

Spring 5-15-2014

# Hot Culture, Cold Halls: Narrating History and Healing at Sites of Trauma

Emily L. Burde

*Seton Hall University*, [elburde@gmail.com](mailto:elburde@gmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), and the [Social History Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Burde, Emily L., "Hot Culture, Cold Halls: Narrating History and Healing at Sites of Trauma" (2014). *Seton Hall University Dissertations and Theses (ETDs)*. 2016.

<http://scholarship.shu.edu/dissertations/2016>

HOT CULTURE, COLD HALLS:  
NARRATING HISTORY AND HEALING  
AT SITES OF TRAUMA

EMILY L. BURDE

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS IN MUSEUM PROFESSIONS

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY  
MAY 2014

JÜRGEN HEINRICHS, PH.D., FACULTY ADVISOR

Copyright 2014 by Emily L. Burde

Hot Culture, Cold Halls:  
Narrating History and Healing at Sites of Trauma

by

Emily L. Burde

Approved by: Jürgen Heinrichs

Jürgen Heinrichs, Ph.D.

Thesis Advisor

August 1, 2014

## **ABSTRACT**

With the increased threat of geopolitical violence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (bioterrorism, nuclear war, government upheaval, and the like), and at a time when most of the world's citizens are desensitized to extreme forms of violence, it is necessary for museum professionals to undertake the mission of bringing order out of such chaos to educate the public by creating a tangible truth. By "cooling off" the material remains of a mass trauma through processing, registrars begin a chain of events that ultimately allows curators to establish effective visual narratives of the build-up of tensions, the culmination of the events, the immediate aftermath, and the lessons learned in an exhibition that is both educational and commemorative. This paper will explore the process of ordering chaos in the wake of trauma from the initial processing of material remnants through final exhibition and propose best practices for ongoing and future commemorative projects.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
INTRODUCTION	4
CHAPTER 1:	
UNDERSTANDING THE MEMORIAL MUSEUM HYBRID	6
Memorial, Monument, Museum: A Synthesis of Commemorative Methodologies	7
Moving Toward Universal Practices: Transferability across Sites of Trauma	11
CHAPTER 2:	
FROM HOT CULTURE TO COLD HALLS:	
PROCESSING MATERIAL REMNANTS AND ORGANIZING MEMORIAL MUSEUM FACILITIES	15
Bringing Order from Chaos: Initiating Recovery at Sites of Trauma	16
From Memory to Action: A Toolkit for Memorialization in Post-Conflict Societies	18
Objects of Suffering, Objects of Learning:	
Creating Tangible Meaning in the Memorial Museum	21
CHAPTER 3:	
TO EXHIBIT, OR NOT TO EXHIBIT?	
PROBLEMATIC OBJECTS AND NARRATIVES IN MEMORIAL MUSEUMS	25
Cultures of Victimization and Martyrdom:	
Maintaining the Integrity of the Memorial Museum Exhibition	26
Makeshift Memorials: Collection and Conservation of the Ephemeral	29
Voiceless Victims: Human Remains in the Memorial Museum	30
CHAPTER 4:	
TRANSFERABILITY ACROSS SITES OF TRAUMA:	
A BASIC FRAMEWORK OF BEST PRACTICES FOR FUTURE ENDEAVORS	33
Know Your History, Know Your Goals	33
Sites of Trauma, Sites of Truth	34
Communication and Consultation	35
Separate Spaces, Separate Functions	35
Processing Problematic Materials	36
CONCLUSION	39
BIBLIOGRAPHY	41

## INTRODUCTION

On April 20, 2013, the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum announced a \$5 million improvement plan for its permanent exhibition that would include the addition of the Mercury Marquis that bomber Timothy McVeigh was driving at the time of his arrest, as well as the police footage of his incarceration. The announcement came one day after the 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing tragedy at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, which claimed 168 civilian lives and caused countless other casualties.

The news, while only publicized in local Oklahoman sources (KOKO-TV, The Oklahoman, and the Edmond Sun), initially met with backlash toward the curatorial choice to include any artifact pertaining to McVeigh. Commenters on the web articles argued that the inclusion is degrading to the memory of the victims of the bombing; others took the argument a step further, suggesting that the museum include a sledgehammer next to the vehicle to allow visitors a literal whack at something emblematic of the terrorist act. At the time of this writing, close to a year after the announcement, it is clear that the discussion became so heated among Oklahomans that all of the comments had to be removed from the news articles, and the commenting option has been disabled on each of the news sites.<sup>1</sup>

The Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, like other commemorative sites, is committed first and foremost to remembering an event that robbed innocent civilians of their lives. However, as a museum institution it possesses the dual function of being a learning institution, necessitating a commitment to representing a truthful narrative of the

---

<sup>1</sup> "McVeigh's Car Coming to OKC Memorial," *KOCO.com Oklahoma City*, 20 April 2013, <http://www.koco.com/news/oklahomanews/okc/McVeigh-s-car-coming-to-OKC-Memorial/-/11777584/19828442/-/a2yjoz/-/index.html>

circumstances leading up to the event, the event itself, the aftermath, and the lessons learned. This duality of purpose is a point of contention between the museum and the public it serves: the public seeks comfort and justice; the museum seeks to offer that through education and commemoration – but should the exhibition narrative suffer in its accuracy because a collection object may be considered too emotionally charged for viewers to handle?

In a period when much of the global population has become desensitized to extreme forms of violence in the news, it is necessary for museum professionals to undertake the mission of bringing order out of chaos in order to educate the public by creating a tangible truth. By “cooling off” the “hot” material remains of a mass trauma through processing and documentation, museum registrars and collections managers begin a chain of events that ultimately allows curators to establish effective visual narratives of the build-up of tensions, the culmination of terroristic or genocidal events, the aftermath, and the lessons learned in exhibitions that both educate and commemorate.

Using case studies from around the world, as well as representations of different historical periods, this thesis explores the process of ordering chaos in the wake of severe trauma from initial processing through final exhibition, emphasizing how the emotional value and meaning of objects changes as they are prepared for exhibition, and identifying transferable methods of processing and exhibition across memorial institutions in order to establish best practices for current and future endeavors.

# CHAPTER 1

## UNDERSTANDING THE MEMORIAL MUSEUM HYBRID

By their very nature, memorial museums and other commemorative sites must address collective memory and history. It follows, therefore, that the process and style of memorialization varies according to the goals of the organizing body and the needs of the public it serves, taking into account the cultural setting and political context in which the memorials are being created.

In times past, the fall of oppressive governments has been met with a knee-jerk reaction for iconoclasm from the new order: to remove aspects of a particularly uncomfortable heritage, the deliberate demolition of the “material relics of the old...system” and the “reinterpretation or rejection of history...which has become uncomfortable or difficult to handle”<sup>2</sup> seems the path of least resistance. However, the total erasure of such markers from the landscape is only cosmetic; it is impossible to eliminate the sense of trauma that inevitably remains.

