

FALLEN AND FORGOTTEN? MEMORIALIZATION PROCESS AND THE AFRICAN UNION HUMAN RIGHTS MEMORIAL

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Abstract

The task of ensuring that the atrocious events of the past shape and determine the better ordering of contemporary society seems to be a lesson that is lost on many African nations. This explains why violent conflict and the flagrant abuse of human rights persist. Interestingly, the African Union seems to have responded to this problem by the establishment of the Human Rights Memorial (AUHRM) project. Unfortunately, this project is yet to be fully implemented continentally and appropriated by many member states, most of which are still complicit in the escalation of violence and various forms of abuses. It becomes expedient to respond to this challenge. Hence, this essay makes a case for the necessity of memorialization and suggests ways of bypassing the 'power' obstacles in order to promote the process of memorialization in today's Africa. Quite interestingly, it argues that the African worldview of community-centeredness provides a philosophical foundation for the reasoning and implementation of the AU project of memorialization.

Keywords: Africa, African Union, history, memorials, memorialization, , conflict.

Introduction

During her first official visit to Auschwitz on 6 December 2019, the German Prime Minister, Angela Merkel said, "We Germans owe it to the victims and we owe it to ourselves to keep alive the memory of the crimes committed, to identify the perpetrators and to commemorate the victims in a dignified manner. This is not open to negotiation. It is an integral part and will forever be an integral part of our identity."¹ Merkel's statement emerges from a culture that takes memorialization seriously. Her position is also based on the famous words of the philosopher, George Santayana (1863-1952), that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."² Unfortunately, the preponderance of conflicts in Africa and the weak culture of memorialization raises a lot of

¹Melissa Eddy, "Visiting Auschwitz, Merkel Warns Against Danger to Liberal Democracy," *The New York Times* (6 December 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/06/world/europe/angela-merkel-auschwitz.html> (accessed 15 January 2023).

²George Santayana, *The Life of Reason: Reason in Common Sense*, Volume 1 (London: London Constable, 1905). There is today a critical edition of Santayana's works. See, George Santayana, *Reason in Common Sense*, Book 1 of *The Life of Reason*, Volume VII of Marianne S. Wokeck and Martin A. Coleman, eds., *The Works of George Santayana* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: The MIT Press, 2011).

concerns. A vivid example comes to mind. On 24 June 2018, armed gunmen suspected to be herders attacked 8 villages of Barkin Ladi LGA in Plateau State, Nigeria and killed about 200 villagers in an incident that lasted over 7 hours without any intervention of the Nigerian security outfit.³ What is more worrisome is that most of the victims were hurriedly buried in a shallow grave, with no names, no prayers, no dignity, no roses, no epitaphs. Some of their family and friends were denied the privilege of giving them a dignified burial. This incident is not particularly limited to the victims of such gruesome attack by terrorists but also extends to other victims of armed conflict in various nations of Africa. From the thousands who were sold into slavery and the many who died in resisting the colonizers, to the victims of South African Apartheid, Rwandan genocide, Biafran pogrom, and to the victims of today's violence, there is barely nothing to keep their memory alive, except in few cases.

This concern raises a lot of questions: Is the lack of memorials unconnected with the persistence of human rights abuses in Africa? What is the link between the Universal human rights and the victims of the abuses of human rights? Do memorials contribute in the realization of the universal human rights? Of course, by making history concrete on marbles, it is my claim that, the human mind is constantly reminded of the consequences of violence and how the victims of human rights abuses continue to confront our experiences today. In addressing this central concern and its corollary questions, I shall proceed by a) providing an overview of an understanding of memorialization with a justification for approaching the case in Africa from an African worldview of interconnected reality, b) examine the *African Union Human Rights Memorial* (AUHRM) in the light of collective memory, and c) finally, raise some critical concerns regarding its realization in the light of current abuses of human rights across the continent. An aspect of such critical interrogation would involve the re-imagining of the African grounding of the memorialization project. The African worldview must be made to constitute the foundation of the process, even when it must integrate modern elements for its realization. The objective is to argue for a Human Rights Memorial that is not disconnected from the present realities in various countries of Africa. This is a case for the promotion of a memorialization process that serves to foster the defense of human rights and the prevention of conflict within Africa's present and ever-changing contexts.

