Contextualising the Principles of Memorialisation

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Eight guiding principles for memorialisation or memory initiatives were developed by participants at the 2012 International Memory Initiatives Exchange Forum held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The principles which were proposed for the initiatives include: Context; Critical Self-Reflection; Participation; Complementarity; Process; Multiple Narratives; Youth; and Politicisation (Impunity Watch, 2013: 1). This section will expatiate on the eight principles by drawing from a body of literature within the humanities and the social sciences across different continents.

The Context in which a memorialisation project is introduced needs to be given appropriate consideration due to the failure of uncritical adoption of memory initiatives across different national contexts (Impunity Watch, 2013: 4). The distinctiveness of hierarchical layers and socio-cultural nuances across different societies ought to be considered in order to create comprehensive memory initiatives. These are fundamental to understanding the peculiarity of the root causes and nature of conflicts in different spaces, and develop appropriate strategies for the management and termination of conflicts; thereby countering their lasting legacies and shaping the socio-political context in transitioning societies. The implication of this is that of creating relevant blueprints for structural and institutional reforms for incoming regimes in such societies (Impunity Watch, 2013: 4). For instance, the Norwegian context within which war children were deported and publicly discriminated against (on the assumption that they constituted social problems and were inferior citizens having sprung out of underdeveloped parents) (Valderhaug, 2011: 15) was very important in advancing a memory initiative for their resettlement. Likewise, The 4.3 Research Institute in South Korea had to play a vital role in recapturing the memories of the 4.3 events as the evidence had been purposively destroyed by the past regimes (Kim, 2009: 414-415). It achieved this by unearthing the list of the court-marshalled persons, while the discovery of the Darangashi cave provided enough evidence and was relevant in the parliamentary approval of commemoration projects such as the building of the memorial cemetery, park and museum, (Kim, 2009: 422, 421).
The role of the archivist in aiding memorial initiatives is also relevant here. This is because of the need to go beyond making archival facts available to inquisitors to detailing them with the context within which these facts were produced (Valderhaug, 2011: 20-21). This would go a long way in achieving a holistic presentation of history and aid the adoption of the right memory initiatives. Again Prutschi and Weintraub (2000: 23) supported the need for this when they proposed that “what is needed in not only authenticity in the preservation of memory but also memory anchored in purpose and meaning.” This is important to preclude negative reactions from sympathetic non-participants in the catastrophic events. For them, beyond accuracy of the accounts provided, understanding the meaning within the context of occurrence of these events is the most fundamental objective of memorialisation. Also, there is the need to understand the contemporary value context within which memorialisation takes place to avert the danger of ignoring important events which may be deemed irrelevant to the present but have symbolic implications for the future (see Jelin, 1994: 50). The role of researchers and academics in understanding the context of developing memory initiatives cannot be overemphasized. Scholars and researchers in the fields of History, Archaeology, Chemistry, Anthropology, Transitional Justice, Law, Political Science and other such relevant fields, including the medical and biological sciences have roles to play in deciphering the actual contexts of violations. This multidisciplinary approach would endeavour near accuracy for documentation of events and aid the relevance of archival materials for initiating memorials. Finally, the initiation of memorial projects ought to also consider the different contexts of perception of stakeholders who could be third party observers, victims, perpetrators, rescuers and bystanders. The integration of their diverse perspectives helps to sustain and implement memorialisation policies within relevant spatio-temporal contexts.

