

Mini Conference

The Involvement and Representation of Victims and Perpetrators in Memorialisation Processes

Amsterdam, November 2010

Report

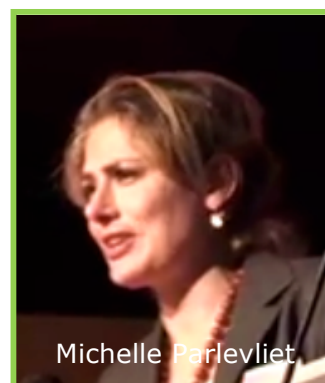
The Involvement and Representation of Victims and Perpetrators in Memorialisation Processes

A mini conference organised by Impunity Watch, the Anne Frank House and the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies to explore the relationship between two ostensibly distinct post-conflict actors and processes of memorialisation.

Amsterdam, 30th November 2010

On 30th November 2010, Impunity Watch (IW)¹ and the Anne Frank House (AFH),² together with the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies (CHGS),³ organised a mini conference in Amsterdam on the *Involvement and Representation of Victims and Perpetrators in Memorialisation Processes*. The conference marks the final public event in a series on the 'Memorialisation of Grave International Crimes', forming one aspect of a joint research project currently being conducted by IW and the AFH on memorialisation after mass violence.

Attendance at the mini conference brought together a diversity of persons, from academics, civil society workers and practitioners, to students and researchers, each contributing to a veritable wealth of knowledge in the room, as well as fruitful debates. Expertly moderated by Michelle Parlevliet drawing on her extensive experience on issues of transitional justice, the mini conference sought to address cross-cutting themes in transitional justice agendas that are raised by processes of memorialisation in various post-conflict situations. In addition to Ms. Parlevliet's comprehensive knowledge, expert participants and audience members contributed to an insightful and rich discussion throughout the conference.



I. The Involvement and Representation of *Victims* in Memorialisation Processes.

The mini conference took shape in a morning and an afternoon session, with each dedicated to addressing one of two ostensibly separate groups in the memorialisation paradigm: victims and perpetrators. The morning session, focusing on victims, began with a keynote address on the involvement and representation of victims at Srebrenica, provided by Dion van den Berg, Senior Advisor in Politics at IKV Pax Christi (The Netherlands). Mr. van den Berg's principal fields of interest are the *democratisation and consolidation of peace and religion in conflict*. IKV Pax Christi, among many other initiatives, facilitated the first meetings between former Dutch soldiers stationed at Srebrenica and the families of those massacred. As an experienced peace professional and activist, Mr. van den Berg conveyed the grassroots difficulties in the struggle for memory in the former Yugoslavia, employing a unique perspective which combined years of experience with an impassioned approach to the issues at hand. Following the

¹ www.impunitywatch.org

² www.annefrank.org

³ www.chgs.nl

key note address, an expert panel composed of a policymaker, an academic and a civil society worker, each with expertise in dealing with post-conflict societies, provided comments from the three different perspectives. The panel included:

- **Bea ten Tusscher**, Director of the Human Rights, Gender, Good Governance and Humanitarian Aid Department at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MinBuZa). Ms. ten Tusscher has experience working in Guatemala and Bangladesh, among other countries;
- **Dr. Jens Meierhenrich**, Senior Lecturer in International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and previously at Harvard University. Dr. Meierhenrich is the author of numerous articles and books, including *The Rationality of Genocide*, *The Structure of Genocide*, and *The Culture of Genocide*, and has extensive experience dealing with memorials in post-Genocide Rwanda;
- **Dr. Malathi de Alwis** received her PhD in Socio-Cultural Anthropology from the University of Chicago and currently teaches in the Women's Studies Programme at the Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. Dr. de Alwis has published extensively on nationalism, militarism and humanitarianism, and is currently working on issues including memorialisation, as well as being a founding member of several anti-war groups in Sri Lanka.

Dion van den Berg: Victims - The case of Srebrenica and the former Yugoslavia

Having worked for several years on peace processes in the former Yugoslavia, Dion van den Berg's focus on Srebrenica visibly engaged both an extensive knowledge of the region and a personal commitment to affecting change. During the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, over 8,000 men and boys were massacred at the United Nations-protected enclave of Srebrenica (Bosnia-Herzegovina) in July 1995, in what the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and various Chambers at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) have called, 'Genocide'. The Genocide took place whilst a battalion of Dutch peacekeepers sent to guard the enclave under mandate from the UN ('DUTCHBAT') failed to intervene.



As of November 2010, the ICTY was still prosecuting crimes committed in the former Yugoslavia, with one of the most high-profile accused, Radovan Karadzic, currently facing charges including Genocide. Since its establishment in 1994, the ICTY has prosecuted many of those bearing the greatest responsibility for international crimes committed in the former territories, though the trial of former Serbian and Yugoslav President, Slobodan Milosevic ended without a verdict as the accused died in custody in 2006.

Mr. van den Berg chose to focus on four principal themes during his speech. To begin, he set out the two dominant types of memory initiatives that exist in the former Yugoslavia - "victim initiatives" and "multi-ethnic initiatives" - with particular focus on the relationship between them and the 'special case' of Srebrenica. Further, Mr. van den Berg addressed the role of the outside world,

questioning whether a shift away from retributive justice could be seen, in addition to looking more at the hierarchy of victims and upcoming challenges in the region.

