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(RE) COVERING THE PAST, REMEMBERING TRAUMA: THE POLITICS OF COMMEMORATION AT SITES OF ATROCITY

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This article explores the current upsurge in the production of memory with the construction of memorial sites worldwide to commemorate incidences of mass violence, atrocity, and genocide. Through the two empirical lenses of Cambodia and Rwanda, it grapples with what propels the impetus to memorialize, in whose interest memorials are constructed, and how memorials may fulfill multiple and competing purposes as a form of symbolic justice or reparations to the victims, an instrument for reconciliation, a mechanism for nation-building and political legitimacy, and a pedagogical tool to inculcate the preventative lessons of “never again.” Finally, using the contemporary debate surrounding the commemoration of Ground Zero in New York City, this paper argues that the challenge for architects, policymakers, and civil actors in the construction of memorials is not only to target their design toward their intended purpose, but is also to navigate the fact that memorials are eminently present and can enact violence through their representation of the past.

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INTRODUCTION

The past is full of life, eager to irritate us, provoke and insult us, tempt us to destroy or repaint it. The only reason people want to be masters of the future is to change the past. They are fighting for access to the laboratories where photographs are retouched and biographies and histories rewritten... The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting (Kundera 1981, 22).

A recent survey of victims of violence reported that memorialization was prioritized as the second most valuable form of state reparations following monetary compensation (Brett, et al 2008, 2). In part, it is perhaps this impetus to bear witness to the suffering of victims that has given rise to a proliferation of memorials in recent decades, including those marking genocide in Rwanda, Cambodia, and Bosnia, violent repression in Argentina and Chile, wars of liberation in Bangladesh and Palestine, nuclear disaster at Chernobyl, and terrorism in Madrid and New York. As a form of transitional justice, memorials have too often been relegated to the domain of artists and architects whereas they represent a strategic resource in conflict and peace.

Many veins of memorialization can be pursued in the space between justice and reconciliation, forgiveness and retribution, and remembrance and forgetting. Memorials can act as a conduit for reconciliation, bringing opposed groups together, or they can entrench divisions and aggravate old wounds. They may consult afflicted parties and deliver a form of justice through acknowledgement to the aggrieved or they may entirely exclude the victims from the process of construction. They function as pedagogical instruments, instilling the lessons of “never again” in future generations or threaten a nascent peace by inciting retaliation through an inflammatory rendering of the past. Memorials can also provide a place of sanctuary for mourning or they can become targets of future aggression due to their symbolic resonance. There is no right or formulaic way to construct memorials. The choice facing survivors and nations alike is not only whether to memorialize, but also in what form and to what end. At best, memorials help to heal the wounds of antagonism and to induce individuals to reflect on what they can do to prevent future violence. At worst, memorials undermine peace building and reconciliation, “providing zones of ‘symbolic’ politics where both national governments and local constituents may promote divisive or repressive messages in ways they could not in other spheres” (Brett, et al 2008, 3). At the very least, memorials must be taken seriously as socio-political forces that wield tremendous

symbolic influence.

Using Cambodia and Rwanda as empirical lenses to frame my analysis, I intend to illustrate how processes of commemoration create a representation of the past that is, in fact, eminently present. My purpose in this article is three-fold: first, under what circumstances and for what ends do memorials in sites of atrocity emerge? Second, in whose interests are they constructed? And, finally, given that some memorials are likely to be more politically dangerous or approximate some semblance of the *truth* more than others, what lessons can be distilled to inform the ongoing construction of a memorial at Ground Zero? My objective in exploring the different functions that memorials play is not to distinguish between good and bad memorials *per se*. To make such a distinction would be entirely subjective. There are, however, best practices that can be drawn with regard to civil society engagement, local ownership, presentation, and pedagogy for extension elsewhere. Attempts to compare examples of memorialization in different contexts often elicit the truism that “no one size fits all” and that each context is different. This is not in dispute. In the aftermath of genocide and mass atrocity, while efforts to memorialize will have to be calibrated to the local context, recovering countries, communities, and individuals do not entirely have to remake this enterprise. Within this relatively new field of study, there is considerable value added in fleshing out some of these existing best practices.