The second principle discussed was that of Critical Self-Reflection which must be given basic consideration by all parties, especially the third parties. This principle focuses on the ethical implications of instituting risk-laden projects for the purpose of memorialisation. The what, why, where, when and how of the memory initiative should then be critically examined to maximize the effect of the memorialisation process. Following from the above, external actors in the memorialisation project must avoid untoward attitudes to the societal context and refrain from imprudently imposing stereotypical versions of historical truth, which delineates the act from its teleological mandate of justice attainment (Impunity Watch, 2013: 5-6). The observation of Miller (2008: 272) about the possible “coherence of blindness” to methodical limitations resulting from the indiscriminate importation of transitional justice mechanisms, without appropriate transmutation to suit the relevant national and local contexts, is very instructive herein. Therefore, irrespective of the global normative status which the transitional justice mechanism (in this case memorialisation) may have attained (Teitel, 2003: 89-92), the adaptation of memory initiatives should be a primary focus of third party interventions. This is because, as Jelin (1994: 39) explained, the memorialisation of past violations denotes “a social and cultural operation involving a symbolic power struggle of considerable magnitude.” It is recommended that outside actors consult with local ones, as well as those topmost in the societal hierarchy, in understanding the power dynamics within local contexts, with the view of developing an integral memorialisation policy in line with acceptable universal norms (Impunity Watch, 2013: 5-6). The domestication of this transitional justice mechanism is therefore very important especially as communities...
have their unique ways of remembering that is suitable to their contexts. The consideration of local symbols, customs, traditions, social arrangements, and their historical relevance is key for determining the appropriateness of memory initiatives. This would help in preventing exploitation of victimhood where the display of memorials do not address critical issues but are manipulated for political and economic gains.

The third principle is that of Participation in which the members of the grassroots form an integral part of the memorialisation process. This principle projects a situation wherein there is the actual qualitative participation of important stakeholders in local communities, rather than they serving as mere consultants. The politicisation of the post war trials of Nuremberg and Tokyo, in which the transitional justice mechanisms were designed to address perpetrators of national conflicts to the detriment of individual experiences of the victims (especially women victims of rape and sexual violence), led to the muting of the latter’s experiences (Henry, 2011: 2). This exclusion of individual experiences often leave the most vulnerable groups with the trauma of relieving this experiences without any help in assuaging the pain. This principle is therefore important to ensure the bridging of gaps between hegemonic narratives and individual accounts while still respecting the socio-cultural traditions, needs and rights of the people. It also encourages empowerment of the locals through a sense of ownership with the responsibility of guiding the memory initiatives. Ensuring this within the relevant social context will facilitate sustainability of the process (Impunity Watch, 2013: 7). In the creation of memorials for societal integration and peacebuilding, specific attention ought to be paid to women, children and people living with disabilities who are often kept at the periphery of the transitional justice project. There is thus the important need to engage all the relevant stakeholders in determining the suitable forms of justice (whether retributive, reparative, distributive or corrective)\(^5\) in precluding dissociation (see Gwyn, 2011)\(^5\) by major stakeholders in the memorialisation process. The integration of this most vulnerable groups in the society will help in addressing issues of power, exclusion, gender, equity and justice in transitioning societies.

Closely linked with the principle of participation is that of Complementarity which is about combining memory initiatives with other transitional justice mechanisms, to achieve truth, justice, reparations and non-recurrence of violence, both at the individual and community levels. The true transformation of transitional societies can only be attained when the social, political, legal, cultural, economic and institutional reforms are made possible through the adoption of various transitional mechanisms suitable to particular contexts. Memorialisation is considered as a transitional justice mechanism that could be combined with other mechanisms to achieve transformation of the post-conflict society, especially where perpetrators of past crimes remain in power and tend to manipulate other mechanisms to preclude institutional and political reforms (Impunity Watch, 2013: 8). An example of a memory initiative could be shaming of perpetrators when they make public appearance as a persistent way to demand for justice. The Hillsborough example also reflected the impact of memorialisation as a complement to the inquests into the killings of the 96 Liverpool fans which resulted in their exoneration from their culpability during the disaster that resulted in their death. In another sense, the principle of complementarity could be applied to participants where individuals come from diverse cultural, political, religious and ideological inclinations, as was the case with Argentina’s Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos (the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights)
One other major principle is that of Process, whereby memorialisation is regarded as a long-term process leading to individual, institutional and structural transformations in post-conflict societies, rather than as an end in itself. Within this scenario, the focus is on the sustenance of the involvement of local actors through intergenerational dialogue. The relevance of this lies in the fact that memorialisation is central to the post-conflict formation of identities and alliances by defining interactional models between individuals and communities in dealing with the past. (Impunity Watch, 2013: 10). The three conditions which affect memory initiatives discussed by Jon Elster in his “Memory and Transitional Justice” are important for consideration in defining the process of memorialisation. They include the spontaneous decay of emotion; the increase in difficulty of documentation of wrongdoings and sufferings with time; and decay of memory of events through generations. These mechanisms are said to affect the decline of the severity of punishment and the generosity of compensation (See Elster, 2003). These could be countered by timely involvement of local actors across generations within the memorialisation process in order to make it positively enduring. However, due to the evolutionary nature of memory (see Roberts and Roberts, 1996: 23-24), there is also the need to factor in apposite timing and sequencing of memory initiatives in the bid to achieve the transformation of interactions over time (especially in societies where dealing with the past is still covert) rather than serve as mere collectives of ills of the past. Within this context, building of monuments as a memory initiative must be enlivened through organisation of activities around the symbolic moment or events which they memorialise. Inferentially, appropriate timing and sequencing of memorialisation activities should be done in such a manner that its effects are maximised (Impunity Watch, 2013: 10). For example, the Jeju 4.3 events Committee was set up as the aftermath of different memory initiatives to fit into the context of resistance. The unravelling of events went on for much longer periods (close to a decade as at 2009) than had been the experience within other contexts (Kim, 2009: 408). The right interpretation of monuments is also very important because of upcoming generations who may not have been first hand witnesses of the memorialisation process. Extant challenges in bringing down monuments, such as the “Rhodes must fall” campaign at the University of Rhodes in South Africa, and the recent “Ghandi must fall” campaign at the University of Ghana, signifies the importance of ensuring objective creation of memory initiatives and the enduring interpretation of these initiatives in post-conflict societies.

