

Conflict Museums, Nostalgia, and Dreaming of Never Again

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Sites that mark atrocity span the globe including Villa Grimaldi in Chile, the Anne Frank Museum in Amsterdam, the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Museum in eastern China, and Robben Island in South Africa. Generally such sites seek to have some form of social and individual impact. Typically they seek to educate the next generation and prevent future forms of atrocity by revealing the past. It is contended that an overly emotional focus on the narratives of victims at such sites can limit understanding of the dynamics that cause violence. The article also explores whether there is a nostalgic element to conflict museums. Although it seems counterintuitive that nostalgia would have any place in thinking back on periods of extreme violence, it is argued that nostalgia is present in a number of ways. How this plays out in postapartheid South Africa is specifically explored. The article concludes by highlighting the dangers in South Africa of what can be termed a regenerative nostalgia for the “struggle” against apartheid and the perceived unifying peace process that followed.

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Museums are tombs, and it looks like everything is turning into a museum. (Robert Smithson, 1979, para 2)

There are many interesting and strange museums in the world, and one of these is the Sarajevo Tunnel Museum. It is situated on the outskirts of Sarajevo on the far end of the airport. The “museum” is essentially a private home, which at the time when I visited it in late 2007 was still pockmarked with bullets. Inside the house is one of the more remarkable feats of human ingenuity during times of adversity. The cellar of the house serves as the entrance to the so-called Sarajevo Tunnel. During the siege of

Sarajevo between May, 1992, and November 1996, the tunnel, which stretches some 875 yards, and is a mere 3.3 feet wide and 5 feet high, served as the lifeline for the city. It took 4 months to construct by hand in the midst of the war and it is said that 4,000 people per day used it smuggling fuel, food, military equipment, and medicine out of sight of Serb snipers.

On visiting the makeshift museum, where one can still walk down a small part of the tunnel, one is left with a strange feeling. The tunnel is symbol of defiance and resilience, yet the museum is bizarre. The small entrance of the home is scattered with old bits of military equipment, photographs, flags and military uniforms, flotsam and jetsam from the fighting. Outside a video plays on a loop outlining the history of the war and the remarkable story of the tunnel, and tourists watch this on wooden benches underneath military webbing, snapping photos.

Local planning authorities are seeking funding for a ‘full reconstruction of the tunnel’ and the ‘building of museum buildings at its entrance and exit points’ (Agence France-Presse, 2004, para 19). When it comes to the purpose of the museum, Vladimir Zubic, deputy of the City Council of Sarajevo, notes that the museum is:

A reminder to everyone, so that a thing like this tunnel, that provided the people of this city with the minimum subsistence, will never have to be used again. It will be a place where younger people will

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be able to study a part of our recent past and it will be proof that this part of our history will never be forgotten. (Alic, 2002, para 2)

There is no doubt that the act marked by the museum is extraordinary, and the courage and persistence of people under siege to survive against the odds commendable. However, at the same time, one is left wondering what is exactly the point of preserving this curious place and the paraphernalia collected? That said, although makeshift at the time of my visiting (maybe it is now an official museum with a parking lot, restaurant, and gift shop) the Sarajevo Tunnel museum is not too different to similar sites around the world that mark atrocity or adversity during war or political conflict. Sites such as the Hohenschönhausen Memorial Center also known as the Stasi prison museum in Berlin or the Robben Island museum typically embody core aims such as remembrance, preserving artifacts, educating the next generation, and providing lessons to prevent a recurrence of human rights violations. These aims are also almost invariably mixed with concerns about visitor numbers, income generation, tourism, and development.

This article focuses on what Young (1993) calls ‘memory sites,’ that is, places and spaces where remembering activities such as commemorations, mourning, celebration, and educational activities take place. The focus of this article is not the placement of objects as markers of memory (typically monuments), but rather on spaces where *memory work* takes place. This article is concerned with such “memory sites” but specifically where they are tied to or part of a museum. Although the nature of museums is changing (e.g., combining recreation with learning) (see Gayle, 2006), and museums that focus on atrocity are typically contested, a museum can broadly be defined as:

A nonprofitmaking, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits, for the purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his (sic) environment. (Lennon, 1999, p. 73)

For the purpose of this article the focus will be on what will be termed ‘conflict museums,’ that is, permanent sites of conservation and exhibition that focus on the legacy of political violence.

Museums like the Sarajevo Tunnel Museum, and especially sites such as prisons or former detention centers that have been turned into museums, are burgeoning and growing in number (Duffy, 1993). More memorial museums have been opened in the last 10 years than in the last 100 years (Jenkins, 2005). The most well known are the Holocaust memorial sites such as Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial site and the Memorial and Museum at Auschwitz-Birkenau. These two sites alone attract 900,000 and 750,000 visitors a year respectively (Young, 1993). However, sites that mark atrocity span the globe including among many others Villa Grimaldi in Chile, the Anne Frank Museum in Amsterdam, the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Museum in eastern China, and the Toul Slén Genocide Museum in Cambodia, the notorious Khmer Rouge Security Prison 21 (S-21). South Africa in the last decade and a half has become a country particularly marked by the emergence of similar memorial museums including, among others, the well-known Robben Island museum; The Red Location Museum (an apartheid museum in the New Brighton township of Port Elizabeth); the Constitutional Hill former prison site in Johannesburg; and the Hector Pieterse Memorial and Museum in Soweto.