THE DIALECTIC OF REMEMBRANCE: MEMORY AS PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

The current interest in memory and memorialization is typically traced back to World War II and the Holocaust. The proliferation of Holocaust memorials continues even today. Many constituencies have voiced resentment that the Holocaust continues to be singled out internationally with an official day of mourning, while other genocides and incidences of mass violence are not (Berlins 2005). Cultural theorists and historians observe an increased deference to a right to memorialize among aggrieved populations. Historians posit that this era can be viewed as the “age of commemoration” and that this temporal phenomenon is linked to the recognition that the rapid change of today is marked by a feared precipitation of “all things into an ever more swiftly retreating past” (Nora 2002). The seemingly accelerated passage of time has created an archival urgency to document, preserve, and reconstruct the past as soon as possible, lest we forget. However, memorials are as much about the future as they are about the past. Even with the most benign intentions, all attempts to

represent the past can only ever be a revisionist history of what occurred, “the only question being revision to what end, revision with what desires in play?” (Phillips 2005, 2).

How to Memorialize ? Embalming the Past, Ordering Memory

The decisions of how and where to memorialize impinge heavily on the narratives that memorials ultimately communicate. With this in mind, I will first provide an overview of the relevant debates surrounding how to memorialize as a starting point for a discussion of what communities and nations hope to achieve through memorialization. Some memorials exist in physical dislocation from the actual site of tragedy; these memorials may make the past more accessible to visitors if pedagogy is their ultimate aim. However, they may have more difficulty evoking the particularities of the tragedy they commemorate. Perhaps for this reason, memorials are increasingly emerging at their actual sites of memory. Given the site-specificity of most memorials, Williams considers the actual design features of a memorial (e.g., its physical size, the visibility and accessibility of its location, and its proximity to major landmarks) as determinants of the “geographical reach” of the memorial and its ability to inscribe itself into the public consciousness (Williams 2007, 79).

The perceived authenticity of memorials is enhanced by the presence of tangible evidence of the event at the actual site. From the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Museum to Ground Zero, actual sites of atrocity serve as the breeding grounds for memorials. In order for sites to be signified as authentic, they must be marked as such. On this note, a conundrum arises. Whereas markers are necessary in order for individuals, beyond the immediate survivors, to locate these seemingly authentic sites, implicit within our notion of authenticity lies the unmarked (Rojek and Urry 1997, 4). Given the contested nature of many of these memorial sites – and the perilous histories they pay tribute to – it is not uncommon for claims of in-authenticity to be lodged against them. For visitors external to the context, however, authenticity is always an elusive pursuit. It is also, perhaps, unwarranted: what right do foreigners have to exert claims of authenticity over the wishes of affected constituencies with regard to memorial design?¹

Absent the corporeal bodies that attest to activities of torture and violence at sites of atrocity, many memorials present an impoverished understanding of their history. Yet, remnants of the victims, including shoes, clothing, teeth, and hair, may have been collected as physical reminders of the absent. While visitors may grieve over these artifacts, what is no longer visible or

accessible, what they might lament but cannot articulate, is subsumed by the presence of these artifacts. The decision to memorialize by preserving all corporeal and material vestiges of an atrocity does not in itself assuage concerns over authenticity, even if it does help to create a historical record through this preservation. In fact, some argue that memorials that are more sensationalist in their presentation face an inherent representational inadequacy: there is no way that artistic representations, however seemingly authentic, can give visible form to the horrors they represent. Moreover, the “sites feel spatially illogical; they are dwarfed by the historical significance of what took place” (Williams 2004, 204). On the one hand, the public display of human remains is inadequate to represent the actual tragedy; on the other, memorials that are more sensational may be counterproductive by desensitizing us and normalizing violence.

