in 1998 (following its abandonment in the wake of the 1984 massacre) and subsequent efforts to exhume, account for, and provide proper burials for the war dead. Additionally, a short video includes Putis residents commenting on the community’s current challenges and aspirations. “Now we have a dream,” local leader Gerardo Fernández Mendoza explains, “that as a symbolic reparation of how much we lost, the district of Putis is created” (referring to the process of establishing Putis as a “district,” a legal classification in Peru that has implications for accessing state services).

The inclusion of such content and messages invites visitors to reconsider Peru's present, with the exhibition subtly referencing aspects of the violence (e.g., the role of racialized inequality in the war's origins and escalation) and post-conflict reconstruction (e.g., the importance of continuing the work set in motion by the country's truth commission) that would likely be controversial if expressed more overtly. What's more, the museum's general emphasis on particularity and heterogeneity—attending to specific regional cases and featuring first-person audiovisual testimonies—challenges the idea that a uniform national narrative or simple moral message about the war is possible. Indeed, it is likely that Peruvians of diverse ages and social backgrounds encounter material at the Place of Memory that prompts reflection and inquiry beyond common-sense notions that “Shining Path was bad” or “human rights violations are unacceptable.”

In sum, where the focus of this chapter has been on the use of memory rhetoric as a means of legitimizing the national museum, this is not to deny the pedagogical value of memory as a framework for representing Peru's internal armed conflict. An open historical question is to what extent this narrative strategy responds to the political and economic context of the Place of Memory's creation. How much of the museum's story is about “legitimation” and how much of it might be about survival? Would a more assertive approach, focused on the causes and consequences of the violence, have been politically possible? Could an exhibition focused on “knowledge” or “national history” be persuasive in post-conflict Peru, a setting where there is virtually no consensus about how the violent past should be remembered and powerful sectors continue to deny basic truths about what happened (Vich 2015, 11–13)?

I had concluded an earlier draft of this chapter on a somewhat optimistic note, stating that “since opening its doors in late 2015, the Place of Memory has not been subject to the kinds of opposition and institutional threats that human rights-oriented memorialization initiatives in the country have often experienced.” As I make final revisions (in July 2018), however, circumstances compel me to report three events in the past year that have marked the Place of Memory's trajectory in a significant way. The first was a controversy involving a temporary exhibit, *Resistencia Visual 1992*, which came under fire after a Fujimori-aligned politician critiqued the display for its alleged “anti-fujimorista” bias. The episode ultimately resulted in the dismissal of the Place of Memory's director, Guillermo Nugent. The second event was President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski's decision to grant a “humanitarian pardon” to imprisoned former president Alberto Fujimori in December 2017, a move announced in the wake of a political crisis brought on by the *fujimorista*-led opposition in congress (Kuczynski would eventually resign in March 2018 amid various scandals). More recently, the Place of Memory made headlines again in May 2018 when conservative congressman Edwin Donayre released secretly recorded video footage from a visit he made to the museum (disguised as a victim of the Colombian armed conflict), which he offered as evidence of the institution's supposed “apology for terrorism” and anti-military bias.¹⁵ The incident galvanized opposition to the

Place of Memory among certain sectors of the Peruvian Right, but has also resulted in greater visibility for the institution and a significant increase in visitors.

It remains unclear how, and to what extent, such developments will affect the Place of Memory as a site of persuasion. Amid a resurgence of illiberal sentiment, it is possible that the museum's association with ideals such as human rights, democracy, and historical accountability will make it the target of future attacks. Another potential outcome could be the limiting of critical perspectives at the Place of Memory (e.g., in temporary exhibits or museum-sponsored events) because of political pressure or self-censorship. As the editors to this volume remind us in the Introduction, the moral messages and imagined transformative work of sites like the Place of Memory must be understood in relation to state power, and there is always the potential that "persuasion" will ultimately reinforce the status quo. One hopes, however, that planners and workers at the Place of Memory are able to navigate Peru's shifting political climate in the years to come, and continue to question what can and can't be displayed in an official museum about the internal war.

Notes

- 1 Research for this chapter was supported by a Dissertation Fieldwork Grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation as well as the Center for Intercultural and Indigenous Research (CIIR) (CONICYT/FONDAP/15110006).
- 2 Vargas Llosa had vocally opposed the rejection of the German funds.
- 3 For analysis of historical memory as an essentially future-oriented phenomenon, see Gutman et al. (2010).
- 4 Geoffrey White (2016, 210), in his ethnography of the USS Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor, draws attention to three techniques found in this site's remade museum display: the use of direct quotes from historical actors (as opposed to a synthesizing curatorial voice), a reliance on personal histories, and encouraging visitors to "make up their own minds" when it comes to the broader meaning of the events depicted.
- 5 Williams notes the "especially strong pedagogic mission" of memorial museums relative to other types of museums, with human rights-oriented institutions typically "[drawing] ties to issues in contemporary society in a way that is uncommon in standard museum presentations of history" (2007, 21).
- 6 The Uchuraccay massacre refers to the January 1983 murder of eight Peruvian journalists in the rural village of Uchuraccay, located in the Huanta province of Ayacucho. The event and subsequent investigation—which found that community members (*comuneros*) had killed the reporters—played a major role in making a national public aware of the violence being suffered in rural Andean communities. The Vargas Llosa inquiry was criticized for interpreting the episode as the tragic outcome of Uchuraccay's cultural isolation and placing emphasis on alleged "ethnic" characteristics of the area in its analysis. Anthropologist Juan Ossio, a member of the museum project's High Level Commission, was also part of the commission that investigated the incident.
- 7 I draw here on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2013, including observations at a number of the workshops organized as part of this consultation process.
- 8 The Itinerant Museum of Art for Memory was founded in 2009 by Lima-based artists and activists. It produces exhibitions and interventions, often in public spaces such as city plazas and university campuses, that seek to promote awareness of and reflection

- on Peru's recent history of political violence. Additional information can be found on the group's website: <https://arteporlamemoria.wordpress.com/page/3>.
- 9 Housing Yuyanapaq, the photo exhibit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, was part of the Place of Memory's original mandate, but the focus of the project shifted for a variety of reasons (Feldman 2018). Currently, Yuyanapaq is displayed at Lima's Museo de la Nación, where its lease runs through 2026. Although the Place of Memory offers some information about the photo exhibit and its impact, the content of Yuyanapaq does not form part of the Place of Memory's permanent exhibition.
 - 10 Shannon (2014, 39) notes the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian's desire to work with individuals who were not the "usual representatives to museums"—so-called "rolodex Indians" (2014, 110)—in the making of the *Our Lives* exhibit.
 - 11 González (2015) suggests that the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, though commended for its focus on gender and regional histories, did not attend sufficiently to violence perpetrated against LGBT individuals during the conflict by insurgent groups and armed state actors.
 - 12 The curatorial team for the Place of Memory's final exhibition script included Ponciano del Pino, artist Natalia Iguñiz, literary scholar Victor Vich, and art critic Jorge Villacorta. In late 2015, shortly before the museum's inauguration, Miguel Rubio (2015) offered a defense of the script he authored with Karen Bernedo and responded to issues raised in del Pino and Agüero's (2014) report. The theatre director also critiqued the "veil of mystery that has covered this long process of implementing [the Place of Memory]," a lack of transparency that "[includes], for certain, the current script, which only seems to be known by those charged with implementing it."
 - 13 I draw on observations from my visit to the museum shortly after its inauguration in 2015, along with visits in 2017. The Place of Memory's permanent exhibition can be visited virtually at lum.cultura.pe/visita360. I thank Iván Ahumada for helping me analyze and think through aspects of the permanent exhibition, though any errors or shortcomings here are my own.
 - 14 Here the display also recognizes the "impossibility" of representing all of the pain and suffering the war caused.
 - 15 As a number of observers subsequently noted, the video itself provides no real evidence of anti-military bias or alleged sympathies with insurgent groups at the national museum. For instance, Donayre and others seized upon a Place of Memory worker's remarks about the possibility of imprisoned Shining Path leader Abimael Guzmán receiving a medical pardon similar to the one granted by President Kuczynski to Alberto Fujimori, presenting the comment as if it were an endorsement of such a measure. The Place of Memory employee who appears in the video—an education specialist at the institution who did not normally work as a guide, but volunteered to serve in this role for the visiting "Colombian victim"—has given her account of the congressman's visit. Among other things, she noted that members of the group with whom Donayre visited the museum requested that the tour place particular emphasis on crimes committed by the armed forces against civil society (presumably as part of a bad faith to elicit material that would "demonstrate" such a bias). For an overview of the controversy that includes the video clip circulated by Donayre, see El Comercio (2018)

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PART IV

Resistance through memory

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8

MEXICO CITY'S MEMORIAL TO THE VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE AND THE FAÇADE OF PARTICIPATION

Benjamin Nienass and Alexandra Délano Alonso¹

Along Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City, past iconic monuments, buildings, and museums and within a previously unused section of 15,000 square meters in Chapultepec Park which was formerly managed by the Ministry of Defense, seventy massive red steel walls mark the site of the Memorial a las Víctimas de la Violencia en México (Figures 8.1 and 8.2). The memorial was built in 2012 by the outgoing administration of President Felipe Calderón in response to the demands of families of the hundreds of thousands of victims of the violence during his presidency and was financed with money impounded from the drug cartels. It is located next to the Auditorio Nacional concert hall and the Campo Marte military camp in the affluent Polanco neighborhood. The memorial is several kilometers away from other markers of Mexico's immediate past on the long boulevard locals refer to as "Reforma," such as the recent countermonument "43+", the numerous graffiti interventions alluding to the missing students from Ayotzinapa and the plaques placed by activists in front of the controversial Estela de Luz (Stele of Light) tower² that name victims of the so-called "War on Drugs" begun by the Calderón administration in 2006.

Despite its size and the imposing presence of the red walls, the park is not easily identifiable for passersby or even those actively looking for the site. Designed by architects Julio Gaeta and Luby Springall, the memorial seems both hidden and openly accessible at once; hard to stumble upon, but visible to those driving past on one of the two major thoroughfares. It is located on a busy intersection between Reforma and the Periférico freeway, with thousands of cars driving past it every day but with no place to park. One can walk from the Auditorio Nacional subway station alongside the military camp or take the recently inaugurated Metrobus to its last station (also named after the Campo Marte military camp³), but there is no sign or information pointing to the location of the memorial. In fact, as we tried to find our way there a few months

after its inauguration in April 2013, we soon realized that most people in the area, including the military officials guarding the doors of the military camp, didn't know about the memorial. On that first visit, the security guards around the military camp pointed us to the memorials and sculptures inside the camp that commemorate fallen members of the Mexican army.

The memorial's approach from the main entrance on Reforma Avenue at first gives an impression of the site as a beautiful sculpture park—reminiscent of Richard Serra's iconic work—with benches to sit on, though the constant sounds of cars honking and speeding by disturb the notion of an urban oasis. It is only as one walks through the horizontal and vertical red steel walls and catches sight of the title of the memorial or reads the quotes inscribed on some of the walls, which allude to mourning, violence, and justice, that the site subtly reveals itself as a place that commemorates an event, although it makes no reference to the victims that it commemorates, or the violence that produced them.

Further inside the park, which was almost completely empty of visitors during our multiple visits between 2013 and 2018, there are other walls with traces of graffiti and chalk drawings. Some are random images and phrases; others are messages of solidarity that relate directly to violence and the dead or disappeared. Toward the middle of the site, several walls have canvases affixed to them with names and text, some of which are damaged, ripped or peeling off. A close reading of these canvases is confusing, as they refer to the memorial with a modified title—Memorial to the Victims of *State* Violence—and explain the intention of naming victims of various forms of violence from the 1950s to the most recent assassinations of journalists and the missing forty-three students. At first sight, it is unclear whether this is an intended part of the memorial or an external intervention. In fact, it is an effort by the Comité 68, a group of Mexican activists, to radically resignify and seize the memorial; an effort which we will describe in more detail in this chapter.