Another vital principle discussed is that of Multiple Narratives. This principle is based on the supposition that social discourses need to embrace diverse views from unique experiences of different actors. This is vital in order to get the most basic truths through the right timing and within the appropriate context(s). This principle is founded on the fact that multiple narratives are constructive; and secondly, that they bring hidden narratives to the fore by opening up the space for an all-inclusive conversation about the system of repression and the individuals concerned. It also helps in putting past atrocities within the objective historical perspective in the understanding of the present (Impunity Watch, 2010: 4; Impunity Watch, 2013: 11, 12). This principle is important within the Israel-Palestine contest of geographical boundary definition. Scholars such as Blaut (1979) and Falah (2005) had contested the official Israeli version of Palestine’s geography, which had been enforced by the Israeli government through the academia. This, according to
them, was an alleged attempt by Israel to institutionalise state ideology as historical truth. Therefore, the academia on both the Israeli (Jewish) and Palestinian (Arab) axes are critical to creating narratives which would “speak the truth to the powers” (Falah, 2005: 1037) and eschew political sentiments within the context of ensuring enduring truth, justice, reparations, peacebuilding and non-recurrence of past atrocities in the volatile disputed region. As Valderhaug (2011: 19-20) advocated, the Norwegian example reflects the need to go beyond accounts by public documentation (as contained in the Norwegian National Archives which were meant to justify the oppression of war children), and move towards the documentation of the unheard voices of these children as contained in personal memoirs, letters, diaries and photographs of relevant non-state actors. The diary of Frank (1967), a twelve year old Jew whose family became victims of Nazism, is a testimony to the relevance of individual narratives that captures the aspirations and anxieties of victims through every day lived experiences. Such details, which are relevant for objective historical representations are often neglected in official narratives. Another important area in which narratives from different sources can be utilised is in the bid to counter the errors of distortion which could occur when memory is engaged, especially in giving Post Event information. This is because memory error could have fatal consequences in terms of forensic evidence (Wright, Self and Justice, 2000: 199) and archival documentation.

The next principle is based on the Youth Population, as the sustainability of any memory initiative is dependent on youth participation. Therefore, beyond the focus on major players in the atrocious events of the past, the younger generation must be enlightened and given the appropriate orientation as regards the preclusion of future occurrence of past crimes. Memory initiatives ought to be geared towards recruiting agents of change in transforming the social, cultural, legal, institutional and political spheres of the transitioning society (Impunity Watch, 2013: 12). In line with this, Prutschi and Weintraub (2000: 18) described the role of memorialisation in connecting subsequent generations with the survivors of past atrocities. It thus creates a connection between the youths and the victims, with whose sufferings and struggle for justice they come to identify. Such youth engagement could also aid the youth population in putting the inherited identity and ideologies of the present within the right historical perspective (Impunity Watch, 2013: 13). Jelin (1994: 50) quoting Yerushalmi (1989) stressed that the very act of remembering must necessarily entail the purposive handing on of past events to the younger generation through “the channels and repositories of memory.” The youths are then enjoined to accept and internalize these the significance of the transmitted heritage and then charged with the eventual transmission to subsequent generations. There is no gainsaying the fact that such transmissions have the potential of creating sustainable home grown peace cultures if properly implemented.

