



Memorialization and Democracy: State Policy and Civic Action

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A global conference organized by FLACSO-Chile, the International Center for Transitional Justice, and the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience
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In the last few decades, memorialization – historic sites, monuments and museums, public events, and other ways people collectively confront the past – has become a critical force in current struggles for human rights and democracy. Across vastly different contexts, divided communities demand memorialization as a central to justice and reconciliation - witness Rwandans refusing to bury their dead until they were adequately recognized, Bosnians building a memorial at Srebrenica, and Morocco, where debates about how to memorialize former torture centers are playing themselves out daily in the press. These sites are experienced by hundreds, sometimes thousands, of visitors (both national and international) each year. These sites can build public support for short-term projects to build democracy, such as seeking justice for victims through tribunals or truth commissions. They can also build lasting cultures of democracy over the long term, by bringing divided communities together over sustained periods and engaging new generations in the lessons of the past. Recognizing this potential, NGOs, victims' groups, and truth commissions from Peru to Ghana have advocated for memorialization as a key component of reform and justice in transition. In fact, a recent survey of victims of violence suggests that, for the victims surveyed, memorialization initiatives were the second most important form of state reparation after financial compensation¹.

Despite this recognition, memorialization remains an underdeveloped, or unevenly developed, field. Memory sites fall between the cracks of existing policies for historic preservation; transitional justice;

¹ Ernesto Kiza, Corene Rathgeber, Holger-C. Rohne, *Victims of War: An Empirical Study on War-Victimization and Victims' Attitudes towards Addressing Atrocities* (Hamburg, Germany: Hamburg Institute for Social Research, June, 2006)

democratic governance; urban planning; and human rights. As a result, too often, memorials are not integrated into broader strategies for democracy-building. Monolithic state projects with insufficient community input can be resented by the very people they are meant to honor, such as when Kurdish citizens of Halabja attacked the state party-funded memorial constructed to remember their family members killed with chemical weapons. Projects developed by grassroots groups with no connection to broader state efforts or state support can languish in obscurity or have little impact on broader society, such as the original “Trojan Horse” memorial in Cape Town, South Africa.

Memorials and memorialization efforts can contribute towards strengthening democratic practices and attitudes by leaving “physical” marks about violent pasts and their victims, thus pushing society to reflect upon ways of resolving conflicts, confronting difference and dissent. Dealing with conflictive pasts is an essential component of the construction of the identity of a political community. As the experience of many “consolidated” democracies has shown in recent years, ignoring the past, avoiding policies of truth telling and retribution with respect to victims and society in general can only hamper the search for stability and peaceful interaction in the present and future.

In this sense, memorialization holds both great risk and great promise for building democracies, depending on how they are developed and managed. In the worst case, memorials that trumpet ethnic superiority (in the former Yugoslavia or Rwanda, for example) can deepen divisions, and even provoke violence. In some cases, the form of a memorial can undermine its own goals: memorials that are built to send a message of “never again!” may in fact be constructed in ways that minimize their message. This can be true of memorials that are too didactic, making visitors passive observers rather than active participants in pressing issues; too abstract, so that visitors cannot glean meaning from them; or too detached from other meaningful forms of justice. In the best case, the deep investment in sites of memory from every level of society, and the contested nature of those sites, can be harnessed for productive new dialogue and public engagement. As central terrains of conflict and cooperation, memorials require the same level of analysis and accountability as any other democratic process.

Memorialization and Democracy will bring together theorists, practitioners and policy-makers from diverse fields to develop innovative approaches to “Sites of Conscience” – places of memory that serve as forums for citizen engagement in human rights and social welfare -- and other ways of remembering the past that support democracy building. It will promote an intellectual and political dialogue among academics and practitioners to question the ways in which memorials are serving democracy efforts around the globe. Moreover, it will focus on strategies for collaboration among and between state and civil society actors. Activating a former detention center as an ongoing space for citizen engagement on current human rights issues might involve actors in human rights, to connect the site and its stories to judicial processes; urban planning, to help guide its physical development and public access; education, to integrate its history into school curricula; culture, to support the site as a museum; and tourism, to promote visitation.

The meeting will celebrate the cultural and historical specificity of different efforts to address the past, and will not develop prescriptions or formulae for what a memorial should look like. But it recognizes the need for policymakers to take memorials seriously as social and political forces, and to create innovative, self-conscious strategies for integrating memorialization into overall democracy building. Participants will work together to develop the first set of recommendations for specific ways states and civil society in different national contexts can work together to open memory sites as new centers for lasting citizen engagement in protecting human rights.

Focus on Chile

Chile provides a unique and invaluable case study for this international discussion. Over the last decade, memorialization projects have proliferated -- from preserving and interpreting sites like the

Villa Grimaldi Peace Park to constructing memorials that acknowledge regional and social heterogeneity of repression, such as those in Pisagua and Lonquén. A diversity of state and civil society groups have incorporated memorialization as part of their democracy-building and justice work – including the office of the president, Ministries of *Bienes Nacionales* (responsible for public sites and state territory), Interior through its Human Rights department, Housing and Foreign Affairs among others, the Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos, de Ejecutados Políticos, Mujeres de Memoria among others. In the wake of Pinochet's death, Chile provides a productive starting point for exploring how and whether nations should construct policies for preserving and remembering sites with controversial histories.

Chile is thus an important case study and example for other societies inasmuch as it has made strides to incorporate memorialization efforts into its broader efforts of dealing with the past and setting accounts with the victims and their families.

An Integrated Policy Approach to the Past and Future of Human Rights

The Conference will explore three interrelated paths regarding memorialization and democracy:

- **Theory:** broader questions on the relationship of memorialization and democracy. What is the relationship between how people connect with the past and how they participate in present issues? What does a “democratic” history look like? How can memorials balance between telling objective truths about the past that bring justice to victims, offering multiple perspectives that open an inclusive, representative, and dialogic view of history? How can different historical narratives contribute to the development of post-authoritarian or post-conflict identities? How do physical marks about violent past contribute towards building a culture of respect for human rights and peaceful resolution of conflicts?
- **Practice:** forms and strategies at individual sites that most effectively foster citizen engagement in democratic processes. What structures and activities can sites of memory use to create spaces for democratic dialogue? How can they be used to support democracy in both the short and long term, by addressing the immediate needs of victims and involving new generations?
- **Partnerships:** the range of actors that need to work together to support memorials as central components of democracy-building – particularly how states interact with civil society to fashion the best policies for memorialization. How can memorials support truth commissions, tribunals, police reform, schools, community centers, watchdog groups, and other democracy-building projects? How can the state and civil society best collaborate on controversial projects to ease tensions over who “owns” the past and find mutually satisfying solutions?

Three of the leading organizations now addressing these issues – FLACSO-Chile, the International Center for Transitional Justice, and the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, whose Chilean member is the Villa Grimaldi Peace Park Corporation – will work with the Chilean government and civil society representative to convene the first major global meeting on this topic. The meeting will result in the first set of international recommendations for integrated policies of memorialization and democracy building.

The Conference will be sponsored by the Ministry of *Bienes Nacionales*, which will serve as the official governmental counterpart for the organization; other ministries and governmental institutions involved in memorialization policies will also have a central role in the event's proceedings.