Considering what appeared to be an open invitation to interact with the steel walls with chalk and other materials, during our second visit we asked the police that patrol the grounds if visitors are allowed to write on the walls. The officers responded affirmatively, explaining that it could only be done with chalk, and that they would provide it for us. A few minutes later they brought a box with white chalk and observed from a distance as we drew and wrote on the walls. In further conversations with the security guards during our research visits, we were told that part of their role is to ensure that no one writes with anything more permanent than chalk. In fact, according to one of the security guards, anyone caught using spray paint is taken directly to the police station because such permanent interventions are considered vandalism. When asked why some of the graffiti has been erased while some remains, the officers explained that they only erase the graffiti that is considered offensive. While it remained unclear who functions as the arbiter on this question, officials from the *Comisión Ejecutiva de Atención a Víctimas* (CEAV; the government's Executive Commission for Assistance to Victims) confirmed in an interview (2015) that they have been

FIGURE 8.1 View of the Memorial to the Victims of Violence. Photo credit: Alexandra Délano Alonso.

FIGURE 8.2 Memorial to the Victims of Violence wall with chalk. Photo credit: Benjamin Nienass.

in charge of removing some of the graffiti because it was considered inappropriate, “not because of the message but because of the material used”; however, later on they clarified: “we do remove messages that are aggressive.”

Gaeta, one of the two architects who designed the memorial, does not support this practice because the acid used to remove the graffiti damages the steel and leaves a visible, unpleasant mark. At the same time, he agrees writing and drawing should be done with chalk to be impermanent, as a metaphor of the passage of time and the different stages in the process of memory and mourning: “Although at first the chalk felt too soft, without power, I also see its magic. Some messages remain, and others are written over them, a canvas of a layered palimpsest, one message after the other” (Gaeta, interview with authors, 2015). In fact, the site is designed to mark those “stages” in the way the walls are placed (first horizontally and close together, then vertically, pointing toward the sky, and at the end horizontally and more open) and through the phrases that are carved into some of the steel walls. Springall, the other architect, claims that the inspirational quotes on most of the seventy walls—reflections on justice, grief, and reconciliation by Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., poets, and writers such as Rainer Maria Rilke and Gabriel García Márquez, a number of Mexican authors, and other rather loosely connected historical figures as well as anonymous quotes—were meant to “make this an educational space that accompanied the visitors through the memorial, starting with quotes that make reference to pain and mourning and then moving towards the other end of the space using phrases alluding to forgiveness and peace” (interview with authors, July 10, 2015). Gaeta and Springall see the walls as canvases or mirrors (a few of the steel walls do have actual mirrors) “in which the citizens can see themselves reflected and see the forest and also write, draw and express their feelings” (Gaeta, Springall and López 2015)—feelings and positions which may change over time.

Gaeta and Springall, partners and co-founders of the architectural firm Gaeta-Springall Arquitectos, each had a personal interest in this project, as they were both touched directly by abductions and other forms of violence that affected family members. Born in Uruguay and a resident of Mexico for over a decade, Gaeta was involved in processes of commemoration and reconciliation in transitional contexts in Latin America and had participated in the contest to build a memorial to the disappeared in Montevideo. Springall, born in Mexico, had explored issues of war and violence in other countries through her artwork as well as in relation to memorials to the victims of femicide in Ciudad Juárez. The two architects drew upon memorial practices in other transitional contexts, particularly in reference to the trope of participation.

In transitional justice literature, there is now a strong focus on the memorial as a space of engagement and open dialogue (or conflict), a point of departure for debate rather than a sacred space of mourning. This memorial paradigm reflects a general skepticism of monumental sites of memory and looks to concepts of the “counter-monument” or “complex memorials” (Stevens, Franck and Fazakerley 2012; Wilke 2013). Counter-monumental structures focus on

avoiding a dominant narrative, instead favoring “complex[ity] in terms of [...] de-codability” (Krzyżanowska 2016, 470). Memorials in transitional contexts are supposed to perform plurality and commitment to open-ended deliberation by incorporating “in the design of territorial markers a level of ambiguity that invites active engagement of the public, offering an opportunity for expression of a variety of sensibilities” (Jelin 2007, 147–148). “It appears,” Ekaterina Haskins claims, “that inclusiveness and diversity have become normative aspirations of memory projects that seek to encourage the broadest public participation” (2015, 9). Consequently, in the literature on sites of memory, these sites are increasingly regarded through the prism of theories of pluralist democracy, with varying implications for how a site is meant to facilitate persuasion.

Even where the audience is perceived as an active co-constructor of a memorial site, however, what this means can differ considerably depending on the specific democratic vision. In deliberative approaches that take their inspiration from Habermasian discourse ethics, for example, memorial spaces are viewed as part of a “minimal mnemonic public sphere” (Luczewski and Maślanka 2013, 18). According to this understanding, a democratic site of memory is one that aids the development of a public sphere in which the “public contestation of the past” (Habermas 1989) can be based on rational communication. In contrast, several recent theoretical accounts prefer to conceptualize sites of memory as spaces open to conflict, where persuasion is a matter of rhetoric rather than consensus. Taking cues from political theorists like Chantal Mouffe, Bonnie Honig, and others, these authors (Bell 2008; Bull and Hansen 2016) claim that memory struggles and the spaces in which they take place should be and remain open to keeping democracy’s competition of ideas alive by allowing conflictual positions to play out in the open (without, however, ever turning them into antagonistic, aggressive conflict in which opponents are considered existential enemies). Starting from the premise that “contestation can never be extinguished” (Bell 2008, 159), they propose instead that communication about the past should be openly politicized by reflecting the “co-existence of opposed and contradictory social forces and ideological dispositions” (Bull and Hansen 2016, 397).

In what follows, we show one struggle over the memory of the “War on Drugs” in Mexico through the site of the memorial in Polanco described above. Designed with a participatory audience in mind, the struggle over the site not only played out in the debate before and during its conception, but also in the space of the memorial site itself (and eventually elsewhere). Particularly as the “memory” being discussed in this context is about an ongoing event, the participatory angle gains a heightened relevance since collective meaning-making pertains to questions of what is being remembered in the first place. It is productive, we suggest, to read this struggle, in part, as a struggle over different notions of meaningful democratic participation in the public contestation of the past. However, in doing so, we do not treat the distinction between different theories of democratic public memories primarily as a category of analysis, but as

a category of practice (see Brubaker and Cooper 2000, see also Wüstenberg 2017, 29). When mnemonic actors engage in struggles over sites of memory they not only make claims about events in the past; they also, implicitly or explicitly, make claims about the functions of memorials as sites of persuasion and, specifically, about their relationships to democratic ideals and practices. They are, in other words, partly driven by convictions about the way public memory needs to be democratically negotiated and formulated and how exclusion from a memorial site may replicate the exclusion that led to the violence being remembered in the first place.⁴

The “War on Drugs” and Calderón’s memorial

Initiated by the Felipe Calderón administration (2006–2012) and continued during Enrique Peña Nieto’s tenure (2012–2018), the “War on Drugs,” a strategy to confront the drug cartels with an enlarged military and police presence, has claimed more than 200,000 lives and led to the disappearance of 37,000 by 2018. There are high levels of impunity resulting from corruption and an ineffective criminal justice system in which victims and their families are presumed guilty and often disrespected by authorities. Boudreaux (2016) explains how victims of violence in Mexico are often portrayed by the government and media as collateral damage, as criminals who killed each other, or as “deserving” of what happened to them. On this basis the government justifies its strategy as effective, and at the same time presents these criminalized victims as ungrievable and undeserving of justice.

The memorial in Polanco was a government response to the growing mobilization of Mexican civil society groups demanding justice for the victims of narco- and state violence, including their identification, decriminalization, and a space for collective mourning and public recognition. Yet, the memorial remains largely unused and unrecognized by the sectors of civil society that originally demanded a commemorative space. Part of the reason many people in Mexico do not know about the memorial—or view it in a negative light—is because it was not widely supported by the families of the victims. The three organizations most closely associated with the memorial (and listed as supporters of it)—Alto al Secuestro, Mexico SOS, and Fundación Camino a Casa⁵—are considered to be connected to the Calderón government and uncritical of its role in the violence, abuse, and discrimination faced by the families of the victims.

The main critiques against the memorial were brought forth by the Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad (Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity) led by Javier Sicilia, a poet whose son was killed by members of a drug gang in Cuernavaca, Morelos in 2011. Sicilia became a powerful voice leading groups of victims in Mexico and abroad. He and the activists involved in articulating the initial demand for a memorial space had envisioned a space for communal mourning, but also one that could represent and mobilize society

around the ongoing violence and its many victims. Miquel Adriá, an architect and editor of the renowned Mexican architecture magazine *Arquine* who was working closely with Sicilia to support the project, described the site as a

place for a social catharsis in the face of violence and pain; a memorial that recognized that what was being commemorated was still happening; and a space that allowed mechanisms for building it day by day as an open process, an open wound; a work in progress that needed to be permanently inhabited.

(Interview with authors, June 9, 2015)

Sicilia's group had advocated for the close participation of families of victims in the process of issuing the call for proposals, selecting the project, participating in its creation and developing ideas for its use. Instead, the administration's urgency to complete the project and to control the outcomes before Calderón left office in 2012 led to a controversial process that included a rushed contest with a twenty-day timeframe for submission and a four-month timeline for completion, with a 30 million pesos budget (approximately 1.7 million dollars) using money confiscated from drug cartels. Eighty projects were submitted (some architectural firms—including the winners—submitted more than one project), but many architects boycotted the competition because of concerns about the short deadline and the exclusion of large segments of society. They also voiced additional apprehension about the opaque composition of the jury, which the hosts of the design competition⁶ did not disclose (Adriá 2012).

The lack of consideration for the active involvement of victims' families throughout the process of deciding where and what the site should be was partly a result of the fact that Calderón wanted to fulfill the promise of building a memorial before leaving office. But it was also a way to avoid the contestation and critiques mounted against the government, especially by the Movimiento. Brisa Maya Solís, director of Cencos, one of the civil society organizations supporting the Movimiento por La Paz con Justicia y Dignidad, argues that the whole intention of the memorial project was to open a debate around memory and justice: who should be recognized as a victim and how should they be named, where should the memorial be, how would it be titled? "But the government closed the opportunity for such a debate. There was no space or time for public participation, particularly for those directly affected" (Solís, interview with authors, June 21, 2015).

Another point of critique was the problematic choice of location. The Movimiento had proposed plans for a memorial space in an open area of Chapultepec Park, and while the memorial was eventually built in the park, it is in an isolated and unused area next to a military camp. This choice of location was, to many, a clear statement that the administration actively ignored the role of the military as perpetrators or accomplices in the violence of drug cartels. Interestingly, Gaeta and Springall respond to this critique by arguing that placing the memorial

on this site was an opportunity to reclaim public space and perhaps to even send a strong message to the military officials that would be constantly exposed to it.⁷

More importantly with regard to the specific question of participation, however, was the choice of neighborhood. The site is far removed from the communities most affected by the violence and in a space that they cannot easily access or appropriate. The memorial's placement in one of the most affluent neighborhoods of Mexico City, "the most foreign area to this conflict," avoids a direct confrontation with and participation of those most vulnerable to the narco-machine, particularly in underdeveloped and poorly governed areas in Mexico City and in the rest of the country (Benitez 2013, 42).

In the problematic positioning vis-à-vis its surroundings, the memorial thus departs from a counter-monumental language, which, in principle, does not strive to derive "symbolic meaning from any specific external arrangements" (Stevens, Franck, and Fazakerley 2012, 960). However, aesthetically, the state-sanctioned memorial in Polanco ended up adhering to an explicitly open, counter-monumental concept. Accordingly, it does a particular kind of memory work. Reminiscent of Eisenman's Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, renowned and controversial in its depiction of absence, but also of other recent "non-representational and self-thematic" memorials (Pickford 2012, 421), the memorial and Gaeta's own description of the project reveal an assumed affinity between abstraction and openness. Similar to other counter-monuments, the memorial in Polanco depicts structural absence devoid of specific historical loss, i.e., without the concreteness attached to real relations of power (see Crownshaw 2008). This becomes especially problematic in light of the demands of the social movements that had focused on balancing a broad depiction of violence, inclusive of different forms of victimhood, with the explicit naming of specific individual victims.