After surveying the main “victim initiatives” that exist - including war monuments, cemeteries, commemorations, and preserved sites of memory - Mr. van den Berg described how such initiatives are characterised by a focus on one version of the truth, the message of retributive justice and with victims associations taking the lead. Such initiatives *voice the story of one group of victims*. At Srebrenica these characteristics are particularly manifest, as victims organisations have represented a forceful lobby. Shifting focus to “multi-ethnic initiatives”, Mr. van den Berg described initiatives that *give voice to all victim groups*. These initiatives are characterised by multiple truths, an attempt to combine both retributive and restorative justice, development from a national level and initiation by human rights NGOs working with local organisations. National level examples include the 'Bosnian Atlas of War Crimes', 'Documenta' in Croatia and 'Vivisect Fest' in Serbia, whilst at a regional level the 'Coalition for REKOM' is a well-known example.

According to Mr. van den Berg, the relationship and interactions between these different types of initiatives are fraught with difficulties. The reasons for this are threefold: (i) victims may find it too early to speak of restorative justice, particularly when 'reconciliation' is imposed as an outside tendency to assuage international feelings of guilt; (ii) the conflict between the often conservative rural culture of many victim initiatives compared with more liberal, broader tendencies of the multi-ethnic initiatives of the urban elite; (iii) competition over access to funds and attention.

Concerning Srebrenica, its memory initiatives can be seen as 'special cases'. As the fall of Srebrenica represents the most heinous massacre in Europe since the Holocaust, the international community has been heavily involved. Here, the judicial determination of 'Genocide' noted above has also been very significant for the legitimacy and value of memory initiatives. However, Mr. van den Berg contrasted the fact that the initiatives are places *owned by the victims (and they should be)* with those working at the initiatives who strive for openness and reflection about the past. One clear example demonstrated this, when the Director of the main centre at Srebrenica was dismayed when a group of DUTCHBAT soldiers who wanted to pay their respects at the cemetery were prevented from doing so by the widows of those massacred. However, Srebrenica is also special because both the presence of the international community and the proximity of the dead prevent the worst kinds of political manipulation that befall many attempts at remembering and representing the past.

With regard to the role of the outside world, Mr. van den Berg noted the crucial importance of the ICTY and the growing importance of the European Parliament notably due to EU membership ambitions. Furthermore, Mr. van den Berg highlighted the mistakes made by DUTCHBAT at Srebrenica and the prevailing state of denial that exists - particularly among the political elite - in the Netherlands concerning those mistakes.

Addressing the question of shift from retributive to restorative justice, Mr. van den Berg noted the difficulties in making such a shift, most importantly because of the magnitude and character of the crimes perpetrated. In addition to the reluctance of victim organisations as mentioned above, the central role of the ICTY and its inherent retributive approach, European traditions and the absence

of a requirement for legislation on dealing with the past for EU membership, all create difficulties. Regarding the latter, Mr. van den Berg criticised the lack of a coherent strategy at the EU for addressing crimes of the past, which he concluded could lead to great problems. In general, Mr. van den Berg recognised that in some circles this shift had taken place, but recognised that of crucial importance are the interests and desires of those persons affected by violence, to which the interests of outsiders should yield.

Drawing on his experiences, Mr. van den Berg offered insight into several upcoming challenges for victims and memorialisation of the past. In addition to the challenge of handling the many differences that arise concerning approaches to dealing with the past, Mr. van den Berg also warned that with so many thousands of people still unaccounted for and with thousands of families still awaiting information on their loved ones, moving forward will obviously be difficult. In the absence of additional recognition and acknowledgement - for example by the Netherlands - challenges will also remain. Moreover, EU policy and regional arrangement must devote greater attention to bottom-up approaches since those imposed from the outside will never garner the 'ownership' of those most in need. Nevertheless, in cooperating with victim organisations, a critical approach is key, to avoid promoting political agendas. Finally, Mr. van den Berg noted the necessity for citizenship to prevail over ethnicity.

As with the perpetration of many genocides in history, the massacres at Srebrenica took place in the context of an armed conflict being fought through much of the former Yugoslav territories, itself claiming the lives of many thousands of victims, both innocent and armed combatants. Set against this background, Mr. van den Berg highlighted that all sides - or ethnic groups - to the conflict can lay claim to the status of 'victim', whilst the label of 'perpetrator' may equally, and simultaneously, seem applicable. Nonetheless, according to the apparent international hierarchy of victims that has emerged, Serbia is deemed most culpable, with its victims regarded as having low victim status, not least owing to the crimes committed at Srebrenica. Bosniaks and Kosovo Albanians by contrast suffered most, thus attain the highest victim status. Caution should prevail however, particularly when such hierarchies are manifest *within* victim organisations, with everyone clamouring for the highest victim status. Here too, memory initiatives suffer great problems in a context such as the former Yugoslavia.

Bea ten Tusscher: The experience of policy-making

Commenting on the key note address, Bea ten Tusscher offered insight from her experiences as a diplomat and policy-maker at the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MinBuZa). Based on her work in Guatemala and knowledge of the situation in Asia, in particular in Bangladesh, Ms. ten Tusscher distinguished five key aspects of memorialisation processes and lessons learned. Alongside these key lessons, Ms. ten Tusscher warned that processes of memorialisation can very quickly become politicised, which in her experience has considerably hampered the potential of such initiatives.