Following an iconoclastic event, any number of things can happen to the site of trauma. It can be left void of any traces of history and replaced by something benign and removed from its past: a park, school, or grocery store, for example. In other cases, the space can be filled with the more traditional embodiment of a memorial – a grand monument which points out to the world that something devastating happened on this spot, at a particular time, to a particular group of people, with little else of the historical context being commented on. More recently, however, focus has shifted towards creating spaces that both commemorate and

---

<sup>2</sup> Anjah Merbach, “From *Removing Uncomfortable Heritage, its Meaning and Consequence: A Case Study on the Fall of Political Public Monuments in the Former GDR*,” in *A Reader in Uncomfortable Heritage and Dark Tourism*, ed. Sam Merrill and Leo Schmidt (Brandenburg: Brandenburgische Technische Universität Cottbus, 2010), 280-81.

educate, fostering societal healing through historical and visual narratives and humanitarian outreach programs that facilitate active discourse between survivors and younger generations, promoting a newfound sense of normalcy and purpose for the former and a sense of community for the latter. The primary venue for these efforts? The very sites where crimes against humanity were committed adaptively reused.<sup>3</sup>

### **MEMORIAL, MONUMENT, MUSEUM: A SYNTHESIS OF COMMEMORATIVE METHODOLOGIES**

In his book *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*, Paul Williams traces the history of commemorative projects and differentiates between the types of structures we encounter as tourists when visiting areas with a troubled past.

He explains first and foremost that a memorial site is the physical location that serves a commemorative function, but is not necessarily adorned with a built structure.<sup>4</sup> In its most basic sense, the memorial site is the location where the traumatic event likely occurred and over time was allowed to blend back into the surrounding landscape in a benign way – a park, for example. (Of course, there are other memorial sites that are not physically associated with the events they commemorate, but have been selected as appropriate commemorative locations for other reasons. However, this paper is not concerned with these sites.)

The line between memorials and monuments is also clear: a memorial is “anything that serves in remembrance of a person or event” and which “often [signifies] mourning or loss,” while a monument is a “sculpture, structure, or physical marker designed to memorialize” and

---

<sup>3</sup> Adaptive reuse is the process of reclaiming a site of cultural or historical importance and adapting it for use as the main exhibition space for the narrative of its history.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (New York: Berg, 2007), 8.

which “[signifies] greatness or valor.”<sup>5</sup> Memorial museums, on the other hand, are a synthesis of site, memorial, and monument. Encompassing the functional roles of remembrance and veneration, memorial museums are additionally devoted to the “acquisition, conservation, study, exhibition, and educational interpretation...[of] a historic event [involving] mass suffering of some kind.”<sup>6</sup>

Germany is possibly the world’s best case study in the practices of commemorative culture. From WWI to the Holocaust to the fall of the German Democratic Republic (the formerly Soviet-occupied territories of Germany), the nation possesses one of the most difficult socio-political histories to contend with, and as a result runs the gamut in terms of memorialization processes. From the subtle artistic memorials like the Stumbling Block project by German artist Gunter Demnig to the impressive and imposing 19,000 square meter Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe designed by American architect Peter Eisenman, to the sites which have been adapted and reused as documentation centers and museums, it would seem that no one in the world knows more about owning and commemorating dark heritage than the Germans.

At sites like Topographie des Terrors and the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, Germans seem to have streamlined the process of adaptive reuse of sites of trauma. Though all of the sites speak to the same period in German history, each has been allowed to relate its particular facet of that history through the use of the original site and accompanying material remnants. They are not grand traditionalist monuments such as France’s Arc de Triomphe (de l’Etoile), Russia’s The Motherland Calls, Malaysia’s Tugu Negara, or America’s National WWII

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 7-8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 8.

Memorial; rather, they are sites that educate the public about a dark heritage by putting the audience in the exact location of trauma, simultaneously providing an exact, inarguable narrative of events and imparting feelings of suffering, fear, and longing for normalcy across generations in these now sacred places.

The Topographie des Terrors, located on the former Prinz-Albrecht-Straße and Wilhelmstraße, was the location of the Secret State Police, Reich Security, and Reich SS Leadership headquarters from 1933 until 1945. Though the remains of the buildings were removed before 1961, the foundations of the original building complex are visible and surround the modern documentation center that fills the space today, linking the concrete location with the documents and exhibitions housed in the museum.<sup>7</sup> The adaptive reuse of the specific location, with its voids and compilation of material evidence, allows for Germans and international visitors alike to confront identifiable perpetrators and their crimes against humanity in the very place those crimes were initiated.

Like the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland, the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, located at the edge of Berlin, has been adapted as a memorial museum space preserving original buildings, furniture, documents, personal effects, and instruments of torture that give a voice to the victims of the Nazi regime. Only those structures which are deemed absolutely pertinent to the visitor experience remain standing; the main gate, two inmate barracks, interior cell block, guard towers, infirmary, laundry and prisoner kitchens, and camp crematorium and morgue, among other structures, endure in whole or in part surrounded by the footprints of structures that had been leveled after the war. Inside each building, a different

---

<sup>7</sup> Andreas Nachama, *Topography of Terror: Gestapo, SS, and Reich Security Main Office on Wilhelm- and Prinz-Albrecht-Straße: A Documentation*, (Berlin: Stiftung Topographie des Terrors, 2010).

aspect of the camp's history and prisoners' lives are addressed through objects and text in a manner that is highly matter-of-fact yet culturally sensitive. The gravity of the trauma that happened on the site is apparent from the minute visitors approach the front gate, and the presentation of the converted site allows the camp to speak for itself, to impose the lingering feelings of dread and degradation on the tourist. It is a site where the tourist dares not complain of hunger or thirst because the people who suffered here were starved and dehydrated; it is a site where the tourist (at least in harsher winter or summer weather) dares not complain of fatigue or lack of places to sit as the people who suffered here were worked to death on the very ground the tourist is standing on. The material components of the exhibition – text and objects – play an explanatory supporting role to this very visceral, and often troubling, visitor experience.

In an ideal situation, the hybrid of memorial and museum would incorporate the following: the adaptive reuse of original sites or structures of the trauma as the main museum facility, allowing the site to speak for itself through its architecture, its state of preservation, and its overall presence as a site of extreme suffering and loss; the use of all available documentation to the fullest extent to achieve the most precise, unbiased, and culturally sensitive narrative of events; a research institute/library to deal with themes relevant to, but perhaps not directly addressed by, the exhibitions in the museum space; and a memorial space for the victims adjacent to the site, rather than within the museum, to allow for private mourning and contemplation. Additionally, unidentified victims could be interred in a tomb of unknowns or other repository attached to the memorial space to distinguish them as separate from artifacts.

## **MOVING TOWARD UNIVERSAL PRACTICES: TRANSFERABILITY ACROSS SITES OF TRAUMA**

Every society that has ever suffered genocide, or other trauma, without fail adopts the same mission: we must be a lesson to the rest of the world so this can never happen again. Using sites of trauma adapted as memorial museums as the primary forum for creating fruitful discourse on the origins of the trauma, the particular events of the trauma, and the aftermath of the trauma is highly effective for the sheer fact that the audience is held captive, not only by the factual information being presented, but also by being placed in the physical space where devastating events occurred. In the case of Sachsenhausen, for example, the visitor cannot help but imagine being in the place of a camp prisoner as he moves through the barracks, past the guard towers, across the work yard, to the last stop – called Station Z – the camp morgue and crematorium. This context gives visitors no choice but to internalize some aspect of a particular history or emotion regardless of whether or not they opt to read the exhibition texts.

In January 2011, a study group from Rwanda embarked on a journey to Berlin in the hope of gaining insight into a shared history of politically institutionalized violence and genocide. The participants in the Rwandan study group were the presidents and vice-presidents of grassroots organizations designed in the wake of the 1994 Rwandan genocide to foster societal healing through humanitarian outreach programs, education, and commemoration. In Germany, they visited numerous memorial sites dedicated to the memory of the Holocaust and met with their institutional counterparts to discuss modes of representing an accurate history of their own genocide and appropriately memorializing it in a public space.

