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## Exhibiting Atrocity

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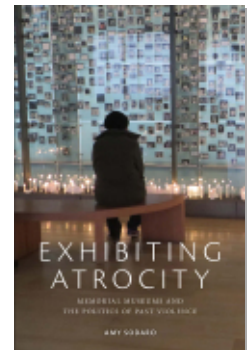
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## 7 • MEMORIAL MUSEUMS

### Promises and Limits

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Perhaps too much value is assigned to memory and not enough to thinking.

—Susan Sontag (2003)

Memorial museums are intended to be about both memory and thinking in the form of historical understanding; they are also aimed at inspiring emotional, affective responses and empathy. This is a broad mandate for any cultural institution; add to this their focus on the most sensitive of subject matter and memorial museums emerge as very complex institutions. In this final chapter, I would like to suggest a few broad conclusions about the form that can be drawn from these five case studies and reflected in dozens of other memorial museums around the world.

Through these case studies, I have endeavored to trace how and why the memorial museum form has emerged and how it is used around the world in the attempt to come to terms with past violence and atrocity. I have concluded that there are three primary functions that memorial museums are created to fulfill. The first is what we can consider their “museum” function—that is, their role as a mechanism of truth-telling about history and preserving the past; in this sense, they aspire to be houses of history where the past is uncovered, documented, and preserved, and the “truth” about what happened is revealed to their visitors. The second is what we can consider their “memorial” function, which is to serve as a space of healing and repair; in this they are a form of symbolic reparation that seeks to give acknowledgment to the victims and serve as a solemn space of mourning and remembrance in the effort to help heal and repair a community. The

final function embodies what is most new and unique about these museums and is the very reason that this hybrid form has emerged: they are intended to morally educate visitors to internalize an ethic of “never again.” Memorial museums consider themselves to be first and foremost a warning to the present and the future about the dangers of division, ideology, intolerance, and hatred. Their most lofty goal is to prevent future genocide, human rights abuses, and violence, and in their robust efforts to do so, they radically depart from many other forms of commemoration.

## PRESERVING THE PAST: MEMORIAL MUSEUMS AS TRUTH-TELLING MECHANISMS

Like other mechanisms for dealing with past conflicts, such as truth commissions or criminal prosecutions, one of the primary functions of memorial museums is to serve as a record of the past and to reveal and preserve the truth about what happened. This was the initial impulse behind the preservation of concentration camps like Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau immediately following World War II, which were early precursors to what has crystallized into the memorial museum form today. Lest it be forgotten what horrors were suffered on the sites, they were preserved. In the immediate sense, this preservation was pragmatic: should justice be sought, the evidence would be on hand to support accusations against perpetrators of the tremendous atrocities committed in the camps. But there was also a more enduring purpose for the preservation of the concentration camps that came out of a sense that the camps and the terrible past that they represented would be something that the future could learn from, reflecting memory’s utilitarian or consequentialist function. Similarly, memorial museums have at the center of their mission the function of preserving the past in order to tell the truth about what happened to present and future generations and to preclude those who might deny the history.

Museums have always been concerned with material culture and remains. History museums collect documents and artifacts in the name of preserving and telling history; natural history, science, and anthropology museums similarly collect specimens and artifacts not just for display but for scientific study; art museums’ functions are based on their collection of the authentic works of art, which have meaning and value precisely because of their authenticity and which are used for the study and preservation of

art history.<sup>1</sup> The museum as a cultural and educational form in society is charged, at least in part, with this function of preserving the past and its physical remains.

These material remains of the past, such as documents, photographs, films, and artifacts, serve as evidence of what happened, especially when dealing with violence, human rights abuses, and genocide. In some cases, such as Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, the detention center was left as it was found by the Vietnamese liberators of the city as “evidence” of the crimes committed and this evidence—including photographs, torture instruments, and documentation by the perpetrators—has recently been used in long-delayed international criminal proceedings against former Khmer Rouge leaders.<sup>2</sup> In other cases, like the District Six Museum, in Cape Town, South Africa, the material remains on display in the museum serve as evidence of what once existed and is now gone.<sup>3</sup> A map on the floor reconstructs a neighborhood that was razed to the ground, and artifacts, photographs, and other documents are the only physical reminders of the past. In the cases studied here, the use of artifacts, documents, and photos as material evidence may not be as obviously functional as in the cases of Tuol Sleng or District Six, but it serves a similar purpose. The material remains of the past are intended to document what happened thoroughly and convincingly so as to suppress any efforts to deny the events and to persist as a record for posterity of man’s inhumanity to man.

Further, as centers for scholarship, memorial museums seek to tell the story of the past in a way that is more in-depth and self-reflexive than their history museum precursors were able to. As we have seen, the growing awareness over the twentieth century of the social and political manipulations of the past in the service of the nation-state resulted in a new, apparently more reflective way of relating to the past, with a focus on its negative aspects, the victims or groups that were silenced or left behind, and righting its wrongs. Memorial museums, as products of this shift to the “politics of regret,” are not intended, therefore, to underpin the dominant versions of the past that the nation-state would have told—generally focused on the triumph and glories of the nation—but are intended to be more balanced, critical, and reflective in their telling of the past. They are also intended to be open to new scholarship and research on the past, hence their extensive programs of conferences, lectures, book launches, and other fora for sharing research and scholarship. However, each museum also has its own relationship to history, authenticity, and truth, as we’ve seen, which can complicate

