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More than Memory: Can Memory Spaces Really Prevent Mass Atrocities?

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Introduction

Twenty years ago, Andreas Huyssen diagnosed the world as suffering from a "hypertrophy of memory"—a condition that has led to a deep desire in many individuals and collectives to form personal and political connections with the past, and especially with traumatic pasts.[1] Two decades later, this condition shows no sign of abating. If anything, it has become even more pronounced, as more and more societies around the world have undertaken, in one way or another, the work of confronting the more difficult aspects of their pasts. The call for justice and transformation in the aftermath of large-scale human rights violations, which started, perhaps, with the International Military Tribunals in Nuremberg after World War II, then exploded in the democratization of the post-dictatorship societies of Latin America beginning in the 1980s and the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s, has today become all but a mandate for contemporary societies in the wake of abuse.[2] Demands for redress from grassroots organizations, especially those formed by victims and their family members, consistently push governments to respond to the harms they have inflicted on targeted groups. Likewise, a growing cadre of international norms push state actors to confront, rather than ignore, past large-scale human rights abuses. Simply turning the page on the past is no longer an option for governments that desire recognition as valid members of the so-called international community. Today, what has come to be known as transitional justice is an expectation, and within that framework, what Louis Bickford calls "memory works" have become an integral component.[3]

Transitional justice (TJ) refers to both the juridical and non-juridical means by which societies deal with the legacies of gross human rights violations, including the crime of genocide and other mass atrocities. In line with many early theorists of TJ, Colleen Murphy defines TJ as "formal attempts by postrepressive or postconflict societies to address past wrongdoing in their efforts to democratize."[4] Although the tools of TJ have historically been implemented most commonly in societies transitioning from more authoritarian to more democratic forms of government, the world has increasingly seen TJ mechanisms applied in non-democratic societies—for instance, in the case of Morocco's Equity and Reconciliation Commission (2004–2005)—as well as in societies experiencing no political transition whatsoever

[1] Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Berkeley: Stanford University Press, 2003).

[2] Pablo de Greiff, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-Recurrence," *UN Human Rights Council*, August 28, 2013 (UN Doc. A/HRC/30/42); Roger Duthie, "Transitional Justice and Prevention: Summary Findings from Five Country Case Studies" (New York: International Center for Transitional Justice, June 2021), accessed July 27, 2024, https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ_Report_Overview_TJ_Prevention.pdf; Colleen Murphy, *The Conceptual Foundations of Transitional Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Tricia D. Olsen et al., *Transitional Justice in Balance: Comparing Processes, Weighing Efficacy* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2010); Clara Sandoval Villalba, "Briefing Paper: Transitional Justice: Key Concepts, Processes, and Challenges" (Essex: Institute for Democracy and Conflict Resolution, 2011), accessed July 27, 2024, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/9590211.pdf; Olivera Simić, ed., *An Introduction to Transitional Justice*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[3] Louis Bickford, "Memoryworks/Memory Works," in *Transitional Justice, Culture, and Society: Beyond Outreach*, ed. Clara Ramírez-Barat (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2014), 491–528.

[4] Murphy, *The Conceptual Foundations of Transitional Justice*, 1.

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—for instance, Canada's recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2008–2015) related to residential schools for Indigenous youth and its subsequent National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2015–2019). Regardless, TJ is now widely seen as including four pillars, each with its basis in international human rights law: the rights to truth, justice, reparations, and guarantees of non-recurrence.[5] Increasingly, however, another more contested right has emerged as a potential fifth pillar of TJ: the right to memory.[6] Of course, societies have developed ways for remembering their dead for time immemorial. Beginning in the twentieth century, however, new modes of remembering have emerged in response to the specific instances in which states themselves have perpetrated harm against their own populations.[7] The idea that victims have a right to have their suffering acknowledged by the states that have perpetrated that violence through memory initiatives is relatively new.

Memory initiatives take a variety of forms.[8] They can include any number of actions taken to represent, invoke, or recall the past in the present, including things like educational programs, artistic endeavors, activist practices, and, perhaps most commonly, the creation of physical memory spaces. For the purposes of this study, I define a memory space as any physical space dedicated specifically to engaging with the past, and very commonly with a violent or difficult past. To be clear, memory spaces also exist in the virtual sphere. Indeed, digital memory initiatives are a rapidly developing form of engaging with the past.[9] This study, however, focuses exclusively on physical memory spaces. Whether they be monuments, memorials, museums, or sites of violence that have been transformed into sites of memory, memory spaces have become a common tool for societies to deal with histories of violence and death. Within the TJ framework, they have traditionally been considered as a form of symbolic reparations: gestures that provide redress to victimized groups by acknowledging the harm they have suffered in public space.[10] But the expectations placed on these memory spaces have grown well beyond symbolic repair. Indeed, memory spaces are also consistently framed as contributing to the prevention of future violence.[11]

Can a memory space really help prevent future acts of atrocity violence? If so, when and how are memory spaces a preventive force? This article uses the findings of nearly four years of research into more than 400 memory spaces around the world to offer a framework for determining when and how memory spaces can contribute to atrocity prevention. This analysis

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[5] Line Engbo Gissel, "The Standardization of Transitional Justice," *European Journal of International Relations* 28, no. 4 (2022), 859–884, accessed July 27, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661221120980; Jonathan Sisson, "A Conceptual Framework for Dealing with the Past," *Politorbis* 50 (2010), 11–16; Swisspeace, "A Conceptual Framework for Dealing with the Past: Holism in Principle and Practice" (Bern: Swisspeace, 2016).

[6] Noam Tirosh and Anna Reading, eds., *The Right to Memory: History, Media, Law, and Ethics* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2023).

[7] Kerry E. Whigham, *Resonant Violence: Affect, Memory, and Activism in Post-Genocide Societies* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2022).