Sites from around the world have very different histories and trajectories in terms of their development, for example, some started as memorials and then became museums, others were developed as museums and have commemorative spaces built into them, and some such as the Holocaust Museum in Washington and the Apartheid Museum were built on sites without a specific historical meaning. The memory work that takes place around them varies including, *inter alia*, outreach 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.

By analyzing the Web sites and gray material from 30 of the most well known conflict museums around the globe, four broad interrelated goals shared by the sites were identified, namely preservation, assisting victims, education, and prevention. A fifth goal was at times also present, that is for the site to engage in socioeco-

conomic development in some way. This is common in sites in developing contexts. The Robben Island Museum, for example, seeks to promote 'economic sustainability and development' and the Red Location Museum seeks to be 'responsive to the developmental needs of the local community.' Presumably these aims seek to offset criticisms that the cost of building a museum is made at the expense of other local development and poverty-alleviation work. Although these aims are generally particular to museums in developing contexts they are also seen in other societies. For example, the Museum of Free Derry in Northern Ireland seeks to make 'a contribution to the local economy, which is still suffering from the effects of this turbulent period' (Museum of Free Derry, 2005, para 7).

The goals listed above are interconnected and not all sites share all the goals, however, the categories provide a basic list of key goals of most conflict museums. Space does not permit a thorough exploration of all the aims. The focus of this article will therefore be restricted to the issue of prevention, that is, the degree to which conflict museums can prevent atrocities from happening again.

This article contends that the growth in museums with a focus on political atrocity is not merely about a deepening social interest in preservation, but rather represents a growth in the modernist belief that learning about past atrocity is an antidote to future violence. Of specific concern will be the assertion made by many of these museums that 'learning about the past will prevent the violence from reoccurring.' The first part of this article, entitled *Never Again*, will explore some of these claims and will draw on a range of global examples to contextualize the shifts in how atrocity is remembered.

The second part of the article will focus on nostalgia, and ask if the concept has any currency within an analysis of conflict museums. Traditional museums (e.g., focused on specific historical issues such as textiles, farming, toys, or community history) often embody nostalgia, that is, 'a longing for a place' or 'a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams' (Boym, 2001, p. xv). This type of nostalgia has become 'institutionalized in national and provincial museums, heritage foundations, and urban memorials' with the past literally becoming "heritage"

(Boym, 2001, p.15). The article will ask whether nostalgia serves the same purpose in conflict museums, or another role. How does nostalgia relate to museums such as the Sarajevo Tunnel museum, or more challengingly, museums such as those focusing on mass violations of human rights or systems like apartheid, where suggesting a longing for the past in some way runs counter to the terror and suffering they embody?

Controversy aside, the second part of this article, entitled *Nostalgia*, will explore from a global perspective whether there is a nostalgic element to conflict museums sites, and if so what are the implications of this. Drawing on a range of examples from around the world, a specific concern will be the interplay between the preventative aims of conflict museums, nostalgia, emotionality and nationalism.

After exploring the global shifts in memory work in relation to political atrocity, the final part of the article will focus more directly on South Africa. It will explore how these trends play themselves out in postapartheid South Africa, specifically questioning the nature of memory work in the country and highlighting the danger of what can be termed a regenerative nostalgia.

Never Again

In the lobby of this office let there be painted representations of all the common military instruments of death, also human skulls, broken bones, unburied and putrefying dead bodies. (From Plan of a Peace-Office for the United States, Dr. Benjamin Rush, 1798 cited in American Society of Peace, 1845, p. 7)

The idea that witnessing horror may deter future violence, as is evident by the quotation above, is not a new one. Learning from past violence so as not to repeat it, especially when alerted to the full weight of its consequences, has become a standard mantra of the conflict transformation world, often associated with the notion of *Nunca Más* or Never Again. The cry of *Nunca Más* (Never Again) was popularized in Brazil following a period of military rule (1964–1985) and the publication of *Brazil: Nunca Mais* (1985) that documented cases of torture (Archdiocese of São Paulo, 1998), and then by the Argentinean (1983–1985) and Chilean (1990–1991) truth commissions that both

used the phrase in the title of their reports. The notion of Never Again, particularly in the transitional justice field, has become associated with strategies to prevent future atrocity.

Sites such as the Nyarubuye Memorial Site and the Ntarama Church in Rwanda, as well as the museums of the Killing Fields in Cambodia, have become infamous for their harrowing display of thousands of bones and skulls of those massacred. The bones are meant to be a reminder of the impact of political violence, and ultimately a deterrent. Other sites rely on more traditional forms of documentary evidence including films, artifacts and documents. Such sites can become spaces for what Laurie Beth Clark calls disclosure, that is, a strategy whereby through the display of the evidence (personal effects of the victims, photographs, or documents) of the tactics of trauma we can learn from the past and become perpetually vigilant preventing its return (Clark, 2011). The Jasenovac Memorial Museum and Education Centre—a site of a World War II Ustasha-run death camp where thousands of Jews, Serbs, Roma, and other non-Catholic minorities, as well as Croatian political and religious opponents of the regime were killed—explicitly proclaims it “is a symbol of human suffering that loudly proclaims the contemporary admonishment: ‘Never again!’” (Jovičić, 2006, p. 297). The Web site of Apartheid Museum in South Africa (www.apartheidmuseum.org) implores visitors to take heed of the past to change the future in the slogan a “forgotten history” is a “future lost.” To drive the point home the Web site includes a series of revealing video clips developed as part of the ‘History Forgotten Is A Future Lost’ campaign in which young South Africans of all races are asked to identify popular icons and most can only recognize sport, film, and pop stars, and have no knowledge of various apartheid activists.