Memorialization Process and African Interconnectedness

In 2016 the Vietnamese scholar Viet Thanh Nguyen published a work that memorializes the Vietnam War under the title, *Nothing Ever Dies*.⁴ Such a title counteracts the tendency to a selective attention to history and a political amnesia to civil conflicts and wars in Africa. Discourses centered around the 'dark side' of nations' histories are bracketed as if silence provides a solution to the questions, agitations, and interrogations that have been left

³Amnesty International, *Harvest of Death: Three Years of Bloody Clashes Between Farmers and Herders in Nigeria* (Abuja: Amnesty International, 2018), 35-36.

⁴Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

unanswered. I do not claim that there is a definitive solution to these questions, but rather an acknowledgement of the truth that 'nothing ever dies' is a place to begin the engagement with our history and our peculiar experiences. The question is about the value of collective memory and the attempt at keeping it alive for the sake of building a better society. It is a question of whether we do remember the atrocities of the past, and about what we do with what we remember.

Among sociologists, there is a contention between the so-called 'collective memory' and 'collected memories'. Renowned French philosopher and sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs is a strong proponent of 'collective memory' in which remembrance happens within and through a community.⁵ Just as Ludwig Wittgenstein advocated the impossibility of private language, there is also an impossibility of 'private memory'. Each individual memory is formed within the context of inherited memories from others, from the community. The other, 'collected memories', is defended by James E. Young, an expert on Holocaust studies. Collected memories simply allude to an assemblage of the memories of different groups or communities. Both approaches are not necessarily contradictory despite the de-emphasis on individual memories in 'collected memories'.⁶

As evidence of both the project of memorialization and of collective/collected memories, memorials should not be seen as static and inactive symbolic objects. Beyond being representational, memorials should be *re-presenting* in an active sense. Hence, memorialization is not only the act of setting of memorials but ought to involve the active agency of the memorials in the debates that predate its erection and the ongoing discourses that it continues to generate.⁷

Memorialization is essentially a process of preserving a historical event or personage. As a process it creates an interaction between the historical past and present (or rather, ongoing) discourses. Memorialization could thus be considered as a living, dynamic process. The past is not a fossil that is merely recounted but an object of constant and contemporary engagement. While the fact of the past is kept sacrosanct in this process, the discourses, interpretations and debates around the events constitute a process of deconstruction, reconstruction and recontextualization of the past. In that sense, memory and memorials as

⁵The role of the individual, however, is not missing in Halbwachs. Maurice Halbwachs, *La Mémoire Collective* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1950/1997), 7-12; Maurice Halbwachs, from *The Collective Memory*, 139-149 in Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy, eds., *The Collective Memory Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Nicolas Russell, an Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Wisconsin, highlights the attributes of the early modern studies on collective memory, particularly in Jean-Baptiste d'Argen's *Lettres juives* (1736) and Maurice Halbwachs. See: Nicolas Russell, "Collective Memory Before and After Halbwachs," *The French Review* 79, no.4 (2006): 792-804.

⁶According to Nguyen, "Whether we speak of collective memories or collected memories, these models are only credible if they are inclusive of the group by which they are defined, however great or small. So, it is that a call for war is usually accompanied by a demand that the citizenry remembers a limited sense of identity and a narrow sense of the collective that extends only to family, tribe, and nation.... Those who are against war call for a broader human identity that would include those we had previously forgotten, hoping that such expansiveness will reduce the chances of conflict," Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, 10.

⁷James E. Young, *The Stages of Memory: Reflections on Memorial Art, Loss, and the Spaces Between* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 16.

aspects of a living and active history is distinguished, but not separated from monuments. All of these, namely, memory, memorial and monuments constitute part of the memorialization process.

The process of memorialization depends heavily on the discourse on memory, not from the neurological or psychological sense, but from the sociological and historical dimensions. The starting point here is to distinguish personal memory from collective memory. The former belongs to an individual⁸ while the later is attributed to more than one individual. Collective memory rightly belongs to a group, whether a small or a large group.