[8] Impunity Watch, "Policy Brief: Guiding Principles of Memorialization" (The Hague: Impunity Watch, January 2013), accessed July 27, 2024, https://www.impunitywatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/PolicyBrief_Guiding_Principles_of_Memorialisation_2013_eng-1.pdf.

[9] Jeffrey Shandler, *Holocaust Memory in the Digital Age: Survivors' Stories and New Media Practices* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); Eve Monique Zucker and David J. Simon, eds., *Mass Violence in the Digital Age: Memorialization Unmoored* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan Cham, 2020).

[10] Kris Brown, "Commemoration as Symbolic Reparation: New Narratives or Spaces of Conflict?," *Human Rights Review* 14, no. 3 (2013): 273–289, accessed July 27, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12142-013-0277-z; Duthie, *Transitional Justice and Prevention*; Liz Ševčenko, "Sites of Conscience: Reimagining Reparations," *Change Over Time* 1, no. 1 (2011), 6–33, accessed July 27, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1353/cot.2011.a430735.

[11] Alejandro Baer and Natan Sznaider, *Memory and Forgetting in the Post-Holocaust Era: The Ethics of Never Again* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Scott Straus, *Fundamentals of Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention* (Washington, DC: US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016); James Waller, *Confronting Evil: Engaging Our Responsibility to Prevent Genocide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Kerry E. Whigham, "Remembering to Prevent: The Preventive Capacity of Public Memory," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 11, no. 2 (2017), 53–71, accessed July 27, 2024, http://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.11.2.1447.

focuses specifically on the programming and activities undertaken by various sites not only to engage with the past, but to respond to contemporary risks of large-scale, identity-based violence. It argues that memory spaces are not inherently "positive," nor do they always contribute to the prevention of atrocities. Rather, the preventive impacts of memory spaces vary based on the contexts in which they exist and the activities in which they engage. Specifically, this article argues that memory spaces play a role in the prevention of atrocity violence when they 1) adequately assess contemporary risk factors that are present within the society where the site is located, as well as the identity groups that are most susceptible to victimization, and 2) develop programming and/or exhibitions that respond directly to these realities in a way that mitigates risk and reduces the likelihood that said groups will be targeted. After explaining the research methodology and framework for assessing preventive impact, this article offers several examples of memory spaces that contribute to atrocity prevention according to the framework.

Methodology

This article and the prevention framework it asserts are based on findings from a multi-year research project on the preventive impact of memory spaces. The research involves two parallel data-gathering processes. First, the research team compiled a comprehensive database of 1,527 memory spaces, built to remember genocides and other forms of large-scale, identity-based violence, representing 112 different countries—to our knowledge, the largest database of its kind in existence.[12] The research team next gathered contact information for as many of these spaces as possible. A large number of spaces in the database are memorials, monuments, plaques, or parks that have no permanent staff nor contact information. The team was able to uncover some form of contact information for 746 (48.9%) of the spaces. Each of these spaces was sent an in-depth, 46-question survey with questions about the space's mission, audience, programming, management, and other activities. We received responses from 256 memory spaces (a 34.3% response rate), representing 54 different countries. In addition to other things, this survey data provides a large, if superficial overview of how memory spaces conceive of their missions in relation to atrocity prevention, along with the kinds of programming and activities they conduct to achieve those goals.

To supplement this data, the research team made a series of site visits to memory spaces in seven different countries. During these visits, the team toured the memory spaces, observed programming, and conducted a range of semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders. During this field research, conducted over a period of 16 months, the team visited 109 memory spaces and/or organizations working on issues relating to memory in seven countries: Argentina (13), Cambodia (13), Colombia (14), Morocco (13), Northern Ireland (17), Rwanda (22), and South Africa (17). These specific countries were chosen for several reasons. First, they represent a variety of global regions—Latin America, Europe, MENA, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia—which allows for a consideration of memory practices that are generalizable across the world and which are specific to their given contexts. Second, these cases represent a variety of different forms of atrocity violence, from canonical cases of genocide, as in Rwanda, to state terrorism and crimes against humanity, as in Argentina and South Africa, to long-term armed conflict and civil war, as in Colombia and Northern Ireland. Finally, these countries feature varied approaches to memorialization practice, with many featuring memory spaces at the national and local levels, and others (Morocco) with very few memory spaces at all. During these visits, the team conducted 164 interviews with relevant stakeholders, which ranged in length from 10 minutes to two hours, with the vast majority lasting between 60 to 90 minutes. These interviews focused on each space's programming and activities, with special emphasis placed on determining how each space conceives of its role in addressing current human rights

[12] Because this database was assembled primarily through online research, it naturally excludes many small, community-based memory spaces around the world that do not have a presence on the internet. Although the research team did include many local memory spaces without a web presence in their qualitative assessments during in-country visits, more work could be done in the future to integrate findings from other such small, local memory spaces.

issues and responding to contemporary risks for identity-based violence. Both the information gathered through survey data collection and through site visits was considered in developing the subsequent framework for evaluating the preventive potential of memory spaces.