Visitors to such sites are often encouraged to take action against injustice and related ongoing problems such as xenophobia and racism. For example, the public are called to join the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation or join a Facebook Campaign (www.facebook.com/AuschwitzInterveneNow) to preserve the physical evidence of the Auschwitz camp and raise awareness of ‘the tragedy in order to prevent future acts of hatred and intolerance’ because of ‘what happened, what happens and what could happen

again.’ The well-known Anne Frank House in Amsterdam hopes to encourage visitors ‘to reflect on the dangers of anti-Semitism, racism and discrimination and the importance of freedom, equal rights and democracy.’ The Guernica Peace Museum seeks to get visitors to ‘Think, reflect, assess and act,’ and the Constitutional Hill heritage site in South Africa seeks to create a culture of independent thinking creating citizens unafraid to question society.

Achieving such goals typically involves visiting the site and engaging the public in ‘educational and awareness-raising programs’ (Red Location Museum). Contemporary conflict museums generally include an educational component. This can involve a range of educational methodologies such as ‘peace education,’ ‘citizenship training,’ ‘human rights education,’ and the teaching of critical thinking skills and programs that aim to break down stereotypes and perceived truths about the past (Hamber, Ševčenko, & Naidu, 2010).

However, what is particularly interesting about the educational goals of most conflict museums is that they generally seek some form of generalizability from the experience of visiting and undertaking any allied education program. For example, instead of simply being sites that might demonstrate the horrors of a particular atrocity (e.g., the realities of torture in the tour of the converted torture center at Villa Grimaldi in Chile), the hope is lessons can be drawn and applied to contemporary problems such as building democracy, or challenging all forms of xenophobia and racism wherever they may occur.

Core to this conversion is the experience of the site. Most contemporary museums that focus on conflict, especially those built on sites of former atrocity, tend to use the stories of the site and of victims to hopefully make a contribution to changing attitudes and behaviors of visitors. There appears to be an assumption that the more visceral and realistic the experience the more likely a deep and lasting memory will be created in those exposed to the stories, and as a result they will begin to think and act differently. Instead of marking triumphs and commemorating victory, as so many traditional museums seek to do, conflict museums center around the torture chamber, the concentration camp and the prison seeking to demonstrate the horrors of war and oppression. They seek to instill a sense of

disgust, anger, or sadness in the visitor (Bickford, Weah, & Avivi, 2009). The exposure, and resultant emotional reaction, is intended to be personally transformative.

Some museums have taken this to the extreme. As part of *A Journey Unlike Any Other* in the National Museum in Denmark, visitors are expected to enter a role-play and take on the character of a refugee for the duration of the visit subsequently encountering immigration officials and soldiers in a powerful confrontational drama (Funch, 2006). The visit evokes strong reactions, including visible anxiety, shaking and crying from some visitors (Funch, 2006). Although an outlier in approach, museums like the one in Denmark are on the same continuum as other sites that seek to provide the visitor with an experience rather than a cerebral engagement with historical materials. Such experiences hope for an existential conversation (Bickford et al., 2009) and like testimony in processes such as truth commissions are intended to result in moral and social reconstruction (Humphrey, 2002).

However, what is the impact of these encounters at conflict museums? Research shows that engaging in visits to conflict museums, and particularly engaging visitors in the various educational programs often linked to them, is associated with increased awareness, some positive individual attitudinal changes and the development of critical thinking skills (Cameron, 2008; Hamber et al., 2010; Luke, Stein, Kessler, & Dierking, 2007; Maitles, Cowan, & Butler, 2006; Salomon, 2004). At the same time, no matter how powerful emotionally, the impact of a once-off visit to a conflict museum is going to be inherently limited. There is little research to show that effects of exposure to different sites have a long-term impact on individuals (Hamber et al., 2010). Outreach programs are also restricted in terms of reach and the number of people they can affect at any given time. Furthermore, the educational processes associated with conflict museums are not linear. Visitors influence what is learned, and do not just absorb messages from museums but construct their own meanings (Crooke, 2007; Sandell, 2007). Visitors can also use conflict museums to confirm preexisting understandings rather than build new knowledge structures (Falk & Dierking, 2000).

The use of emotions in conflict museums has also specifically attracted criticism. A disjunction between displaying suffering in museums and preventing its reoccurrence has been observed (Purbrick, 2011). Typically encounters in conflict museums focus on the experience of victims (Hamber, 2009). Nicola Lisus and Richard Ericson (cited in Jenkins, 2005) have referred to conflict museums as emotions factories that create an artificial sense of connection between the visitor and victim. Methods used in conflict museums to make one feel empathy for the victim can, according to James Young (1993), encourage 'a certain critical blindness on the part of the visitor' because imagining oneself as a victim is not the same as imagining another person as a potential victim (p. 344). Conflict museums can create an overidentification with the victim, precluding people from thinking of themselves as potential victimizers thus devaluing the notion of historical responsibility and the complicity of bystanders (Novick, 2001). As a challenge to the victim-centric approach of most conflict museums Young (1993), in his global study of memorials and museums, urges readers to consider:

A perpetrator-made Holocaust museum would turn visitors into potential murderers: the professor who collaborated, the schoolchild who taunted her Jewish classmates, the Hitler Youth who ended up in the SS, a concentration camp guard. How people became killers might be almost as interesting as how people became victims (pp. 344–345).