Finally, the principle of Politicisation was also expounded to reflect the malleability of the memorialisation process. Politicisation could either be adapted to aid the restoration of the rights and dignity of victims of violations, or employed to claim legitimacy for a regime which has failed to break with the past, thereby sustaining violence. The latter is often the case in situations where ethnic affiliations and alliances have been politicised, whereby memory initiatives assume a hegemonic nature of either suppression or distortion of certain historical truths (Impunity Watch, 2013: 13-14). The need for non-state actors to spearhead devising policies for recalling historical events through memorials is thus pertinent. Labour Unions, Non Governmental Organisations, Civil...
Society Organisations as well as influential individuals ought to be integrated into initiating and implementing such policies. This would serve to put a check to the overbearing influence of the state in monopolising such initiatives. From the economic viewpoint, Miller (2008: 287) discusses the neglect of narratives on economic causes of violence within communities. This neglect does not factor in the social costs of “the role(s) in conflict of powerful outside states or multinational corporations, making transnational structural imbalances seem irrelevant with regard to internal violence or repression.” Therefore, advocates of the memorialisation policy could assume the role of political activists in helping to transform the political, social, cultural, institutional, economic and legal order by deposing regimes (both internal and external) to tackle impunity and ensure that the demands for truth, justice, reparations and non-recurrence are impartially met (Impunity Watch, 2013: 14). They have a duty to ensure that regime transitions are accompanied by necessary institutional and structural reforms to enable the completion and sustainability of the transitioning process.

NOTES

1. The variations in meaning of the display of bones across Guatemala, Burundi, Cambodia and Rwanda is very informative in this regard (Impunity Watch, 2013: 5).

2. Bell and Bucher (2010: 678, 677) in the study on the impact of justice sensitivity on source memory outlines the importance of these different contexts in the perception of injustices. The contexts are also applicable within the memorialisation discourse as they could help initiators understand the variance in accounts of past events given by different individuals as well as the memorial initiatives suggested by different groups.

3. Miller (2008: 272-278) focused on the subjugation of the economic factors (poverty, inequality and structural violence) within both the literary and institutional frameworks for the exercise of transitional justice mechanisms. This omission makes for the impossibility of practical socio-economic and cultural transformation which is very vital in transitioning societies, and could be addressed through ethical considerations by third parties.

4. Christopher Kutz gave a philosophical analysis of how to attain justice within specific contexts of post-conflict situations and this is also important in determining the memorialisation of events which should be teleological and ultimately tended towards the attainment of justice (See Kutz, 2004).

5. Gywn evaluated the bicentenary commemoration of the abolition of transatlantic slave trade by Britain across heritage sites organised in 2007, which was too centered on the role of William Wilberforce (and the abolitionist movement), thereby diminishing the agency of Africans in the abolition of slave trade. This led to the disclaimer by certain Black communities who viewed it as neo-imperialism and the ‘White academia’ who criticised the neglect of the discourse on apology and reparation by the organisers. A more participatory and integral approach would have been sufficient for more
acceptability as was shown in the case of the Welsh official response and the Historic Houses.

6. Here, the functional definition of memory as “a dynamic social process of recuperation, reconfiguration, and outright invention” is of relevance.

7. The point here is not to critique these campaigns but to stress the importance of ensuring that the process of creating memorials is not done arbitrarily.

8. Though the study of Daniel Wright et al (2000) was based on how misinformation can impact on memory dependent eyewitness accounts used as forensic evidence in courts, it validates the need for multiple narratives from independent sources and eventually ascertaining the veracity of the accounts by discussing the discrepancies. Within the context of the Nigerian Civil War for instance, the narratives of the allegations of massacres against both Nigerians and Biafrans ought to be juxtaposed with independent narratives of families who helped both Hausa and Igbo victims escape death and victimisation during the war.