Memory Spaces and Prevention

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."[13] This quotation from philosopher George Santayana has become a mantra for many working in memory initiatives. Its message serves as a foundational logic for the missions of countless memory spaces. According to Bickford, memorials and other memory spaces consistently claim to serve a dual purpose: "to help redress or repair the damage of past abuse in the public domain and prevent future violations of human rights."[14] That the establishment of memory spaces serves as a form of redress for past harms is somewhat easier to prove. After all, calls for memorialization efforts have become a standard among victim groups across a variety of contexts, from Argentina[15] to Guatemala,[16] Germany[17] to the United States.[18] Furthermore, proposals to construct memorials and other collective memory projects as a form of symbolic reparations have become standard in the final recommendations of truth commissions around the world.[19]

Many spaces of memory, however, assert that the second of these purposes—the prevention of recurrence—is also an essential part of their mandate. Below are only a few examples of the mission statements of memory spaces that mention prevention:

> **Parque de la Memoria (Buenos Aires, Argentina):** This place of memory does not pretend to heal wounds or replace truth and justice, but rather to become a place of remembrance, homage, testimony and reflection. Its objective is for current and future generations that visit the site to become aware of the horror perpetrated by the State and the need to ensure that similar acts will NEVER AGAIN occur.
>
> **Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery for Victims of the 1995 Genocide (Potočari, Bosnia and Herzegovina):** As an institution dedicated to safeguarding the truth about the Srebrenica genocide, we have a responsibility to react and work to prevent the recurrence of "Srebrenica" anytime, anywhere in the world.
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> **Salón del Nunca Más (Granada, Colombia):** The "Never Again Room" is a process of reconstruction of the memory of

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[13] George Santayana, *The Life of Reason, Or, The Phases of Human Progress* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 284.

[14] Bickford, *Memoryworks/Memory Works*, 494.

[15] Kerry E. Whigham, "Memory Encroachments and Re-Plotting the Past: Cartographies of Violence and Memory in Post-Atrocity Argentina, Germany, and the United States," in *Historical Dialogue and the Prevention of Mass Atrocities*, ed. Elazar Barkan et al. (New York: Routledge, 2020), 277–303; Whigham, *Resonant Violence*; Natasha Zaretsky, *Acts of Repair: Justice, Truth, and the Politics of Memory in Argentina* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021).

[16] Kaitlin M. Murphy, *Mapping Memory: Visuality, Affect, and Embodied Politics in the Americas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).

[17] Whigham, *Resonant Violence*; James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

[18] David B. Allison, ed., *Controversial Monuments and Memorials: A Guide for Community Leaders* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018); Kerry E. Whigham, "States of Conception: Renegotiating the Mnemonic Order Amid Crisis," *Memory Studies* 14, no. 6 (2021), 1333–1346, accessed July 27, 2024, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/17506980211054339.

[19] Elin Skaar et al., *Exploring Truth Commission Recommendations in a Comparative Perspective: Beyond Words Volume I*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Intersentia, 2022).

> the victims of the armed conflict in the municipality of Granada, which seeks to generate a physical setting and a social, public and political dynamic where the voice of a society makes known to the world the abuses experienced in the framework of the armed conflict, and at the same time ensures that these are not repeated…
>
> **Kigali Genocide Memorial (Kigali, Rwanda):** To teach visitors about what we can do to prevent future genocides.

Even though non-recurrence and/or prevention is a key feature in the mission statements of so many memory spaces, measuring how successful they are at achieving this goal is a notoriously difficult task. Too often, memory is simply *assumed* to be a contributing factor toward prevention, with little effort to interrogate whether a causal link between these two phenomena exists.

Several scholars express extreme skepticism in the claims that memory spaces can play a role in the prevention of atrocity violence. As the title of David Rieff's treatise on historical memory, *In Praise of Forgetting*, illustrates, Rieff argues that, at best, active discourses of public memory have a neutral effect on post-atrocity societies and, at worst, serve only to elevate the tensions that can lead to identity-based violence.[20] In *The Past Can't Heal Us,* Lea David argues that connecting memorialization efforts with the global human rights agenda has only resulted in rising nationalisms, rather than increased respect for human rights.[21] In *Beyond Memory*, Sarah Gensburger and Sandrine Lefranc argue that contemporary surges in racism, antisemitism, and hate crimes demonstrate the failure of memory policies to build peace and social cohesion.[22] And in a recent edited volume, Joyce Apsel and Amy Sodaro take a more balanced approach to this argument, demonstrating that, while memory spaces may have the capacity to persuade, they can also fall prey to politicization and other social factors that mitigate their potential benefits.[23]

Even those scholars and practitioners who do argue in favor of memory spaces as tools for prevention often struggle to articulate and, more importantly, prove the exact mechanism by which this occurs. Most build their argument on a narrative of personal subjective change. In this story, individual visitors come to a memorial, memory site, or museum. They are deeply impacted and transformed by the content and experience of the memory space. This experience stays with them as they leave the space, subsequently transforming their behavior and choices as they move forward in life. Bickford writes that "the theory of change is that creating a public memorial will lead to learning by citizens, as individuals and as organized groups, and in particular by potential future bystanders."[24] He continues, "According to this view, memorials teach by employing specific pedagogic strategies: generating empathy for victims, transferring facts and information, and asking existential questions."[25] Through these strategies, visitors are transformed into so-called upstanders in the face of future atrocities, armed now with tools to recognize the warning signs for such violence.

There are, of course, several problems when it comes to proving the accuracy of this narrative. First, most people visiting memory spaces do so only once, and even then, for a fairly

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[20] David Rieff, *In Praise of Forgetting: Historical Memory and Its Ironies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

[21] Lea David, *The Past Can't Heal Us: The Dangers of Mandating Memory in the Name of Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[22] Sarah Gensberger and Sandrine Lefranc, *Beyond Memory: Can We Really Learn from the Past?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

[23] Joyce Apsel and Amy Sodaro, eds., *Museums and Sites of Persuasion: Politics, Memory, and Human Rights*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2019).

[24] Bickford, *Memoryworks/Memory Works*, 495.