Bea ten Tusscher

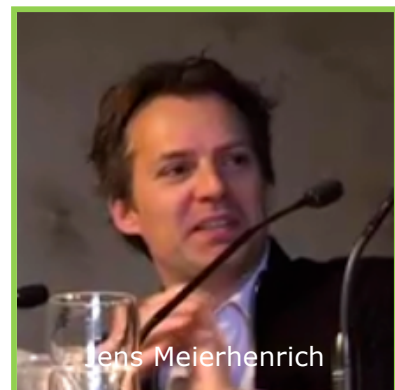
The five aspects of memorialisation processes according to Ms. ten Tusscher are:

1. The importance of knowing the facts. Particularly given the plurality of truths that exist after violence, an historical investigation is of crucial importance. In Guatemala, for example, the discovery of police archives, thanks to the relentless lobby of human rights activists, helped to unearth the facts concerning mass murders and mass graves, and their perpetrators;
2. Unearthing the truth. Both the physical digging-up of bones, DNA identification and allowing families to re-bury their loved ones. In societies like Guatemala, one can either drown in memory, or deny it;
3. Psychological restoration of families and communities. NGOs and religion both play a role in this, the latter through ceremonies, traditions and symbols. In the Mayan tradition, reburials are important for example, and so allowing space and time for this to take place and supporting the process is an important goal of memory initiatives. Such processes are long-term and should not be rushed, particularly because they can benefit both individuals and the state;
4. Retributive aspects: ensuring criminal and moral justice is dispensed to the perpetrators, in addition to financial restoration to victims. Both aspects are important, and the latter should not be underestimated since in some countries it may be the difference between the ability or not to send a child to school. Without these aspects, a *moral state of decline* will exist as a result of on-going impunity. Tribunals remain important;
5. The role of the 'international community'. The role involves the financing of projects, putting massacres on the international agenda, defending human rights defenders, and simply providing support and encouragement. The latter involves demonstrating to victims and survivors that a future does exist.

Dr. Jens Meierhenrich: Rwanda as a case study

Dr. Meierhenrich began by questioning the implicit assumption that memorialisation is a *desirable thing to pursue*, referring briefly to *statue-mania* of the 19th century and then the subsequent *memorial-mania* from the mid-20th century onwards. Dr. Meierhenrich also questioned the idea of 'restorative justice' as perhaps just another buzz-word, as reconciliation once was. According to Dr. Meierhenrich, the role of an academic is to question the work of activists and policy-makers.

Turning to his more substantive contribution to the conference and having conducted research on *lieux de mémoire* ('sites of memory') in Rwanda since 2002, Dr. Meierhenrich briefly described his work documenting over 130 sites of memory in Rwanda, both formal and informal. According to Dr. Meierhenrich, memorialisation should be seen as a process. The dynamic development of many sites of memory in Rwanda demonstrates this fact, whilst according to his research, informal sites of memory - *loci* sites - are far more relevant to ordinary people than the national monuments that have had government and international involvement. Dr. Meierhenrich highlighted that the problematic narrative that



these latter monuments promote in Rwanda demands greater circumspection from funders and organisations seeking to work with local partners, otherwise we as outsiders may become complicit in the promotion of such narratives of the past. The simple provision of funds does not guarantee that victims will benefit.

Concerning the address by Dion van den Berg, Dr. Meierhenrich expressed his unease at trying to generalise the lessons learned from processes of memorialisation and transitional justice, offering the opinion that there exists no data to suggest the link between memorials and restoration or reconciliation, despite a belief to the contrary. Further, confronting one of the closing comments by Mr. van den Berg on the hope for citizenry over ethnicity, Dr. Meierhenrich warned that in a situation like Rwanda this precise approach has had disastrous consequences. In fact, through outlawing ethnicity, a climate of distrust and fear has been created between Hutu and Tutsi. (In the subsequent discussion Mr van den Berg came back to this point, noting that according to his interpretation of 'citizenship' - fully rooted democracy where individuals can express their individual identity, but where citizenship is more important than ethnicity - Rwanda would not be part.)

By way of conclusion, Dr. Meierhenrich reiterated the need for circumspection, particularly in the funding and creation of memory initiatives. He suggested that memory initiatives *are in no way less controversial or politically harmful* than any other justice mechanism.

Dr. Malathi de Alwis: The case study of Sri Lanka

Echoing many of the comments of the previous speaker, Dr. Malathi de Alwis additionally sought to stress the very complicated nature of memory initiatives. Dr. de Alwis noted that for those engaging with such processes, an awareness of the historical and political role that initiatives play is crucial.

Noting first some issues of terminology, Dr. de Alwis pointed out the difficulty involved with who chooses to define themselves as victims, and who otherwise chooses to define themselves as survivors. In itself this can be very revealing for processes of memorialisation and the engagement with those communities.