Eisenman famously claimed that he wanted a space "without information"⁸ in Berlin, and there is similarly very little information at this site as well. One important difference is that Eisenman's memorial was built at a time and in a context where evidentiary concerns were addressed in many other sites. The ongoing violence in Mexico and the limited and weak judicial system make evidentiary claims more complicated and elusive in this case. The process of gathering such evidence often falls on the families of victims themselves, as is shown by the work of Comité 68 and the many local associations of families of victims (Schwartz-Marin and Cruz-Santiago 2016; Robledo 2017). Moreover, scholar and activist Alfonso Díaz Tovar argues that many families of the victims fear that making their story public or placing the names of their disappeared or murdered family members in a public space will put them in danger, given that the perpetrators are still threatening them (Tovar, interview with authors, June 17, 2015).

The choice not to include names is justified by the initiators in reference to an open, participatory memorial concept. The architects, as well as government officials from the office created to support victims, which includes the task of maintaining the memorial, claim that names were left out so as to not "exclude

anyone” (CEAV representatives, interviews with authors, June 15 and 17, 2015), but also so that “victims are not next to perpetrators, and so that we know it is ongoing” (Gaeta, personal communication, 2015),⁹ indicating a tension between the evidentiary and expressive functions of this memorial site (Buchenhorst 2017). Benítez (2013, 44) states that, consequently, the memorial “does not tell the story of the conflict, not even the government’s version, which conceived it in the first place.”

Instead, visitors are encouraged to engage and shape the memorial according to the original concept of it as “open to the city and open to the appropriation by the citizens” (Gaeta and Springall quoted in Edelson n.d.). Springall asserts: “It’s not a monument. Because people can engage with the space. We want people to scratch it and write on it however they wish to” (interview with authors, 2015). Although some of the walls have scratches—mainly small drawings—and graffiti, the main mode of direct engagement available is through the white chalk that the security guards provide.¹⁰ However, exactly where the boundaries around this state-sponsored iconoclasm are drawn remains unclear, even in interviews with CEAV officials and the architects. Ironically, by inviting graffiti (of the non-permanent kind), the site plays with a mode of expression that, in other commemorative spaces in Mexico, has been linked to the delinquency of the victims and therefore often been deciphered as a posthumous confirmation of the criminality of the victim (Boudreaux 2016).

Boudreaux describes how, because of its association with gang activity, “graffiti as a form of memorialization appears to primarily, if involuntarily, cast victims in a negative light” (2016, 400). This in turn justifies the commemorated death:

Strangers read the memorial graffiti as indicative not of an individual person but of a member of a group (a gang) that exists on the margins of the law and proper life and is therefore disposable. People who see the victims as delinquents often justify and even approve of the killings. This is true of some private citizens ... but even more uniformly and glaringly true of state actors such as police and elected officials. Undoubtedly, many of the victims were perpetrators of violence and other criminal acts, but this makes them ungrievable only if we forget that ... the state first created the conditions for violence.

(Ibid., 402)

One of the CEAV officials interviewed makes this connection between graffiti and delinquency at the memorial site: “We don’t allow vandalism in the memorial. When vandals are protesting and have spray cans, we do not allow them to use it” (June 17, 2015).

“Society is responsible for making the memorial,” the architects assert in their description of the memorial (Gaeta, Springall, and López 2013). However, in this context, many activists found that engagement with an illegitimate memorial would give too much ground to the state-sponsored view of violence (and/or

the state-sanctioned absence of any viewpoint), especially when the form of that engagement was actively policed. The response of those hoping to create alternative spaces to symbolize or reflect on the violence largely falls into two camps: those who take the memorial sites elsewhere, and those who take the invitation to (re)appropriate seriously, such as Comité 68.

“A seized memorial”: Comité 68’s intervention

Comité 68 was founded by a group of activists, intellectuals and artists to commemorate the victims of the 1968 and 1971 student massacres in Mexico City and the Dirty War of the 1970s with the main goal of bringing the perpetrators to justice and ensuring that these events are publicly remembered. The group created an archive of victims of state violence collected through oral histories and primary documents and has helped build a legal case against Mexican officials such as President Luis Echeverría. Building on their work around public memory, which has mainly consisted of commemorative marches, publications, and a stele dedicated to the victims of the 1968 massacre in the Tlatelolco Plaza in Mexico City (where it occurred), members of the Comité 68 decided to intervene in the space of the memorial to reclaim and eventually transform it. Their main goals were to challenge the state’s narrative by drawing a link between the drug war and state violence dating back to the 1950s. As Karl (2014, 12–13) and others have shown, this historical continuity lies not only in the use of “governmental discourse that disguises counterinsurgency methods similar to the Dirty War of the past,” but also in “the perpetuation of a system of structural impunity,” the cartels’ adoption of state methods from the Dirty War, and even in the overlap of personnel.¹¹

In response to a memorial to victims but without victims and in recognition of a much longer historical trajectory of violence, members of the Comité 68 placed canvases with the names of 7,978 victims of various events of state violence, including political persecution, torture, extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, femicides, and criminal negligence, on each of the steel plates in the memorial.¹² The events listed go back to the 1950s and also include events that occurred after the inauguration of the memorial. In 2016, the Comité also added a large canvas on the first and last steel walls of the memorial—the ones most visible to drivers and pedestrians passing by—with their suggested title for the memorial, which builds on the existing title to emphasize the role of the state: *Memorial to the Victims of State Violence* (Figures 8.3 and 8.4).

Comité 68’s decision to intervene was based on the idea that this was an opportunity to give the space a new meaning and to repurpose it, at first sight in line with the proposed openness of the design. However, Dulce González, who coordinates the Comité’s actions, explains that through these interventions it is no longer an institutional memorial; it is a “seized memorial,” where memory is built “through our own archives, *we* name our victims and assign responsibility” (interview with authors, July 26, 2016). Part of the project is also

focused on bringing together different groups and social movements that have been working on similar efforts separately:

Ideally we would want all the organizations working on this issue to reappropriate the space so that it means something for everyone, all sectors involved across society, not just the victims. To make the memorial their own. We see it as a call for justice, to not forget who are the perpetrators of violence and the crimes.

(González, interview with authors, July 26, 2016)

Beyond the direct interventions in the existing structure, Comité 68's long-term vision is to create a space in the memorial for an archive with the documents and materials that they have gathered over several decades to trace the history of state violence and recognize and name its victims.

Although more organizations have joined their most recent efforts to intervene in the space of the memorial and to make it more visible, support for the Comité's actions is still withheld by some of the main activist groups, including the Movimiento por la Paz and Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio (HIJOS), who see a danger in such actions legitimizing the space. This is precisely how the architects and the CEAV refer to the Comité's actions: "The memorial is being used by groups that represent the victims; therefore it serves its purpose" (Gaeta,

FIGURE 8.3 The Comité's intervention. Photo credit: Benjamin Nienass.

FIGURE 8.4 The Comité's new title for the memorial. Photo credit: Alexandra Délano Alonso.

interview with authors, July 7, 2015). In fact, the Comité purposely designed the canvases so they could blend in with the steel walls—to the point that a visitor may not necessarily recognize them as a contestation or alternative to the original memorial project. And the Comité informed the CEAV of its intention of placing the canvases there. “We wanted them to know what we were doing so they wouldn’t react negatively; but we also wanted to show that even if they take them down, we will put them up again” (González, interview with authors, June 10, 2015). Directly addressing the issue of impermanence and the ephemeral quality of interventions on steel walls that rust and make it very difficult for any material to last, González argues:

This choice was made so that nothing would last. And our intervention is designed to last. We want to show that those responsible for these acts of violence are still unpunished. We chose a material that was in harmony with the space but that would remain permanently. Even through bad weather, the canvases remain.

(Interview with authors, June 10, 2015)

Over the past few years, Comité's interventions in the memorial have taken place in stages, determined in part by their progress in their research on victims' names and their access to resources to install the canvases. Some of their most

recent interventions, including the canvas with the new title, peeled off the steel plates after a few weeks (partly because of a different type of glue that was used), while the canvases installed earlier have been more resilient. The activists claim that the caretakers of the memorial removed or tampered with the canvases as an “act of repression” because “our installation has always made them uncomfortable and now even more,” referring to the fact that the title focusing on state violence was visible to drivers and passersby as the canvas almost completely covered two of the steel walls facing Reforma Avenue and the Periférico (González, personal communication, July 13, 2017). While the CEAV and security guards have expressed that they support participation and activities by civil society actors on the site, they emphasize that, contrary to the graffiti, these are temporary interventions and that “time will eventually take care of removing them” (interview with authors, June 15, 2015). That is, the canvases will eventually peel off, and therefore, according to the parameters of participation that the government and the architects have implicitly or explicitly established, they were accepted if not welcomed. CEAV’s justification for removing them is that when the canvas starts to peel off it has to be removed, “otherwise it looks dirty; and this is a space that Mexico needs, we can’t have a space that is criticized as ugly at this point” (interview with authors, June 15, 2015).

According to Comité 68, although more organizations have begun to participate in their calls to action, the contestation of the space itself still limits Comité 68’s ability to transform the dominant narrative given the controversies surrounding the memorial. Architect Ortiz Struck emphasizes that in order for the memorial to be a true space for participation, it needs to be shaped by society, not originate from the state: “memorials are built by the people.” Moreover, given the many forms of and contexts for violence and the number of victims around the country, he argues for the construction of many memorials, not just one (Struck, interview with authors, 2015).

In fact, in a more explicit rejection of the memorial, many artists, activist groups and associations of families of victims have taken on different commemorative spaces, where all of the assumptions and design choices of the state-sponsored project can be questioned or at least approached radically differently (Díaz Tovar and Ovalle 2018; Délano Alonso and Nienass forthcoming). Examples include interventions in other existing monuments such as the plaques installed by the national Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad on the plaza surrounding the controversial Estela de Luz, as well as its renaming of a street in Cuernavaca to recognize the victims that triggered the movement; projects to name the victims in public spaces through embroidery (the Bordando por la Paz network), graffiti projects in Ciudad Juárez, and the Huellas de la Memoria (Footprints of Memory) exhibit of shoes of relatives of the disappeared engraved with their stories. There are also larger memorial spaces such as the News’ Divine memorial in Mexico City and the RECO memorial in Tijuana that were conceived and created through processes where relatives of the victims actively participated, and with a vision to make them spaces that could serve community needs and thus address the conditions that produced the violence.¹³

Façades of participation

From the architects' perspective, the Polanco memorial was constructed with a participatory ethos in mind. Springall recognized that the government and the organizations involved in the process feared contestation if the space allowed unrestricted forms of intervention but insisted that the space

had to be a memorial, not a monument; and thus, it had to be scratched; it had to be a space where people could also express their anger. And it is up to the Mexican society to decide who and what should be named there. We can't decide which victims' names are included. The mother of a perpetrator can also decide to write their name there.

(Interview with authors, 2015)

However, what the Polanco memorial suggests in its genealogy is often reminiscent of what the German architect and theorist Markus Miessen (2011) calls the "nightmare of participation." In his work, Miessen describes the façade of partaking (Malzacher has called this "placebo participation," 2018, 326) that is not so much intended to bring more democratic legitimacy or open debate to certain decisions or spaces, but to simply relieve decision-makers of accountability. The Polanco memorial seems like an exercise in foregrounding apparent participation at the expense of real accountability. This displacement of accountability is what the Comité addresses in its use of the memorial space, most notably by changing the name of the space to include the state's role in the violence and by providing an archive to back this claim up.

What notions of meaningful democratic participation does this imply instead? In its actions, the Comité provides a radically alternative view of the violence, in direct opposition to the state's view and those of the three civil society organizations who joined the state's effort. It resignifies a site that was initially meant to control the narrative while suggesting openness by removing from political debate and contestation some of the most important questions of this conflict: What counts as violence and who counts as a victim? This intervention provided an alternative to the assumed consensus of reading the crisis as one of only narco-violence and thus repoliticized a debate that had marginalized a more comprehensive, historical and structural view of the violence.