their efforts to be houses of history, truth-telling, and preservation that embrace the new historiographical trends of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The USHMM has amassed the largest collection of Holocaust-related artifacts and documentation in the world: it has a vast database of photographs and documents that are accessible on its website and in its archive; it has acquired an authentic railway car from Poland, trees from Lithuania, milk tins from the Warsaw ghetto, and piles of personal belongings from Auschwitz; and it has hours of survivor video testimony playing on loop, recounting for visitors what “actually” happened, though individual memory is notoriously faulty. What it could not bring to Washington DC, the USHMM has reproduced: a cast of the ghetto wall of Warsaw reproduces it precisely, and a perfect reproduction of the Auschwitz “Arbeit Macht Frei” sign welcomes the visitor to *l’univers concentrationnaire*. Thousands of miles from the “scene of the crime,” the USHMM has placed a significant emphasis on authenticity and re-creation of the sites of suffering to bolster its mission as a site of preservation for future generations of the truth of the Holocaust. One of its primary purposes is to stifle any potential or real instances of Holocaust denial, and with the vast amounts of real and re-created material and documentary, photographic, and filmed evidence that it displays, the museum seems very well positioned to accomplish this goal; only one who is completely blinded by hatred could maintain denial in the face of such compelling evidence.

The USHMM is also a huge center for scholarship on the Holocaust. The museum’s Jack, Jason and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies is an extremely active center for research on the Holocaust, sponsoring fellowships, faculty and teacher trainings, conferences and lecture series, workshops for scholars, and publications, including the journal *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*. Its purpose is “to shed new light on significant topics, fill gaps in the literature, and facilitate access to study of the Holocaust for scholars and the general public” (USHMM “About the Mandel Center”). It acknowledges that our understanding of the history of the Holocaust is expanding and changing, and it seeks to accommodate this by putting itself at the center of the new scholarship. Unlike history museums of the nineteenth century, the USHMM attempts to both capture and flow with the nuance of history and historiography, including asking difficult questions and raising contentious issues, and remain at the forefront of Holocaust research. Though as we have seen, despite all these

efforts, it remains a highly Americanized telling of the Holocaust, infused with American principles and ideals.

The House of Terror has a slightly different truth-telling mission and relationship to scholarship and historiography. While indeed its intent is to document the “truth” about life under communism, it is not necessarily outright denial that it is fighting, but rather, the possibility of the Hungarian people, especially younger generations, forgetting or not understanding just how terrible communism was. For the House of Terror, a large part of enforcing remembrance of the horrors of communism is challenging what it views as the dominant historiography that places the Holocaust and fascism at the center of totalitarian evils of the twentieth century and creates the perceived taboo of comparing fascism and communism. Therefore, central to the House of Terror’s mission is questioning the scholarly positions that the museum’s creators see as dominant, especially in Western Europe and the United States. In the effort to document and preserve the absolute terror of communist “occupation” in Hungary, though, the House of Terror undermines what could be one of its greatest strengths in fulfilling its mission, which is the power of the historical space in which it is located. The House of Terror is in a building steeped with history, but apparent disregard for authenticity in its displays, exhibitions, and reconstructions takes the power from the building. Ironically, it should be one of the most “authentic” museums examined in this book and so be able to provide compelling material evidence of what happened, but it instead is the most theatrical, resulting in a deeply cynical rendering of the past. Much of the museum’s “evidence” of communist crimes and terror is manipulated in a way that undermines the museum’s efforts at preserving and disseminating the truth about the past.

The Kigali Centre is also intended to preserve the truth of what happened to prevent and forestall efforts at genocide denial. As an unprecedentedly well-documented genocide, there seems to be little space for denial, and the museum has compelling photographic, documentary, and testimonial evidence of the hundred-day genocide. Though it is not on the site of a particular massacre, the more than 250,000 individuals buried on the site postgenocide give it a heavy air of authenticity and lend further credence to its tale that is, unfortunately, all too believable.

However, as we have also seen, increasingly in Kagame’s Rwanda, denying the genocide or questioning the official version is a highly punishable crime and one that tends to be invoked anytime someone of public import

voices opposition to Kagame's regime or policies. Therefore, the museum must tread an extremely careful line between telling and preserving the truth about the genocide and serving as a form of government propaganda intended to prop up a dictatorial regime. At the moment, until it takes a harder look at the postgenocide massacres by the RPF, the ongoing consequences of the genocide in the DRC, and the repressive policies of the present regime, it threatens to lean more toward propaganda than documentary and truth-telling. As long as the genocide remains a political tool—for use by all sides—truth-telling will be very difficult, as will being at the center of new scholarship on the genocide if the museum and its associates must follow the official history.

Like the others, the Museum of Memory and Human Rights (MMHR) also seeks to reveal and preserve the truth, in this case about Chile's fifteen-year military dictatorship. Chile's fraught transition to democracy did not allow for immediate confrontation with the past beyond attempting to uncover the truth about what had happened. Following the recommendations and findings of the two truth commissions, then, the museum reflects Chile's efforts to reveal the truth in a way that can help the country move forward. The nature of state terrorism in Latin America and Chile was deeply secretive, especially disappearance as a tactical strategy by the junta. While the bodies of those disappeared may never be recovered, the hope in Chile and throughout the region is that at least the truth about what happened to them can be told. The MMHR is a key mechanism for telling this truth in a way that can reach a broader audience than a truth commission report or the proceedings of a criminal trial. Thus the museum has provided not just a home for the substantial archives collected by the human rights NGOs in Chile but also a permanent space where Chileans can go to learn about their recent past. Because Chilean politics remain divided today, however, the truth that the Chilean museum tells is perhaps only partial, with a very narrow focus on the years of dictatorship that hinder deeper understanding of the causes of the abuses that are so well documented in the museum.