Memorials that display human remains and artifacts are plagued by the inevitable problem of decay: the passage of time causes the decomposition of artifacts that are important to a memorial’s claim of authenticity. The decomposition of the grisly display of hair at Auschwitz or the map of skulls at Tuol Sleng raise concerns about what happens when the places and artifacts of death are in fact dying themselves (Lennon and Foley 2000, 61-62). These reminders of death cannot be merely disposed of when they constitute markers of genocide, particularly when, as Jean Baudrillard intimates, “forgetting the extermination is part of the extermination itself” (Ibid., 40).

Why (for whom) Memorialize ?

Given that memorials have not emerged to commemorate all sites of mass violence – and the variation among those that have – what underlying motivations compel the memorialization process? As mentioned previously, sites of former atrocity can be reclaimed through memorialization to serve multiple purposes: they can occupy a private sacred space for mourning as a form of symbolic reparations or justice for survivors; they can fulfill didactic ends, teaching the preventative lessons of “never again” to future generations; and, they can create group cohesion (or division) and serve as a nation building mechanism in the aftermath of conflict. Memorials may also seek to satisfy many of these objectives simultaneously by providing both a sacred space for mourning and reflection as well as a public or profane side for education and awareness. The tenuous balance between the two often depends on who is directing the memorialization. Next, I will turn to a closer analysis of genocide memorials in Cambodia and Rwanda in order to explore this balance.

CAMBODIA: THE NATIONALLY MINED TERRAIN OF HISTORY

The Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocidal Crimes and the Choeng Ek Center for Genocide Crimes represent primary evidence of the genocide in Cambodia (Williams 2004, 235). The “S-21 prison” (now Tuol Sleng Museum) was a secret Khmer Rouge prison facility in Phnom Penh where opponents or deemed traitors of the Khmer Rouge were held and tortured. One of 450 killing fields documented in 22 provinces, Choeng Ek functioned as a killing site and burial ground for thousands of victims of the Khmer Rouge, including many of those who were captive at S-21 (Hughes 2006, 257). When the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia in 1979 – ending the war with the Khmer Rouge – they discovered S-21, a barricaded school that had functioned as a torture compound housing evidence of genocide: bodies of recent victims, torture instruments, and incriminating documentation from prisoner inventories to coerced personal confessions (Williams 2004, 198). The Vietnamese capitalized upon the strategic importance of this site and enlisted Mai Lam, a Vietnamese colonel turned museologist, to archive the contents and transform the site into a memorial (Ibid.).

The fact that the People’s Republic of Kampuchea, the successor government, was ushered in power by Vietnam provided an imperative of “providing evidence to the outside world that the invasion by the Vietnamese army was indeed a liberation movement” (Ledgerwood 1997, 87). This imperative guided the transformation of Tuol Sleng into a museum. Mai Lam even traveled to visit the Holocaust concentration camp memorials in his pursuit to memorialize the genocide in Cambodia. This resulted, however, in the deliberate inclusion of Holocaust imagery and the borrowing of Holocaust memorial features in order to conflate the Khmer Rouge and the Nazi regimes (Williams 2007, 175).

Tuol Sleng and Choeng Ek have been hence instrumental in the creation of a master narrative of the past that legitimizes the current nation-state. This narrative tells of a “glorious revolution stolen and perverted by a handful of sadistic, genocidal traitors who deliberately exterminated three million of their countrymen. The true heirs to the revolutionary movement overthrew this murderous tyranny... just in time to save the Khmer people from genocide” (Ledgerwood 1997, 82). Following this narrative, one is either depicted as a traitor to the Cambodian people and was complicit with Pol Pot’s brutal regime or one is loyal to the People’s Republic of Kampuchea. Thus, while these memorials, Tuol Sleng in particular, were initially designed to prove to the world that the genocide

did occur, to garner international aid, and to absolve the Vietnamese of wrongdoing, they have also institutionalized the deployment of the above national narrative: Tuol Sleng today reifies a nationalist social order in which contradictory stories are henceforth subsumed within this master narrative of the state in order to project the aura of a unified national identity (Hughes 2003, 179).