As Mouffe claims, "to participate, you need the possibility of choice [...] choice that implies a decision between alternatives that can never be reconciled" (qtd. in Hirsch and Miessen 2012, 31). In its genealogy the memorial process had, *de facto*, excluded explanations for the violence that raised questions of structural violence and countered the ad-hoc criminalization of a large group of people affected by the "War on Drugs" or the firm distinction between victims and perpetrators. The Comité not only made sure to reinstate the role of state agency in the narrative but also to broaden questions of responsibility and grievability (Butler 2009). It refuted (some of) the parameters of the memorial's

setting and expanded the horizon of possible interpretations (interpretations that prove to be incommensurable to a certain degree), by placing its view of the violence prominently next to (or rather onto) the narrow interpretation of the three civil society groups who endorsed the memorial project, displaying the deep ideological fault lines running through Mexican society.

Moreover, as mnemonic agonists like Bull and Hansen remind us, agonistic memory scrutinizes not only depoliticized spaces of memory, but also the closely related depoliticized view of the commemorated events, where an “exclusive focus on victimhood tends to construct history as something done to people” (Bull and Hansen 2016, 394). Instead, they suggest expanding our memorial spaces to include “the socio-political context in which human beings came to commit evil acts,” in part by reintroducing “ambiguity and ambivalence surrounding the concepts of victims and perpetrators” (Ibid., 394). While Bull and Hansen address the European context, their intervention gains a particular relevance in the Mexican context where questions about the boundary between victim and perpetrator have been contested, not least because existing boundaries exclude the possibilities of a potential overlap between the categories.

However, at the same time, the critiques of the memorial in Mexico City mounted by many of the civil society actors also seem to display assumptions about sites of memory as spaces where rational deliberation about the past and its meaning can or has to take place, where specific claims with regard to truth, rightness, and sincerity are to be realized and validated (Habermas 1984; Luczewski, Maślanka, and Bednarz-Luczevska 2013). In particular, the site of memory in Polanco was heavily criticized for violating sincerity claims as well as truth claims: the former by associating the space with Calderón’s cynical and instrumental attempt to close the chapter of commemorating the victims in a rushed manner at the very end of his administration to save his legacy; the latter by avoiding clear statements about who and what is being commemorated and for what reason (although implicitly at least it is clear who is not being commemorated) and by excluding several categories of victims of the ongoing crisis. In a similar vein, the Comité’s intervention also addressed an aesthetic conundrum by revealing a tension between what Young (1993, 48) once called the “formalization of impermanence” found in the abstract and open language of counter-memorial architecture on the one hand, and the need for symbolization, recognition, and clearly assigned responsibility on the other. Arguments about the adequacy of aesthetic ambiguity are often founded on assumptions about the importance of communal efforts to shape meaning in a pluralistic setting, the society’s continuous everyday responsibility to remember (versus the absolution granted by an authoritative memorial), or the impossibility to fully represent mass violence and trauma. Yet, other potential functions of public memorials related to their informative and educational purposes (their truth claims) can be undermined in turn. The aesthetic focus on openness and absence can come to symbolize the absence of any need for historical claims whatsoever. This is especially the case in this example where the site of memory in Polanco cannot (yet) rely on a wider

memorial context in which evidentiary questions (what happened and to whom) are being answered or at least raised and debated.

Moreover, the repeated encroachment of the state in the space, most notably by removing some of the interventions, is seen as an impediment to open dialogue more generally, implying a “colonization” of a space that should be, in Habermasian terms, a part of the lifeworld. All of these critiques imply that rational debate about the past (and present) is foreclosed, but in turn they also suggest that it is desirable and possible, and that a memorial site may potentially work as a contribution to a “communicative mnemonic public sphere” (Luczewski and Maślanka 2013).

Almost by default, rhetorical interventions in memorial spaces like the Comité’s are often agonistic in their strategies of persuasion. As Haskins states, commemorative practices “tend to ... visualize ... rather than argue” (Haskins 2015, 9), which already inherently problematizes an exclusive understanding of memorials as “consensually dialogic” (Bull and Hansen 2016, 400). The Comité’s initial intervention was a potent rhetorical reminder that the list of victims depends on one’s view of “the violence,” a claim backed up by the powerful act of renaming the memorial to suggest a more central role of the state. But in its meticulous efforts to build an archive on each case (one they would like to see incorporated into the memorial site), the Comité also provides the background to debate specific historical claims about the continuity of state violence (and the historical link of the “War on Drugs” to long legacies of state impunity). If we think of memorials as part of deliberative systems with different communicative logics in different sites or moments of debate (Mansbridge et al. 2012),¹⁴ we do not have to view the Comité’s (and other activists’) different contributions—one geared toward persuasion through rhetoric and the depiction of ideological fault lines, one geared toward persuasion through evidence and reason—as mutually exclusive.¹⁵ Moreover, a single arena may display non-deliberative forms of expression while also performing important functions for the overall deliberative system (Mansbridge et al. 2012, 3). We can find similar claims in recent work on memory activism (see Gutman 2017), where activist interventions are intended to make available alternatives that did not exist before, which then can be taken up elsewhere.

In closing, it is important to notice that in order to provide these alternative views, memory activists will not (and have not) wait(ed) for the state’s invitation. In his critique of the façade of participation, Miessen proposes that participation cannot simply mean sanctioned participation. In a similar fashion, in their defense of agonistic memory, Bull and Hansen remind us of the insurrectional character of claiming human rights, i.e., of the fact that rights are not granted by state power, but actively claimed and self-conferred by individuals and groups through “bottom-up mobilization” (Bull and Hansen 2016, 395).

A similar notion has led many activists to refuse the invitation of the memorial in Polanco altogether and to take their mnemonic interventions elsewhere.

They not only refuse to see their right to participate as one granted by the state but also seek to broaden our view of the violence(s) that are subsumed under the terms “narco-violence” or “War on Drugs” (see also Reguillo 2014). They do this also to recognize the structural and historical violence that has led groups which have long been excluded and oppressed by the ruling class to participate in drug cartels or networks of corruption given the lack of opportunities and the vulnerability to threats from more powerful actors—be it drug lords, police or government—thus once again complicating distinctions between victims and perpetrators.

These activist reactions to the memorial process in the Mexican context not only reveal that the exclusion from commemorative spaces often has direct links to the exclusions that facilitated the human rights violations that are to be remembered, but they also remind us that we present our own visions for meaningful debate and inclusion in the context of pluralist societies, implicitly or explicitly, in every such struggle. In their Introduction, the editors to this volume rightfully warn us that a focus on human rights violations often ignores “systemic and structural violence and inequity, lest they threaten the existent economic and political structures” (p. 5). By linking debates about commemorative spaces meant to remember human rights violations to explicitly political questions of democratic participation, the activists described in this chapter remind us that one debate is meaningless without the other. As Balibar forcefully claims, without political action, human rights “are not simply suspended, they are in fact deprived of any content and meaning” (Balibar 2013, 18).

Notes

- 1 We are grateful to the activists, architects, scholars, and government representatives who participated in interviews conducted during three extended field trips and site visits between June 2015 and September 2017. We thank the editors for their feedback and suggestions on previous versions of this chapter. Benjamin Nienass would also like to thank the Humanities Center at the University of Rochester for supporting his work on this research during his fellowship in 2017–2018.
- 2 The tower was built in 2011 to commemorate the bicentennial of Mexico’s independence and was referred to by critics as the “monument to corruption,” because of its high costs (\$54 million over budget) and the delays in its construction. Because it was built during the years of the drug war and its visibility along the main areas of Reforma Avenue, one of the most important avenues and sites for protests and celebrations in the city, the Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad and other activists proposed to make it into a Memorial to the Victims of Violence in Mexico, including a space to name the victims. The proposal and over 10,000 signatures collected to support it were ignored by the government. Nonetheless, the activists of Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad in collaboration with other associations of victims’ families and NGOs placed about fifty plaques on the plaza surrounding the Estela de Luz naming victims that died or disappeared between 2006 and 2012 (although more plaques have been added since, including one commemorating the disappeared students from Ayotzinapa). Some of the plaques include information about the individual disappeared and their family, narrated in the first person, or

- represent a group of victims, including one for disappeared military and navy officials. Some of them include poems, sketchings or paintings in addition to the text.
- 3 It is worth noting that activists have been advocating for the (re)naming of public transport stations adjacent to other memorial projects in Mexico City to spread information about the sites and to attract visitors. The naming of the News' Divine Memorial station in the municipality of Gustavo A. Madero at the Northern tip of Mexico City is a prominent example. The activists involved in the memorial saw the naming of the station as a powerful acknowledgment of their claims for justice and recognition, beyond the memorial site itself.
 - 4 This does not necessarily mean that specific actors subscribe to exclusive conceptions of democracy. In fact, often agonistic and deliberationist ideals, for example, are evoked at different moments of the democratic process; as a category of practice, both sets of assumptions can be apparent in the same actors. There are also several accounts in democratic theory that have convincingly questioned the conceptual incompatibility of deliberationist and agonistic approaches to democracy (see for example Knops 2007).
 - 5 These three organizations were founded by Mexican citizens whose family members were abducted or killed before the start of the Drug War. Alto al Secuestro was founded in 2005 by Isabel Miranda de Wallace after her son was abducted and killed. The organization focuses on supporting victims of kidnappings. Her work was recognized with the National Award for Human Rights by the Felipe Calderón administration. Miranda de Wallace has been criticized by human rights organizations and families of victims for her close association with government officials (including her candidacy for mayor of Mexico City) and lack of sensitivity toward other victims. Mexico SOS was founded in 2008 by Alejandro Martí, a well-known businessman whose son was also abducted and killed. The organization focuses on institutional and legal reform regarding issues of justice and security but, similarly to Alto al Secuestro, is seen as an organization that represents a vision of the elites affected by violence. Fundación Camino a Casa, founded in 2005 by Patricia Prado, focuses on rehabilitation and reintegration for girls and young women who are victims of trafficking.
 - 6 The competition was hosted by the three civil society organizations mentioned above plus the College of Architects, an institution considered by some critics as biased and obsolete.
 - 7 Springall suggests: "If the military has contributed to the violence, the memorial is right next to them to remind them every day" (Springall, interview with authors, July 10, 2015).
 - 8 See interview with Eisenmann in *Der Spiegel*, May 9, 2005 (accessed at: www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel-interview-with-holocaust-monument-architect-peter-eisenman-how-long-does-one-feel-guilty-a-355252.html).
 - 9 One of the few concrete references in the memorial is the inscription of the names of the three civil society groups mentioned above. The focus of these organizations has been on issues of security and crime prevention, with little emphasis on the larger socio-economic context in which different forms of violence have flourished. This implies specific definitions of victims endorsed by the memorial, limited mostly to high-profile upper-class victims or, in the case of Camino a Casa, women victims of trafficking, instead of encompassing a broader definition of the victims of murder and disappearance as a consequence of the many ramifications of the drug war.
 - 10 The guards argue that if they just left the chalk out, it would get stolen.
 - 11 At the inauguration of the Museum Home of Untamed Memory (Museo Casa de la Memoria Indómita) in Mexico City in June 2012, the organization HIJOS México (Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio) also articulated the need to recognize the linkages between the violence of 1968 and 1971, and the

“continuity in state terrorism and the impunity that leaves us with the horror of the present.”

- 12 See www.facebook.com/events/1452935088333251.
- 13 In this sense, these projects also actively rethink the relationship between memory and hope addressed by the editors in the Introduction to this volume, where remembrance of atrocities is shaping the future not just by fostering empathy, but also by creating sites of memory that actively create and reshape public spaces and focus on rebuilding the social fabric, thereby directly addressing issues of structural neglect (see also Délano Alonso and Nienass forthcoming).
- 14 Here we very briefly shift the gear back to the notion of democratic sites of memory as a category of analysis.
- 15 See also the discussion of *logos* and *pathos* as dual, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, commemorative strategies in the editors' Introduction to this volume.