Though the causes and events of the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide were vastly different, Rwandans and Germans have a mutual sense of trauma and therefore a common understanding of the importance of reconciliation in a nation shared by multiple cultural groups. It was for this reason that the Rwandan study group made its pilgrimage to Germany in the winter of 2011: as Rwanda approached the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its own genocide, debates regarding the public commemoration of its particular history were ongoing:

The idea of extermination – that a certain people think of exterminating the others, and the ideology behind this, the methods being used, the cruelty...all this looks similar, even though in our case there were no gas chambers. But some victims would have preferred gas, instead of being massacred with a machete, being killed with traditional tools. We do not want that the Hutu people are considered as criminal people. It is not innate, there is nothing passing from father to son. We are searching, in our history, for the foundations, the roots of the genocide. How we ended up there, a people which used to live in harmony. Yes, there have been clichés, myths, demonstration, and exclusion...but we are still looking for explanations.<sup>8</sup>

Rwandan genocide memorials are problematic for a number of reasons, the biggest reason of all being the use of unidentified human remains as the primary exhibition objects. Anthropologist Kristin Doughty of the University of Pennsylvania noted in a 2011 article that as of 2002, the National Genocide Memorial in Kigali and the Murambi Memorial Center, both seemingly harmless from their exteriors, housed the most grotesque exhibition of genocide history imaginable – the victims themselves arranged on tables and shelves in whole and in part, alongside personal effects and perpetrators' weapons.<sup>9</sup> Recent photos from National Geographic's Instagram account show that not much has changed around the nation since Doughty's article was published; however, some changes have been made to the National

---

<sup>8</sup> Theodore Simburudali in "Sharing the Past, Shaping the Future: A Rwandan Study Tour to Germany and Poland, January 2011," YouTube, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-Aqz26TVRs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-Aqz26TVRs).

<sup>9</sup> Kristin Doughty, "Memorials, Human Rights, and Controversy in Post-Genocide Rwanda," *Anthropology News*, September 2011, 10.

Genocide Memorial (now Kigali Memorial Center) that mirror the ideals and examples mentioned above:

At the ten year anniversary of the genocide, the site has been transformed consistent with a global memorialization lexicon. Outside, an eternal flame burned before a wall of victims' names, and a reflective garden flanked a grave where remains of an estimated 250,000 people were interred. Inside, a museum-quality exhibition had been mounted with glossy panels depicting a brief historical synopsis of the genocide, accompanied by photos of victims and audio-visual testimony from survivors. Select material remains, including a few dozen skulls and items of clothing, reinforced the exhibit's authenticity.<sup>10</sup>

During a phone interview that spanned some 7,000 miles of land and sea in late 2012, I had the opportunity to speak with Dr. Joseph Nkurunziza, President of Never Again Rwanda (and participant in the aforementioned study group), about the reasons behind the state of memorial sites in Rwanda. He explained:

The important learning point about German commemorative culture is that they have been able to document their history so thoroughly. The Germans are able to pinpoint the exact perpetrators of the Holocaust and preserve this history because of a plethora of writings, videos, photographs, etc. Most Rwandans now know that not all Hutus brutalized and murdered Tutsis, but without documentation it becomes more difficult to present as accurate and as accepted a history as the Germans have. In our case, in the eyes of the Rwandan government, the bodies of the unidentified victims *are* the documentation of the genocide. Is it right? No. But we are trying to make a change by following the examples of other genocide memorials.<sup>11</sup>

While the Rwandan government maintains that the human remains are crucial to bearing witness to the atrocities of genocide, the majority of Rwandan citizens object to the public use of unidentified remains, arguing that the bodies should be given proper burial or allowed to decay naturally, reinforcing the idea that healing and reconciliation will come only

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Joseph Nkurunziza, phone communication with the author, October 7, 2012.

with the passage of time.<sup>12</sup> As we continued our conversation, Dr. Nkurunziza explained that as the debate over maintaining the exhibits or burying the unidentified victims continues, agencies from the United Kingdom are working with the National Genocide Commission to preserve the sites and remains in their present state.<sup>13</sup> He also described particular sites that stood out to him on the study tour: the *Topographie des Terrors* for its reuse of the site of perpetration as a documentation center to tell the exact story of the Holocaust and, in Poland, the Auschwitz concentration camp for the use of original structures and objects as the primary narrative. These sites, he believes, incorporate modes of commemoration that would transfer well not only to Rwanda, but to other nations with histories of institutionalized violence and genocide as well.

But before the leap from trauma to memorial museum can be made, a complicated cooling off and organizational planning process must be initiated.

---

<sup>12</sup> Doughty, 10, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Nkurunziza, 2012.

## CHAPTER 2

### FROM HOT CULTURE TO COLD HALLS: PROCESSING MATERIAL REMNANTS AND ORGANIZING MEMORIAL MUSEUM FACILITIES

Museums at sites of trauma, particularly those established via adaptive reuse, possess an inherent *hotness* about them. Take, for example, the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp which operated as a “model camp”<sup>14</sup> in Oranienburg, a suburb of Berlin, from 1936 until liberation in 1945. Over the course of its operation, of the over 200,000 prisoners at the camp roughly 30,000 victims perished on its grounds,<sup>15</sup> yet the site is visitable to contemporary audiences. But why?

As explained in Williams’ book, the *hotness* of a site and the objects associated with it comes from the high emotional quotient<sup>16</sup> imbued within the material remnants of an event. These are the sites and objects that tell a more personal and highly sensitive side of the story: victims’ personal effects, perpetrators’ tools of atrocity, bones and other human remains, and often the very landscape itself.<sup>17</sup> When a government or other organization decides to adaptively reuse a *hot* site and its artifacts for commemorative and educational purposes in the wake of trauma, the site and objects must be *cooled off* – or processed – to make them presentable to the public in an appropriate historical narrative context.

---

<sup>14</sup> “Model camps” in the period from 1936-1945 were smaller-scale *Arbeitslager* and forced labor camps developed by the Nazis on which all other *Arbeitslager* camps (Auschwitz-Birkenau, Dachau, Buchenwald, and the like) were designed and administered. Günter Morsch and Astrid Ley, *Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp 1936-1945: Events and Developments* (Berlin: Metropol, 2008), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Memorial and Museum Sachsenhausen. Brandenburg Memorials Foundation. <http://www.stiftung-bg.de/gums/en/index.htm>

<sup>16</sup> Williams, p. 33.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

While the primary facet of the cooling off process is time, (museum) registrars and other investigators and organizers are capable of setting the process in motion. The first step (though easier said than done in most cases) is to order the chaos: separate debris from artifacts and remains, decide which items will be kept and which will be returned to family members, and determine a chain of custody for items that need to be stored for further analysis. The creation of the museum and its narrative follows this painstakingly detailed process.