The 9/11 Museum, like the House of Terror, is also on an authentic historic site and seeks to harness the power of the site in its truth-telling and preservation efforts. The colossal slurry wall, tridents, and other pieces of the Twin Towers speak to the enormity of the buildings and their destruction. And like the USHMM, the 9/11 Museum has a massive collection of documents, photograph, artifacts, and audio recordings. However, unlike

the other of the museums in this book, 9/11 is an event that was highly mediated and globally witnessed even while it was unfolding, meaning the truth does not necessarily need to be revealed and preserved. Nevertheless, it was deemed important to create a museum full of documentary and material evidence to preserve the truth of the event. In its acknowledgment of the conspiracy theories, the exhibit suggests that part of the museum's purpose is to counter those who believe that the attacks were even more heinous and nefarious than they actually were. But proving these theories wrong is not the purpose of the museum. Rather, it preserves the "truth" about 9/11 as a reminder to the United States and the world of the innocence and good of America in the face of a new, radical evil. The "truth-telling" of the museum is a way to bolster US national identity and invite into the fold all those who are "with us," dividing the world into good versus evil. Further, the terrible tale of September 11 that the museum tells serves to justify US political and military responses to 9/11 that have gone against the very American ideals the museum purports to uphold.

Of course in all these cases, the intention of memorial museums to be truth-telling mechanisms that preserve the past for posterity assumes that there is some "truth" in the past worthy of—and requiring—preservation. Like Hannah Arendt's image of Walter Benjamin as a pearl diver searching for the hidden meanings of the past, memorial museums seek to dredge from the depths of the past pearls of truth that they deem essential to preserve and musealize for the future. However, which pearls they excavate and bring to the surface and how they are displayed and narrated does much to shape our present understanding of the past. A close reading of these museums' exhibitions tells us more about the present's needs and desires vis-à-vis the past than about the past itself. True, the photographs, documents, film footage, and other artifacts from the past are existential realities and serve as evidence that can help us understand what happened and prove that indeed massive crimes were committed. However, which pieces of "evidence" are chosen and how they are arranged and presented can dramatically shape the story of the past into a narrative that fits present needs. The past as told in these museums is indeed composed of pearls of "truth," but how they are put together—artfully as in the USHMM or more crudely as in the House of Terror—can change and shape our reading and understanding of history, from a subtle emphasis on American values to a disturbingly imbalanced, highly political maneuvering for political power in the present.



## HEALING THE PRESENT: MEMORIAL MUSEUMS AS SPACES OF REPAIR AND REMEMBRANCE

The second primary function of memorial museums, and one that is as important as preserving a record of the past, is what we might consider their memorial function: memorial museums are a form of reparation, solemn remembrance, and healing. They are intended, to varying degrees depending on how much time has lapsed, as spaces for survivors and families to find peace and healing that comes from public acknowledgment and recognition of the wrongs that they or their loved ones suffered and that is provided by a public space in which their memory is preserved and honored. Throughout human history, individuals and communities have used public ceremonies and spaces to commemorate their loved ones, and memorial museums serve a similar function to cemeteries, memorials, and other forms of public remembrance and acknowledgment of loss. This is based on the assumption that memory is necessary as a part of healing; though of course this assumption overlooks the potential of memory to incite violence, divide people, and open old wounds.

Despite this other very real potential of memory, memorial museums are built upon the assumption that memory heals, and accordingly each of these memorial museums has at least one purely memorial component that is intended to be a space for quiet contemplation and remembrance: the USHMM has the Hall of Remembrance where an eternal flame burns and where hushed visitors sit and contemplate what they have just seen in the exhibit or light candles in memory of the victims. The House of Terror has the memorial Hall of Tears, where eerie lights wave gently on delicate crosses, echoing the memorial trope of the eternal flame and evoking a cemetery. Not only does the Kigali Centre have the Children's Memorial and memorial rotunda, but the entire site is a memorial, with mass graves beautifully landscaped into the rose gardens and around the memorial fountain, where an eternal flame burns. The eternal flame is replicated, and includes photographs, in the MMHR's Area of Remembrance, where quiet contemplation is just one function; visitors can also gather information about victims in the database. This effort to restore individual humanity through photographs and life details is even more robustly realized in the 9/11 Museum where the memorial room not only displays a photo of each victim but also has searchable databases and projects individual profiles.

And of course, upstairs and outside are the gigantic memorial pools if the memory in the museum does not suffice.

Each museum also has, as a central part of its mission, a memorial function aimed at this perceived power of memory to heal individuals and communities: the USHMM is intended “to preserve the memory of those who suffered”; the House of Terror is built to be a “monument to the memory of those held captive, tortured and killed in this building.” The Kigali Centre, for which memory and healing is more pressing, has deemed itself a “permanent memorial to those who fell victim to the genocide and serves as a place for people to grieve those they lost.” The MMHR is envisioned as the “country’s most significant effort to recuperate buried words and return to its own self pieces of its lost heart” (Zurita 2011, 27). And the 9/11 Museum sets as a goal that “the lives of every victim of the 2001 and 1993 attacks will be commemorated as visitors . . . learn about the men, women, and children who died” (9/11 Memorial “Museum”).

Public projects of commemoration can do much to provide a sense of restoration to individuals and communities and can help assuage some of the suffering. The mere existence of each of these museums, and their very high profiles in their own countries and around the world, means that the suffering of the victims of the Holocaust; communism (and fascism) in Hungary; the Rwandan genocide; torture, detention, and disappearance under Pinochet’s regime; and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 have been duly acknowledged by a government that prioritizes recognition of wrongs committed, redress for suffering, and a new direction for the future. These museums also create communities of and for victims, survivors, and families, providing a space for shared memories, pain, and understanding. Survivors work or volunteer in some of these museums, such as at the USHMM, the Kigali Centre, and the 9/11 Museum, perhaps finding some sense of relief in sharing their stories with each other and visitors.