In some ways, the argument for collective memory chimes in with the African worldview, but in an integrative way that recognizes the profound value of the individual person. Fundamentally, the African worldview is relational. It is marked by the consciousness of community, interconnected, wholeness and collective harmony.⁹ Within this framework, the individual person is only realized within the context of otherness, yet paradoxically this principle of multiplicity is understood as constitutive of the person in itself. Certainly, it is difficult to claim that a singular worldview represents Africa with its inherent plurality. But a review of a wide range of African cultures (Zulu, Yoruba, Igbo, Akan, Bantu) shows a consistent consciousness of community-centered (Ubuntu, Ujamaa, Umunna), although the details of these 'understandings' differ from one culture to another. Like other cultural worldviews, the African worldview is a matrix of African people's "understanding of the universe (cosmology), nature of being (ontology), values (axiology), and knowledge (epistemology)."¹⁰ Such an understanding grounds reality as it presents itself in various forms to Africans and manifests in their approach to religion, culture, technology, education, economics, art, politics and history.

The relationship between the individual person and the community in the African worldview has consequences on the process of memorialization in Africa, particularly for the model that I propose in the essay. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya while re-affirming the African communal worldview of communality argues that this African understanding of reality is first and foremost constituted in the person within the community. Ogbonnaya dismisses the "monopsychic concept of the human person" together with its "dualistic or atomistic understandings of the world" in favour of "the multiplicity of intrapsychic interplay within the person."¹¹ This implies that the person is in itself a 'communal' entity. Ogbonnaya's

⁸ There is a distinction between individual or personal memory and private memory needs to be clarified. Private memory is impossible since no 'memory' is completely severed from contact or association with others. Individual or personal memory represents a personal appropriation of the history or memory of the community. It could also be seen as a product of one's individual experiences, that happen, and are thus interpreted in the context of the realities that the community present.

⁹ Cf., John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1970); Kwame Gyekye, *African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995); Chukwunyeri Kamalu, *Foundations of African Thought: A Worldview Grounded in the African Heritage of Religion, Philosophy, Science and Art* (London: Karnak House, 1990).

¹⁰ Karanja Keita Carroll, "An Introduction to African-Centered Sociology: Worldview, Epistemology, and Social Theory," *Critical Sociology* 40, no.2 (2014): 257-270; 263.

¹¹ Okechukwu A. Ogbonnaya, "Person as Community: An African Understanding of the Person as an Intrapsychic Community," *Journal of Black Psychology* 20, no.1 (1994): 75-87; 76.

position is in line with an integrative concept of community in which individual identities are entangled rather than the aggregative model of collectivities.¹² Consequently, the integrative model is plausible on the grounds of the constitutive communal nature of each individual member of the community (*intra-communal*).

The community and its centers of vitality are the beginning and end of the individual. The person, too, is an integrating entity. The person has a principle of vitality as does the community. This center of vitality for the individual harmonizes and connects the community within the individual in the African worldview. Although the individual in the African worldview is connected fundamentally to community, the individual is able to raise both oneself and the community to a new level of creative harmonizing.¹³

By implication, the possibility of associating harmony with the African worldview of interconnectedness is established in this integrated nature of the individual with the community. Harmony is thus not merely externalized with regard to the community, but emanates from within the individual, who is constitutively existing as what Ogbonnaya would term 'persona-communal' entity.