An understanding of the sources of the evil at the heart of atrocity is critical to preventing the reoccurrence of political violence (Wilkanowicz, 1993). This requires a detailed understanding of the factors that lead to atrocity and extends beyond empathizing and standing in solidarity with victims, as important as this is at a human level. A more honest self-reflection (as visitors, consumers, and social actors) on our own capacity to support violence in terms of our own acts or omissions is needed, but also scrutiny and understanding of the micro- and macropolitics of power that makes violence possible.

This is not to say that some conflict museums are not acutely aware of this challenge, that is, to be immersed within political realities if one is to make social change. Staff from the Washington Holocaust Memorial Museum, for example, have participated in supporting attempts to map

current genocides using satellite images, and have been part of initiatives such as the Genocide Prevention Task Force.

That said, many conflict museums have a fairly limited view of how social change will take place. Thinking beyond the individual, what Never Again demands in societies emerging from a legacy of violence is not simply a remembering of the past in a certain way, or preparing the next generation for the future through imparting certain skills, but a constant and realistic engagement with the politics of the present. One of the dangers of the Never Again discourse is that it can create an idealized and imagined concept of the future that is devoid of context and political reality.

This is not to say that conflict museums cannot use emotions to provoke an engagement with the past, and potentially create attitudinal and behavioral change. However, engaging only in an emotional way with the narratives of victims can limit our understanding of the dynamics that cause violence. Of course, it is important to uncover the truth about the past and understand it, but once emotion enters into the picture there is a danger that the suffering of people can supersede the struggle for meaning in the current context (Jenkins, 2005).

Many conflict museums are also infused with a largely Western-liberal notion of choice. The Never-Again discourse, and the power of the individual experience of visiting a conflict museum, implies that conflict can be prevented through individuals. Although this of course has elements of truth to it, and individuals can make some difference (certainly in the lives of other individuals at the very least), preventing large-scale political atrocity is an eminently more complex issue. The idea that conflict museums can be used to encourage people to confront difficult moral decisions in the future, speak out against violence and make the “right” decision implies a degree of agency and at least some social power. There are always possibilities for individuals to act as agents of social change in conflict situations, but seeing social change as an individual matter can mask the complex social dynamics in communities where choices, especially when the threat of extreme violence is present (e.g., the forced participation of child soldiers in killings), are rather limited. To this end, we need to be careful that we do not overstate the ability of conflict museums to af-

fect social or individual change in contexts of extreme violence. This at the very least demands more modest claims by conflict museums, which in themselves will never prevent violations of human rights (Purbrick, 2011).

Nostalgia

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us. . . (Tale of Two Cities, Charles Dickens, 2011, p. 1)

In the introduction to this article a challenging question was posed with regard to nostalgia and conflict, most notably, is there an element of nostalgia present in conflict museums? To make this more specific: despite the suffering portrayed in conflict museums, is a regressive (partly) nostalgic process underway in some museums in which new silences about the past are being created, or is the opposite happening, that is, by looking back conflict museums open space for a new engagement with the future.

Nostalgia is typically viewed pejoratively by academics, because of its tendency to recreate something imagined unencumbered by social and political fissures, often presenting a limited and narrow view of the past. Nostalgia of this kind can become, in the well-known words of Michael Kammen (1991), ‘history without guilt’ and a type of heritage ‘that suffuses us with pride rather than shame’ (cited in Boym, 2001, p. xiv). Svetlana Boym (2001) equally feels such a take on the past can be an ‘abdication of personal responsibility’ and creates ‘an abyss of forgetting . . . in inverse proportion to its actual preservation’ (p. xiv).

Nostalgia is deeply embedded within idealized memories of the past, but it can also operate in a backward-looking and forward-looking manner simultaneously. It would be problematic to paint the process of developing new sites of memory focused on political atrocity as simply and inevitably, to use Boym’s conceptualization, a restorative form of nostalgia. Restorative nostalgia embodies a longing for traditions and origins, aimed at the trans-historical reconstruction of the lost home (Boym, 2001).

However, when memorializing atrocity and mass destruction it is generally not possible to 'return to the original stasis' (Boym, 2001, p. 49) in any restorative sense, or in fact desired when one thinks of the Holocaust, apartheid and the litany of atrocities marked in conflict museums globally. This is not to say that one cannot 'cherish shattered fragments of memory' in a nostalgic way, even within a context of hardship (Dlamini, 2010, p. 18), or long for a place before the conflict began, but it is difficult to imagine how the conflict itself can embody a restorative form of nostalgia.

That said, large-scale political conflict is more than likely going to provoke a sense of reflective nostalgia, that is a nostalgia that dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging, and is more comfortable with contradiction and critical thinking (Boym, 2001). The focus is not on the reestablishment of stasis, 'but on the meditation on history and the passage of time' (Boym, 2001, p. 49). Most contemporary conflict museums tend more toward this form of nostalgia. They stress education and profess to use an element of critical thinking in their educational programs and displays. Conflict museums can be studies in the meditation of history, somber and reflective, and generally, at least the museums developed in the last 20 years, see themselves as living museums that will develop and change over time.