[25] Ibid.

limited amount of time. According to our survey, the majority of visitors (55.6%) visit the given memory spaces only once per year or less, with the plurality (34.3%) visiting a space only once or twice in a lifetime. Of these, most visit for only a portion of that day. For instance, the website for the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum—without doubt one of the largest and most time-consuming memory sites in the world—recommends that visitors reserve at least 90 minutes for their visit.[26] If visitors follow this advice, it provides museum directors, curators, and staff with a relatively short window to make a lasting impression on the visitor. Of course, it is possible for visitors to have a transformative experience in a short amount of time, but this reality does present a special challenge to museum directors and educators as they consider how to generate such an impact during this limited period of engagement. Second, for most spaces, their interaction with the visitor ends when the visitor leaves the memory space. Because of this, it is very difficult to track long-lasting impact in any systematic way. Third, even if memory spaces were able to track long-lasting impact, it is impossible to isolate the memory space as *the* variable that makes a difference, as visitors do not live in a vacuum. While they may be impacted by a visit to a memory space, they are also impacted by their home environments, social interactions, jobs, education, and countless other aspects of their daily lives. How does one determine which of these variables has been responsible for shaping a visitor's attitudes and behaviors? Finally, there is the question of self-selection. The kinds of people most likely to visit memory spaces may be those who are already "converted" to the message the memory space is trying to communicate.

All this said, there is some innovative work happening to evaluate the impact of memory spaces. Lorraine Brown analyzes the responses of visitors to memorials, statues, and museums relating to the crimes of Nazism in Berlin, finding that visitors to memory spaces demonstrate an increased knowledge of the history of these crimes, alongside strong emotional responses of "sadness, shock, anger, despair, and incomprehension."[27] This study does not evaluate any long-term effects of these visits, however, nor does it look at behavioral change. Duncan Light, Remus Creţan, and Andreea-Mihaela Dunca conducted focus groups with students after visiting a Romanian memorial museum and found mixed results, ultimately expressing skepticism about the power of the museum to demonstrate a lasting impact.[28] Brandon Hamber, Liz Ševčenko, and Ereshnee Naidu investigate three different memory spaces in Bangladesh, Italy, and Chile, citing the relative ease in measuring changing attitudes or the increased awareness of visitors when compared with evaluating longer-term impact and how these memory spaces are integrated within larger societal processes of post-atrocity transformation.[29]

One recent study proves an exception to this trend. Laia Balcells, Valeria Palanza, and Elsa Voytas conducted a first-of-its-kind empirical study of the effect of visitation to the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Santiago, Chile.[30] Unlike other studies, this one established a control group of college students who did not visit the museum alongside another group who did visit, then compared their responses to an array of questions. Their study finds that the visit to the museum indeed did have a desired impact; museum visitors were more prone to renounce the institutions most closely associated with perpetrating the crimes depicted

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[26] See Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, accessed September 11, 2024, https://www.auschwitz.org/en/visiting/#:~:text=In%20order%20to%20take%20in,time%20for%20Auschwitz%20II%2DBirkenau.

[27] Lorraine Brown, "Memorials to the Victims of Nazism: The Impact on Tourists in Berlin," *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 13, no. 3 (2015), 244, accessed July 27, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2014.946423.

[28] Duncan Light et al., "Museums and Transitional Justice: Assessing the Impact of a Memorial Museum on Young People in Post-Communist Romania," *Societies* 11, no. 2 (2021), accessed July 27, 2024, https://doi.org/10.3390/soc11020043.

[29] Brandon Hamber et al., "Utopian Dreams or Practical Possibilities? The Challenges of Evaluating the Impact of Memorialization in Societies in Transition," *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4, no. 3 (November 2010), 391–420, accessed July 27, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijq018.

[30] Laia Balcells et al., "Do Transitional Justice Museums Persuade Visitors? Evidence from a Field Experiment," *The Journal of Politics* 84, no. 1 (2022), 496–510, accessed July 27, 2024, https://doi-org.gate3.library.lse.ac.uk/10.1086/714765.

in the museum. They also proved to support transitional justice measures more than the control group. Additionally, the researchers conducted a follow-up study six months after the initial visit and found that some of these effects were still present. Although this study is only the first to attempt such a methodology, it does offer a promising model that researchers and practitioners may build upon in the future to evaluate the short- and long-term impact of memory space visitation.

Still, all these studies demonstrate the tendency to connect the preventive impact of memory spaces with a potential change at the level of the individual visitor. Such change may, in fact, be possible, and, given that genocides and other forms of large-scale, identity-based violence are perpetrated by individuals acting against other individuals, pursuing such change is not a bad goal. In many ways, it mirrors the same kind of change pursued by other educational mechanisms, including primary, secondary, and post-secondary education,[31] and most particularly recent initiatives at human rights and citizenship education.[32] But atrocity prevention certainly entails much more than the attitudinal change of individuals within a society. It also requires the transformation of systems, alongside social and political institutions. Is it possible to think of memory spaces as having this kind of impact, as well?

A Broader View of Prevention at Memory Spaces

Providing evidence that an atrocity has, in fact, been prevented is not a simple task. The difficulty associated with it also correlates directly with how an audience understands what atrocity prevention entails. If prevention is measured based on a metric where an atrocity was known to be imminent but was averted by a specific intervention, it becomes basically impossible to prove anything as truly preventive. Such a metric, however, is far too much of a burden to place on any single intervention. Genocides and other mass atrocities are complex social and political processes. The idea that a silver bullet solution exists to prevent one from occurring is a fallacy. Complex problems require complex solutions, and atrocities are no different in this regard. Rather than one action that single-handedly saves the day, true prevention involves many distinct yet interrelated actions that, bit by bit, make the occurrence of atrocity violence less likely.