Further, reiterating the comments concerning the different types of memory initiatives, Dr. de Alwis pointed out that memorials are as much about forgetting as they are about remembering. A crucial point, Dr. de Alwis noted that through a process of *sanitisation*, certain facts or narratives are left out of memory initiatives, which in itself is very revealing. Taking the initiatives presented earlier, one can see *the battles that take place around even the production of each of them*. In this respect, Dr. de Alwis noted that *the life of a memorial is very important*, given that what is retained at memorials may shift over time. Concluding on these aspects, Dr. de Alwis highlighted the fundamental point about the involvement of different actors, stating that those memorials that receive the greatest attention are not necessarily those that are most meaningful, in this case to the people in Sri Lanka.

Shifting to so-called 'lessons learned', Dr. de Alwis recognised the difficulty in

engaging in such conclusions and drawing out broader frameworks for memorialisation given the specifics of each particular context. In this light, the manner in which the conflict or atrocities ended (for example a negotiated settlement or a military victory) is also an important - and influential - determining factor. These factors must be taken into consideration, particularly concerning the space for memorialisation processes. Finally, Dr. de Alwis demonstrated her caution over whether memory initiatives can lead to impunity reduction. Nonetheless, she suggested that perhaps due to their processual nature and presence in communities, memory initiatives can enable us to consider how people live after conflict, particularly concerning the re-habitation of worlds affected by atrocities.

Audience reaction

The audience were informed that questions or reactions to the speakers would be particularly encouraged within three main themes: (a) the dilemmas inherent to memory initiatives; (b) whether strategies and lessons learned can be generalised; and (c) the contribution of memory initiatives to impunity reduction.

Burundi can be used to demonstrate the *culture of silence* that exists more generally in many African contexts. Despite the massacres that took place in 1972 and 1993, to which different interpretations have been given, successive governments have prevented open discussion and mourning. The political space has also been restricted by the government. People fear being labelled as *génocidaires*, but also as victims. In Burundi, both Hutus and Tutsis are implicated in Genocide. In many respects these factors lead to the simple desire to forget the past in Burundi, but this in itself has institutionalised impunity. Concerning the hierarchy of victims, a fundamental question in Burundi - as in many contexts, not only African - is how to deal with people who can concurrently be regarded as victim *and* as perpetrator.



Concerning the South African context, it was highlighted from one audience member's experience that truth was the overwhelming desire of the people, before reparations or other forms of 'justice'. Nonetheless, initiatives can also have negative impact according to local people, as with the example of Nelson Mandela's former house in Soweto, now so prone to tourism that local residents resent its place near their homes.

Picking up on the point made with regard to Burundi, an example was raised from Guatemala about how memory initiatives can be used to break the culture of silence, and that victims often attach importance to this. Furthermore, there can be creative ways for monuments to play a role in taking a stand against impunity.

An audience member sought to challenge the statement made by Dr. Meierhenrich that no evidence exists of the links between memory initiatives and restoration, reconciliation, and so forth, by pointing to the 'massive psychological evidence' of the importance of mourning for victims. Whilst the contribution of memory initiatives in themselves can be discussed, when these initiatives are connected to psychological processes, huge amounts of evidence exists. In reply,

Dr. Meierhenrich suggested that psychological evidence is inconclusive, and at the same time focuses on individuals, whereas the concern of memory initiatives is directed much more towards a society and the collective.

As a final comment, the question was raised as to how far we should go in striving to represent victims, and at what stage we must begin to look more critically? Ms. ten Tusscher commented on this, stating that to some extent we need to take such questions seriously, so as to avoid simply 'patting victims on the back'. Nonetheless, she was clear in her assessment that particularly from smaller countries like the Netherlands, no ill-will is intended by such practice, it simply demonstrates the complex issues with which one must grapple in seeking to provide assistance. On these points, Dr. Meierhenrich provided an assessment that countries becoming involved in such initiatives need to reflect more readily and critically on their involvement in order to *appreciate unintended consequences*. Comprehension of the context and better foresight is key. Furthermore, on the questions of uncritical representation of victims, Dr. Meierhenrich cited the work of Lawrence Langer (*Holocaust Testimonies*) in which the controversial claim was made that one cannot trust the testimonies of survivors. Mr van den Berg also noted that just as acknowledgement is important on the part of the perpetrators, so too is it important for processes of memory that the 'international community' acknowledges its failures - e.g. in Srebrenica, Rwanda - where this too would be important for victims, and the truth.

Dr. Meierhenrich called for greater research, but also greater comprehension of the meaning of memory per context, to challenge our assumptions that are framed by the Holocaust.

Taking lead from the foregoing comments, Dr. de Alwis clarified certain issues from her anthropological perspective, including on the complexity of terms such as 'memory' and 'truth'. She noted that memorialisation processes can have psychological benefits, but equally recognised that they *can be very ugly processes*, citing examples of the power relationships that are produced, even between victim groups, which once again highlighted the point of hierarchies and identities. Related to this point, one audience member put forward the misuse of the term 'Genocide' as demonstrating the competition for victim status. Similarly, comparing Bosnia to Kosovo, it has become apparent that the former has become *a society of victims*, whilst the latter in no way acts in such a way in spite of the massive crimes also committed against its people. Finally, the concern about *professional victims* was noted. Comparing the South African TRC, many people before the commission rejected the label of victim, calling themselves 'survivors'.