The Sarajevo Tunnel museum embodies, despite the hardships it uncovers, a type of nostalgia that is difficult to characterize as restorative or reflective; most notably, a strange longing for the time when the community worked together in face of adversity, and a time when choices were simpler and made with courage and morality, despite all the challenges. The exhibit also has elements that could be described as tacky or *kitsch*. The museum is highlighted as "a must see" as part of the "Funky Tours" of Sarajevo (Sarajevo Funky Tours, 2010). The site has a similar feel to other private museums visited by the author such as the Museum at Check Point Charlie in Berlin, which contains a hodgepodge of photos and artifacts from a divided Berlin, including various contraptions used to smuggle people from East to West Berlin. Although some exhibits are startling (such as cars and suitcases modified to smuggle people) the whole collection is some-

what surreal, including actors in Soviet-style uniforms with whom you can have your photo taken, and the sale of T-shirts, postcards, and Cold War memorabilia.

The nostalgic view of the past represented by the museum and memorabilia at Check Point Charlie, and more specifically by the nostalgic demand for DDR foodstuffs, cars, and TV programs, as well as preserving symbols such as the Fedora wearing green man seen on former DDR traffic lights, has been termed *Ostalgie*. *Ostalgie* combines the German words for "nostalgia" and "east" (Enns, 2007). *Ostalgie* has become a way of describing the cultural interest in the communist East (originally focused on East Germany but now used more widely) in art and particularly pop culture, tourism, and *kitsch* Soviet memorabilia.

Ostalgie, however, is not "mere" nostalgia and is linked to the politics of transition, that is, it is a form of commodification of resistance against the devaluing of everything associated with the communist past and in part a rejection of aspects the politics of reunification and the Western capitalist values at its core (Berdahl, 1999; Margalit, 2011; McAdams, 2010). Broadly, *Ostalgie* represents an affirmation that large parts of their life were not meaningless (Nadelson, 2004).

Times of conflict, hardship, and social upheaval can, as in the case of post-Soviet Eastern Europe, provoke a nostalgic response. Outbreaks of nostalgia have been documented following the French Revolution and the "Velvet" Revolution in Eastern Europe (Boym, 2001). Conflict can bring with them a clarity of purpose, a definitive belief in striving for something better, hope, camaraderie, a sense of people coming together, utopian desires unfettered by the realities of governance or social constriction.

Longing for this is perhaps understandable on one level. War War II, certainly in the United States and United Kingdom, is routinely used in this way in popular culture, most notably in so-called 'war movies.' It has been highlighted recently how since September 11, 2001, George W. Bush consistently evoked the legacy of the World War II "greatest generation" to convey a simplicity of choice and action (Noon, 2004). *Ostalgie* too has been linked to the desire for a 'life perceived as simple and innocent in comparison to life under the menace of commercial

capitalism,' albeit a desire that negates the harsh realities of life under communism (Margalit, 2011, p. 274).

In other contexts there can even be a longing for a place before the conflict began. In Northern Ireland, for example, it is usual to hear people describe the time before the onset of the modern part of the political conflict (pre-1969) as an age of intercommunity peace and harmony. In interviews with victims of the conflict it was found:

Many of the participants reflected on the "good old days" before the conflict where Catholic and Protestants lived side by side in the same streets and mixed freely, unaware of any inequality or difference, until the genie of sectarianism was let out the bottle and members of the minority were forced out of the area. (Ferguson, Burgess, & Hollywood, 2010, p. 879)

A similar restorative nostalgia has been observed with Palestinians longing for a pre-1948 life or Jews for the land of Israel (Margalit, 2011). On the Web site of the Kigali Memorial Centre (www.kigalimemorialcenter.org) that focuses on the Rwandan genocide it is noted, 'We had lived in peace for many centuries, but now the divide between us had begun.' Interestingly, however, such notions of the past are a form of vicarious nostalgia, as firsthand memories are often dwindling or nonexistent, although this does not seem to diminish its evocative power (Margalit, 2011).

This 'making-do during wartime' (Clark, 2011, p. 76) and longing for the so-called simpler or earlier times is also evident in many conflict museums. Another example is the oft told story of the cave at the quarry on Robben Island where prisoners rested after hard labor and is referred to as South Africa's first democratic parliament; or the many stories I have heard from political prisoners in Northern Ireland about how they smuggled communications and transistor radios despite the rigid security regime. Such stories can lull us into minimizing the traumatic impact of the past (Clark, 2011), but equally they could, of course, be read as moments of resistance and resilience. In short, such remembering evokes a type of nostalgia where 'feelings of loss are at times comingled with a sense of social gain or liberation' (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p. 921).

It is increasingly common in South Africa to hear different activists reminisce about the struggle against apartheid in this way. Take, for

example, Lindiwe Sisulu, Minister of Defense and Military Veterans, who trained militarily in the former USSR in the 1970s. She views her time in the USSR as one when:

A new person was emerging . . . who understood that there was a greater good . . . the morality of the communists was much higher than any I have come across . . . [it was] very stringent and each one of us wanted to aspire to that which was greater than ourselves' (Benton, 2006, online).