But the function of repair and restoration goes beyond individual or even community remembrance and these museums are not for the victims or survivors alone; as forms of symbolic reparations, memorial museums have important social, political, and international roles to play. As symbolic reparations, memorial museums attempt to turn the knowledge that their historical, truth-telling side produces—at least in part—into public acknowledgment of the suffering of victims. This recognition and the acknowledgment of victimization are considered to be two of the first steps toward healing and repairing both the individual lives that have been

broken and the social fabric that has been shredded. And there is hardly a more effective place for this to happen than an expensive, state-sponsored museum that is prominent not only among the national public but also on the international stage.

To see how memorial museums function as a form of symbolic reparation and seek to repair at the individual, social, and international levels, it is useful to return again to Hannah Arendt's notion of the "promise" (1958). I have argued that memorial museums are built as a promise to the future that such violence, intolerance, hatred, and atrocity will not be allowed to occur. This message is aimed not only toward those who suffered and their families but also toward society more broadly—including perpetrators, bystanders, and those with no experience of the atrocities and crimes being remembered—as well as toward the international community. Not only is the promise of memorial museums evident to their local, national, and international visitors, but the museum itself is an external symbol to the world that the present (and future) regime(s) will not allow such violence to recur. Memorial museums serve as society's "prosthetic conscience"—a social contract with the present and future.

The memorial museum as promise to its own public and to the world is evident in the speeches made at the opening of the museums studied here; the creators of these museums and the politicians who dedicated them were clearly looking to the ruins of the past as the basis on which to promise a better future. President Clinton called the USHMM "an investment in a secure future against whatever insanity lurks ahead," assuring America and the world that America had learned from her lessons of inaction during the Holocaust (1993). At the opening of the House of Terror, Viktor Orbán promised, "We now lock fear and hatred behind bars, because we do not want them to have a place in our future lives" (House of Terror Guide, 67). In Rwanda, Kagame opened the Kigali Centre looking to the future: "We cannot turn the clock back nor can we undo the harm caused, but we have the power to determine the future and to ensure that what happened never happens again" (2004). Michele Bachelet, in opening the MMHR, echoed Kagame, saying, "We cannot change the past. All that remains for us is to learn from what we have lived. This is our responsibility and our challenge" (Kornbluh and Hite 2010). And on opening the 9/11 Museum, Barack Obama declared that the museum would not only capture "the true spirit of 9/11—love, compassion, sacrifice" but "enshrine it forever in the heart of our nation" (2014).

Each of these museums stands as a symbol that the regime responsible for its creation acknowledges and remembers the destruction wrought by other regimes of violence and, through this acknowledgment, promises to be different. While each context is different, the message is the same: this negative and violent past is behind “us” and that healing for survivors, families, the nation and all of human kind can begin, since the evils of the past have been locked up in display cases and musealized for posterity. Implicit in the creation of memorial museums, then, is that the past is truly past. In this sense, memorializing through a (state-sponsored and official) museum is a luxury available to those nations and communities that are no longer in conflict and have the political, social, and economic means to put the past behind them. This underlines the legitimating potential of memorial museums as public way of demonstrating the “door has been slammed” on the violent past (Orbán, qtd. in Rev 2008, 78) and that a new direction has been set for the future. Thus the regime that builds a memorial museum sets itself apart from the previous, destructive regimes and sees a brighter, more peaceful and liberal-democratic future ahead.

However, again we must take into account the particular political and cultural context of each museum. In the United States, it was President Carter who started the USHMM project fifteen years before Clinton dedicated the museum with his sweeping rhetoric, and Carter’s motivation was purely political. In Hungary, Orbán and his Fidesz Party built the House of Terror as a central part of their difficult reelection campaign, dedicating it as a promise to their constituents on the eve of an election they would lose. In Rwanda, the Kigali Centre is caught up in the Kagame government’s hegemonic discourse on the genocide, dissenters of which are jailed or worse. The MMHR tiptoes so carefully around contemporary politics that it hardly is able to tell its story, and the 9/11 Museum goes so far as to seem to justify blatantly nondemocratic, damaging, and deadly actions by the US government. It is therefore the *rhetoric* around making a promise to the future and drawing the line between past and present, between that regime and this, that unites these museums and the museums’ politics dramatically limit the possibility that such a promise will be effective.

## SHAPING THE FUTURE: MEMORIAL MUSEUMS AS SITES FOR MORAL EDUCATION

While memorial museums are intended to present an accurate record of the past and serve as a form of reparation, restoration, and healing, their primary goal, as both museum and memorial, is to morally educate their publics to embrace democratic values and internalize the moral imperative of “never again.” Museums always serve the purpose of education; however, memorial museums seek to balance their intellectual-historical narratives with affective-emotional experiences that will impact the visitor more fully and, in this way, morally transform her to come away from the museum with a new moral sensibility. While precisely what this sensibility is may differ from case to case—in the USHMM and 9/11 Museum, it’s an embrace of American values of democracy, freedom, innocence, and (a particular form of) tolerance; in the House of Terror and the MMHR, it’s the value of democracy over dictatorship; and in the Kigali Centre, it’s the dangers of divisionism and genocide ideology—in each museum, the goal is to create a newly moral public that will work to prevent future violence. It is not enough to reach the mind of the visitor so that she comes away with a more thorough understanding of the past; the museums also strive to reach the visitor’s heart, so she absorbs the lessons of history and actively puts those lessons to work in the present and the future. They attempt to use empathy, affect, and emotion to educate the visitor against what Adorno referred to as the “coldness of reason,” which he believed lies at the heart of modern society and its most damning moment—Auschwitz.