Designed primarily as an appeal to the international community, Tuol Sleng was initially open only to foreigners to persuade them of the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge. In fact, a 1980 Ministry of Culture, Information, and Propaganda Report said that the museum was “used to show the international guests the cruel torture committed by traitors to the Khmer people” (Ledgerwood 1997, 88). Thus, while the museum showcased the suffering of Cambodian people, Cambodians themselves were denied entrance to the museum in its nascent days. They were also entirely detached from the design of their memorials.

Of course, even amongst foreigners, the perception that the Tuol Sleng Museum is an authentic marker of the genocide masks the fact that most, albeit not all, of the prisoners housed there were actually disloyal members of the Khmer Rouge who were being punished for their defection (Ledgerwood 1997, 86). The focus of S-21 was to elicit obedience or exact punishment on administration insiders believed to have betrayed the Khmer Rouge. This reality, however, is being effaced from memory with the adoption of an official mandate refusing to allow the victims of S-21 to be identified or named in their mug shots (Hughes 2003, 183). Shortly after its inception, many Khmer frequented the Museum to look at the walls of photographs in the desperate hopes of finding their missing relatives and gaining closure. For those who were identified, their relatives were prohibited from inscribing the photographs with the victims’ names (Ibid.). By doing so, the Museum actually replicates the violence and dehumanization of the Khmer Rouge because the nameless photographs of the victims commemorate “the violent voiding of identity that was the torturers’ explicit goal and always preceded disappearance” (Huysen 2003, 103). Conversely, the act of naming and thereby individuating the victims would be to reject a genocidal ideology. However, identifying victims risks foiling the master narrative of the genocide deployed at the Museum (Hughes 2003, 183).

Since all sectors of Cambodian society were traumatized by the Khmer Rouge period – it was not an instance of the victimization of one group alone – what is the need to preserve the proof of the past if it is ingrained in everyone’s psyche (Hughes 2003, 259)? The education of the next

generation of Cambodians is provided as a rationale, but clearly there are political imperatives at stake in the construction of Cambodia's genocide memorials. The visceral forms of the memorials defy an educative purpose. At Choeng Ek, there are no signs or official guides to contextualize the site. Until recently, the emotional climax of the tour of Tuol Sleng culminated at a map of Cambodia filled with hundreds of skulls ostensibly collected from killing fields throughout the countryside depicting the scope of the genocide (Williams 2004, 202). The mechanical repetition of the skulls at Tuol Sleng, like those stacked in the stupa at Choeng Ek, has the unintended effect of reinforcing "the idea of grisly productivity, despite its presumed intention to convey the opposite – the unnatural truncation of each rich and unique life" (Ibid., 205). Finally, by exhaustively detailing the Khmer Rouge's favored torture tactics, Tuol Sleng paradoxically focuses on remembering the perpetrators, not the victims (Ibid., 242). In addition, until 1991, Cambodians observed a national "Hate Day" in which places that had borne witness to atrocities, including Tuol Sleng and Choeng Ek, were used as gathering sites for testimonials by victims. The purpose, however, much like the memorials, was not to create an open discourse on the past nor to initiate the healing process for victims, but to sustain animosity toward the Khmer Rouge and – by implication – allegiance to the government (Ibid., 249). While perhaps not encapsulating the actual trajectory of events, the memorials can be viewed as useful in at least reflecting the politicization of Cambodian history that persists today.²