Dr. de Alwis also offered the insight that perhaps *traces of memory* can be more effective, rather than simply trying to present a memory or truth. For this, she explained that these simple traces make people work a little harder to discover the truth and memory, with examples common in Germany.

The question was ventured by one audience member as to what exactly is the aim of commemoration? The suggestion was this must be understood, otherwise mistakes will be made, which can lead to victims becoming perpetrators if they feel that they have not been treated correctly. Just as the law is there to punish (etc.) what is commemoration there to do? Dr. Meierhenrich concurred with such a view, stating that it is incumbent upon international outsiders working with local partners to alert those locals of the possible unintended consequences of memorialisation. We should be wary that intervention does not *exacerbate the conditions on the ground*. Mr. van den Berg commented that from a victims'

perspective it can be said that aims shift over time. Aims cannot be defined, *it is a development*, a process.

Adding some additional context concerning Rwanda, Dr. Meierhenrich noted in his experience that the national monuments had very little, if any, impact for ordinary people. Often local memorials, however small, were there simply to counter denial for a particular family. The consequences of the state-sanctioned narrative in Rwanda also prevent memory of Hutu suffering or heroics during 1994. Mr. van den Berg also made similar suggestions, noting that the larger an initiative the more international attention it will receive - including 'Genocide tourism' - but the less importance it will have for the people. According to Mr. van den Berg, the smaller initiatives are more important for the people, which also translates into processes of truth-telling, whereby *the best way of doing truth-telling is where people live*, in the local communities. More concerted effort is needed on this.

Providing some final comments, Michelle Parlevliet assessed that it is difficult to simply ascertain the 'facts', since there is always a context, analysis and so forth to consider, and as soon as we look to the processes, structures or otherwise that led to or facilitated such crimes, then the 'facts' become less objectively definable. Mr. van den Berg commented that *collecting the facts is crucial, but to understand them properly is another challenge*. Finally, Ms. Parlevliet questioned whether memorialisation should be seen as specific events, or as a process, using the South African TRC as a good example of trying to seek the truth at a local level, but with little consideration of what happened in those communities *once the Truth Commission circus had moved on* leaving communities sitting with the stories revealed.

II. The Involvement and Representation of *Perpetrators* in Memorialisation Processes.

In the second half of the mini conference, focus shifted to perpetrators in processes of memorialisation. Dr. Simone Erpel, historian and curator at the German Historical Museum (DHM) in Berlin, provided the keynote address. With a background in social history and sociology and a doctorate in political history, Dr. Erpel has considerable experience with representations of German history, including involvement in the exhibition at the memorial site of the former Camp of Ravensbrück.

Following the format of the morning session, a panel of experts offered comments on the keynote address. The panel consisted of:

- **Prof. dr. Rob van der Laarse**, Associate Professor of European Cultural History & Heritage at the Department of KRC (Art History, Religion & Culture) at the University of Amsterdam, senior fellow at the Huizinga Institute for Cultural History, and Professor of War Heritage at the VU University Amsterdam;
- **Miljenko Dereta**, co-founder of the Belgrade-based civil society organisation, Civic Initiatives. In the nineties Mr. Dereta was active at the Centre for Anti-war Action and the Belgrade Circle, and in 2000 was appointed a member of the Serbian National Council for Education;
- **Kristina Chhim**, researcher on post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia. Ms. Chhim has lived in Cambodia for several years, and also works as a consultant for the German organisation, Inwent.

Dr. Simone Erpel: Nazi Germany and WWII Perpetrators

Hitler und die Deutschen

Dr. Simone Erpel and her colleague, Prof. Dr. Hans Ulrich Thamer, recently initiated an exhibition at the German Historical Museum in Berlin titled, 'Hitler und die Deutschen: Volksgemeinschaft und verbrechen' ('Hitler and the Germans: Nation and Crime'). Sixty-five years after the end of WWII, the exhibition was established to address questions that remain concerning the relationship between the people of Nazi Germany and Hitler. In particular, what socio-political conditions facilitated Hitler's rise to power, and upon which he was able to base his mass following?

Due to his unforeseen absence, Dr. Erpel delivered the prepared speech of Prof. Dr. Thamer on his behalf. The speech introduced the objectives of the *Hitler und die Deutschen* exhibition, with visual examples that seek to explore and examine the relationship between Hitler's dictatorship and German society.



Specific challenges that Dr. Erpel and Prof. Dr. Thamer have faced in setting up the exhibitions have concerned questions of how to present Nazi perpetrators at a national museum, and how to present them at a former site of their crimes? In particular, the presentation of Nazi propaganda raised certain challenges, as did

the representation of images of perpetrators (notably Hitler) because of the risk of humanisation. Whilst humanisation may not necessarily be counter-productive - i.e. understanding the commission of crimes is in no way excusing them - the exhibition seeks to offset images of the perpetrators with everyday objects that provide a context for the crimes that were committed, and ultimately facilitated. In this regard, the absence of photographs depicting Hitler at sites where the crimes were perpetrated - a conscious decision by his photographer, unlike for example Himmler - underlines the importance of showing the wider context.