### **BRINGING ORDER FROM CHAOS: INITIATING RECOVERY AT SITES OF TRAUMA**

Two years after the 1994 Rwandan genocide in which some 800,000 Tutsis were persecuted, brutalized, and murdered by their Hutu neighbors, the United Nations created the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) for the sole purpose of forensically investigating and excavating mass graves in order to provide evidence against the leaders of the genocide in international court. This enormous undertaking rested on the shoulders of some sixteen archaeologists, anthropologists, pathologists, and autopsy assistants representing Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) in Kigali and Kibuye (Jan.-Feb. 1996 and June 1996, respectively).<sup>18</sup> The information gathered by these scientists was used to accomplish a vast number of tasks both in Rwanda and in international court, the most important being the compilation of evidence that would enable the tribunal's conviction of Hutu leaders indicted for genocide and crimes against humanity. The process would also be the initial step on the long road to memorialization and reconciliation among Rwandans.

---

<sup>18</sup> Clea Koff, *The Bone Woman: A Forensic Anthropologist's Search for Truth in the Mass Graves of Rwanda, Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo* (New York: Random House, 2004).

In the earliest stages of recovery, key elements of processing are analysis and documentation. In the case of genocide, or other related traumas, this includes preliminary study of the range of devastation; photographic or audio/visual documentation of the terrain are essential to interpreting the sequence of events. This is particularly important where genocide is concerned, as the ways in which human remains, instruments of torture, and debris are found provide important and telling insight into the last moments of the victims. For example, in Rwanda, bodies which were buried were mostly attended to by survivors during the aftermath, while those which were surface skeletons were positioned in a way that showed they were running away from the attackers and left where they fell; it also indicated, in many instances, a struggle for survival.

This painstaking and multilevel undertaking is generally initiated on some kind of politically organized scale, whether by local governments or international agencies like the United Nations. In most cases, the task is completed by outside investigators as they possess the emotional detachment necessary to perform such intense work; though on specific occasions, locals may be consulted as guides regarding the terrain, events, and range of devastation. After the site of trauma has been thoroughly documented, excavation begins: human remains and material remnants are separated from debris and then individually photographed, analyzed, documented, and stored for future identification, repatriation, burial, or use (depending on the artifact). Documentation, both photographic and written, is essential for both establishing a chain of custody and *collection* management system, as well as for processing and *cooling off* objects that will later be considered for use in a memorial museum context.

It is a common occurrence that this primary stage of ordering chaos can take upwards of several years, if not several decades, to complete depending on the particular circumstances of the site in question: political organization, economic standing, scale of devastation, and availability of resources (both human and technological) are often the key determiners of how efficiently this initial stage of processing occurs: to put things in perspective, the recovery, organization, and construction of a memorial museum site in the wake of 9/11 in the United States took considerably less time in comparison to the same process in Rwanda – twenty years later, Rwanda is still struggling to develop exhibitions and identify and inter remains, while in New York City the National September 11 Memorial Museum is slated to open its doors on May 21, 2014, a *mere* thirteen years after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center.

### **FROM MEMORY TO ACTION:**

#### **A TOOLKIT FOR MEMORIALIZATION IN POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES<sup>19</sup>**

The next step in the cooling process, after sites of trauma have been excavated, is deciding how the site and artifacts will be used. The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, a global network of museums, memorials, historic sites, and memory initiatives dedicated to bringing about social change and civic action in post-conflict societies,<sup>20</sup> published a brief manual outlining the basic practices and principles that any memorialization project should entail. According to the Coalition, memorial museum sites should focus on opening up dialogue rooted in the history of the site and concentrate that dialogue on younger generations

---

<sup>19</sup> Ereshnee Naidu, Bix Gabriel, and Mofidul Hoque, *From Memory to Action: A Toolkit for Memorialization in Post-Conflict Societies* (International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, 2012), 9

<sup>20</sup> Ereshnee Naidu, *Making Memory: Memorialization Efforts in the Middle East and North Africa, A Report on the First Meeting of MENA Memory Initiatives* (International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, 2012), 2.

in order to engage their interest and activism in contemporary issues. The authors of the toolkit explain:

Memorialization is context specific and there is no “one size fits all” approach; however...the toolkit aims to provide an overview of memorialization in post-conflict societies, share lessons learned, as well as work towards guidelines for best practice by providing creative ways to address some of the common challenges in undertaking memorial initiatives. As such it is envisaged that the toolkit will provide basic guidance to questions of memorialization in post-conflict settings but will be adapted according to different contexts and different post-conflict needs.<sup>21</sup>

Despite these varying contexts and post-conflict needs, identifying key universal challenges across sites of trauma provides a basic framework for memorial museum conceptualization and development.

On a thematic level, there are a number of issues that connect sites of trauma and that should be addressed by the organizing body: victims were civilians, with women and children not being spared; the circumstances of *unnatural* suffering and death range from morally problematic to completely inhumane; the suffering and death of victims and survivors cannot be interpreted or represented as heroic, sacrificial, or beneficial of the *greater good*; the motives of the killers and the modes of killing are at the forefront of public consciousness; and issues surrounding identity, culpability, and punishment of perpetrators require resolution.<sup>22</sup> Given these ties, the initial questions that should be answered by memorialization project organizers include the following:<sup>23, 24</sup>

- Is it the right time to begin a memorialization project?

---

<sup>21</sup> Naidu, Gabriel, and Hoque, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Williams, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Naidu, Gabriel, and Hoque, 23.

<sup>24</sup> Anthony M. Gardner, “Complex Factors in Planning the September 11 Memorial Museum at the World Trade Center: Politics, Obstacles, Opportunities and a Planning Model” (2007). *Dissertations*. Paper 1155.

- What are the mission and goals of the commemorative project? Who is the memorial museum site intended to serve?
- What stories and lessons will the institution use to educate future generations about the event? What documentation and objects will be appropriate to tangibly support this narrative? How will perpetrators be represented in the exhibition?
- With regard to consultation with survivors, who are the key stakeholders that should be involved in the project? Which stakeholders need to be informed of the memorialization process? How will their expectations be managed?
- What additional existing resources are available to support the memorialization project?
- How does the project relate to other post-conflict activities in the region?

Memorial museums across sites of trauma also share a number of universal functions which should be taken into account during the commemorative planning process. First and foremost, the site of trauma, and consequently of commemoration, is integral to institutional identity and often functions as the central location for research centers geared toward identifying victims, providing materials to aid in the prosecution of perpetrators, and disseminating strong pedagogic missions that usually include some component of work with survivors.<sup>25</sup> As such, the majority of the museum's constituency consists of clients who have a special relationship with the particular site or museum subject in some way.<sup>26</sup> But perhaps most importantly, the educational work of the institution is stimulated by moral considerations tied to issues in contemporary society and is frequently aligned with truth and reconciliation commissions and human rights organizations.<sup>27</sup>

During these early recovery and planning stages at sites of trauma, it is common for commemorative projects to begin as grassroots projects with makeshift museums – for example, the Berlin Underworlds Society and Museum, which preserves the WWII civilian bomb shelters and bunkers located beneath the streets of Berlin – to initiate public awareness and

---

<sup>25</sup> Williams, 21.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 21.

interest until sufficient funds can be raised for conservation, collections, educational programs and tours, research institutes and libraries, etc.:

Sites from around the world have very different histories and trajectories in terms of their development...some started as memorials and then became museums, others were developed as museums and have commemorative spaces built into them... The memory work that takes place around them varies including...outreach and youth education programs, traveling exhibits, tours, lecture series, and storytelling sessions – but all seek to have some form of social and individual impact, most typically to educate the next generation through revealing the past and in so doing to prevent future forms of atrocity.<sup>28</sup>

This is a frequent occurrence in the present day, when more memorial museums have opened in the past decade than in the past century<sup>29</sup> and in which organizers find themselves concerned not only with goals of preservation, reconciliation, education, and prevention, but also increasingly with some form of socio-economic engagement between the commemorative site and the region at large.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, once all of the aforementioned issues have been addressed and clear missions, goals, and policies are in place, the collection and processing of tangible evidence of the trauma may begin.