RWANDA: THE LAND OF A THOUSAND MEMORIALS³

Given the lack of international intervention in Rwanda to curtail the genocide, the international interest in its memorials is deeply ironic. Each year, a national day of mourning for victims is observed at a new memorial site in which human remains are exhumed and given a formal burial (Zorbas 2004, 40). The Rwandan government will not be running out of new sites to host this event any time soon. Some Rwandans remark that Rwanda is no longer a place for the living. Since the hills of Rwanda are literally strewn with memorials to the victims of the genocide, it is not difficult to see how one could conceive that the dead have a monopoly on the land. While locally driven genocide memorials pervade the Rwandan landscape, my analysis will focus primarily on the Kigali Memorial Center at Gisozi and the Murambi Technical School Memorial in Butare. The Kigali Memorial serves multiple purposes: mass graves and sanctuary gardens are a tribute to Kigali's victims; an interactive museum provides (selective) historical antecedents to the genocide and chronicles the months of the genocide;

and, several special exhibits are dedicated to modern-day Rwandans who laudably acted in resistance and to the cultivation of awareness of genocides that have occurred in other parts of the world.

In contrast, at Murambi, the bodies of hundreds of victims have been preserved in lime powder so that they still depict their original positions of violation from when they were massacred. This memorial site is also intended to house an international genocide education center, developed and funded by the Aegis Trust UK, but the project has elicited controversy from critics who contend that its proposed narrative fails to fully appreciate the logic of genocide as it unfolded (Laville 2006). In its current state, the Murambi site is a testament to the magnitude of the violence, but its human remains – albeit preserved – are not preserved in a way to “demonstrate how, where, or when they were killed” (Cook 2006, 290). Only a skeletal view of Murambi is provided. When it comes to memorials, arguments about the aesthetics of design and preservation are more often than not proxies for political debates about the atrocities themselves (Kennicott 2004, B01).

While Rwanda’s experience with memorialization shares similar traits with Cambodia’s, namely the use of politically loaded memorials to support the consolidation of power, Rwanda’s story is more hopeful by gesturing toward the ways in which memorials might be both beneficial and necessary. Even so, Rwanda’s memorials are no less mired in controversy. For the Kagame government, the genocide is the *raison d’être* of the nation and the memorials are an effective vehicle of fulfilling this official narrative and exploiting the international community’s guilt of inaction to cast Rwanda as a victimized nation (Buckley-Zistel 2006, 136). This hegemonic narrative of the genocide as the starting point and culmination of Rwanda’s history has two major imperatives: first, to consolidate legitimate political power for the incumbent Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF); and, second, to facilitate a post-ethnic reconciliation process in which ethnicity is outlawed and ultimate blame for the genocide is displaced on foreigners (Longman 2006, 2-3). The memorials are strategically connected to this rewriting of history. For example, at the Murambi Technical School Memorial, signposts located around the periphery of the memorial indicate where the French “Operation Turquoise” troops played volleyball with the *Interahamwe* militias while the corpses were still freshly massacred.

Rwanda’s memorials also fit into a strategy of selective memory by highlighting only those atrocities committed against Tutsis. In fact, even within a *post-ethnic* Rwanda, the signs marking national memorials are being rewritten from *Le génocide* to read *Le génocide de Tutsi*. Within this

depiction of victor's justice, allegations of atrocities by the government's defense forces – the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA) are buried in silence. This, however, may prove problematic for the Rwandan government since this very silence gives “pro-genocide ideologues free reign to inflate the size and nature of RPA abuses in order to argue parity between the genocide and alleged crimes committed by the RPA” (Zorbas 2004, 41). This strategy of chosen amnesia also eclipses past historical tensions between the Hutus and Tutsis in order to perpetuate the notion that ethnicity in Rwanda was a colonial imposition (Buckley-Zistel 2006, 142). This strategy may be targeted at reconciliation – under the purview of RPF power – but it also “bears the danger of not challenging the social cleavages that rendered the genocide possible in the first place, and so obstructing their transformation in the future” (Ibid., 131).