How can we measure which actions can make such a contribution? In recent decades, academics and practitioners working in the field of atrocity prevention have reached a remarkable level of consensus regarding the social, political, and economic factors that most clearly predict risk that a genocide or other mass atrocity will occur. The result has been an array of early warning lists and risk assessment frameworks for indicating the likelihood that mass killing will take place in a given society. Some of these lists are designed to diagnose the current situation in various countries when it comes to specific human rights metrics. For instance, Freedom House assesses each country's level of civil and political rights, while Georgetown University's Women, Peace, and Security Index measures rights and security related specifically to women and girls. Others of these lists are meant to predict how imminent atrocity may be in the future, for instance, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's Early Warning Project, Australian National University's Atrocity Forecasting Project, and Minority Rights Group International's Peoples Under Threat ranking. Still other risk assessment frameworks provide no ranking of countries at all. Instead, they are designed as tools for policymakers and practitioners to determine where the risks for atrocity lie in a given society. Within this category one would find the United Nations' Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes or James Waller's risk assessment framework.[33]

Despite the quantity of lists and frameworks that exist for evaluating atrocity risk, there is surprising consistency across these mechanisms when it comes to the factors deemed worthy of

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[31] Bickford, *Memoryworks/Memory Works*.

[32] Clara Ramírez-Barat and Roger Duthie, eds., *Transitional Justice and Education: Learning Peace* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2017).

[33] Waller, *Confronting Evil*.

consideration. As Waller points out, these risk factors that are most highly related to risk for identity-based mass killing typically fall into four categories: factors related to governance, conflict history, economic conditions, and social fragmentation.[34] If, as I argue, the atrocity prevention community has and should move beyond the idea that prevention can be measured based on the success of any single intervention, these risk assessment models provide a framework for assessing preventive impact. In fact, if an action, initiative, or intervention serves to respond to and diminish current risk, that action can be considered as contributing to prevention. For instance, if the research supports the idea that a homogenous governance structure in a diverse society is a risk factor for atrocity violence, then a policy or program that succeeds at diversifying a previously homogenous government institution can be seen as contributing to prevention because it is helping to mitigate that risk factor. Again, it is not single-handedly removing all risk within a society, but it should also not be expected to do so. The reality is that this initiative, in complementarity with a bevy of others, could have a positive impact.

Rather than only thinking about prevention as the reduction of risk, Stephen McLoughlin describes how it can also be understood as the building of societal resilience—a point that may be especially prescient when thinking about the preventive impact of memory spaces.[35] The Oxford English Dictionary defines resilience as "the quality or fact of being able to recover quickly or easily from, or resist being affected by, a misfortune, shock, illness, etc."[36] When societies are resilient in the face of atrocity risk, they are able to bounce quickly back from factors that, in less resilient societies, might trigger instability or outright violence. Resilience is often used to describe the capacity of individual victims of atrocity, and particularly children, to recover from the extreme harm they have suffered. A healthy critique of this version of resilience has emerged, however, which highlights the inherent injustice in expecting victims of harm to "bounce back" so easily.[37] As New Orleans-based civil rights attorney Tracie Washington puts it, "Stop calling me resilient. I'm not resilient. Because every time you say, 'Oh, they're resilient,' you can do something else to me."[38] In this context, however, I use the term resilience to refer more broadly to societies and institutions. While it can be unfair to ask victims to be resilient in the face of the most outrageous harms, shoring up institutions and structures within our societies that are able to withstand the forces and triggers that may otherwise lead to atrocity is something to which we all can aspire. Building societal resilience contributes directly to atrocity prevention, as it makes a society less susceptible to the risk factors that might otherwise lead to violence. For instance, if religious or ethnic division is a known risk factor for mass atrocities, then an initiative that promotes religious or ethnic cohesion would be an example of building societal resilience. Similarly, a president or other ruler with full and unquestioned authority is a known risk factor for atrocity violence. A policy that would strengthen societal resilience to mass atrocities, in this case, would be one that places some forms of legislative or judicial constraints on the executive.

Thinking about atrocity prevention as part and parcel with building societal resilience opens the possibilities for what can be considered as preventive. It also vastly expands the ranks

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Stephen McLoughlin, *The Structural Prevention of Mass Atrocities: Understanding Risk and Resilience* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

[36] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "resilience (n.)," September 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3371756822.

[37] For example, see Hamideh Mahdiani and Michael Ungar, "The Dark Side of Resilience," *Adversity and Resilience Science* 2 (2021), 147–155, accessed July 27, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1007/s42844-021-00031-z; Abby R. Rosenberg et al., "When Resilience Is Cliche and Resilience Resources Are Taboo: How Language and Policies Exacerbate Mental Health Disparities," *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* 7, no. 4 (2023), 236–237, accessed July 27, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(23)00005-6.

[38] Quoted in Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs. The Climate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), 419.

of the kinds of actors that can play a role in prevention work.[39] It is not only politicians or world leaders who help build societal resilience. In fact, this kind of resilience can truly emerge from the grassroots. It is work that can start at the community level and work its way outward and upward, rather than the other way around. When we think about prevention in this new way, then, even the most modest of memory spaces can become a hub for building resilience to identity-based violence and division in its respective community. This kind of prevention is more than just the individual attitudinal change that has typically been seen as the purview of memory spaces. Here, memory spaces are institutions, and therefore can become a player in strengthening communities and other institutions with which they interact.

What follows are examples from three memory spaces, each from a different country in a different geographical region. None of them is particularly large. None has the kind of massive audiences one would associate with the most well-known memory sites, like the US Holocaust Memorial Museum or the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. But they are all making a true impact within the communities they serve by actively recognizing the risk factors that exist around them and taking direct and concerted actions to mitigate those risks and simultaneously strengthen societal resilience. To be clear, highlighting the contributions of these three memory spaces is not to say that all memory spaces are inherently preventive. Memory can be instrumentalized to create great social harm just as easily as it can be a tool for social good. When designed and managed with prevention and human rights in mind, however, memory spaces can be a powerful actor in the work of preventing atrocity violence, as the following examples illustrate. Furthermore, although memory spaces of every size can contribute to building societal resilience to atrocity risk, this article focuses specifically on local memory spaces to demonstrate that even spaces and initiatives with the smallest possible sphere of influence can have a positive impact in preventing atrocity violence. Moreover, as will be visible, the lessons from these small spaces can certainly be scaled up to larger spaces, as well.