The exhibition thus focuses on the political conditions, forms and consequences of Hitler's rise and rule to demonstrate the interaction between the nation and the crimes that were committed. It was reiterated that simply showing those faces whom we identify as mass perpetrators does not explain their actions, crimes, motives, responsibility and the functioning of the system. Furthermore, simply focusing on those in the upper echelons of criminal perpetration risks ignoring the conditions that allowed such crimes to be perpetrated, and the involvement of the nation at large. For these reasons, the simple everyday objects are depicted in the exhibition. Examples include a telephone operator's note showing communications from a factory producing equipment for the gas chambers. While not directly involved in the process of mass extermination, such objects challenge observers to consider the responsibility and knowledge of such members of society. Further, demonstrating the 'banality' of the entire apparatus, the exhibition contains a document for reimbursement of travel expenses from a Foreign Office employee travelling to Budapest "for reasons of the liquidation of the young European Jews". The suggestion was made that presenting such smaller documents is more moving than official diplomatic documents because of the wider involvement of the population

Others objects presented at the exhibition include photographs taken by policemen during the deportation process. Once again, their presentation alongside images of the perpetrators causes the observer to consider the ambivalence of the wider community. If such acts were taking place in full view and on a grand scale, it would appear nothing short of impossible for people not to have been aware, and thus to have in effect provided tacit acquiescence.

Perpetrators on Display: Case Study, Ravensbrück

Moving on to deliver her own contribution, Dr. Erpel presented the challenges and decisions behind the exhibition at the former Ravensbrück concentration camp. Intertwining her keynote address with visual examples, the audience was provided with a comprehensive introduction to such challenges. The exhibition itself focuses on female concentration camp wardens - the 'SS Women's Auxiliary' - at the notorious Ravensbrück camp, 80 kilometres north of Berlin. The Ravensbrück initiative was the first permanent exhibition at a former concentration camp when it was realized in 2004. By way of context, Dr. Erpel noted that over the entire duration of its operation, around 4,000 women were involved with the camp as wardens, the vast majority of whom were never called to account for their crimes.

According to Dr. Erpel, remembering and paying respect to the dignity of the victims of the Holocaust and the Ravensbrück camp in particular has not been undermined by exhibiting the perpetrators at the camp. Nor, according to Dr. Erpel, has the site become one of pilgrimage for Neo-Nazis. Nevertheless, two key dilemmas when memorialising such a past remain ever-present in a paradigmatic relationship to one another: humanisation and demonisation. Noting the challenges facing many memorials which address perpetrators of mass violence, Dr. Erpel recognised the fundamental importance of representing and exploring the perspective of the perpetrator in order to understand the past,

whilst being conscious to the risk of excusing their crimes. As noted by Prof. Dr. Thamer, Dr. Erpel reiterated that the Nazi-era crimes cannot be understood without looking closely to the perpetrators.

With this in mind, Dr. Erpel explained that understanding in terms of *comprehension* of the actions of perpetrators is essential to any memory process, and should be clearly distinguished from sympathy for those actions. Exploring the crimes that were committed, imparting knowledge concerning such crimes and presenting all such information in a factual manner is the goal of the Ravensbrück initiative. In this way, the initiative seeks to address questions of why the women became SS wardens. By encouraging visitors to look at the motives, the radius of action, and the deeds of the female SS guards, the exhibition demonstrates that they made a conscious choice to participate by depicting their actions in occupational terms, not simply in an abstract manner as 'perpetrators'. As Dr. Erpel explained, by doing so, memory initiatives can reduce the tendency for demonisation and at the same time prevent repetition. Indeed, the images that make up the initiative demonstrate that the women were normal citizens with a choice, not extraordinary perpetrators, which further counters any suggestions of a 'Nuremberg Defence'; this typifies Hannah Arendt's 'banality of evil'.

Explaining these issues further by way of the research she has conducted into Ravensbrück and interviews with two former prison guards, Dr. Erpel examined how visitors to the memorial are presented with images depicting everyday life for the female guards and wardens. Through these images which capture moment in history, one can see the normality of life for the guards, seemingly far removed from the atrocities that were being committed in close proximity. According to Dr. Erpel, one of her most striking discoveries was to see the reaction of visitors to the private photos of the guards that are also on display. Rather than these scenes of normality causing visitors to downplay the atrocities, in fact the images deeply shock their observers because they are disorientating. Such images do not belong to the canon of Holocaust imagery. In particular, the sight of the women smiling into the camera suddenly seems to blur the boundaries between 'us and them'. It is through these reactions that memory initiatives are so powerful.

Dr. Erpel offered the conclusion that perpetrators and bystanders often use the same justifications: they create a distinction between their public and private persona, establishing parallel worlds.

Miljenko Dereta: Perpetrators in Serbia

Miljenko Dereta began by explaining the dilemma that he was faced with when initially asked to speak on the subject of perpetrators: *They are part of these events; the most important part in a way...and we know everything about them – how they look, their lives, etc. except how they became perpetrators, why they became perpetrators and when they became perpetrators?* Mr. Dereta further explained the complexity surrounding dealing with perpetrators through a Serbian lens, by looking at the international involvement of Milosevic from international criminal, to guarantor of the peace after Dayton, and then back to criminal. The same situation can be seen with regard to Tito. Known now as a dictator, he managed to maintain peace for 40 years, being



loved by a vast majority of persons, with statues erected in his honour. Only after the coming of democracy did he become a perpetrator, at which point the monuments were destroyed and the street names changed. Nonetheless, many still honour him at his grave in Belgrade as someone who brought unity to the region. Mr. Dereta assured that the issue is not about whether perpetrators will be remembered – they always will be – but a question of how they are remembered.