THE ELUSIVE PROMISES OF MEMORIALIZATION

The case studies of Cambodia and Rwanda highlight the four primary motivations underlying the construction of memorials: symbolic justice for victims, reconciliation, nation building, and prevention. These objectives are not mutually exclusive, but they may conflict.

Symbolic Justice

Memorials affirm the humanity of those who were killed and ascribe accountability for their deaths, thereby fighting a culture of impunity often endemic after violence (Neier 1998, 85). The processes of preservation and archival research involved in their creation help to provide an official transcript of atrocities that can be useful for the pursuit of justice through legal channels. It has been suggested that memorialization is a cathartic process that allows survivors to work through their trauma. This assumes, of course, that survivors have agency in the process itself, unlike in Cambodia. The diverse experiences of survivors may not be compatible so it may be difficult to create a memorial that is inclusive of all perspectives. The challenge is also how to reconcile the construction of memorials with the immediate needs of post-conflict communities. Some argue that funds are being misallocated to create memorials to the dead, rather than to support those who survived. Given the need to reconstruct schools and public institutions after conflict, it may be difficult to justify preserving these sites as memorials.

Reconciliation

The narratives that memorials weave can either facilitate or obstruct group

cohesion. The process is just as critical however. The process of constructing a memorial, if inclusive, can facilitate necessary dialogue that can help to mend entrenched social antagonisms and heal painful wounds. Some memorials have also become sites for hosting reconciliation events, thereby reclaiming sites of trauma for peace. In post-war, yet still politically divided Mostar, a “counter-monument” dedicated to Bruce Lee, childhood hero of both Bosniaks and Croats alike, brought the conflicting groups together (Raspudić 2004). While not obviously connected with the grievances of the past, this monument depicts a symbol of justice that is meaningful to all groups. Scholars concede that it may be easier to use memorials as a vehicle for reconciliation in places where perpetrators and victims do not cohabitate side-by-side. In Rwanda, the omnipresent nature of memorials as a constant reminder of the genocide may prove prohibitive in the reintegration process of accused perpetrators.

Nation Building

In the spirit of Benedict Anderson’s notion of imagined communities, memorials provide the victor’s regimes with a mechanism of imagining a new nation through the narratives of the past they disseminate. Anderson elaborates that nations, unlike individuals, fashion these narratives “by deaths... these deaths are not ordinary deaths; the nation’s biography takes the suicides, martyrdoms, assassinations, executions, wars, and holocausts to serve the national purpose and these must be remembered/forgotten as ‘our own’” (Anderson 1991, 205-206). The obvious irony of course is that these post-genocide regimes deploy a historical narrative to consolidate their power analogous to their genocidal predecessors. Of course no *tabula rasa* exists and there is a danger in pretending that the ethnic or social cleavages that incited the violence can be memorialized without rekindling the divisions that incited the violence at the outset (Caplan 2007, 20). States are disparate in their support for memorials and this variation is perhaps connected to how useful memorials may be as arbiters of history making. In some instances, the absence of memorials may be useful to suppress particular unsavory histories, including those of the defeated. Albeit polemic, Rwanda and Cambodia exist at the far end of state engagement.

“Never Again”: Prevention through Education

At the inception of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. in 1999, staff wore lapel pins with the messages “Remember” and “Never Again.” As Gourevitch remarks, “The museum was just a year

old; at its inaugural ceremony, President Clinton had described it as ‘an investment in a secure future against whatever insanity lurks ahead’.” (Gourevitch 1998, 152). In fact, against the backdrop of the genocide in Rwanda and the ongoing ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, the construction of this proclaimed bulwark against human suffering represented a palliative for international intervention. The most frequently cited rationale for memorials is hence their pedagogical value in preventing recurrences of the past. How can memorials engage new generations with little or no knowledge of what they commemorate? Each generation, indeed every visitor, will view memorials through a different lens to draw relevance for their own lives. If the explicit goal of their pedagogy is prevention through learning from the mistakes of the past, then “their very presence indicates our failure to do so: they most clearly represent evidence that history has been repeated” (Williams, 2004, 208). Yet, to caution that those who forget the past are bound to repeat it, as the famous truism ominously warns, does not mean that those who remember it will not (Bernard-Donals 2005, 98).