Parque Monumento, Trujillo, Colombia

Parque Monumento (Monument Park) sits on a hillside in the small town of Trujillo, about an hour and a half outside the bustling city of Cali in Colombia's Cauca Valley. Trujillo faced extreme levels of violence throughout the armed conflict that racked Colombia, starting in the second half of the twentieth century and (mostly) ending with the signing of a peace agreement in 2016. The height of this violence in Trujillo occurred between 1986 and 1994, when Trujillo saw 342 of its citizens disappeared and murdered in what is now known as the "Massacre of Trujillo."[40] In the face of this terror, a group of family members directly impacted by this violence came together in 1995 to form the Asociación de Familiares de las Víctimas de Trujillo (Association of Relatives of the Victims of Trujillo), or AFAVIT, for short. In stages over the years, AFAVIT dedicated itself to constructing the Monument Park, which contains a memorial pathway that educates visitors about the various massacres around Colombia and the rest of Latin America; a tiered array of monumental ossuaries that depict the lives of 232 victims murdered over the decades in Trujillo; and a large community center that serves as a hub for AFAVIT's activities and programming.[41]

AFAVIT's Monument Park is an interesting example to consider when thinking about memory spaces and prevention for several reasons. First, it is markedly different from the vast majority of memory spaces examined in this study. As referenced above, most memory spaces are visited by individuals only one time per year or less. 55.5% of all memory spaces surveyed are visited by the average person once per year or less. Only 3.1% of respondents reported that the

[39] Nadia Rubaii et al., "Expanding the Ranks of Atrocity Prevention: Bringing a Prevention Lens to Professional Graduate Education," in *AIPG Sherri P. Rosenberg Policy Papers in Prevention and I-GMAP Mechanisms of Atrocity Prevention Report* 2 (New York: Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities and the Institute for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention, 2021).

[40] Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, "Informe No. 68/16, Caso 11.007," OEA/Ser.L/V/II.159, Doc. 77 (November 30, 2016), https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/2016/cosa11007es.pdf.

[41] For more information, see AFAVIT, accessed September 28, 2024, https://afavit.webnode.com.co/.

average visitor to their memory space comes on a weekly or daily basis, making these kinds of sites a true anomaly. Monument Park, however, fits this description. Its audience is not a rotating slew of visiting tourists; rather, it is the community of Trujillo that they serve, and the level of engagement they have developed with that community is impressive. The community center is first of all a hub for surviving family members who have lost loved ones during the armed conflict. For this reason, Monument Park is foremost a space for rebuilding community and healing wounds left by years of violence. The center hosts frequent potluck meals that bring this community together in a space of conviviality—a strong rebuke to the divisive nature of armed conflict.

But two other examples from AFAVIT demonstrate a direct contribution that the space is making to the prevention of current and future violence. First, AFAVIT has intentionally hired Venezuelan refugees as maintenance workers and, more importantly, as active participants in their community events. Like many communities in Colombia, Trujillo has received a number of Venezuelan migrants and refugees who began fleeing Venezuela in 2013. Today, nearly 3 million Venezuelans reside in Colombia.[42] Around the world, displaced populations suffer increased risk of violence and marginalization. Although Colombia has recently become a global leader in this field by passing legislation[43] normalizing the residency status of the Venezuelans and thus granting them the right to work, healthcare, and education, this does not mean that migrants and refugees have been accepted warmly in all communities. When AFAVIT saw the needs of local Venezuelan refugees and noticed an uptick in hate speech in reference to them, they made direct efforts to make them part of the AFAVIT community. By providing jobs to Venezuelan refugees, they mitigated the most direct economic risks suffered by displaced individuals. Perhaps more importantly, however, AFAVIT cited the connection between the political violence they experienced in Colombia and the political and economic violence that Venezuelans were fleeing in their home country. By integrating them within the activities of their organization, they modeled for Trujillo a different mode of engagement: one based on generosity, acceptance, and the construction of transnational networks of solidarity.

Another program at Monument Park may contribute even more directly to atrocity prevention. Like many community organizations, AFAVIT hosts several programs aimed at local youth. Their most successful is an after-school music program. Local primary and secondary school students come to the community center at Monument Park after school each day, where they learn to play instruments, write songs, sing, and perform traditional Colombian folk dances. At face value, it is difficult to connect an after-school music program with atrocity prevention…until one hears from its orchestrators from where the idea for the project came. Trujillo, like other communities around Colombia, suffered greatly when armed groups like the FARC recruited their young children (between 9 and 17 years old) to join the armed conflict as combatants.[44] The most likely to fall victim to these recruitment efforts, according to AFAVIT, were the children who had no opportunities, no community, and no passions to keep them in Trujillo. The music program was born out of a need to create both a sense of passion and a community of accountability for the young people of Trujillo so that their risk of joining the armed conflict diminished. Through grassroots fundraising efforts, AFAVIT finds ways to buy each student's preferred instrument, and they come to Monument Park each day to learn how to play it with an ever-growing band of their peers. The youth group plays concerts for the local community on a regular basis, which also serves as a way of getting more people involved in the other work that AFAVIT is doing. In this way, a simple after-school music program is perhaps doing the most direct prevention work possible by providing healthy alternatives to the generation that could otherwise be continuing the armed violence. AFAVIT and their

[42] See UNHCR webpage on Colombia, https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/operations/colombia.

[43] Institute for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention and Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities, "Safer Havens: Better Protection of Venezuelans in Colombia from Identity-Based Violence" (Binghamton, NY: I-GMAP and AIPG), 2024.