### **OBJECTS OF SUFFERING, OBJECTS OF LEARNING: CREATING TANGIBLE MEANING IN THE MEMORIAL MUSEUM**

Though mentioned earlier in this paper, it bears repeating: the *hotness* of a site and the objects associated with it comes from the high emotional gravity placed on the material remnants of an event – victims’ personal effects, perpetrators’ tools of atrocity, bones and

---

<sup>28</sup> Brandon Hamber, “Conflict Museums, Nostalgia, and Dreaming of Never Again,” *Peace and Conflict: The Journal of Peace Psychology* 18, no. 3 (2012):269.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 269.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 269-270.

other human remains, and the site itself.<sup>31</sup> In the context of a commemorative museum, such objects reassure the visitor that “the event has been determined or solved to some extent. As witnesses to history after the conflict, we are confident that we have some control over what the calamity meant, at least some assurance that it is no longer happening. Yet...the artifact also stands as unsolved, as something that, through its concrete unchanging form, makes plain our present inability to ameliorate or change it.”<sup>32</sup>

In the case of *hot* objects – artifacts of trauma – the meaning of the objects changes over time, place, and differences among individuals, whether victim, survivor, perpetrator, or viewer.<sup>33</sup> By the nature of our humanity, we use objects on a daily basis to help us understand notions of time, space, causality, life, and society,<sup>34</sup> and we use these objects to make aspects of our lives more concrete. “We forget that objects have a history. They shape us in particular ways. We forget why or how they came to be. Yet...objects are historically specific.”<sup>35</sup> During periods of ownership and use, objects constantly change meaning as they become physical representations of the owner’s identity and experience. Meaning continues to change even after objects have long been abandoned, and once brought into a new context, objects have the capacity to take on new identities.

As the key organizers in the *cooling* process, the museum registrar and curator are responsible for infusing learning with emotion and tangibility. In a sense, they are what anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss would refer to as *bricoleurs*, practitioners who manipulate a

---

<sup>31</sup> Williams, 28, 33.

<sup>32</sup> Williams, 50.

<sup>33</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 307.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 308.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 311.

closed set of materials to develop new thoughts and meanings.<sup>36</sup> But while the artifacts of trauma are an essential component of illustrating historical narratives in commemorative exhibitions, memorial museums run the risk of imposing on these objects the stories they perceive people *want* to hear, rather than the story the object actually tells.<sup>37</sup> Though this kind of sugarcoating may appear to be the most culturally sensitive means of interpretation, it is not necessarily the best way: it is more important to place the object within its proper historical, natural, and social context within the lives of the people who owned and used it, rather than force it to fit more comfortable ways of thinking.<sup>38</sup> Though at times this may mean particular exhibitions might be difficult for viewers to digest, it removes lingering ideas of victimization and martyrdom from immersive exhibitions and allows visitors to better come to terms with the past.

To return briefly to the issue surrounding the Oklahoma City Memorial Museum's choice to include bomber Timothy McVeigh's car and arrest footage, it is clear that the detractors from the decision preferred that the exhibit maintain an air of victimization and suffering rather than a complete story with some form of closure. From a curatorial standpoint, however, both the car and the video hold meaning for the way justice was served and complete the narrative by showing that there was a final outcome to an act of senseless violence.<sup>39</sup>

The issues concerning what content is appropriate for exhibition in memorial museums and other commemorative sites are ongoing and often highly contentious. This is particularly true at sites where a great loss of human life occurred and there is a dual necessity to meet

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 308.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 323.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 313, 323.

<sup>39</sup> "McVeigh's Car to go on Display at the OKC Bombing Memorial Museum," *NewsOn6.com*, 22 April 2013, <http://www.newson6.com/story/22045602/mcveighs-car-to-go-display-at-okc-national-memorial>

both the emotional and educational needs of the public. Generally, the memorial aspect and the museum aspect of these sites are regarded as separate and equal – the memorial site is open, reflective, and commemorative, while the museum site presents an exact history complete with oral histories, video recordings, physical remnants, or other evidentiary objects. In the case of the OKC Museum adding McVeigh’s car to the permanent exhibition, the addition is more socially acceptable than it is culturally insensitive because the car itself is not an instrument of destruction. Rather, it is a symbolic object which is representative of the conclusion of the trauma and ultimately of McVeigh being brought to justice.

## CHAPTER 3

### **TO EXHIBIT, OR NOT TO EXHIBIT? PROBLEMATIC OBJECTS AND NARRATIVES IN MEMORIAL MUSEUMS**

While visiting Berlin in May of 2012, I heard an interesting story at the Berlin Underworlds Museum. As our tour guide, a tall Danish woman with dark hair pulled back into a bun, led our school group through the civilian bunkers beneath the city streets, she explained how civilians would crowd into the subterranean rooms, often filled beyond capacity and with little or no ventilation, to wait out the air raids happening above. We came to a room furnished with benches near the end of our tour, and she invited us to sit down for a Q&A session.

Someone from our class asked the guide what other visitors' reactions had been to the site, and how she interpreted those reactions from the perspective of a guide. She then described one incident in which she led a group of Polish tourists through the same bunker we were seated in, and how one of the visitors became enraged by the exhibition narrative – which included stories of rape, suicide, suffocation, and other horrors – indicating that German civilians were as much victims of violence and destruction as anybody else affected by the war. The guide explained that her personal reaction was one of surprise, then of immediate understanding when she realized the basis for the Polish visitor's outrage and offense: when someone survives a trauma, regardless of how many people suffered the same tragedy, the experience and perception of one person and his level of understanding of the event will be unique to that person. No one else's suffering, no matter how severe, will ever be understood by that person as worse than his own suffering. This is the victim mentality in its most basic sense, and there are times when in individual, social, and even political and public life, that this

mentality is propagated for generations. It is one of many risks that memorial museums must face and overcome when developing the context of their narratives.

The bottom line, of course is: the museum won't please every individual that ever walks through its doors. However, if the museum has a clearly defined mission, set of institutional and educational goals, and site-specific narrative with supporting evidence, it will at least spark some emotion or thoughtfulness among the viewers, if not a total change of perspective or understanding of the particular facet of the event that the site represents.

### **CULTURES OF VICTIMIZATION AND MARTYRDOM: MAINTAINING THE INTEGRITY OF THE MEMORIAL MUSEUM EXHIBITION**

*I believe with every fiber of my being that every human being has the right to live without the pain of the past. For most people there is a big obstacle to forgiveness because society expects revenge. It seems we need to honor our victims but I always wonder if my dead loved ones would want me to live with pain and anger until the end of my life. Some survivors do not want to let go of the pain. They call me a traitor and accuse me of talking in their name. I have never done this. Forgiveness is as personal as chemotherapy – I do it for myself.*

- Eva Kor, Auschwitz survivor and Founder of the CANDLES Holocaust Museum, Indiana<sup>40</sup>

Holocaust survivor Eva Kor is the prominent subject of the documentary film *Forgiving Dr. Mengele* in which she comes to terms with the horrors she and her twin sister suffered as children in Auschwitz and ultimately forgives her Nazi tormentors by actively throwing off the shroud of victimhood and hate that she lived with for many years by assuming the persona of an empowered survivor. Of course, this is not an easy task to accomplish on a personal level; on a societal level the idea of forgiveness is sometimes unthinkable. However, if established correctly, memorial museums can be the forums that facilitate reconciliation and healing.