FACING GROUND ZERO: 9/11 AND THE FUTURE OF MEMORIALIZATION

Almost immediately after the planes collided with the Twin Towers at the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York City, there was a palpable urgency to memorialize this tragedy. Luminescent, austere, and utterly banal, the winning memorial design “Reflecting Absence” at Ground Zero was widely criticized by victims’ families as an affront to memory by masking the horror of the attacks (Dowd 2003, 9). Designed with the explicit purpose of remembering this tragedy on U.S. soil, the memorial begets forgetting.⁴ The controversial International Freedom Center met its demise as critics said that the sacred grounds for a memorial were not the appropriate place for a didactic lesson in politics (Dunlap 2005). With the consequences of 9/11 still being played out in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan, the notion of the United States hosting a global freedom center was not politically palatable. There was also the omnipresent fear that this Tower, like the Srebrenica Memorial or the Kigali Memorial Center, would itself become a symbolic target for future violence.⁵ The sanguine and sanitized design of the memorial is reflective of the view that it remains untenable to question the nuances of 9/11; it is foremost a tragedy in which the U.S. is unequivocally innocent. The memorial reminds us that the representation of certain narratives serves to legitimize particular courses of action. Indeed, the memorial’s representation of a United States

victimized by September 11, 2001 has been used to wage and justify a war against terrorism; thus, how the past is represented has real material consequences for what the future will foretell.

The controversy surrounding the design of the memorial and who has ownership over the Ground Zero space – from the families of the victims to the city – is also telling. The most recent incarnation of this controversy positions the architects against the families of the victims in a debate over how the names of the victims are listed. The current plan calls for the names to be dispersed randomly around the two reflecting pools with only service insignia marking the names of the uniformed emergency workers who died (Dunlap 2006). The primary architect responsible for the design of the memorial explained that “the haphazard brutality of the attacks is reflected in the arrangement of names, and no attempt is made to impose order upon this suffering” (Ibid.). While this explanation is symbolically compelling, visitors and the families of the victims may find it frustrating that they would have to be guided by memorial staff, a printed directory or a computerized registry in order to visit their loved ones. For those who waited in the aftermath of September 11th for word of their missing relatives, they do not want to have to search again (Ibid.). Finally, associations representing firefighters and police officers believe that those individuals should be afforded special recognition given that they were “first responders” to the crisis and voluntarily sacrificed their lives.

The case studies of Cambodia and Rwanda teach us that there are no easy answers to these questions, but that there are, perhaps, lessons learned that the arbiters of this Ground Zero memorial debate could turn to for guidance. Providing a forum for this public debate over the memorial design – and a space for the families of victims to be heard – is itself profoundly useful. And even among this constituency – the families of the victims – there are multiple and competing viewpoints of what the memorial should entail. Memorialization is a relatively new field of study, but the efforts of organizations like the International Center for Transitional Justice or the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience to develop best practices for the development of memorials by civil society groups and other key stakeholders is a welcome contribution.

The case of Cambodia suggests that civil society engagement and local ownership over the process is paramount; thus, the presence of debate – however contentious – among Ground Zero’s various constituencies over who constitutes the memorial’s primary audience is itself positive. The design and construction of memorials should involve a broad consultative process given the multitude of stakeholders so that no one audience

monopolizes the process. This process – and the memorial it eventually engenders – provides a space to prompt constructive civic dialogue about the past. To the extent too that visitors to memorials are seen as active participants in history, the most productive memorials are those that are living memorials: where history is not relegated to the past, but where visitors are invited to draw upon the past to inform their understanding of the present.