[44] María Isabel Ortiz Fonnegra, "Tras 4 Años, así va el Caso en la JEP por Reclutamiento de Niños," *El Tiempo*, April 11, 2023, accessed September 25, 2024, https://www.eltiempo.com/justicia/jep-colombia/reclutamiento-de-menores-por-las-farc-asi-va-el-caso-en-la-jep-758248.

Monument Park may not see the numbers of visitors that many of the most famous memory sites and museums welcome each year, but through sustained and targeted engagement with their local community, they are undoubtedly playing a role in mitigating the risks for future atrocity violence.

Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, Lwandle, South Africa

The Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum (LMLM) is a small community museum located in Lwandle, a township about 50 kilometers outside of Cape Town, South Africa. The township itself started in 1960, when a series of hostels were constructed to house about 500 migrant laborers from the Eastern Cape who came for jobs at the nearby factories. Although only working men were legally permitted to stay in Lwandle, these men began bringing their families with them in the 1980s, which is when many informal settlements began to spring up around the hostels. The township continued to grow over the years, even after Apartheid officially came to an end in 1994. Today, it has about 20,000 official residents crammed within an area of about 1.2 square kilometers (about half a square mile)—over one-and-a-half times the population density of New York City.[45]

The LMLM, housed in a former community hall, opened in 2000 with a mission to tell the history of Lwandle and the stories of individual workers who built it and continue to live there today. It includes an exhibition space with a permanent exhibition telling the story of how Lwandle came to be, along with temporary exhibitions related to specific topics. One, for instance, uses photography and storytelling to give voice to the residents of Lwandle and what they experienced under and since Apartheid. Another depicts recent efforts to evict and tear down sections of Lwandle to make room for the encroaching, predominantly white, neighborhoods.

In addition to telling the stories of Lwandle to locals and the occasional tourist who visits the exhibition, the LMLM is also taking on some innovative activities that respond directly to the risks that the residents of Lwandle face on a daily basis. Given the historical realities that gave birth to Lwandle, the LMLM naturally connects the economic, social, and political factors that shaped non-white South Africans' lives during and after Apartheid, but it is also working to transform many of those factors that are still in play. First, the museum has become a hub for career development for local residents. During the research team's visit to the LMLM, a steady stream of locals came and went throughout the time. Most of these people stopped at the museum to print and receive feedback on resumes they had drafted as they applied for new jobs. According to the museum's director, Masa Soko, people started coming to the LMLM to have their resumes printed because doing so on their equipment was more reliable and less costly than what was available at the nearby library. Soon, the staff of the LMLM started providing career development counseling to these residents, helping them draft and revise their materials as they applied for new work. Now, the LMLM is working to formalize this component of their work even further by creating an official resource center that provides counseling on job-related issues and runs workshops for locals to help them find better work opportunities.

Additionally, the LMLM offers a series of workshops focused on social cohesion and community-building. One series of workshops brings together local women who range in age from their early twenties to late sixties to work on traditional beading and crocheting projects. This group meets twice per week to work on their handicrafts. At the end of the series of workshops, the LMLM hosts a festival to showcase the work developed through these workshops; this has also become an opportunity for participants to sell their wares. This workshop series is now so popular that there is a long waiting list to participate. Soko explained the rationale behind the workshops: "With COVID, there are a lot of people that are left unemployed, and we fear that people are more dependent on jobs instead of creating the work with their own hands. And there's a lot of demand, as well, for beads especially, so it's something that they can be able to leave off with, and it's something that they can pass on to the

[45] For more information, see Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, accessed September 28, 2024, https://lwandle.com/.

next generation."[46] As a result, not only have their workshops served as a way to build community; they are also a source of economic empowerment for residents who formerly struggled to sustain themselves and their families.

In describing how the LMLM develops their programming, Soko said,

> We identify issues—and it helps that all my staff, we stay here in this community. So we identify issues in the community that at least we have the power to change those situations. And those that we don't have the power to change, we normally get experts to come and then speak to the community members. But I think it helps that we also stay here, so we know what are some of the challenges that people have.[47]

The continuing economic vulnerability of groups that have been targeted by systematic, identity-based violence is often not considered as a component of the atrocity prevention project. In fact, of all the risk factors related to mass atrocities, the economic aspects of their crimes are perhaps the least studied and understood.[48] Despite this fact, the LMLM has naturally developed tools for responding to these risks that are most pertinent to the residents of Lwandle. Such a response seems especially serendipitous given the history of Lwandle itself. The township, which was born of the repressive economic policies of Apartheid to exploit non-white laborers, and the museum, which was created to tell their stories, is now also a space deeply involved in providing the tools and skills that have still been denied to the residents of Lwandle even decades after Apartheid officially ended. In doing so, the LMLM is fighting to prevent the continued economic vulnerability of the community in which it resides.

Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

The Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center (BARC) is an NGO based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, that was started in the 1990s by Cambodian filmmaker Rithy Panh. The cultural destruction wrought by the Khmer Rouge surrounding the 1970s genocide in Cambodia, followed by years of civil war, meant that Cambodia was at risk of losing its entire cultural history. In response, Panh started BARC as a center for collecting all possible film, photography, television, and sound archives related to Cambodia as a means of preserving Cambodia's audiovisual history and making it publicly available to all Cambodians. But BARC did not stop at collecting materials that already exist. As it has grown, BARC now has an array of programs through which they add to this archive themselves and disseminate it around the country in a way that addresses some of the contemporary risk factors that Cambodia faces.[49] Two programs in particular showcase this kind of work.