---

<sup>40</sup> Eva Kor, "Eva Kor (Poland)," The Forgiveness Project, last modified March 29, 2010, <http://theforgivenessproject.com/stories/eva-kor-poland/>

One of the most difficult aspects of the memorial museum narrative to contend with is that of the victim-perpetrator relationship. From the victim/survivor standpoint, any narrative relating to the perpetrators' lives, motives, and actions have no place in the memorial space and those feelings, to an extent, are understandable. However, from a curatorial standpoint, to perpetuate victim status within an educational and commemorative institution – or more importantly the “us vs. them” mentality – is a disservice to posterity and a failure of the museum's educational mission and role in society.

As Albert Nzamukwereka, Vice President of Never Again Rwanda, explained at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe:

In Rwanda, sometimes you find there are things that are not told. There are suspicions between people...there is history which is not agreed on. People of my generation – we are the second generation – we are all committed and curious to get out of this and to face the history because we are all Rwandans. We share the same things: the same schools, the same workplaces. So, if you want to construct a new Rwanda, we need to make this [commemoration] happen.<sup>41</sup>

Dr. Nkurunziza, of the same organization, added while en route to Poland to visit Auschwitz:

I never read that it was the Germans who did this. I read it was the National Socialism, the Nazis, the SS, so it shows that the people who wrote the history wrote the *exact* history. It took almost fifty years to have what we are seeing today, but given the same experience I think Rwanda...we shouldn't wait for fifty years.<sup>42</sup>

As this culture of victimhood is being combatted in Rwanda and other nations that suffered similar losses, we see that this challenge is also being dealt with at museums in the United States. In addition to the fierce backlash toward the OKC Memorial Museum's choice to

---

<sup>41</sup> Albert Nzamukwereka in “Sharing the Past, Shaping the Future”

<sup>42</sup> Joseph Nkurunziza in “Sharing the Past, Shaping the Future”

include Timothy McVeigh's car and arrest footage as part of the exhibition, a similar issue arose at the National September 11 Memorial Museum when curators and consultants differed in opinion about bringing Al Qaeda, and the hijackers specifically, into the exhibition narrative.<sup>43</sup> According to the museum's website, curators and designers dealt with this challenge by separating the historical content from the memorial content. "After learning about the day of 9/11, visitors will enter a series of galleries that chronicle what led up to the attacks. The exhibition examines the World Trade Center as a symbol and a target. It then addresses the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the evolution of the terrorist network al-Qaeda. The exhibition features trial evidence, oral testimony and archival news footage."<sup>44</sup>

This approach, which is reminiscent of many of the sites around Berlin and similar to the methods now being implemented in Rwanda, is both comprehensive and culturally sensitive. By including information about the evolution of the terrorist organization and the events leading up to the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, the museum remains true to its pedagogical mission; however, the organization of the exhibition space will allow those visitors who are uncomfortable with this particular facet of the history to bypass the gallery entirely and focus instead on the memorial aspect of the exhibition.

It is a curatorial imperative to address the victim-perpetrator dynamic as part of memorial exhibitions. Doing so, the museum facilitates recognition of the origins of violence, gives a face to the particular actors who perpetrated serious crimes against their fellow man, and above all eliminates over-generalized or hyperbolic interpretations of the event represented. As part of the museum's pedagogical mission, this information is necessary to

---

<sup>43</sup> Gardner, 6.

<sup>44</sup> 9/11 Memorial, last modified 2014, <http://www.911memorial.org/museum-exhibition-design-1>.

encourage understanding and stimulate critical evaluations of how this history impacts the present and shapes the future for posterity, as well as to fully reach the ideal goal of never again. Furthermore, this inclusion plays a crucial role in tearing down notions of perpetual victimhood or criminality between groups who must reconstruct a common national identity by offering a sense of closure and indicating a conclusion to the trauma.

### **MAKESHIFT MEMORIALS: COLLECTION AND CONSERVATION OF THE EPHEMERAL**

Often, in the wake of a large-scale devastation, survivors and society at large grieve publicly through the creation of makeshift memorials: mementos constructed mainly of ephemeral materials and placed at the site of trauma. Among the most prominent examples in recent history are those created and left at ground zero in the days immediately following the attack on the World Trade Center: floral arrangements, posters, letters to victims, photographs, sculptures, and other objects that bear significance to the creator's relationship to the event. These components of public memorialization are a major cultural expression both on the individual and societal level; they exemplify the importance of personal participation in the memorialization process and help survivors cope with trauma and the existential crisis of facing a new reality.<sup>45</sup>

The question, however, is whether or not memorial museums should, or have the right to, collect the ephemeral artifacts from these makeshift memorials for use in the permanent exhibition. On the one hand, institutions that collect the objects "assume that these collections

---

<sup>45</sup> Peter Jan Margry, "Thou Shalt Memorialize: Memory and Amnesia in the Post-Secular," *Anthropology News*, September 2011, 8.

represent an alternative testimony about what happened in the...society involved.”<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, registrars and curators must also be aware that once makeshift memorials have been dissembled and archived as part of the collection, the memorial function of the display ceases to exist, and its meaning in its original context is lost.<sup>47</sup> Organizers must ask themselves, if maintaining these memorials is perceived as necessary for the institution, when and how to accession these objects, and more importantly how to select what is considered worth saving.

“Intentional ‘forgetting’ (destroying) might be advisable and even necessary, as often people who leave materials at a site do not want to have them conserved, let alone documented or published.”<sup>48</sup> Dealing with ephemera left at makeshift memorials is certainly an ethical conundrum, and for the most part many institutions prefer to dismantle the materials as they were intended to be dismantled, rather than recontextualize these deeply personal objects as commodities for display. On the other hand, the preservation of some of these articles may be important visual evidence for narrating the aftermath of the trauma, and the museum can allow for a select few pieces to be used for exhibition. The institution will also have the option to maintain works on paper as part of the archival collection for future study.

## **VOICELESS VICTIMS:**

### **HUMAN REMAINS IN THE MEMORIAL MUSEUM**

In September 2011, an article was published in the *Anthropology News* describing difficulties that surviving relatives of 9/11 victims faced when they sought to consult with museum organizers about the storage of unidentified human remains. At the time,

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 8.

approximately 41% of World Trade Center victims were still unidentified and comprised some 9000 fragments of remains.<sup>49</sup> As part of the museum's original plan, these remains were to be kept in a repository inside the main museum complex, causing a great deal of upset among family members who felt there was not adequate consultation about identifying and returning remains for proper burial.<sup>50</sup> Among some of the key concerns raised by family advocates were the following:<sup>51</sup>

- Where in the museum complex would the repository for remains be located?
- Who would control family access to the remains for visitation, mourning, and private commemoration?
- What was the likelihood that the museum would exhibit objects embedded with human remains?
- Why were museum officials making decisions about the victims' remains without adequate family consultation?