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9

NARRATIVES OF ETHNIC AND POLITICAL CONFLICT IN BURUNDIAN SITES OF PERSUASION

Sixte Vigny Nimuraba and Douglas Irvin-Erickson

Since Burundi's independence from Belgium in 1962, the country has suffered greatly from ethnic violence. The mass violence of the 1990s between the Hutu and Tutsi was especially brutal and all-encompassing, touching the lives of nearly every Burundian, shattering the institutions and economy of the country, and escalating conflicts in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and across the African Great Lakes region.¹ Burundi, however, is unlike most other countries that have experienced mass violence—from Cambodia to Argentina to Rwanda—which, after the fact, established official histories and memories of conflicts. In neighboring Rwanda, for example, genocide memorials and museums express an extreme hegemonic state narrative of official memorialization that presents a clear vision of Hutu perpetrators and Tutsi victims, while legitimizing the current ruling government as the creators and guarantors of the current peace (Sodaro 2018). By contrast, in Burundi, there is no official, state-sanctioned narrative or museum of the past, nor is there a particular coherence to government-supported memorials. Instead, the memorials built by the Burundian government since independence have reflected narratives about the conflict espoused by the party in power at the time the memorial was built, but have not advocated for a particular national historical memory of past violence. Burundian sites of persuasion reflect local partisan and sectarian narratives, not national-level narratives, and are the result of highly contradictory local efforts to commemorate and memorialize genocide and ethnic violence. These sites of persuasion, moreover, are not positioned for an international audience to promote tourism (such as in Rwanda), but are built for a national and local audience in this small but densely populated country of 11.2 million people.

It is tempting to look at these clashing and contentious narratives as escalating factors in an ethnic conflict that raise the risk of violence in Burundi, and it is even more tempting to suggest that Burundi's failure to memorialize past episodes of mass violence has left the door open for denial, ethnic resentment, and

collective group vilification. Much of the literature on genocide prevention, after all, suggests that memorialization efforts through public monuments, education, and museums are necessary for preventing future genocides (Hamburg 2015). And, across a wide range of cases, scholars have argued that a commitment among state leaders to promote messages of support for ethnically plural, tolerant societies is one of the greatest bulwarks against ethnic or group-selective violence (Strauss 2015). In Burundi, therefore, scholars often lament the absence of museums and memorials that communicate messages of national unity and reconciliation (Batungwanayo and Vanderlick 2012, 28; Moore 2012, 298; Novelli 2015).

These arguments, which suggest that Burundi is at greater risk of ethnic violence because it lacks coherent, national-level memorialization processes, take three things for granted. First, such positions imply that Burundian society has not undertaken memorialization efforts. To complicate these commonly held positions, this chapter considers two sites of persuasion in Burundi: the Kibimba Memorial which opened in 1999, and the National Monument in Memory of All the Victims of Burundian Conflicts erected in 2005 and called the “Monument to Weapons” by locals. The chapter also considers two memorials built earlier that were important precursors: the Mausoleum of Prince Rwagasore built in 1967 and the Cemetery of Melchior Ndadaye built in 1993. All of these monuments were built in the midst of ethnic conflict, and were often re-imagined and re-interpreted as the conflict changed over time. Therefore, we present each site of persuasion chronologically, placing each within the context of the changing landscape of Burundian political history in order to understand how different sites of persuasion attempt to memorialize violence, to persuade, and to convey history.

Second, public memorials and sites of persuasion are usually physical spaces. These sites, because they resulted from efforts among neighboring communities or national-level partisan political actors, are closely connected to politicized, contentious public demonstrations and rallies at the local level. The rallies and demonstrations have played an important role in the ever-changing conflict dynamics in Burundi and, in many ways, these local demonstrations and rallies at the local level serve a similar purpose to the physical sites of persuasion. These rallies and demonstrations, often held to memorialize suffering or violence that occurred at a particular location, express a moral message, and position particular groups as historic victims of the other group’s violence.

Third, it is often assumed that sites that memorialize past conflict and violence will support future peace. War museums and sites of suffering, however, are less about documenting facts than collecting and telling stories of a given people, as a people—where they have come from and where they are going (Apsel 2016, 2). There is nothing about telling such a story that, *a priori*, makes the story a source of education for reconciliation and peace. In fact, sites of suffering or memorials can glorify the kinds of violence they are memorializing, or create narratives of the past that dehumanize entire groups as perpetrator groups, recreating the same kinds of group essentialism that can propel violence and genocide (Gutman and Rieff 1999).

This chapter seeks to show how past memory wars over these sites of persuasion reverberate in today's society and politics in Burundi. The current conflict, set off following President Pierre Nkurunziza's announcement in 2015 that he would seek another term, which the opposition argues was in contradiction to the Arusha peace settlement, is connected to the dynamics of ethnic violence over the last three decades. Nkurunziza's party, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy—Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), rose to power after the civil war of the 1990s on a slogan that they were a multi-ethnic party. The CNDD-FDD depicts the two other prominent parties—Union for National Progress (UPRONA), a primarily Tutsi party, and Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU), which is primarily Hutu—as dragging the country through decades of ethnic civil war. Proclaiming that the CNDD-FDD is a multi-ethnic party means that the CNDD-FDD's politics are steeped in Burundi's history of ethnic political conflict. The memorials constructed since 2005 communicate messages of ethnic unity and attempt to de-legitimize ethnocentric memorials and politics as inherently violence inducing. But, because the CNDD-FDD positions itself as the only legitimate multi-ethnic party in the country, the memorials built across Burundi since 2005 are interpreted by many as sites seeking to persuade Burundians that the CNDD-FDD is the only party capable of preventing inter-ethnic violence.

Indeed, it would seem that Burundi has done a comparatively poor job of dealing with the past, with what looks to be a failure to come to a nation-wide, shared understanding of the mass violence in the 1970s and 1990s. Not only has Burundi not seen a national-level plan of reconciliation, memorialization, or commemoration of the genocidal violence that afflicted the country—but, notably, the Burundian government has been notoriously slow to establish the human rights and truth and reconciliation provisions of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi.² However, we argue that even though Burundi has suffered political violence and the government has committed severe human rights abuses against political opponents, there has not been a return of large-scale ethnic violence and genocide. Burundi's experience and history of memorialization and sites of persuasion, we suggest, has played a role in preventing such large-scale ethnic violence. These sites of persuasion convey competing narratives of the past that have been allowed to circulate in the public sphere, helping prevent a climate where ethnic identities become officially sanctioned political categories attached to the concepts of victims and perpetrators, good and bad, innocent and evil.

The Mausoleum of Rwagasore and the Monument to the Unknown Soldier: commemorating ethnic violence of the 1960s and 70s

The majority of Burundi, roughly 80%, is Hutu. The Tutsi minority represent about 15% of the population, while the remainder is ethnic Twa, or Lingala- and Swahili-speaking immigrants from Tanzania and DRC. Pre-colonial traditions depicted Hutu as a farming people, and Tutsi as a herding people and

the monarchical ruling class. German and Belgian colonial administrators exploited these divisions to empower the Tutsi as their ruling proxies. After independence, Tutsi were in control of the army, made up the vast majority of professional administration, and were in control of most of the economy.

Ethnic affiliation in Burundian society is not understood in the same way that ethnicity is understood in most other parts of the world, where the concept of ethnicity implies clear and sharp identity boundaries between groups. It is hard to define Hutu and Tutsi as ethnic groups. There are no cultural differences between the two groups. Both speak Kirundi, practice the same religions (a Catholic majority, a large Protestant minority, and a small Sunni Muslim minority), live in inter-ethnic communities, and intermarry and share family lineages. In Burundi, therefore, Hutu and Tutsi are not distinct ethnic categories, but identity markers for social groups that are largely defined in opposition to each other—in the sense that they are categories that are part ethnic group, part social status, part economic caste, even as individuals can move between groups depending on their changing economic and social fortunes (Lemarchand 1996).

These conflict dynamics between Hutu and Tutsi were present in Burundian sites of persuasion beginning with the first site built after colonial independence, the Mausoleum of Prince Louis Rwagasore. This big monument is located in Kiriri, next to the street leading to the national university of Burundi. It is surrounded by a wall with three entrances. The top of the monument displays the Burundian motto “Unité, Travail, Progres,” or “Unity, Work, Progress.” Behind the tall wall is the tomb of Rwagasore, the leader of Burundi’s independence movement. He was assassinated in 1961 by a Greek national in a plot that included members of the pro-Belgium Christian Democratic Party, with the suspected involvement of the Belgian government (Lemarchand 1996, 52–56). When the mausoleum was erected in 1967 to honor Rwagasore, an ethnic Tutsi and member of the Unity for National Progress (UPRONA) party, it was largely understood as a memorial to colonial independence. But, as competition between Hutu and Tutsi intensified in the first decade after independence, the memorial began to be viewed by Tutsi groups and by UPRONA party members as a representation of the fact that it was Tutsi and UPRONA who delivered independence for the country. This shift in narrative over the meaning of the site had the effect of delegitimizing political claims by Hutu and non-UPRONA political parties. The most notorious episode of mass violence began in April 1972, when Hutu members of the gendarmerie in the lakeside provinces of Bururi and Makamba in southwest Burundi declared an independent republic (Lemarchand 1996, 89). Hutu militias began to massacre Tutsi in an attempt to eradicate them, as well as kill Hutu who were believed to oppose the rebellion (Lemarchand 2004). In response, President Michel Micombero, a Tutsi and UPRONA politician, and the country’s first post-independence president, began a campaign to eliminate Hutu from the country (United States Institute for Peace 2004, §85). Micombero targeted Hutu intellectuals, business leaders, religious leaders, and Hutu with military training and government

experience. The Tutsi-dominated army expanded the violence to target Hutu civilians (Lemarchand 1996). By some estimates, up to 200,000 Hutu died in the massacres, with hundreds of thousands fleeing to Zaire, Rwanda, and Tanzania (Lemarchand 2008, 6). By the end of April, Hutu rebels formed an alliance with militias in Zaire and attacked UPRONA positions in Gitega and Bujumbura, and began a campaign to eradicate Tutsi. Jacques Sémelin has described the reciprocal cycles of genocidal violence as mutual attempts to “purify and destroy,” to cleanse society of internal threats posed by the group targeted for eradication (Sémelin 2007, 349).

In 1973, the Monument to the Unknown Soldier was built to commemorate the genocidal violence committed by Hutu against Tutsi, by memorializing a soldier who died defending the Tutsi president Micombero against a Hutu attack. The monument looms large over the Burundian political imagination to this day, and it is possible to use the building of this monument to date the starting point of the “memory wars” over all the country’s sites of persuasion. Micombero, a Tutsi and UPRONA politician, is widely regarded as making Burundi into a one-party state during the 1972 massacres, and forging Tutsi dominance with the ruling UPRONA party. The site is therefore taken as legitimating and honoring the Tutsi side in the conflict while de-legitimizing the Hutu side.

The fact that the Hutu rebels targeted the country’s first president, Micombero, and proclaimed an independent republic in break-away regions imbued the narrative communicated by the Monument to the Unknown Soldier with a sense that it was Hutu who were opposed to the principles of a united Burundi. Yet, over the next decades, as Hutu began to refer to the genocide of Hutu in 1972 as the starting point for the country’s political dynamics, Hutu narratives of the conflict came to present the Monument to the Unknown Soldier as symbolizing Tutsi arrogance. That Micombero’s personal guard was honored in this monument in the capital city after being killed by a Hutu—while the thousands of Hutu who were massacred the year before did not get a memorial—politicized the Monument to the Unknown Soldier. For many Hutu, it signaled that Tutsi lives and deaths mattered to the regime in power, and Hutu’s did not (Batungwanayo and Vanderlick 2012, 18–19). The monument, to this day, resonates for the majority of Burundian society as memorializing Tutsi and UPRONA victims of Hutu ethnic violence, and continues to attract rallies, mourners, and ceremonial visits by UPRONA political leaders.

This escalation of ethnic violence was not because of ancestral enmities between the two groups, but because “the ethnic identities have acquired a moral dimension—whether as a martyred community or a threatened minority” in close conversation with the oscillating dynamics of power and opportunity between the two groups (Lemarchand 1996, xii). According to Lemarchand, what lies behind the murder of political opponents in Burundi, the ethnic cleansing of urban and rural neighborhoods, the attacks on refugees, and the killing of civilians going about their daily lives was a sense that mutual retribution

is the only way to prevent one group's plan to annihilate the other. The "reciprocal demonization" is therefore "a social construct rooted in the impending threat of genocide" (Lemarchand 1996, xii). It is this ability to contemplate the annihilation of one's own group, and to contemplate the other as desiring to annihilate your own, Lemarchand writes, that sets the stage for public contestations between Hutu and Tutsi in Burundi over the memory of reciprocal cycles of genocidal violence in later decades.