Their Mobile Cinema program takes material from the central archive in Phnom Penh to rural villages and communities across Cambodia, especially to those without the resources to visit the capital. BARC sets up the Mobile Cinema in a central area of the given village, and they invite the entire community to attend the evening event. Each event consists of three hour-long sections. The first hour is designed specifically for children, showcasing an animation or children's film that at once entertains and conveys an important educational message. For instance, they may show a cartoon on the importance of safe drinking water for public health. The second hour is aimed at adults, and it features a film or show that highlights social issues that Cambodia is confronting. Domestic violence prevention, for instance, has been a focus of

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[46] Masa Soko, Personal Interview, March 15, 2022.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Charles Anderton and Jurgen Brauer, eds., *Economic Aspects of Genocides, Other Mass Atrocities, and Their Prevention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[49] For more information, see Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center, accessed September 28, 2024, https://bophana.org/.

some of these events, as has the enduring trauma of the Khmer Rouge period. The third hour is total family entertainment, with no specific social message. It may feature, for instance, a popular film from pre-Khmer Rouge Cambodia. Importantly, each Mobile Cinema event consists of a moderated open-floor discussion where community members are invited to process and respond publicly to the material they have viewed. These conversations often become a space for sharing testimony of the violence people have experienced, but they also transform into a forum for collective, community-based problem solving. Through the Mobile Cinema program, BARC is using the materials of their audiovisual archive to confront and provide tools for addressing the social and circumstantial factors that make people more vulnerable to violence. Simultaneously, they empower the community itself as a central actor in addressing these problems.

Another program BARC has developed focuses on amplifying the voices of the Indigenous peoples of the Mekong region. Rapid development alongside generalized regional threats to ethnic minorities have made the Indigenous peoples of the Mekong River region (Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam) an incredibly threatened category, as they face a consistent risk of cultural and physical destruction.[50] In light of this reality, BARC created the Voices of Indigenous People program as a way of enabling Indigenous youth to tell the stories of their community and preserve the culture that is at risk of extermination. BARC selects a cohort of Indigenous youth, with a focus on young Indigenous women and girls, for a one-year training. Participants are first trained in the tools of documentary filmmaking, including cinematography, editing, sound recording, and directing. BARC then provides them with the equipment to film their own documentaries based on the stories of their communities that they want to tell and preserve. Each participant is required to film their story in their local Indigenous language as a means of documenting these threatened tongues. The filmmakers must then transcribe their film—a particular challenge, given that many of these Indigenous languages have not previously had a written form. For BARC, however, this step is a key part of the project, as it seeks to preserve these languages that are at extreme threat of complete annihilation. The filmmakers then translate their films into both Khmer and English. At the end of the year, BARC holds a large film festival in Phnom Penh that showcases the films of the participants alongside other films that tell the stories of the people of the Mekong River. Through this program, not only is BARC equipping young people from underserved and underrepresented communities with transferable skills that can empower them to more successful futures. They are also preserving key aspects of cultures that are at extreme risk of disappearance because of political, social, and environmental factors. As such, through its programming, this memory space is actively combatting the threat of genocide of Indigenous populations through cultural obliteration.

Conclusion

Advocates have long cited memory spaces as a tool in making *never again* a reality. Until now, however, much of the rationale for this logic has focused on the potential and aspirational transformation of individuals as they visit the museums, memorials, and sites that tell the stories of a violent and difficult past. This article argues for a broader understanding of the power that memory spaces can have to prevent the recurrence of atrocities and other forms of identity-based violence. Through thoughtful, strategic programming and other initiatives that engage local communities, memory spaces demonstrate the potential to respond directly to the factors that place societies at elevated risk for such violence and, with effort, mitigate that risk in some way. Obviously, memory spaces on their own cannot stop an imminent atrocity—nor should they be expected to do so. But the examples from this article demonstrate how they can play an active role in what must ultimately be a complex, multifaceted, society-wide approach to confronting the risk factors present in a given scenario and diminishing them.

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[50] Khen Suan Khai, "Threat to the Existence of Riparian Communities of the Mekong" (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, August 17, 2021), accessed September 25, 2024, https://th.boell.org/en/2021/08/17/riparian-communities-mekong.

This article only looks at the work being done at physical memory spaces to respond to the risk factors for atrocity violence and to protect identity groups that are most vulnerable to persecution. But memory initiatives take many different forms beyond the physical memory sites and memorials explored here. This study may provide a framework, however, that others can apply to a variety of other memory initiatives—including educational curriculum design and implementation, artistic and cultural interventions, and initiatives by civil society organizations and activists—to evaluate how they contribute to addressing contemporary risk through the process of engaging with the past. Relating specifically to memory spaces, this research project also involves the public release of a toolkit designed to help memory spaces implement an atrocity prevention lens into their exhibition design and programming.[51] This toolkit shares creative practices like those described in this article with the directors and staff of memory spaces around the world in the hopes of inspiring more spaces to actively incorporate prevention thinking into the initiatives they undertake. The toolkit is freely available in multiple languages on the Publications page for the website of the Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities.[52]

The importance of acknowledging and remembering the identity-based violence that groups have endured in the past cannot be overstated. Indeed, it is the internationally recognized right of victims, survivors, and their families to receive redress and repair for the harms they have suffered. But to truly *prevent* large-scale violence like mass atrocities requires more than memory. As the previous examples demonstrate, if, in fact, a memory space desires to play a role in prevention, this may require a new level of creative thinking and action that extends much further than a museum exhibition or a beautiful statue. It necessitates an engaged endeavor to identify the risks that exist in a given community and a concerted effort to activate the past in the service of mitigating those risks in the present.

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[51] Kerry E. Whigham, "Beyond Remembering: An Atrocity Prevention Toolkit for Memory Spaces" (New York: Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities, 2023).

[52] "Publications," *Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities* (n.d.), accessed 25 September 2024, https://www.auschwitzinstitute.org/news/publications.

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