After nearly a year of these questions allegedly remaining unanswered, despite heated correspondence between family advocacy groups and museum officials, survivors turned to the law in June 2011 by filing a Freedom of Information Law request *ν* City of New York.<sup>52</sup> The case, as yet, remains unsettled despite ample evidence in the museum's favor. Furthermore, the design plan of the National September 11 Memorial asserts that "family members of victims will have access to [the] private storage chamber...from which to view these remains from behind glass. An adjacent contemplation room will allow the general public to pay respects in front of a symbolic urn."<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh and David Hurst Thomas, "Unidentified Human Remains and the 9/11 Museum: Struggles of Advocacy and Consultation," *Anthropology News*, September 2011, 4.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>53</sup> Williams, 45.

While not as severe as the issue with human remains in Rwanda, both situations raise the question of whether or not it is appropriate to use human remains as exhibition objects, or to even maintain a repository within a museum facility, at sites of trauma. The simple, black-and-white answer to the first question is obviously no: it's never appropriate. Unfortunately, in many cases, especially in nations that are less developed than the United States and Germany, there are political and economic gray areas that make this particular facet of memorialization a "culturally nuanced affair."<sup>54</sup> As mentioned earlier in the case of Rwanda, the government prefers to keep bodies on display at various memorial sites to erase any doubt that the genocide happened, and on a large scale. Furthermore, the cost of expertise and technology needed to identify and return remains to families, coupled with the hundreds of thousands of victims still unaccounted for, makes identification of remains impractical.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless the ethical way to proceed, regardless of politics or economy, is to lay the victims to rest. They have not ceased to be human; and on a visceral level have endured enough suffering to deserve more than being gawked at by passersby in museum facilities. Providing the victims with a proper burial – in a tomb of unknowns, for example, adjacent to the memorial site – or allowing their remains to decay naturally would reinforce the notion that healing comes with the passage of time.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, such action would challenge views of "how strong a hold the past should have over the present, and for how long,"<sup>57</sup> and allow for museums to instead focus on facilitating reconciliation and healing, educating future generations, and creating a better future.

---

<sup>54</sup> Williams, 45.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 45-46.

<sup>56</sup> Doughty, 12.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 12.

## CHAPTER 4

### **TRANSFERABILITY ACROSS SITES OF TRAUMA: A BASIC FRAMEWORK OF BEST PRACTICES FOR FUTURE ENDEAVORS**

Having examined the process of *cooling off* the *hot* objects and spaces that remain in the wake of trauma and explored the myriad questions that museum organizers must address when establishing exhibition narratives, we can now establish a basic framework of transferable commemorative methods across sites of trauma as best practices for future projects. With these guidelines in place, memorial museum organizers will be able to create sites that are consistent with the idea of a *global memorialization lexicon* as described in Kristin Doughty's 2011 article in *Anthropology News*.

#### **KNOW YOUR HISTORY, KNOW YOUR GOALS**

In order to achieve the most precise narrative of events in the memorial exhibition, it is imperative to use all available documentation – photographs, audiovisual footage, journalistic and government documents, oral histories, etc. – to the fullest extent. Doing so will maintain the historical integrity and cultural sensitivity of the museum by limiting the opportunity for bias one way or another, whether that bias is to perpetuate the victim persona or broaden social disparities rather than reconciling them.

Knowing the history that must be disseminated in the exhibition narrative will also help museum organizers to establish the overall mission and goals of the memorial institution, as

well as guide them through answering key questions in the early stages of development, including:<sup>58</sup>

- Is it the right time to begin a memorialization project?
- What are the mission and goals of the commemorative project? Who is the memorial museum site intended to serve?
- What stories and lessons will the institution use to educate future generations about the event? What documentation and objects will be appropriate to tangibly support this narrative? How will perpetrators be represented in the exhibition?
- With regard to consultation with survivors, who are the key stakeholders that should be involved in the project? Which stakeholders need to be informed of the memorialization process? How will their expectations be managed?
- What additional existing resources are available to support the memorialization project?
- How does the project relate to other post-conflict activities in the region?

In crafting the mission of the museum, therefore, it should also be clearly stated that at least one goal of the memorial project is to foster societal healing through humanitarian outreach programs, education, and commemoration.

## **SITES OF TRAUMA, SITES OF TRUTH**

Whenever possible, memorial institutions should be situated at the site of the trauma, with the original structures and/or landscape adaptively reused to house the museum facility. Using the sites and structures where crimes against humanity were initiated creates an immersive experience for the visitor, making the history of the trauma intellectually and emotionally accessible by placing him in the footsteps of the victim and allowing the site to speak for itself. By adapting and reusing sites of trauma, memorial museums remove biases (toward victimization, criminalization, and inexact narratives, etc.) that would make the content otherwise unapproachable.

---

<sup>58</sup> Naidu, Gabriel, and Hoque, 23.

The particular nature of adaptive reuse, especially for sites of trauma, opens a forum for fruitful discourse that encourages healing and reconciliation between groups and bolsters and overarching mission of *this can never happen again*. As a universal practice it is effective because it promises the preservation of sites, structures, and objects that are culturally and historically important within an exact framework of events, while also opening up additional financial resources to the managing organization that aid research, educational, and outreach programs.

### **COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION**

Museum organizers must establish a working relationship with victims and survivors for consultation and other purposes. These stakeholders are important not only to maintain the integrity of exhibition narrative with first-person accounts, but also to ensure the cultural sensitivity of the final exhibition by guiding which educational and commemorative needs must be met. It is imperative to be as inclusive as possible in these consultations, as survivors are invaluable to oral history projects, workshops, and other programs and narratives both within the museum and outside in the community.

### **SEPARATE SPACES, SEPARATE FUNCTIONS**

Rather than attempting to fit all of the facets of trauma the institution seeks to deal with in a single narrative, a more compartmentalized approach to dealing with each of the institution's functions is beneficial. As exemplified by some well-established memorial sites (such as those in Germany and the United States), addressing separate issues in separate spaces creates a highly organized and highly effective visitor experience.

The museum facility itself should deal strictly with the narrative and associated objects that evidence the build-up, peak, and aftermath of the traumatic event. A research institute/library and archive can be placed adjacent to (or within, depending on the circumstances) the museum; this “wing” can be used to deal with themes related to, but not directly addressed by the exhibition narrative – human rights or freedom studies in a global context, for example.

As for a commemorative space that fulfills the need of a place for mourning and contemplation, a separate memorial garden, reflecting pool, or other symbolic structure should be placed outside of the museum building, but within the terrain of the site. At this location, it would also be appropriate to inter any unidentified victims in a mass grave or tomb of unknowns to symbolically lay remains to rest. Remember, as a point of taste and respect, human remains should not be included as a part of the museum exhibition; the memorial museum is not a morgue or repository, and a body – no matter how long deceased – is nothing to be gawked at as if part of a carnival sideshow.

## **PROCESSING PROBLEMATIC MATERIALS**

The *cooling off* process is perhaps the most arduous task faced by organizers at the onset of developing memorial museums; however, if initiated in the immediate aftermath as part of ordering the chaos in the wake of trauma, all other aspects of establishing both institution and narrative will fall into place. As mentioned previously, the *cooling process* is a painstakingly detailed one, especially at the outset when artifacts must be separated from debris. For the most part, almost anything from the site of devastation can be used as physical

evidence that supports the historical narrative, but there are some items that need extra consideration for ethical reasons.