The Cemetery of Melchior Ndadaye: the early 1990s and the decade of genocides

As Burundian society attempted to come to terms with the extreme violence of 1972 and its aftermath, the meaning of the Mausoleum of Rwagasore began to change. In 1987, the third president of Burundi, Pierre Buyoya, came to power after a military coup against Burundi's second president, Jean-Baptiste Bagaza. While Bagaza and Buyoya were both Tutsi and UPRONA party members, Buyoya's platform included restoring the relationship between Hutu and Tutsi. However, Buyoya could not get the Tutsi-dominated military to carry out meaningful reforms, provoking a Hutu uprising in August 1988. By the end of the year, Buyoya sought ways to mitigate ethnic conflicts, and established a national foundation, the Rwagasore Institute, which promoted the building of Rwagasore monuments in almost every province of the country as a symbol of national unity. While Rwagasore today has regained his status as a hero to both Hutu and Tutsi groups, the memorial to Rwagasore in the two decades after 1972 was recognized as a memorial for Tutsi victims of Hutu violence in Bujumbura, the capital city where the majority of the population was Tutsi in the aftermath of the 1972 genocide against Hutu.

Buyoya's military junta ruled until the country's first democratic elections in 1993, when he lost the presidential election to Melchior Ndadaye from the newly formed Front for Democracy in Burundi (FRODEBU) party. Ndadaye, the first democratically elected president and the first Hutu president in the country's history, was killed in a coup before the end of the year by members of the Tutsi-dominated army. Ndadaye's cemetery, erected in 1993 as a site of persuasion in Bujumbura, contains an adjacent monument to honor his close collaborators who were killed along with him in the coup (Krueger and Krueger 2009).

When Ndadaye's cemetery was erected in the midst of the civil war in 1993, it was largely intended to be a response to the Mausoleum of Rwagasore. Indeed, Rwagasore's mausoleum proclaims a unified ethnic narrative, but is interpreted by Tutsi to be a symbol of how Hutu betrayed the promise of an ethnically tolerant society, and by Hutu to be a symbol of Tutsi disregard for Hutu life. By contrast, the Ndadaye cemetery proclaims a message of ethnic unity but is taken by Hutu to be a site dedicated to Hutu victims of Tutsi,

while presenting Tutsi as those who betrayed the promise of an ethnically inclusive state. In this sense, the burial sites of both presidents are used to convey a message that it is the “other” group that is not committed to a multi-ethnic Burundi.

For Tutsi in Burundi, Ndadaye’s assassination was not a day for mourning the death of the country’s first democratically elected president, but the beginning of a genocide when, immediately after the assassination of Ndadaye, Hutu militias began country-wide massacres of Tutsi as reprisals for the assassination of the Hutu president. According to Lemarchand, “the sudden eruption of anti-Tutsi violence only hours after the news of Ndadaye’s death, resulting in countless atrocities and random killings of Tutsi civilians, was the triggering factor behind an equally devastating display of anti-Hutu violence by the army,” as both groups began to consider the complete annihilation of the other as necessary for preserving their own group security (Lemarchand 2012, 146). Ndadaye’s cemetery, as a memorial to his death, was subsequently claimed by Hutu as a monument to Hutu victimization. In contrast, Tutsi (especially hardline UPRONA party members) claimed the site as a monument that Hutu built to honor the FRODEBU president, whose name they evoked to justify their attempt to exterminate the Tutsi.

The Kibimba Memorial: the late 1990s and the emergence of genocide memorials

When Buyoya seized power again in 1996—in a coup during the civil war that began in 1993 and formally ended in 2006—one of his first orders of business was to erect the Kibimba Memorial in honor of Tutsi victims of Hutu violence in 1993. The Kibimba Memorial became the first in a growing number of memorials created specifically as genocide memorials, reflecting a new global consciousness around the word “genocide” that emerged in the 1990s partially as a reaction to the 1994 mass killings in Rwanda. The Tutsi organization, AC Génocide-Cirimoso (Association for the Fight Against Genocide), was founded in 1993 with the purpose of recognizing the 1993 massacres of Tutsi as genocide, to counter the narrative of the 1972 genocide of Hutu by asserting that there was also a genocide of Tutsi that same year, and to counter the denial of Tutsi genocides through public protests and mobilization campaigns (Kieh 2007, 76; cf. Reyntjens 2008, 54).³ Members of AC Génocide-Cirimoso were against a national monument for all Burundians who lost their lives because of the ethnic conflicts, and raised funds and lobbied for national funds to be directed toward memorials they supported (Manirakiza 2010, 10). In 1996, with the return of Buyoya and UPRONA to power, AC Génocide-Cirimoso and other groups who sought to establish a narrative of Tutsi victimization in genocides committed by Hutu were granted official recognition, and took up the mantle of honoring and decorating the Monument to the Unknown Soldier. It was around this time that the CNDD-FDD—a Hutu power militia that later

evolved into a political party—began its armed rebellion. In 1996, the groups commemorating the constellation of Tutsi and UPRONA sites of memory also began commemorating the massacres committed by the CNDD-FDD (Batungwanayo and Vanderlick 2012, 18–19).

The Kibimba Memorial is perhaps Burundi's most famous site of persuasion. Bold letters spell out "Plus Jamais Ça!" across the memorial, the French translation of "Never Again!", borrowed from Holocaust memorialization (Figure 9.1). Built between 1997 and 1999 with funding from the Burundi government, the monument is about 15 kilometers outside of the city of Gitega, and 100 kilometers from Bujumbura. The site commemorates a 1993 massacre when, a few hours after the assassination of Ndadaye, Hutu militias barricaded Tutsi children in their school and burned them alive. The charred structure of a gas station sits next to the monument, framing the complex, evoking the burning school. A cross in a garden off to the side reads, "to the child victims of genocide, October 21, 1993." The Kibimba Memorial is thus the first memorial that explicitly names the violence as genocide, and it was the first to commemorate ethnic group-specific suffering of civilians instead of the death of a political leader. Since its creation, the site has been important for efforts to shape public narratives of ethnic conflict in Burundi, vis-à-vis the victimhood of the Tutsi and the inhumanity of the Hutu. The Kibimba Memorial, therefore, has been used as a location for gatherings, protests, and speeches by Tutsi extremists under the leadership of AC Génocide-Cirimoso. Most importantly, as Manirakiza has argued, the political speeches held at the site each year demonstrate the divisive character of the site in Burundian politics (Manirakiza 2010).

By October 1998, after Buyoya and the Parliament agreed to institute a transitional government and officially install him as president, Buyoya paid homage at President Ndadaye's cemetery. The next day in Kibimba, he stood before the unfinished Kibimba Memorial to Tutsi children he commissioned. Even though Buyoya had visited Ndadaye's cemetery and the Monument to Unknown Martyrs, his appearance at the Kibimba Memorial set off waves of protests from FRODEBU partisans—not in the least because so many believed, rightly or wrongly, that Buyoya was behind the coup that killed Ndadaye. The protestors accused the UPRONA president of building an UPRONA monument instead of an inclusive monument to all the victims of 1993, such as the monument to the Unknown Martyrs in Bujumbura—which was hardly inclusive according to UPRONA or Tutsi narratives (International Crisis Group 1999).

An imposing, white, temple-like structure, the Kibimba Memorial is made up of concentric circles, one higher than the other, pushing the structure up into the sky. At its center, beneath the open roof, a platform rises up, forming a series of circular steps in proportion to the rising arch of the structure above. Looking at the monument from a distance, the steps connote a kind of tomb or altar—a fitting symbol that brings to mind images of reverence and sacrifice.

When we visited the Kibimba Memorial, school children were playing around the monument. It sits in an open space, tucked safely away from roads with passing cars, and away from plots of land that adults would not want

FIGURE 9.1 Kibimba “Plus Jamais Ça!” Memorial. Photo credit: Sixte Vigny Nimuraba.

children to disturb. Here they were free to run and tumble. As our car approached, some of the children ran away, afraid of the kind of car we were driving—a rental car unlike the cars they usually see. Some stayed and greeted us. After introducing ourselves and talking to them a little bit, we asked them what this building was. One said it was a tomb, a grave; some agreed, and immediately another child said that it was a “Tutsi memorial.” We asked the children what “a Tutsi memorial” is, and they spoke to us about why it was built. They knew the story of the school children who were burned alive, and they knew these were Tutsi victims of Hutu militias. But they did not believe the memorial was intended to preserve the memory of the gruesome atrocity. No, according to a six-year-old child, this was a Tutsi memorial. When we asked him what he meant, he responded that the Kibimba Memorial is for Tutsi people so they can remember the Tutsi who were the victims of the civil war.

Why were we here, another asked? Because when Ndadaye was assassinated in 1993, we explained, one of the co-authors of this chapter was in school that day in Giheta commune not far away—the same killings came to the seminary in Giheta where he was studying.

Is there a monument for Hutu victims, we asked? They first said that there was no Hutu monument, and then another child jumped in and said loudly that the Hutu monument was in Bujumbura. This statement betrayed a child’s perspective on the conflict—a window into what his family and neighbors might be thinking in the moment, innocently ahistorical. In 1973, a prominent foreign correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times* had marveled that trying to find a Hutu in Bujumbura after the 1972 genocide was like trying to find a Jew in Warsaw after World War II (Meisler 1973). The social fabric of the city had been violently engineered in an attempt to remove ethnic Hutu from positions of social and political privilege (Uvin 1999). The genocide of Hutu by Tutsi was preceded, and followed, by a genocide of Tutsi by Hutu. Since 1972 Bujumbura has generally been thought of as a Tutsi-majority city with Hutu districts on the

outskirts pushing up against a predominantly Hutu countryside. But, for this child, Bujumbura would be the rightful place for the nation's memorial for the memory of the Hutu who were victims of civil war. Why? Was it because the capital city Bujumbura was where Ndadaye, a Hutu, was assassinated, setting in motion the massacre of the children at Kibimba and the civil war? Was it because the current president of Burundi is a Hutu? Did the child know that, in 1972, there were Hutu massacres in Bujumbura?

There is nothing at the Kibimba Memorial site that announces the victims were Tutsi—no placards or inscriptions that state the ethnicity of the child victims. What remains are the charred gas station wall that recalls the burned school nearby, the local rumors that Hutu from the neighborhood were the ones who killed the Tutsi children, and the local knowledge of what happened that day in 1993. While the site does not announce itself as a memorial to Tutsi, the children themselves revealed the meaning the site has taken on for those who live by it—commemorating one group's suffering at the hands of the other. On another level, it serves as a reminder of the extent of hatred and violence in targeting and destroying children because they are Tutsi. In its most contentious state, it is seen as a monument to the group-specific suffering of Tutsi—memorializing the victims not in their capacity as individual children, but in their capacity as members of the group. The ethnicization of the monument does not occur because of any writings, inscriptions, or depictions at the monument, or because of the presentation of the physical building, but rather within the social contexts of when and where it was erected, and the persistence of local narratives through the passage of time. The monument becomes a site of persuasion because of social acts carried out at the site, the recurrence of annual remembrances, and the speeches of elites, and through stories told by those who gather.

Not only is the site contentious in ethnic terms, but it is also a point of contention between rival political parties. In part, the UPRONA putsch against Ndadaye in 1993 was a self-defensive posture by ethnic Tutsi who felt the need to remove a Hutu president from power. It was also a UPRONA rebellion against a FRODEBU government (Uvin 1999). The Hutu reprisal killings of Tutsi, in turn, were very much FRODEBU reprisals against those associated with UPRONA. The result was that many ethnic Hutu lost their lives in the Hutu revenge killings, and Tutsi partisans massacred many Tutsi who were aligned in the opposing political camp. As the cycles of retributive political violence that followed in the wake of the coup increasingly took on ethnic dimensions, the ethnic fault lines of the violence concretized; but they never lost their political party significance within the context of the civil war. The monuments never lost their party significance, either. Like sites of persuasion around the world, whose construction and interpretations are often based on personal memories and politics, the Burundian monuments thus reproduce versions of history and ethnic conflicts that are passed on to future generations.