Of course, many other memorials today have such preventative aspirations built into them; Santayana’s dictum that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” is one of the dominant justifications underpinning the memorial frenzy of the day. We have seen that there appears to be a strong ethical demand to remember, based in part in the belief that memory can help prevent violence in the future. Around the world, human rights memorials are being constructed at a dizzying rate as communities, societies, and nations struggle to learn from past violence and prevent it in the future. However, it appears that experiential memorial museums are perceived to be especially well-equipped to create an emotional *and* intellectual experience that will morally impact the visitor in a way that a memorial cannot do, creating Alison Landsberg’s “prosthetic memory” with all of its ethical potential. It is their particular ability to reach

visitors' hearts *and* minds and their lofty goals of morally transforming their publics that set memorial museums apart from other forms of commemoration and makes them a unique and entirely new cultural form for remembering the past.

As I have noted, museums play a particular role in society; they are spaces of education that produce and disseminate what Carol Duncan calls "secular knowledge," which "functions in our society as higher, authoritative truth" (1995, 90). Despite our postmodern skepticism of "truth" and "history," even today we tend to visit museums expecting a degree of authenticity, objectivity, and truth that we may not expect from a more artistic and abstract form of commemoration like the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin or the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC. Museums are still presumed to be houses of history, with the "facts" and "evidence" laid out in an objective manner that tells us the truth about what happened. The experience of a museum is different from more abstract forms of commemoration, and the "higher, authoritative truth" of a museum is clearly believed to have a powerful impact on visitors, and so museums are considered an important—if not essential—way to deal with a difficult past.

Museums also provide a regulated and mediated experience beyond that of a different kind of memorial; most if not all memorial museums use a controlled path that leads the visitor not only through the narrative but also through the experience of the exhibition, and each step of the way is highly mediated with a particular visitor experience in mind, though of course visitors bring their own experiences and backgrounds to their visits and may have a completely different experience than that which is intended. But unlike memorials that are clearly open to multiple interpretations and experiences, memorial museums do not appear to allow for the same level of interpretative freedom. This makes their messages and experiences especially powerful, as museums are a voice of authoritative truth; this is especially true of the state-sponsored "official" memorial museums like those I have considered here.

Further, museums create a particular audience experience. Tony Bennett describes the "exhibitionary complex" in which the crowd both sees the exhibition and sees itself as part of the exhibition, thus learning self-regulation—"a society watching over itself" (1999, 341). For Bennett, the museum works not unlike a panopticon in that its visitors internalize the discipline they acquire, knowing that they are being watched. He

describes the history of the museum as intended to provide spiritual uplift for the working class masses; part of the goal of early museums was to teach the lower classes self-regulation that would persist outside the museum in their social life. Similarly, memorial museums wish to see their visitors take a moral message away with them that will help improve society. Memorial museums, in attempting to reach the “heart” of the visitor, work to create a personalized experience of the exhibit—one that the visitor can connect to her own life and experience. But at the same time, the museum experience is a public one, and the fact that one is “experiencing” the suffering of the past with others is extremely important. If indeed part of the function of the museum is to create a self-regulating public, then a memorial museum takes it a step further and seeks to create a *morally* self-regulating public. Not only are the museums’ visitors aware of and so internalize how they behave while experiencing the exhibition, but the memorial museum also seeks for them to internalize, with the discipline of being watched, the moral lesson of the past that they have learned in the museum, leading to a new moral discipline in everyday life. Together with self-regulation in how they experience the past, memorial museums’ visitors are intended to also internalize the values that oppose the horrors on display in the museum in a way that they will carry into the future.

But how is it, exactly, that museums attempt to make the leap from a powerful emotional experience in the museum to a moral transformation and shift in moral sensibility that will be sustained beyond the museum visit? The primary way that they attempt to do this is by making their visitors *identify* with the “victims,” in this way instilling them with *empathy* and the ability to connect the past and its trauma to their own lives.

The methods through which they do this vary according to the message and goal of each museum, as well as who the museum’s primary audience is. The USHMM, for example, is primarily aimed at a US audience, almost all of whom are too young to have any direct experience of the Holocaust; therefore, it aims to bring this distant traumatic experience closer to home in a way that encourages visitors to make connections to their own lives. In addition to the many experiential and affective exhibit components described earlier, the most obvious method is the identity card given to each visitor as they enter the permanent exhibit; divided by gender, the passport-like “identities” are there to accompany the visitor through the permanent exhibit.<sup>4</sup> The cards give some basic biographical information about an individual victim or survivor of the Holocaust, with details such as where and

when he or she was born, his or her experience under the Nazi regime, and his or her ultimate fate. In this way, the nameless and faceless millions whose story the museum is telling are condensed into one individual with whom the visitor “experiences” the Holocaust.

The exhibition’s experiential tactics make the visitor a part of the Holocaust “experience” with this individual. This begins already in the elevator that ascends to the beginning of the exhibition, in which one cannot escape the terror and disbelief of the American service man describing the camps. Released from the elevator, the visitor becomes a player in the Holocaust script, standing opposite the American service men at Ohrdruf with a similar gaping look of disbelief at the pit of bodies that confronts her. The horrors continue throughout the exhibit, as the visitor is first bombarded by “history” and then swept into the inconceivable evil of the Holocaust itself; the Warsaw ghetto is re-created to make the visitor “walk in the steps” of those who perished there before being “transported” in an actual train car to pass under the ominous Auschwitz sign, following the path of the millions that entered and never returned. The architecture of the building and the design of the exhibition are also intended to create spaces of claustrophobia to help re-create the experience of the Holocaust’s victims; there are moments when escape appears to be impossible. In re-creating *l’univers concentrationnaire*, the museum forces the visitor into the role of victim, aiding their sense of identification with those who perished and with the individual whose ID they hold.