Further citing the example of Radovan Karadzic, Mr. Dereta demonstrated the differing perceptions that surround those regarded as perpetrators. To some they remain heroes. Furthermore, as in many places, the issue of perpetrators is far from a simplistic label to attach to people in Serbia, since those considered most culpable did not commit the crimes themselves, rather it was people's neighbours or those on the ground who committed the physical acts. Moreover, a person seen as a perpetrator by one group can easily be seen as a hero by another. These dual aspects represent the challenge for memorialisation and impunity reduction.

Prof. dr. Rob van der Laarse: WWII

Noting the tendency to sympathise and identify with victims, Prof. van der Laarse pointed out that in reality, faced with similar choices and similar conditions as in Serbia or during the Nazi period, many of us would probably find ourselves sympathising with the perpetrators. Prof. van der Laarse thus stated his belief that the relationship between normality and mass crimes becomes fundamental to explore.

According to Prof. van der Laarse, it becomes interesting to examine how persons react to the perpetration of crimes at the time of their commission, compared to their later understanding. Prof. van der Laarse noted that frequently the evolution of the 'politics of exclusion' into the very identities of people had occurred, which one can also find reflected in art and other forums for communication. Exclusion simply became part of life, and thus reflected in these everyday objects. Such objects later become interesting to study from a historical perspective and as a window into the past, but also as vessels of memory. When considering perpetrators in general, Prof. van der Laarse warned against the tendency to think in stark 'us and them' terms, owing to the fact that people have the propensity to become victims just as much as they have the propensity to become perpetrators. It is this tendency and this fine line that can be reflected in objects of memory.



Kristina Chhim: The Cambodian case study

Despite her many years of experience conducting research in Cambodia, as a trained historian, Ms. Chhim admitted to her relative inexperience with the specific topic of memorialisation in Cambodia. Her initial forages into the subject immediately – and consistently – raised the issue of exactly who *is* a perpetrator and a victim, particularly in a complex situation as occurred in Cambodia. The situation prevailing in Cambodia seems generally to be relatively young concerning memorialisation.

After 30 years of civil war, peaking with the dreadful violence between 1974-1979 during which up to 2 million people died of persecution or starvation, it remains difficult to address these Khmer Rouge-era crimes. As noted, neither memory initiatives nor attempts to understand why the violence happened have been significantly undertaken. The lack of history education about this period in school curriculums is, according to Ms. Chhim, a perfect example of this lack of discussion. Young people are largely unaware of the past, with the 'survivor-generation' also failing to communicate exactly what occurred. Taken together, Ms. Chhim recognised that the starting point is silence in Cambodian society, making questions of memorialisation difficult to address.



As touched upon in the other speeches, Ms. Chhim recognised that the wider involvement in the crimes – either voluntary or forced – of many persons in the population is a huge factor in such silence. Self-reflection and acceptance of responsibility is thus lacking, with the situation further complicated by evidence that almost all Cambodians, even those active members of the Khmer Rouge, feared persecution. Dealing with this situation, and the consequent possibility of being a perpetrator and a victim at the same time, remains a challenge in Cambodia. Furthermore, recent surveys undertaken in Cambodia suggest that Cambodians are unclear on exactly how the past should be dealt with – stating, for example, the desire for perpetrators to be punished, but at the same time being unable to explain who the perpetrators are. Concerning memorialisation, the problem again resurfaces that the Khmer Rouge is not one homogeneous group, whilst some 'perpetrators' remain active in the state administration.

Audience reaction

The audience were again requested to consider three main themes in their reactions to the speakers: (a) dilemmas; (b) generalising strategies and lessons learned; and (c) impunity reduction.

Similar to the first session and as recognised by conference chair, Michelle Parlevliet, the issue of the representation of the perpetrators in such processes raised many more questions. For the most part, the number of questions seemed to outweigh the number of concrete answers. Nevertheless, the panel of experts addressed several issues raised by the audience, focusing to begin with on the suggestion that by allowing more space for the voice of the perpetrators as opposed to simply demonising them, greater insight into the processes at work during mass violence can be garnered.

Prof. van der Laarse began by addressing the issue of where the interest in perpetrators originates. According to him, the process can be traced to the 'monumentalisation' of Allied heroes after WWII, which can be recognised as the *first wave*, whereas now the interest has shifted to understandings of why and how? The importance of time in such developments can never be underestimated, according to Prof. van der Laarse, since now young Germans, for example, no longer feel any guilt for or association with the crimes of the past. Dr. Erpel agreed with the need to understand perpetrators for understanding why the crimes happened in the first place. Taking this one step further, in Serbia at least, Mr. Dereta noted that such understanding is fundamental to recognising the patterns and processes that lead to violence, in order to prevent it in the future. Furthermore, Mr. Dereta posited that some form of posthumous judgment of

figures such as Pol Pot or Milosevic may have their advantages, by establishing and officially recognising the guilt of such figures, which may facilitate greater reflection on the past and stimulate memory initiatives. Reflecting on the situation in Cambodia, Ms. Chhim noted that understanding the role and motivations of the perpetrators is an essential aspect of seeking the truth and also a component of healing.