The “monument to weapons”: the 2000s and memorializing collective ethnic suffering

The final monument this chapter considers is the National Monument in Memory of All the Victims of Burundian Conflicts. The political opponents of the current ruling party, the CNDD-FDD, mockingly call the monument the “Monument to Weapons.” Erected in 2005, and finished in 2010, the monument was built to commemorate the suffering of all ethnic groups between 1993 and 2000, by representing the typical weapons used by each group—a Kalashnikov, machete, bow and arrow, bamboo spear, and a club. The “Monument to Weapons” is steeped in the same contentious dynamics and the elaborate interplay of party politics and ethnic politics that surrounds the other memorials across the country, but is nevertheless an expression of the political ideologies that emerged after the Arusha peace agreement of 2000 that put an end to the civil war begun in 1993 (Uvin 2009).

The Arusha agreement was the culmination of a peace process presided over by Nelson Mandela (International Crisis Group 2000). Mandela’s moral authority is largely credited as leading the negotiations in Arusha to attempt to mitigate the political, social, and economic drivers of ethnic conflicts in the future. The result was a peace agreement that avoided zero-sum accounts of the past and, looking forward, mandated that ethnic quotas be met in government employment, security forces, civil society institutions, and economic opportunities. The goal of the agreements was to prevent the Tutsi minority from wielding near limitless authority and power, but still allow Tutsi parties to maintain enough representation to ease their fear of a Hutu-majority government. However, the Arusha agreement did not put an end to civil war for a number of reasons, including that the two major armed groups—CNDD-FDD and the Forces Nationales de Libération (FNL)—were excluded from the negotiations (Sculier 2008). The CNDD-FDD and FNL kept fighting until a new ceasefire was signed first with CNDD-FDD in 2003, and later another ceasefire was signed between the then government of Burundi and the final rebel group, a faction of the FNL, in 2006.

After signing the ceasefire, the CNDD-FDD leaders and soldiers were integrated into the government (Nindorera 2012). Under Pierre Nkurunziza’s leadership, the rebel group transformed into a *de facto* political party. Nkurunziza managed to reshape the CNDD-FDD’s Hutu defense slogans into messages of ethnic unity and reconciliation, and presented the CNDD-FDD as a national populist party that could represent both ethnic groups and reject the ethnic terror deployed by FRODEBU and UPRONA (Rubli 2011). In 2005, the CNDD-FDD emerged as the victors of democratic election, winning large majorities in all branches of the government, with Nkurunziza winning the presidency. The CNDD-FDD’s party identity was crafted to present FODEBU (as Hutu majority) and UPRONA (as Tutsi majority) as parties ruled by elites who exploited ethnic hatreds for their own ends, and who had lost touch with the living conditions of the masses, especially the rural masses, Hutu and Tutsi alike.

When the CNDD-FDD took power in 2005, the monuments constructed by officials at the local level reflected the priorities of the new ruling party. The first memorial built during the CNDD-FDD's time in power is a site called the Freedom Fighters Memorial. Located on the road between Bubanza and Bujumbura, the site commemorates CNDD-FDD soldiers killed in Kibira in 1997 by a branch of the same party that was led by one of the party's founders (Batungwanayo and Vanderlick 2012, 21). The Freedom Fighters Memorial bears the slogan in Kirundi, "it is not ethnicity that kills, it is bad leadership" (*ntihica ubwoko, hica ubutegetsu bubu*) (Batungwanayo and Vanderlick 2012, 21). The memorial was the beginning of a pattern of monuments communicating to audiences the specific message that it was not ethnicity itself but the politics of ethnic political leaders that was always the basis of deadly violence in Burundi's history. The monuments erected later, largely by local government administrators who are part of the CNDD-FDD national political structure, took on explicit symbols of collective Hutu and Tutsi perpetration, where the victims were either individuals who defied ethnic identification or who symbolically represent Burundi itself.

The memorials established by CNDD-FDD leaders at the local and national level seek to convey positive moral messages to their visitors that ethnic violence was not caused by ethnic hatreds, but that ethnic hatreds were fueled by UPRONA and FRODEBU leadership. The moral messages of inclusive leadership and ethnic unity were therefore a provocative shift from the pattern of the previous three decades, when monuments took on explicitly ethno-political meanings because of who built them, and in what contexts they were built. This is a transition from an ethnic-driven perspective to a unity-driven narrative of representing the past, and one that clearly makes an appeal to emotions—*pathos*—that is meant to persuade viewers to alter their ethical position in Burundian society. However, it was not a shift to an apolitical, moral message—but a moral message that served to legitimize CNDD-FDD leadership of post-war Burundi, from the local to the national level, while delegitimizing the two primarily ethnic parties, UPRONA and FRODEBU.

The "Monument to Weapons" is the most visible site of persuasion in Burundi that embodies this tendency (Figure 9.2). Funded and built by the CNDD-FDD-controlled government, the monument presents itself as inclusive of all ethnic groups by including all the kinds of weapons used by all ethnic groups during the civil war. Yet, in presenting itself as inclusive and non-sectarian, it espouses the central ideological message that legitimizes the CNDD-FDD rule: that competing ethnically based political parties caused the whole country to suffer, so peace can only be secured if the whole country—from the local level to the national level—is ruled by a single multi-ethnic party, the CNDD-FDD.

From the beginning, the monument was an explicitly political construction. In 2010, the CNDD-FDD prepared for the second national elections since the end of the civil war. The party won the elections in a landslide, but was widely

accused of electoral fraud to deny UPRONA and FRODEBU votes, and international human rights organizations documented abuses and intimidation against Hutu and Tutsi ethnic leaders who did not back CNDD-FDD's multi-ethnic party. In an attempt to promote narratives of the past that bolstered and legitimized their post-civil war domination of Burundian politics, the CNDD-FDD government broke ground on the "Monument to Weapons" memorial in Gitega. The location of Gitega was symbolic and provocative. It was symbolic because Gitega is the geographical center of the country, and holds a special symbolism as the former capital of the pre-colonial monarchy. The site was provocative because Gitega is the center of political resistance against the CNDD-FDD.

Further politicizing the supposedly non-political monument, the words "Plus Jamais Ça!" were written on the façade. This inscription connected the "Monument to Weapons" to the Kibimba genocide memorial. However, symbolically including the perpetration by all the parties in the conflict places the memorial in stark contrast with the other sites of persuasion that memorialize group-specific victimizations. The "Monument to Weapons" can therefore be interpreted as a counter-monument to the Kibimba Memorial, not only because it was inscribed with the same "never again" slogan yet represents violence committed against every ethnic group, but also because it was built just a few miles from the Kibimba Memorial.

FIGURE 9.2 National Monument in Memory of All the Victims of Burundian Conflicts, or the "Monument to Weapons." Photo credit: Sixte Vigny Nimuraba.

The monument comes to a dramatic peak, with a structure that consists of the various weapons used by the different groups to commit massacres. The Kalashnikovs in the structure that forms the monument's summit signify the weapons of the Tutsi-dominated army. Later, when rebel groups were created, the Kalashnikov became an important weapon used by the armed groups, the CNDD-FDD and FNL, which ended up becoming political parties following the Arusha peace and reconciliation agreement. The machete symbolizes the weapons that Hutu used across the country to kill Tutsi shortly after President Ndadaye was assassinated. The bamboo spear was used by Tutsi youth wings to kill Hutu in cities and towns that were at the time occupied by Tutsi communities. The bow and arrow was used by members of the Hutu community, mostly when they were fighting against the Tutsi-dominated army which was known to chase after Hutu from 1993 to 2005. The club (*matraque* or *ubuhiri* in Kirundi) was used by both Hutu and Tutsi across the whole country.

While locals often deride the monument as commemorating weapons, there is a purposeful message that is communicated by the absence of any clear victim. The weapons used by each ethnic group bring all perpetrator groups into the memorial, but in doing so the memorial resists identifying the groups that were the victims of such violence. Rather, because each weapon implies a victim, while being arranged in a manner that implies the weapons are conflicting with each other, the collective presence of the weapons of all groups suggests that all groups were each other's victims. This preserves the broader pattern of memorials in Burundi built after the 2000 Arusha peace agreement that dramatize the costs of ethnic violence, but do not memorialize the suffering of a specific victim group.

As Amy Sodaro argues in this volume, there are parallels to this recent trend in Burundian memorials with other memorials around the world that focus on victims, but, in this case, the perpetrators' group identities are absent to emphasize a single national identity and avoid blaming the "ethnic identity" of groups for violence and hence, it is hoped, lessen future ethnic violence. The "Monument to Weapons" memorial in Gitega, moreover, places these symbols of collective victimization at the center of the country—as if it were Burundi, and Burundian history, that bore the burdens of ethnic violence. If the Kibimba Memorial is built on the site of the Tutsi school children victims, memorializing these victims as individuals worthy of remembrance, then the "Monument to Weapons" conveys the nationalist idea that it was all Burundians and their nation who were the victims of ethnic violence. However, the contrast with the other monuments goes one step further. Its implicit reference to the Kibimba Memorial serves to present the current CNDD-FDD government that built it, as a national populist party capable of representing all ethnic groups and uniting the country in contrast to FRODEBU and UPRONA.

Conclusion

If the Gitega monument symbolizes the victimization and perpetration of all of Burundi's population, there is one monument built during the CNDD-FDD period that stands out for its message of solidarity across sectarian lines. This monument is referred to as the Martyrs of Brotherhood Monument in Buta Seminary, in Bururi province, commemorating the massacre of 40 seminary students by a Hutu rebel group in 1997 (Figure 9.3).⁴ The Hutu rebels wanted to divide students into Hutu and Tutsi groups so they could kill the Tutsi. The students refused to be divided, and died together. What makes the monument stand out among other monuments constructed during the years when the CNDD-FDD was in power is that it was CNDD-FDD-aligned fighters that committed the killings.

Commemorations began at the site the year of the killings, and continued until 2008 when a formal association was created, Association Lumière du Monde de Buta. A memorial chapel was erected the following year, where a mass is held every April 30, attended by the clergy, families of the survivors, and often UPRONA representatives (Batungwanayo and Vanderlick 2012, 19). Besides the yearly mass, building the memorial and chapel provides space for increasing numbers of Burundi victims of violence and others to pay homage to the students. Since 1997, the seminary had been a place of pilgrimage for those who claim the site as an example of Hutu solidarity with Tutsi against Hutu violence (Batungwanayo and Vanderlick 2012, 19). The monument presents those who refused to divide along ethnic lines as martyrs who refused to abandon their belief in the ideals of human solidarity, and hence died together as victims of ethnic violence.

FIGURE 9.3 Martyrs of Brotherhood Monument, Buta Seminary massacre site. Photo credit: Sixte Vigny Nimuraba.

It is possible to construe broad patterns in the shifting landscape of Burundian memorials. One is that the memorials shift from commemorating the deaths of political leaders at the hands of ethnically motivated perpetrators to memorializing the deaths of civilians because of political leaders. While Burundian monuments may no longer focus on group-specific violence in an attempt to solidify national identity around a particular ethnic identity and a single political party, the new more inclusive memorials continue to be used to justify particular national political agendas, and to support current power structures in the face of past atrocities, within the parameters of the existing state and its supporters.

Another pattern that emerged is that the absence of national memorialization efforts—up until the “Monument to Weapons”—promoted an outcropping of local mobilizations on a village by village level. These memorializations often took the form of commemorative gatherings. For Hutu families from 1972 until 1993, kinship-based memorialization of family members became especially important because of official prohibitions on commemorating Hutu deaths since Hutu who died were defined as traitorous enemies of the state (Batungwanayo and Vanderlick 2012, 30). The creation of the monument at Ndadaye’s cemetery for Unknown Martyrs who died in 1993 unleashed a torrent of public protests and public commemorations emphasizing the 1972 genocide of Hutu, in an attempt by political Hutu actors to assert a narrative in which Hutu also suffered genocide from Tutsi.