A more recent example is the controversy in South Africa when the Dalai Lama was refused a visa to come to South Africa to honor an invitation to the 80th birthday party of his fellow Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The decision highlighted how the ANC had shifted from a liberation movement to a political party in power working in a global context of realpolitik, where allegedly concerns about upsetting the Chinese government and deterring investment were more important than welcoming the Dalai Lama to the country. On the 5th of October 2011, the *Sowetan* newspaper's editorial noted:

It is decisions such as this that make many South Africans nostalgic about the strong leadership of Nelson Mandela who, for the record, told the West to go fly a kite when they questioned his invitation to South Africa of Cuba's Fidel Castro. Mandela made it clear that no one had the right to choose our friends. (Sowetan Editorial, 2011, para 6)

The editorial is infused with a desire (self proclaimed by the writer as nostalgic) to return to another time, another type of leader—however, it is devoid of history, as it fails to locate Mandela within a different political historical period, where his ability to make certain decisions and choices were not merely about him as individual but about a different political reality. In the same way, nostalgia is often found in conflict museums when they remember the acts of individuals and tell very narrow stories of heroism often with a nationalist narrative, which in their power almost inevitably make the reader long for the "bad old days" when heroes were forged in the turmoil of war, or people did extraordinary things like building the Sarajevo tunnel.

The Madiba Legacy Series of comic books for young people is a further case in point. A recent issue, titled *The Black Pimpernel*, tells the story of Mandela's evasion of capture by the police in the early days of his activism and how he earned the

nickname the Black Pimpernel (Buchanan, Josias, Mampa, & Nzoni, 2006). In this context, nostalgia can create a type of social amnesia, failing both historical knowledge and the historical imagination (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p. 921). In other words, history is reduced to bite-size chunks of information, structured around the suffering of the past but also stories that conjure up connections to popular stories or cultural icons often infused with notions of triumph. In this context, it could be argued, nostalgia is representing both the melancholic and the utopian (Pickering & Keightley, 2006).

Robben Island, like the Sarajevo Tunnel, offers to show the visitor a 'triumph of the human spirit over enormous hardship and adversity' (2003 Visitor Information Guide, cited in Nanda, 2004, p. 380), and several Holocaust museums also talk about demonstrating the power of the human spirit. This leaves most visitors content and hopeful, and in the case of Robben Island, guilt free and able to enjoy the rest of the afternoon at the expensive bars and restaurants overlooking the sea and even the island itself. Rather than spurring visitors onto to action, visiting certain sites can 'leave tourists with a self-satisfied glow at having given up a day of ordinary sightseeing and shopping for an exhibit of Hell on Earth' (Susan Jacoby cited in Jenkins, 2005, p. 25). Other sites can deflect attention from real present problems in society, preferring to focus on historical issues or sometimes issues not directly relevant to the country in question (Lennon & Foley, 2006). James Young has gone as far as arguing that some sites (and in this case memorials) can provoke a form of forgetfulness:

Under the illusion that our memorial edifices will always remind us, we take leave of them and return only at our convenience. To the extent that we encourage monuments to do our memory-work for us, we become that much more forgetful. (Young, 1993, p. 5)

That said, as noted earlier, every visitor brings a different experience and leaves with a different kind of memory (Young, 1993), so one cannot completely generalize. Some visitors may not wish to use the visit in some deep and meaningful way in the first place, and simply see it as something to be done (Robben Island is a "must see" on all Cape Town tourism Web sites). The immediate experience of visiting the site might be all the visitor desires (Packer, 2008). There is also a growing concern with

"dark tourism" or "horror tourism" (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996) (tourism of sites of death, atrocity, and mass killing) and with this comes questions about *some* visitors' motives, which might be more about witnessing the macabre than engaging in genuinely educative processes (Lennon & Foley, 2006; Miles, 2002).

At the same time, it is important not to stigmatize visitors to different sites without a full analysis of their intentions on a site-by-site basis. Laura Beth Clark, in her extensive study of some one hundred sites in 17 countries, urges caution in relation to the "dark" tourism debate (Clark, 2011). She posits that visiting sites of previous atrocity is not an avoidance strategy as such, but rather a form of repetition compulsion, a (re)dramatization of unresolved trauma (Clark, 2011). Visitors are compelled to visit such sites because "unrepresentable" violence continues in the world and they serve as mirrors of reality within a parallel (real) world (Clark, 2011). The sites are therefore not about Never Again and will continue as long as there is ongoing violence in the world (Clark, 2011).

Clark (2011) warns, however, that trauma sites can also promote what she calls foreclosure, that is, foreclosing and limiting the possible meanings of certain events. Most typically, trauma histories are spun for the purpose of nation building (Clark, 2011). Conflict museums can be part of the process of creating 'the righteousness of a nation's birth' marking triumphs and martyrdom, and become an idealized memory that gives the nation legitimacy (Young, 1993, p. 2). Such processes can be restricting in their narrative like most World War II memorials in the United Kingdom and United States. Clark has found in her research that in fact most conflict museums and trauma sites do not present multiple narratives (Clark, 2011). To this end, although the emotionality of conflict museums can induce contemplation in some cases (Jenkins, 2005), overly focusing on the victims' suffering can promote an uncritical nationalism or patriotism, and a narrow understanding of how the wider structural dynamics of violence operate.

Memory Work in Contemporary South Africa

It was an end of a long journey. But what a glorious journey. What a wonderful legacy for a

young country. (Final words, A Biography of Jan Christian Smuts cited in Smuts, 1952, p. 528)

In South Africa, it is argued that postapartheid memorialization has been integral to development of a new nation (Naidu, 2004). The new South Africa is largely in the process of creating a new founding history in which memory sites such as Robben Island and the Apartheid Museum are central with a core narrative of suffering, struggle and ultimately redemptive unity. The foundation myths of the “new” South Africa, according to Sabine Marschall, is the so-called “struggle,” that is, ‘the antiapartheid struggle for liberation and the historical struggle against all forms of colonial oppression and discrimination’ (Marschall, 2006b, p. 147). Jacob Dlamini also warns against the development of a master narrative of South Africa’s past built around the “struggle” that blinds us to the richness and complexity of life under apartheid (Dlamini, 2010).