Given that no memorial is created in a political vacuum, there are nevertheless some memorials that are more dangerous than others. While doing something is better – at least symbolically – than doing nothing to remember, one must not forsake the present to preserve the past. The dialogue that goes into the memorial process itself can be a valuable missive for reconciliation and healing. A memorial should not subsume transitional issues of justice and reconciliation; instead, foresight should be given to how a memorial may facilitate or obstruct other justice and reconciliation endeavors (Brett et al. 2008, 29). There may not be reconciliation needs in the case of Ground Zero, as there are for Rwanda. However, either an inflammatory or a sanitized memorial may prove politically constrictive: a memorial that fails to be introspective will not illuminate the consequences of 9/11 for the global war on terror, as played out in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq, and for national civil liberties.

The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience holds that, like other democratic institutions, memorials should be judged against standards of independence from political caprice, transparency, participation of marginalized populations and civil society, inclusivity, and interethnic engagement (Brett et al. 2008, 22). The democratization of memory affords marginalized groups a rare opportunity to have their particular narrative recognized. However, memorials must wrestle with whether to consider needs in the short-term or long-term, how to prioritize what to remember and what will, by implication, be forgotten, and what purpose remembering hopes to achieve.

In response to her once controversial Vietnam memorial design, Maya Lin wrote: “The memorial is composed not as an unchanging monument, but as a moving composition to be understood as we move into and out of it” (Edkins 2003, 81). While museums and memorials struggle to stabilize the past, memory remains unsettled, politically fraught, and perpetually haunted by forgetting. The act of making memorials offers the false security that the past is less susceptible to the failures of memory (Huysen 2003, 101). The case studies of Cambodia, Rwanda, and Ground Zero help to concretize how the narratives that are constructed of the past have real

political and material consequences for nations and citizens, present and future. While there may be no pure narrative to recover from these sites, certainly some narratives (e.g., one that entirely denies the incidence of genocide) are more harmful and stray further from the truth than others. The question then is how to commemorate and create meaning out of what is both present and absent at memorial sites without resorting to violence in how it is represented. Finally, one's own presence at these memorials highlights the very impossibility of seeing or preserving everything – not only because some things have been deliberately effaced from memory or are markedly absent, but also since the past and what it means for the future is still being recreated through one's very presence.

NOTES

- ¹This was highlighted by former President Clinton's 1998 visit to Rwanda in which he unwittingly became embroiled in controversy over the authenticity of memorials. The Rwandan government had erected a memorial at the Kigali airport in anticipation of his visit. This memorial featured the remains of victims and the instruments of their death. Clinton refused to lay a wreath on the memorial, as requested by his Rwandan government hosts. He justified this by saying that "he believed its [memorial] hasty construction and its location trivialized the genocide" – especially paradoxical considering his unwillingness to intervene (Williams 2004, 81).
- ²The recreation of history at Tuol Sleng – through a current socio-political lens – was noted in 2008 when Mia Farrow broke into the Tuol Sleng museum to stage a "Dream for Darfur" rally against China's continued support of Sudan. See "Actress Accused of Breaking Into Museum," *Bangkok Post News*, 21 January 2008, http://www.bangkokpost.com/breaking_news/breakingnews.php?id=125316, last accessed 8 January 2009.
- ³Rwanda is otherwise famously known as *pays des mille collines* or the land of a thousand hills.
- ⁴This forgetting includes the fact that the granite fountain memorial to those killed in the 1993 WTC bombing was destroyed in the 2001 attack, thereby effacing the ideological connections linking the attacks and the added symbolism 9/11 held for the terrorists (Williams 2004, 163).
- ⁵Indicative of unresolved ethnic tensions, explosives were found at the memorial center at Srebrenica just before the 10th anniversary of the massacre. Similarly, on the 10th anniversary of the Kigali Memorial, assailants targeted it with grenades and attacked several security guards. For more, see Editorial, "Bombs Found at Srebrenica Centre," *BBC News*, 5 July 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4651713.stm>, last accessed 8 January 2009.

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