Because of a variety of factors (including the number and instability of governments and political parties), there is not one official narrative of past violence in Burundi that has dominated the national discourse or succeeded in being institutionalized as the correct, official history in sites of memory and museums. Instead, competing narratives have been allowed to circulate in the public sphere, helping prevent a climate where ethnic identities become officially sanctioned political categories attached to the concepts of victims and perpetrators, good and bad, innocent and evil. The risk of genocidal violence in Burundi rests to a large degree in the potential for these incitements of ethnic chauvinism and inter-ethnic fear for political and economic gains. While the conflict today in Burundi is structurally and politically different than the conflict 15 years ago, or even three years ago, there are certain dynamics that have remained constant. The Burundian political arena and therefore the Burundian economy is still dominated by a single party. And political elites are still attempting to consolidate power within their parties by manipulating the myth of mutual annihilation that Lemarc-hand identified (1996, 2012), to provoke Hutu solidarity with the ruling party by exploiting fears of Tutsi. At the same time, opposition party leaders promote narratives of Hutu victimization of Tutsi to try to pull Tutsi away from lending their support to the current government.

While these clashing, contentious narratives may be viewed as escalating factors in an ongoing, ethnic conflict, they have so far helped people reject

attempts to place collective blame for past violence on any one group as a whole. Given the violence and fluidity within and across borders and throughout the Great Lakes Region, for now the changing narratives and memorialization infused by changing politics in Burundi have worked to allow for different voices and memories of difficult histories to retain sites and spaces. This has prevented a climate from emerging where a single group's narrative emerges as hegemonic, silencing the narratives of other groups and fostering zero-sum accounts of the past that can drive ethnic resentments and conflict. Nevertheless, in the context of the ongoing conflicts in Burundi and regionally, there is no guarantee to what degree and for how long such varied memories will be allowed, especially since the current government is focused on creating a unified Burundian nation and identity. What we have tried to demonstrate, however, is that—in contrast to the notion that memorials should strive to create coherent narratives of the past that look toward a normative goal of promoting reconciliation in the future—the diverse and partisan nature of Burundian sites of persuasion has promoted, up until this point, contentious debates over memorials and narratives of victimization and ethnic violence. By not commemorating past genocides through any one public narrative, these competing narratives of suffering and violence have been allowed to circulate in Burundian society, helping to advance alternative lessons or morals to be remembered or learned, to promote public debate and discourse over the meaning of the past, and, so far, to prevent ethnic identities in Burundi being understood as fixed political categories.

Notes

- 1 Burundians call the violence *ubwicanyi*, meaning “killings,” or *ikiiza*, meaning literally “it comes from nowhere,” a phrase used to describe catastrophes. In the 1970s, the killings were called *ubwicanyi*, or massacres and killings, but in the 1990s the killings came to be called genocide; the term was picked up in local discourses as part of the influence of genocidal politics in Rwanda and global human rights discourses more generally. To this day, however, the term genocide is usually used in French-language messaging, signage, and narratives and is rarely used in Kirundi-language contexts.
- 2 The Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi was signed August 28, 2000. An overview of the provisions and their implementation status is available from the Peace Accords Matrix, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame: <https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/accord/arusha-peace-and-reconciliation-agreement-burundi>. See also the establishing documents of Commission Vérité et Réconciliation, available from: <https://civrburundi.bi/presentation>.
- 3 *Cirimoso*, in Kirundi, is a concept similar to “dissimulate.” It refers to the practice of knowing something, but pretending that you don't know anything, so you can work for revenge or retribution. ACGenocide's current website is: <http://acgenocide.blogspot.com>. Their original site, <http://acgenocide.com>, is no longer active.
- 4 A description is available from *Dictionnaire Biographique Des Chrétiens D'Afrique*, “Les Martyrs de la Fraternité Chrétienne morts en 1997”: www.dacb.org/stories/burundi/f-martyrs_burundi.html.

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CONCLUSION

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Throughout this volume, we see a range of tensions and politics that sites of persuasion face in their history- and memory-making roles. On the one hand, in uncovering past, and often ignored, human rights abuses—as political and selective as they may be—these sites acknowledge the inextricable connection between human wrongs and human rights, conveying stories of violence, suffering, and harms. But they also provide visitors with a range of emotional and affective encounters that, at their most persuasive, encourage deeper understanding of and engagement with these histories. As sites of persuasion they tell their visitors what is important to remember, understand, and know about the past. However, “As much as they [memory sites] may be read as historical, their rhetoric is principally present, prospective, and imperative. They typically nominate particular acts and agents of history as normative models for present and future modes of ‘being public’” (Blair, Dickinson, and Ott 2010, 27). For many cases in this volume, the mode of being public means embracing the ideals of human rights and democratic culture, even while political, economic, and other pressures influence what is included and left out. They thus encapsulate and reveal the promise and perils of sites of persuasion that work to promote human rights and condemn human wrongs; that is, they exist within a *realpolitik* that espouses human rights and democratic ideals but selectively carries them out in practice.

As sites of persuasion they are rhetorical devices, part of a larger discourse and dialogue about memory, human rights, and politics, reflecting the idea that today it is “taken for granted that societies need to remember political tragedies in order to heal” (Baer and Sznajder 2016, 181). However, while rhetoric is more commonly thought of as a verbal form, these sites’ materiality and location shape their persuasive powers in significant ways, in some cases giving force to their rhetoric and in others compromising their persuasive promises. The fact that they are places means they are “rendered recognizable by symbolic, and

often material, intervention” (Blair, Dickinson, and Ott 2010, 24). The wide range of sites of persuasion represented in this volume reflects the importance of location and form in making meaning about the past. While some sites, such as the Kibimba memorial in Burundi and the Sơn Mỹ Memorial in Vietnam, rely upon the authenticity of the historic site of atrocity to make their persuasive cases, others, such as the Danish exhibits on slavery, are distant in both time and space and must find new ways to engage visitors with a violent history that is largely unknown. Still other sites, like the Center for Civil and Human Rights, attempt to promote more universal messages and have to balance such moral persuasion with commercial and touristic concerns. And other sites, such as Mexico’s Memorial to the Victims of Violence and Peru’s Place of Memory, Tolerance and Social Inclusion, built in affluent neighborhoods far from the people most affected by the violence they represent, are in locations that some consider (by political design) to be inaccessible and inappropriate for their purported intended audiences, challenging their persuasive potential.

The locations of all of these sites remind us that place reflects power dynamics (Blair, Dickinson, and Ott 2010, 29). In choosing to create a site of persuasion and in determining where that site will be located, complex negotiations of power—social, political, economic, and moral—help to shape what is remembered, how, and by whom. Physical spaces and locations provide a place to concentrate memories, constraining and focusing them, but also providing a space for meaning-making by their visitors.

For, as was suggested in the Introduction and is made clear throughout the pages of this volume, once these sites are created, they take on a life of their own:

The “production” of memory places is ongoing. Their rhetorical invention is not limited to simply their initial construction. We must attend as well to the intervening uses, deployments, circulations, and re-articulations in the time between the establishment of a place and our current practices in and of the place.

(Blair, Dickinson, and Ott 2010, 31)

In some cases this new life dramatically alters the site, such as the intervention of Comité 68 that transformed Mexico City’s memorial into a Memorial to Victims of *State* Violence, interposing on the memorial the names of thousands of victims of Mexico’s War on Drugs, many of whom were killed by the state. In other cases, the interventions may take the shape of more structured and “official” initiatives but still imbue the site with new types of meaning; for example, the Center for Civil and Human Rights holds special exhibits and programs that make deliberate connections between past racial struggle in the US and present issues, such as police violence against people of color and anti-immigration rhetoric and practices. And other times, the public’s interaction with the site may be more internal, as in the case of the commemorative ceremonies at the Sơn Mỹ

Memorial and Museum where individuals bear witness in deeply personal and emotional ways (though if the proposed modernization and development of the Sơn Mỹ Memorial goes forward in response to a plan largely initiated to attract foreign tourists, this deeply personal experience will likely be changed in significant ways).

A number of museums and sites have become places where community members or groups, such as survivors, families, and political activists, come together to commemorate events and remember the human toll of violence, as well as gather in protest and to lobby for or against current state policies and practices. The examples in this volume remind us that, in the words of Jeffrey Olick,

memory makers don't always succeed in creating the images they want and in having them understood in the ways they intended. Social actors are often caught in webs of meaning they themselves participate in creating though not in ways they necessarily could have predicted.

(2003, 7)

Perhaps it is this dynamic and creative character of sites of persuasion that is most promising at this juncture. As we have argued in this volume, sites of persuasion emerge out of a relatively recent emphasis on coming to terms with historical violence that has increasingly influenced aspects of cultural, political, and social life around the world. This effort to come to terms with the past is rooted in the powerful and pervasive rhetoric of human rights, a principle that has shaped international, national, and local politics. Human rights norms and structures have been created in reaction to (certain) human wrongs, and their claims extend to preventing future harms and suffering. Museums and sites of memory are also created to record and remember after the crime and trauma occurred. Each site in this book intends, in some way, to promote human rights through its use of memory of violence; at their most idealistic, these sites seek to educate in a way that will transform individuals and their societies. Yet, these sites also reveal the large gap between the ideal of human rights education and its realization. Sites of persuasion are situated in complex contexts filled with contingencies and limitations, such as funding, access to political power, social relations, cultural pressures, etc., and in this way reflect the state's continued power and sovereignty in the face of universal claims of human rights. Thus, it is not surprising that the sites in this volume at best make a rhetorical commitment to human rights, rather than a tangible and practical one. Therefore, perhaps the best hope for the persuasive promise of these sites lies with their publics' ability to animate and make meaning of them outside of the realpolitik by which they are constrained.

The potential of social actors outside of officials, elites, and others who hold power is especially important today. The world has changed significantly since we began working on this volume several years ago. We have seen a sharp shift to the right in the US, Europe, and around the globe as human rights, tolerance, cosmopolitanism, diversity, and even democracy appear to be under attack in

states and societies that were long considered ardent supporters of these ideals, albeit more strongly in theory than practice. Since 2016, social scientists have looked to history to understand how at this moment democracy might be deteriorating in the US (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Snyder 2018), and observers have noted the numerous ways in which the Trump administration has retreated from commitments to human rights, including leaving the UN Human Rights Council and espousing American exceptionalism as central to his “make America great again” rhetoric and policies. And it is not just the US that is experiencing this rightwing populism and authoritarianism; a recent study found that populism has increased fivefold around the globe since 1990 (Kyle and Gulchin 2018). Denmark has proposed sending unwanted immigrants to a remote island; Burundi has seen a rash of government-sponsored assassinations of those responsible for carrying out its repressive policies as the government tries to eliminate witnesses before an International Criminal Court investigation; and while this particular form of rightwing populism hasn’t yet come to Vietnam, it is gaining ground in the region, exemplified by Rodrigo Duterte’s regime in the Philippines. Within this context, many sites in this volume, with utopian ideals underpinning their creation and continued existence, seem to be remnants of a period that is slipping away, in which human rights, democracy, and peace were promoted as principles of social and political life and as part of the remedy to or prevention of harms.

While we have emphasized the politicization and limitation of these sites, it is not without irony that, as we write this in early 2019, these sites’ existence and materiality may be particularly advantageous as spaces of contestation and resistance given the current dominant tropes of exclusive nationalism and denial of the universality of rights. The fact that they are physical, lasting places suggests that they may be able to continue to promote these ideals, resisting current political trends. Of course, we must remember that these sites serve multiple audiences and sometimes reinforce divisions in society even while championing inclusion, tolerance, and rights. Georgia’s National Museum reveals this tension: it tells the important, and previously repressed, story of Georgia’s suffering under Soviet oppression, while promoting a form of Georgian nationalism that excludes minorities from its history and culture. At the same time, this nationalism is itself a form of resistance to ongoing Russian influence throughout the region, such as Russia’s support of breakaway regions in Georgia and recent annexation of Crimea in Ukraine. Hence, the museum—like the other sites in this volume—represents an enduring space where past, present, and future can be negotiated by various audiences. Sometimes this negotiation is visible, open, and active, such as at Kosovo’s NEWBORN memorial, and sometimes it is a long process that can be difficult to ascertain, such as in Denmark’s slavery exhibits. However, if individuals and groups are able to harness the persuasive potential of memory and the sites in which it manifests, perhaps sites of persuasion like many of those examined here can help to serve as a bulwark against creeping authoritarianism, intolerance, and nationalism.

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