Similarly, the House of Terror is aimed at a national audience of individuals who may not have a personal memory of the events; as Schmidt and her cocreators averred, the museum was created to show young Hungarians the terror of living under communist occupation (M. Schmidt, personal communication). Therefore, the exhibit centers on the national trauma of Hungary’s occupation(s). Each room is punctuated by a quote that “every Hungarian will know,” and throughout, the founding myths of post-1989 Hungary are highlighted: Hungary throwing off the chains of occupation and Hungary for Hungarians (A. Mathe, personal communication). Dark spots on Hungary’s past, such as its own Arrow Cross movement and collaboration with both the fascist and communist occupiers, are drastically minimized and internal “enemies,” such as the Arrow Cross or Hungarian Communist Party, are portrayed as a small core of bad apples, while the “real” Hungarians were innocent victims. The narrative of the exhibition creates a Hungarian “us” that won the struggle against “them,” thus drawing



in young Hungarians to identify with their past. As Zsolt Horvath argues (2007), in Hungary's present political rhetoric and in the museum *all* Hungarians are victims and so too then are all who identify and empathize with them, as one cannot help but do in the museum.

Like the USHMM, the House of Terror also uses highly experiential techniques to encourage identification with the victims of the occupiers and encourage empathy with the innocent Hungarians who were terrorized. Throughout, not only do the audio devices allow the visitor to hear individual stories of terror and suffering, but also the act of listening to the old-fashioned phone or communist-era surveillance headphones takes the visitor back in time to experience what it was "really like." Haunting music sets the mood, and the lighting and other effects underscore the visceral experience; the building itself, with its winding rooms, tight spaces, and maze-like interior helps flesh out this experience of the past and the Kafkaesque nightmare of totalitarianism. Finally, the visitor's very long descent to the bowels of the terrible building, in an agonizingly slow elevator filled with terrible description of political execution, begins the claustrophobic climax of the exhibitionary experience, as the visitor is encouraged to enter the torture and detention cells. Squatting in cells that are too low to stand in, or standing in cells that are too narrow to sit in, the visitor's experiential immersion in the innocent and victimized Hungarian past is complete, and the visitor is meant to come out of the exhibit understanding what the thousands of victims of the communist (and fascist) regime(s) underwent. This empathy, then, is intended to underpin an appreciation for the (right-wing) democracy that replaced communism, despite its apparent difficulties.

The Kigali Centre has a slightly different aim, as its terrible past is more recent, and so the question of identification and connection to the present is not as pressing; many visitors to the museum experienced the genocide all too acutely and do not need to be made to feel as if they did. Nevertheless, as I've pointed out, the museum is also very much aimed at international visitors as well as Rwandans (mostly Tutsi) who returned to the country from exile following the genocide. Therefore, the museum uses many similar tactics to make the visitor who may not have direct experience of the genocide identify with what happened. One of the key ways that the Kigali Centre does this is in its efforts to emphasize the individuality of the victims, through their photographs, testimony, and personal belongings, to encourage further identification. This tactic is especially evident in

the haunting memorial rooms in which one is surrounded by the material remains of the destruction; while the bones are oddly impersonal reminders of the terror, stripped of anything but wounds that would identify the individual from which they came, the photographs and the personal effects like clothing have an immediacy that visitors can connect to. Rwandan visitors clearly identify intensely with these artifacts, evidenced by the fact that the photos are often taken. But even international visitors cannot help but identify and empathize. The color family photos of birthdays and other celebrations, the Cornell University sweatshirt, the huge, innocent eyes of the extralarge photos in the children's memorial individualize what is a staggering trauma and draw the visitor in to identify with the individual victims who are portrayed *just like them*. And while the genocide happened far away, it is not far from the visitor's mind that the international community failed to prevent or stop it.

The MMHR similarly seeks to restore individual identity to the victims in a way that helps visitors identify with them and their suffering. This is evident in the memorial photos that line the wall of the museum, but even more affective in the section on the torture tactics of the junta. Here, in a dark and foreboding room, and over the most heinous instrument of torture of all, the *parilla*, the visitor watches the agony of individuals describing the ways in which they were tortured. The stories of different individuals, on a split screen, alternate and together form a disjointed but all too frighteningly coherent description of pain, humiliation, and terror and the effort of the torturers to strip all humanity from their victims. While visitors may not be able to feel or imagine such terrible abuses, the individuals who experienced it are immediate in their words and images, and their suffering is contagious. Any abstract historical understanding of the institutional inner-workings of Pinochet's regime, for example, are immediately elapsed as one listens to the anguishing stories. To counter this dehumanization, the exhibits on the artifacts created by prisoners give a sense of the hope that persisted in the face of such torture, which is almost more affecting than the tortured testimonies themselves. The victims, though tortured so heinously, retained their humanity and hope.

The 9/11 Museum similarly uses testimony, photographs, architecture, and artifacts to experientially draw the visitor in to make her identify with the victims. However, as a truly twenty-first-century museum, it has a powerful tool that the others do not: the use of audio recordings of the victims themselves before they died. While all the museums here use

audio effectively—historical recordings, testimony, music, and other sound effects—it is the voices of those who were killed on 9/11 that are particularly haunting and that inspire deep empathy and identification. Again and again, a husband leaves voice mail messages for his wife, assuring her that he is OK; with each beep of the answering machine, the visitor imagines her agony listening to those messages knowing that he did not make it out of the burning building. Frantic 911 calls and dispatches capture the immediacy of the event and the terror that it instilled—reminding one of the meaning of terrorism, which has become abstract in today’s discourse. Frightened passengers on the doomed planes call their loved ones to say good-bye; their terrible composure forces the individual to wonder what her response would be in the face of impending death. These audio recordings draw the visitor deep into the fear, chaos, and destruction of 9/11, but also the love and compassion expressed that day in an extremely affective and powerful way, and remind the visitor that the victims were just like her, simply going about their innocent daily routines, targeted for nothing they had done, but simply for being free.