Arguably, as important as it has been to create a new sense of national pride and inclusion to build peace in South Africa, new narratives are also being developed that are beginning to silence alternative histories and perspectives. Hlongwane (2008) writes in detail about the attempts in the post-1994 South Africa to commemorate the June 16, 1976 uprisings, when township youth rose up against the apartheid state with hundreds of young people losing their lives. His central thesis is that the various commemorative events that take place each year now on June 16 (now a public holiday called Youth Day) are a platform for ‘government speak,’ and although the events are shrouded in the language of reconciliation they fail to deal with the historical reality that divisions not only existed between Black and White South Africans, but the liberation movement itself was split largely between the ANC and the Africanist and Black Consciousness traditions of struggle (Hlongwane, 2008). The result is that the day has become about projecting unity among Africans (when in fact the ANC and PAC have differing interpretations of the actions on the day and who led them) and the ‘nostalgia for the period when the memory of the uprisings was an integral part of the unfolding liberation project against the system of settler colonialism’ (Hlongwane, 2008, p. 158).

The memorial aspect of the Hector Pieterse site (that graphically highlights the death of young people) takes one back to a sad place, where young people were cut down on the streets by the apartheid police. However, at the same time the message is utopian with young people being celebrated for their valour and contribution to the new South Africa. Interestingly, however, for many young people the day itself is slowly losing its original meaning. It is simply seen as a public holiday provoking public outrage and Facebook Campaigns to bring back the solemnity and hope the day is meant to convey, especially in a context where there is increasing evidence to show most young people know little about the day and in fact use the public holiday to get drunk (Hlongwane, 2008).

Accusations of a similar nature to those made about the Hector Pieterse museum and memorial have been observed in relation to the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre, where PAC members have accused the ANC of “hijacking” it and turning the PAC organized event into an ANC-orientated one now called Human Rights Day (Marschall, 2006b). Other victims—because of the controversy surrounding their deaths—are largely ignored, and their deaths are not marked in any way. Those who died through “necklacing” (suspected spies who were killed vigilante-style by placing a burning tire around their neck) are a type of “discomfiting victim” largely written out of the memory landscape, despite the fact that over 450 people lost their lives in this way (Marschall, 2010).

Despite the new dominant narratives that are emerging, South Africa’s new heritage industry remains contested, complicated, and selective, and linked to some notions of nostalgia. Boym (2001) contends that the distinctions between restorative and reflective nostalgia are not necessarily absolute and arguably the District Six Museum in South Africa has restorative and reflective elements. The District Six Museum highlights the destruction of a mixed neighborhood in Cape Town, when the apartheid government declared the area a “White” district in 1966. The museum has a strong air of nostalgia. The museum is described as being ‘about the loss, yearning, and symbolic reemergence of a vibrant and flourishing multicultural community’ (Nanda, 2004, pp. 382–383), which is portrayed as a place of harmony, tolerance, equity, personal security, and *helpmekaar* (sharing) (In-

terview with Linda Fortune, June 10, 2003, cited in Macdonald, 2011). The emotional stories of the people from the destroyed district are at the core of the museum experience, along with artifacts of a different era:

Many artifacts, such as the street signs kept by a bulldozer driver when the area was demolished, a street map on the floor, “recreated” rooms, and photographs of the site, are displayed in the museum. Ex-residents act as guides, telling visitors about the area as well as their own personal stories. Visiting the District Six Museum is clearly a hot interpretive experience where displays elicit deep personal memories and emotions, especially on the part of ex-residents, as they recall the history and community spirit of the area. (Ballantyne, 2003, p. 281)

There is little doubt that the museum has become a place where those from the community have been able to deal with the trauma of what happened to them; a place to work through the past. In the typology of Laurie Beth Clark, the museum partly serves the function of closure, that is, a museum where survivors of forced removals gather and share experiences as a form of healing (Clark, 2011). At the same time, there is a restorative sense of nostalgia (and increasingly vicarious nostalgia as the older members of the community die) about some recollections of people and documents from the area. Some have criticized the overly romantic view of District Six, and that the suffering, pain, gangsterism, poverty, and even prostitution in the area have been largely underemphasized (Interview with Linda Fortune, June 10, 2003, cited in Macdonald, 2011). A return to stasis, however, no matter how much it is desired, is not possible as “the home is in ruins” (Boym, 2001). This results in a more tentative and reflective nostalgia, one conscious of its own limitations and acutely aware of what is happening in the process of remembering. As the former resident of the district notes: ‘What have we got left? . . . [P]eople tend to romanticize about District Six, we don’t want to think about the pain. We don’t want to think about the suffering, only the juicy bits, the sweet memories’ (Interview with Linda Fortune, June 10, 2003 cited in Macdonald, 2011).