Focusing on the point raised by Mr. Dereta and Ms. Chhim concerning 'healing', questions were raised about the role and need for such a process in societies, citing in particular the example of reintegration in Germany.

Many audience comments were also grounded in the way in which initiatives can address the duality of identity, and the fact that many persons have been both victim and perpetrator. Once again, many examples were cited, including in Burundi where the perpetrators of one generation became the victims in the next. Further, questions were posed from the audience concerning the role of international justice alongside such initiatives and the way in which victims – however defined – may feel by the progression towards empathising with perpetrators and including them in initiatives.

Prof. van der Laarse addressed some of these issues through reference to the distinction between history and memory. Whilst the former deals with interpreting situations within a particular timeframe, the latter deals with the future. Prof. van der Laarse highlighted the example of Albert Speer, Hitler's architect, who became a fascinating object for study because of his ability to disconnect his work from the Nazi regime's crime. Prof. van der Laarse thus cautioned against mixing 'history' with 'memory', believing that the two serve very distinct functions.

Addressing issues related to the connection between the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia – the UN-back tribunal attempting to prosecute Khmer Rouge crimes – and memory in Cambodia, Ms. Chhim expressed extreme caution at any suggestion of its contribution in this regard. Lack of awareness and politicisation have often prevented any contribution in this regard. Furthermore, on the latter point, because of the ECCC being viewed as a political instrument, it has largely failed to stimulate wider discussion on sensitive issues. Ms. Chhim noted that this, combined with the fact that it is largely a process seen as originating outside of Cambodia, means that the ECCC has failed to connect to local ideas and practices. Such institutions and memory initiatives must, according to Ms. Chhim, foster further discussion, create dialogue and should be used as an entry point for reflecting on the past. Somewhat echoing these comments, Mr. Dereta noted that the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) is seen as politicised in Serbia, and while it still remains contested, its potential educational function will never be fully realised.

Some agreement seemed to exist on the inclusion of perpetrators in memory initiatives as a form of moral judgment, itself contributing to impunity reduction. However, Mr. Dereta noted that in his experience working with education and media expressions, showing people examples of courage and the 'banality of heroism' has much greater effect than solely focusing on understanding why people commit crimes.

III. Concluding Remarks

Moderator, Michelle Parlevliet was given the unenviable task of rounding up the mini conference. Given the high level of expertise and debate throughout the day's two sessions, it fell to Ms. Parlevliet to conclude that such conferences can often leave participants with a sense of frustration at the lack of concrete answers provided. Nevertheless, with memorialisation an under-explored aspect of post-conflict and transitional justice, Ms. Parlevliet recognised the necessity of such open-ended debates and the hope that they can generate and facilitate greater research. Furthermore, each of the country researchers, from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Burundi, Cambodia, Guatemala and South Africa, gained useful insight into the dilemmas of memorialisation in each respective context - one of the principal goals of the conference.

Ms. Parlevliet praised the diverse array of information revealed from numerous post-conflict settings, from which one can attempt to begin examining cross-cutting experiences and dilemmas. The suggestion was offered that the categories currently used to make sense of the past and delineate its groupings are frequently the source of problems and limitations. When considering the 'perpetrators', this limitation seems particularly manifest. Memorialisation thus suffers from such limitations, which themselves are often rooted in people's perceptions of themselves and each other. Further, it was suggested that the objectives to be pursued through memorialisation require greater scrutiny, not only to establish the *role* of memorialisation in post-conflict settings, but moreover its potential *contribution* - positive or negative. When undertaking such an inquiry, the target audiences should also be given centre stage.

Ending the conference, Ms. Parlevliet suggested that the involvement of younger generations is of particular importance for understanding the role of memorialisation in impunity reduction strategies.

Preliminary Conclusions:

- As with all methods of transitional justice, there can be no *one-size-fits-all* approach to memorialisation; different countries experience different dilemmas, with different sources of frustration and conflict.
- Nevertheless, certain cross-cutting dilemmas are visible across the various contexts examined in the conference.
- Objectives cannot be defined and imposed from the outside - any links between memorialisation and reconciliation, healing, and so forth must be articulated by local communities.
- In its current conception, the perpetrator-victim-bystander paradigm is often artificial and is problematic for many processes of memorialisation.
- Outsiders must be alert to the impact of their involvement and possible unintended consequences - legitimate actors on the ground must be afforded the principal stake in initiatives, but outsiders must remain independent and critical.
- Initiatives that receive the greatest international (and national) attention are often the least relevant to stakeholders on the ground.
- Timing is crucial.
- Understanding and comprehending the perpetration of crimes is not equivalent to sympathising with those crimes, and can be important for representing and analysing such crimes. Demonisation and humanisation present significant challenges for memory initiatives.

- Memory initiatives may play a role as part of a comprehensive transitional justice agenda, particularly concerning moral justice, acknowledgement of the past and contested truths, in order to avoid a culture of silence that generates impunity.
- 'Facts', 'Memory', 'Truth' and related concepts should be critically assessed, since evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that they are not homogeneous.
- Greater research is needed to understand the precise relationship between memory initiatives and impunity reduction.