This effort to make the visitor “experience” the past in a way that leads to empathy with the victims, however distant and different they might be, is intended to create Landsberg’s “prosthetic memory.” In experiential spaces of our contemporary mass culture, such as memorial museums, visitors who are brought face to face with the past can actually form a memory of a past trauma. But this “prosthetic memory” is not of the actual event itself but of the “mass-mediated experience of a traumatic event” (2004, 19). This potential for individuals to form a memory of a past that was not actually experienced by way of a mediated cultural form is celebrated by Landsberg as opening the door to ethical and moral transformation. Like the creators of the museums described in this book, she sees in prosthetic memory the potential to effect progressive social and political change. Prosthetic memory, because it does not require that an individual actually experience the event, takes away any “biological or ethnic claims of ownership” of the past; according to Landsberg, “Rather than atomizing people, prosthetic memories open up collective horizons of experience and pave the way for unexpected political alliances” (2004, 143) and “opens up memories and identities to persons from radically different backgrounds” (2004, 11). In this, Landsberg argued, prosthetic memory can bring about real change. Prosthetic memory thus has a synergistic connection to Levy and Sznajder’s cosmopolitan memory imperative or Rothberg’s multidirectional memory,

in which memories of diverse and divergent pasts are not in competition but compatible, and in fact, the traumatic past of one group may help another to articulate and remember their own.

The use of experiential learning to inspire empathy and identification in order to alter the moral sensibility of the visitor is precisely what memorial museums aim and purport to do. However, as the histories and contexts of the museums examined here demonstrate quite clearly, the past is always subject to interpretation, which is usually political, and the hope or belief that a prosthetic memory of a traumatic past can transcend group or national ownership and is devoid of the exclusivity of other, more traditional forms of memory (such as nineteenth-century memorials and monuments) is overly optimistic. These museums are political projects, and as lofty as their intentions to morally educate their publics might be, the messages conveyed by memorial museums tend to fall in line with the dominant political agenda of the creator(s). While the past might appear to be open to claims of ownership by any and all visitors, the prosthetic memory created by the museum is of a very particular version of the past; and as we have seen, despite the transnational forms and movements of memory, it is still a national past that is much more hegemonic than the museums acknowledge. In this sense, rather than liberating and holding the potential for political and social change, prosthetic memories as formed in memorial museums might simply reinforce hegemonic, national views of the past, present, and future. Yet they have an undeniable force derived from the affect, emotion, and empathy that forms them and, in this way, are potentially even more dangerous than previous forms of hegemonic memory. Rwanda is the obvious case to watch for the potential dangers of prosthetic memory, but Hungary's continued swing to the far right and the wave of right-wing populism in the United States also reflect the potential danger of the kind of nationalistic narrative of the past displayed in these museums.

## THE UNSTATED GOALS OF MEMORIAL MUSEUMS

While memorial museums have a set of explicitly stated goals that encompass preserving the past and "telling the truth," serving as a space of reparation and healing, and morally educating their publics, they have another set of implicit functions on the national and international level and are—whether stated or not—tools of political legitimation intended to

demonstrate that the regimes that build them have come to terms with the past, made amends to the victims, and promised a better future.

Carol Duncan argued that art museums serve a legitimating function in the modern nation-state. We can easily apply her words about art museums in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to memorial museums in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: “Having a [memorial] museum is a sign of political virtue and national identity—of being recognizably a member of the civilized community of modern, liberal nations” (Duncan 1995, 89). Memorial museums are continuing to be built around the world at such a tremendous rate in large part because they serve this sort of legitimating function. For countries transitioning to democracy (or attempting to), coming to terms with past violence, or working to placate groups that feel that they have been victimized, memorial museums provide a way to publicly recognize suffering and victimization, close the door on the past with the promise of a better future, and produce and disseminate knowledge about the past to morally and civically educate their publics. And as I have noted, during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, facing the past through the lens of political regret has been high on the agenda for many, many nations as central to their ambitions to be recognized as legitimate political players in the international community. It is no wonder, then, that they are looking to do this in part through the use of memorial museums.

Memorial museums also mark (or purport to) the fact that the past is over; they provide a way—as we have seen especially in the case of Rwanda and Chile—to draw a thick black line between past and present, making the past a distinct and terrible entity that is just that: past. This is crucial for new governments and/or nations that are attempting to differentiate themselves from what came before and promising their people a better future. President Clinton did this at the opening of the USHMM, when he promised the American people that such regimes would not be allowed to flourish under his watch; Orbán and Fidesz used the House of Terror as a way to slam the door on the past, forever ending foreign, totalitarian occupation and mapping a new course for Hungary’s future. The Kigali Centre and Kagame have set the Rwandan genocide apart as a discrete event with beginning, middle, and end, placing the Rwanda of the past, with its racial and ethnic divisions and pervasive genocide ideology, very much apart from the Rwanda of the present and future. The MMHR turns the page on the past with the 1988 plebiscite, not even acknowledging the divisive politics that continue today. And the 9/11 Museum contains its narrative primarily to a

mere 102 minutes with no substantive recognition of the consequences of 9/11 and the United States' response that continue to reverberate today. As I've noted, this sort of memory is a luxury for those who are able to demonstrate that the past is truly past, and claiming such can be a large step toward political legitimacy and international recognition of a new regime or its policies, especially in an age in which the "politics of regret" is a central principle of legitimation. Thus perhaps the most important goal, though unstated, is to claim international political legitimacy for the regime creating the museum and the domestic and international actions and policies it pursues.