When thinking about political conflict and nostalgia—and given the possibility that a return to a “golden age” (if it ever existed) is unlikely and, in other cases, there may be no desire whatsoever to return to the past as in the case of apartheid—nostalgia is more than likely

going to be reflective. For reflective nostalgics there is no monumental past to recreate (Dlamini, 2010). Reflective nostalgia can be hopeful and forward-looking. There can be a strength in realizing the past is incomplete, fractured and ambivalent, and worthy of critical reflection. Nostalgia in this context can have a sense of the future about it, and be a powerful force for social reconnection (Battaglia, 1995). This is to a degree the case with *Ostalgie* as outlined earlier and as is also partly the case with The District Six Museum. In other words:

Nostalgia can then be seen as not only a search for ontological security in the past, but also as a means of taking one’s bearings for the road ahead in the uncertainties of the present. This opens up a positive dimension in nostalgia, one associated with desire for engagement with difference, with aspiration and critique, and with the identification of ways of living lacking in modernity (Pickering & Keightley, 2006, p. 921).

This partially explains the upbeat tone of much of South Africa’s memorial culture (Boym, 2001), which sets it aside from a more regressive and pained longing for the past in the hope one could return. Rather, the narratives of the South African conflict museums tend to seek, after one has engaged with the sober parts of the past sufficiently, resolution, and redemption embodied in the peaceful transition to democracy. Although this can reinforce a new founding mythology, it can also offer optimism for the future, and be a creative response to a world with limited social connection.

The Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg embodies Pickering and Keightley’s (2006) mix of the melancholic and utopian. The bulk of the museum reveals the horrors of the past in darkened rooms and exhibits, but the visitor eventually emerges into a well-lit corridor celebrating the advent of democracy in South Africa. The curatorial aim, it has been argued, seems to be national unity, consensus, and the healing of wounds (Pes, 2009). Robben Island conveys a similar feel often driven home by a former prisoner (guide) who generally, toward the end of the tour, tells visitors of his hardships and finally forgiveness. Visitors are no doubt moved by the harsh stories of the island, and emotionality is present in the stories of the victims in a similar way to many conflict museums internationally. However, ultimately the overall experience is redeeming and emancipatory. A 2003 Visitor Information Guide noted that a visit to

Robben Island was ‘a pilgrimage,’ offering ‘hope for the future to a world troubled by division, social injustice and intolerance’ (cited in Nanda, 2004, p. 380). To this end, much of South Africa’s current memory work is not characterized by restorative or reflective nostalgia, but rather a type of nostalgia best described as regenerative.

The key question, however, is whether this way of engaging with the past leads to violence prevention. In a country like South Africa there is a need to rewrite history, and undermine the hegemonic white and colonial view of the past. At the same time, we need to be careful of not creating new stories of the past that limit, rather than widen, our understanding of what happened. “Struggle memorials” in South Africa, although necessary certainly in the short term to challenge dominant historical narratives, can simplify and partially sanitize history and risk developing an uncritical view of the past that is beyond debate (Marschall, 2006a, 2006b). In South Africa a further dynamic exists in which notions of post-1994 unity and reconciliation are also weaved into these narratives, potentially creating a new nostalgia (over time) for when all South Africans stood together giving birth to the “miracle” transition. Although this may be useful at times, and it is not inherently objectionable as it is founded on positive social values, and one cannot dismiss what has been achieved in South Africa practically, the emotionality of emancipation and the perceived unity that forged it could disguise deep social and political fissures, which if not scrutinized, could become the faultlines for the conflicts of the future.

Memories of conflict, although always in flux (Crane, 1997), are powerful. It is well documented how memory can be used to create nationalist fervor and make war (Clark, 2011), and it was argued above that nostalgia too can be used to evoke nationalism. Commemoration of war generally valorizes nationalist male actions evoking concepts such as ‘national pride, courage, physical strength and self-sacrifice’ (Hamber & Palmay, 2009; McDowell, 2008). Therefore, it is worthy to explore how memory operates within conflict museums, which ostensibly seek to do something positive with memory.

However, if we think of social processes as dynamic then nostalgia too is something that can shift and change, and the emotionality used in

displaying conflict can have unexpected individual, community, political, and social consequences. An uncritical view of current remembering in postapartheid South Africa could lead to the ultimate (perverse) irony. As memories fade and the apartheid past becomes less threatening, memory work focusing on it could find its way into the realm of the introspective as books, films, museums, and memories recreate an inevitable mish-mash of increasingly distant memories. However, as new challenges to the postapartheid state emerge from those who feel they have not benefited sufficiently in the new South Africa, the story of the final struggle to overcome apartheid, typified by the new founding myths of the struggle and the compromised peace that followed as a regenerative process, could become the restorative nostalgia of the future.

Conclusion

This article is not a treatise against conflict museums. Conflict museums vary greatly in their methodologies, displays, and approaches, and this article has highlighted some general trends and methods seen in the field. There is enormous value in preserving sites of atrocity and the history they embody, even if all they do is increase awareness about certain human rights violations. However, conflict museums are never a-historical and neutral venues; they are an active part of the postconflict landscape. They reflect this context and they shape it.

Emotion has a special place in the debate about conflict museums, whether in the way emotional accounts of the past serve as vehicles for change or the emotional nature of nostalgia as it finds its way into reflections on a history of political violence. It seems counterintuitive that nostalgia would have any place in thinking back on periods of extreme violence, but it is often present. Nostalgia is visible in the longing for a time before the conflict, whether vicarious or real. Nostalgia is present in the fragments of goodness people seek amid their dark memories of war and conflict, and specifically in the South African case, it is evident in what I have termed the regenerative nostalgia for the struggle against hardship and oppression, followed by victory and the hope a new society. On one level, this may seem benign, yet on another, uncritical remembering, especially when memories are tied into sentiment, is never harmless.

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