**Evidence of Perpetrators, Evidence of Victims:** Obviously within the confines of the narrative context, both objects representing the perpetrators and objects representing the victims will be a part of the exhibition. However, in processing these artifacts and developing the narrative that they support, registrars and curators must be careful to neither charge the historical atmosphere with feelings of perpetual demonization or victimization of entire social groups. Be specific. Pinpoint the roles that various participants filled over the course of the catastrophe, rather than make sweeping generalizations about who did what to whom. For example, the SS initiated the Holocaust vs. Germans initiated the Holocaust; only Jews were persecuted vs. Jews, homosexuals, Roma, Sinti, anti-Nazi sympathizers, and civilians were targets of the Nazi regime. The objects should not be forced to fit a narrative people are comfortable viewing, but rather support an honest discourse that people *must* confront.

**Bricolage and Ephemera:** Whether or not memorial museums and archives should collect these objects is debatable. On the one hand, ethical issues regarding ownership tend to dictate that the objects should be left, as they were intended, to decay or be destroyed by time. Some arguments have been made favoring this stance, stating that archivists' rights to conserve, analyze, and publish documents that were not addressed to the institution, but were meant for deeply personal purposes<sup>59</sup> are nonexistent. On the other hand, artifacts of makeshift memorials express personal participation in the commemorative process<sup>60</sup> and show survivors' relationships to the event in its immediate aftermath. Collecting such objects would provide

---

<sup>59</sup> Margry, 8.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 8.

relevant materials for both the institution's research library as well as portions of the exhibition dealing with commemoration, grief, and healing in the wake of trauma.

**Human Remains:** As iterated several times throughout this paper, it is of the utmost importance that human remains are respected and given proper burial. If the proper technological and human resources are available, victims should be identified and returned to their families; if this path is not an option, unidentified remains should be respectfully interred in a mass grave or tomb and kept separate from the exhibition.

## CONCLUSION

We cannot expect that the physical qualities of objects...can reconstitute a historic event for us. Even in combination with other documentary forms (photographs and film, written placards and brochures, audio-visual testimony, and guided tours), the question of what an event “looks like” resides in the mind – in those mental pictures gathered from outside the museum and even manufactured by one’s imagination. Yet objects may be indispensable in terms of providing some solidity and common reference point for collective memory. While any individual can play down, alter, or refuse a historical narrative, the existence of objects from that time, in a concrete present location, makes the reality of event not easily done away with.<sup>61</sup>

The memorial museum hybrid, by its nature as both an educational and commemorative institution, is responsible for ordering chaos in the wake of trauma, analyzing and interpreting artifacts for collection and exhibition, and ensuring that the reality of historical narratives are not denied by public consciousness. These museum sites are also capable of inspiring reconciliation and healing among society at large by creating tangible truth, promoting active discourse between survivors and younger generations, and promoting a newfound sense of normalcy by juxtaposing the old order against the new.

At a time in history when memorial museums and other commemorative projects are becoming particularly relevant, it is important to remember that these subjects must be dealt with in as thorough and exact a manner as possible. Despite mass desensitization to violence in the media on a global scale, the events and history at sites of trauma, and their subsequent preservation and representation in a historical context, disseminating these particular histories is still a highly emotional undertaking. Museum organizers must take care to provide an exact narrative of events, rooted in the documentation of the trauma, and ensure that the objects

---

<sup>61</sup> Williams, 49-50.

displayed in the final exhibition represent the history that *needs* to be told, not a reimagined history that perhaps survivors *want* to be told.

As some of the most effective memorial museums from around the world have shown, the best approach to achieve both the symbolic and pedagogical missions of the institution is to separate the spiritual from the secular. Within the museum facility, the historical narrative and exhibition, research library and archives, and other educationally-based aspects will address the build-up, climax, and aftermath of the event and related issues. Adjacent to the museum building, and within the terrain of the trauma, a commemorative space that honors (and in some cases houses) the victims and provides a space for mourning and contemplation should be constructed. Dealing with these aspects in separate spaces will better enable the museum to effectively address both the intellectual and emotional needs of the target audience, as well as prevent the perpetuation of victimhood and criminalization among the present population.

Memorial Museums are progressive sites. They articulate the sentiment of “never again;” however, this mission is achieved only if the institution is created in a forward-thinking manner, geared toward societal healing and inspiring youth to create a better tomorrow for themselves and their communities.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

9/11 Memorial, last modified 2014, <http://www.911memorial.org/museum-exhibition-design-1>.

Colwell-Chanthaphonh, Chip and David Hurst Thomas, "Unidentified Human Remains and the 9/11 Museum: Struggles of Advocacy and Consultation," *Anthropology News*, September 2011.

Doughty, Kristin, "Memorials, Human Rights, and Controversy in Post-Genocide Rwanda," *Anthropology News*, September 2011.

Gardner, Anthony M., "Complex Factors in Planning the September 11 Memorial Museum at the World Trade Center: Politics, Obstacles, Opportunities and a Planning Model" (2007). *Dissertations*. Paper 1155.

Hamber, Brandon, "Conflict Museums, Nostalgia, and Dreaming of Never Again," *Peace and Conflict: The Journal of Peace Psychology* 18, no. 3 (2012).

Koff, Clea, *The Bone Woman: A Forensic Anthropologist's Search for Truth in the Mass Graves of Rwanda, Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo* (New York: Random House, 2004).

Kor, Eva, "Eva Kor (Poland)," The Forgiveness Project, last modified March 29, 2010, <http://theforgivenessproject.com/stories/eva-kor-poland/>

Margry, Peter Jan, "Thou Shalt Memorialize: Memory and Amnesia in the Post-Secular," *Anthropology News*, September 2011.

"McVeigh's Car Coming to OKC Memorial," *KOCO.com Oklahoma City*, 20 April 2013, <http://www.koco.com/news/oklahomanews/okc/McVeigh-s-car-coming-to-OKC-Memorial/-/11777584/19828442/-/a2yojoz/-/index.html>

"McVeigh's Car to go on Display at the OKC Bombing Memorial Museum," *NewsOn6.com*, 22 April 2013, <http://www.newson6.com/story/22045602/mcveighs-car-to-go-display-at-okc-national-memorial>

Memorial and Museum Sachsenhausen. Brandenburg Memorials Foundation. <http://www.stiftung-bg.de/gums/en/index.htm>

Merbach, Anja, "From *Removing Uncomfortable Heritage, its Meaning and Consequence: A Case Study on the Fall of Political Public Monuments in the Former GDR*," in *A Reader in Uncomfortable Heritage and Dark Tourism*, ed. Sam Merrill and Leo Schmidt (Brandenburg: Brandenburgische Technische Universität Cottbus, 2010).

Morsch, Günter and Astrid Ley, *Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp 1936-1945: Events and Developments* (Berlin: Metropol, 2008).

Nachama, Andreas, *Topography of Terror: Gestapo, SS, and Reich Security Main Office on Wilhelm- and Prinz-Albrecht-Straße: A Documentation*, (Berlin: Stiftung Topographie des Terrors, 2010).

Naidu, Ereshnee, *Making Memory: Memorialization Efforts in the Middle East and North Africa, A Report on the First Meeting of MENA Memory Initiatives* (International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, 2012).

Naidu, Ereshnee, Bix Gabriel, and Mofidul Hoque, *From Memory to Action: A Toolkit for Memorialization in Post-Conflict Societies* (International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, 2012).

“Sharing the Past, Shaping the Future: A Rwandan Study Tour to Germany and Poland, January 2011,” YouTube, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-Aqz26TVRs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-Aqz26TVRs).

Turkle, Sherry, *Evocative Objects: Things We Think With* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007).

Williams, Paul, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (New York: Berg, 2007).