However, as this study has shown, in the words of Faulkner, "the past is never dead. It's not even past." As much as these regimes would like to use memorial museums to leave the past behind, the museums themselves reveal the battles of the past, present, and future raging in the communities, publics, and nations that build them. Perhaps the greatest insight that we can gain from them is that there is no one version of the past that existentially determines the present and future, but rather that past is always changing, open to interpretation and representation and ready to be put to use in and by the present for whatever political ends are so desired.

Our present relationship to the past is conflicted. On the one hand, we recognize that it is socially constructed and often mobilized around present needs and desires; on the other, we hope to get from it some essential "truth" that we can learn from in order to create a better future. However, these positions vis-à-vis the past are uncomfortable bedfellows. We are skeptical of the tools that we are using at the very same moment that we are using them to work toward progress and a more perfect world. The postmodern rejection of the promises of modernity belies the modern idea underpinning memorial museums: through knowledge and education, we can learn from the past to create a present and future. Revealing the political nature of memorial museums presents a difficult challenge to some of the fundamental presumptions behind their creation—that education leads to prevention, that there is an inherent value in commemoration of atrocity and trauma, and that memory has a direct connection to democracy. Rather, as these cases suggest, while well-intended, the rhetoric around prevention, democracy, and peace may be just that—rhetoric. Rather, the negative past is simply the new battleground on which to fight present battles, and following Halbwachs, this past is socially constructed by and for the present according to the political realities of the day. Whatever "truths" the past might hold are at the service of the present, and so these museums

tell us much more about the present societies that construct them and the expectations of the international community vis-à-vis the past than they do about the terrible and tragic pasts that they are remembering.

## CONCLUSION

On the surface, these memorial museum initiatives appear to be a highly innovative, ambitious, and effective way to come to terms with a difficult past. They represent what is most noble in our convictions: we can learn from past mistakes through engaged and open dialogue and education about the past and thus create a better present and future built upon empathy with our fellow human beings. They also represent an ambitious attempt to confront the past and to make amends and right historical injustice. The fact of acknowledgment of victimization and injustice alone is important, and expensive initiatives like these museums can go a long way toward righting wrongs. In their ambitions, they also strive for something totally new in the project of commemoration—a self-reflexivity and reflection that was not present in previous memorials and monuments. These museums seek to present the past in a way that does not forestall dialogue and understanding but contributes to an ongoing discourse between and among a variety of diverse publics, across past, present, and future. In this way, they are intended to be bulwarks of democratic values and to symbolize a commitment to nonviolence, tolerance, and peace.

And yet, it is impossible to divorce the political reality from the rhetoric and good intentions. Memorial museums are at heart political projects. This does not mean that the good intentions are not there or are deliberate facades for more devious political projects. Rather, it appears that memory today, despite all the good intentions, continues to support and sustain the dominant narratives of the past as delineated by the existing powers that be and their priorities. True, today these priorities are focused on the negative past and fall within the “politics of regret,” but rather than critical spaces of reflection on the negative past, memorial museums tend more toward a celebration of the present as—and because it is—distinct from the past; by exhibiting what is most terrible in the past, they reinforce the superiority of the present. This is surprisingly not so far from the mobilization of memory in the nineteenth century around the political agendas and goals of the hegemonic nation-state.

However, there is reason to hope that these museums will actually contribute to a more peaceful and democratic present and future. Their visitor books and online review sites like TripAdvisor are filled with passionate pledges to never forget so that “never again” can such violence occur, suggesting that individual attitudes are shaped by the experience of memorial museums. However, it is clear that despite the global proliferation of memorial museums calling for “never again,” again and again violence, genocide, and atrocity are committed, often with the international community’s full knowledge. So even if indeed individual attitudes are altered in a meaningful way, societal change does not necessarily follow, and memorial museums’ (and memory’s) imperative to aid in the prevention of future violence seems hollow.

Despite the collapse of modernity’s belief in progress, memorial museums continue to cling to the notion that confronting the negative past can lead to a better future, reflecting broader assumptions about the ethical duty to remember. Indeed, the theories engaged in this book positing an increasingly transnational, traveling, cosmopolitan, or multidirectional memory are hopeful that with globalization’s shrinking of the world, individuals and collectives will be more interconnected, their negative pasts interwoven and articulated in ways that ameliorate division and, ultimately, reduce violence and suffering. Memorial museums are an important part of this effort to learn from the past and bridge past, present, and future with the goal of creating a better world. And yet, what we have seen in recent months is a rejection of globalization, cosmopolitanism, interconnection, and critical engagement with the past and its lessons. Rather, as right-wing populism ascends and nativist, xenophobic and isolationist ideologies take hold, memory and the past are being mobilized to undo the progress that has been made toward a more interconnected and cosmopolitan world. In the calls to “Make America Great Again” or Brexit’s move to “take back control,” we see a powerful nostalgia for a time when the world was not so interconnected and when hegemonic power structures were safely intact. It appears that to some degree the progressive potential of memory has been usurped, and we shall have to find new ways to imagine and articulate our relationship to the past in this new political climate. Memorial museums will doubtless play a role as the politics of the past are renegotiated. However, it’s not clear if this role will be to reinforce the hegemony of the nation and its power structures or to uphold the values of inclusion, tolerance, and democracy that memorial museums are meant to embody and that seem to be currently under attack.