The clarification on the nature of the person as intra-communal entity and extra-communal agent of collective harmony, whereby the intra-communal nature makes possible the extra-communal epistemological disposition and perception of reality of the individual, and so of the community, grounds and reinforces my argument for the re-imagination of the process of memorialization in Africa. This I shall argue later in the essay. Memorialization however ought to be a dynamic process, a constant intermixing of *lived* and *living* experience in which collective memory is replayed and reconstructed through the participation of the community of individuals.¹⁴ I shall thus examine whether the African Union Human Rights Memorial ideally preserves the collective memory of Africans, since it is only by underscoring its challenges and limitations can one propose an alternative path

¹²These two models of communal identities, 'aggregation' and 'integration' correspond with Ferdinand Tönnies' distinction between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* respectively. According to the German sociologist, the former indicates 'association' where individual belonging is based on impersonal and contractual terms, while the latter refers to 'community' wherein the relationship among members is more interpersonal and relational. Tönnies' main ideas could be found in his 1887 work, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, translated in 1957 as "Community and Society" and after several editions was reprinted in 2005 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft). His ideas are also projected by other sociologists who research on community studies: Rolf Fechner, "Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936)," in: *Handbuch der Politischen Philosophie und Sozialphilosophie* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter 2008); [Werner J. Cahnman \(ed.\), Ferdinand Tönnies: A New Evaluation \(Leiden: Brill, 1973\); Weber and Toennies: Comparative Sociology in Historical Perspective \(New Brunswick: Transaction, 1995\).](#)

¹³Ogbonnaya, "Person as Community," 79.

¹⁴Collective memory, just as memorialization process, is characterized by 'immortality' in that it transcends the time and place of the events as well as the individuals that are involved in the tragic events. It lives beyond them in the narratives and discourses of the living, both in the present and in the future. Cf., Russell, "Collective Memory Before and After Halbwachs," 794. The event of the Biafran War (1967-70), for instance, is not the exclusive preserve of a particular generation of 'Biafrans' or Nigerians. More still, the content of the collective memory of Biafra is not even limited to African content nor to the 21st century. There is something that could be claimed for discourse in the Biafran narrative that affects humanity in general. One can thus say that Biafra is for humanity, as such. In other words, the specific terrible experiences of the war can only be considered as an aspect of the Biafran collective memory since there are multiple contents to be appropriated by the same event.

to realizing the same vision.

African Union Human Rights Memorial and the Task of Memorialization

Collective memory represents a living account of a historical event, often maintained by a community. There is indeed a deliberate effort to keep alive an event that ought to have had an existential closure. Thus, collective memory keeps alive what should have become non-existent and forgotten. Paradoxically, it bids 'welcome' to an event that should have had a 'farewell'. Incidentally, the newly transformed African Union (AU) decided in 2002 to erect its new Headquarter in Addis Ababa, specifically on the site of former *Alem Bekagn*, that hitherto served as Ethiopia's central prison. *Alem Bekagn* actually means 'Farewell to the world', and so the AU choice was quite significant, because the intention was to preserve the site "as a human rights memorial museum."¹⁵ Part of *Alem Bekagn* was dedicated to erecting a memorial for the victims of all atrocities in the continent. Both the AU Headquarter and the memorial structure constitute the memorialization project. Primarily, the memorial structure is dedicated to the victims of the Ethiopian Red Terror (1977-79), otherwise originally called Qey Shibir, as well as the 1994 Rwandan Genocide. This was happening in the wake of the 10th anniversary of the Rwandan Genocide in 2004.¹⁶

A Second Consultative Meeting of AUHRM that took place on November 4, 2011 laid out some recommendations that would expand the historical events that are captured in the memorial. These would include the Apartheid in South Africa, as well as colonialism and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Given the level of historical atrocities of monumental degree that have happened in Africa, it is important to indicate that the AUHRM does not intend to focus on few already mentioned. However, the reasons for prioritizing these four events are not made explicit, even though they can easily be guessed.¹⁷ After all there are bound to be political and practical constraints on the AUHRM project.¹⁸

AU's initiative is aimed at intensifying what it refers to as its 'memorialization profile' with the intention that "current and future generations of Africans will be informed about the causes, consequences and lessons of past conflicts."¹⁹ In fact, AUHRM presents the objectives of the memorial as a collective attempt to accomplish the following:

- Increase information available on genocide and atrocities in Africa, simultaneously serving to raise awareness of escalating problems.

¹⁵ AU, *African Union Human Rights Memorial (AUHRM): Conceptual Note*, http://www.au.int/web/sites/default/files/documents/31745-doc-auhrm_concept_note.pdf (accessed 03 January 2023).

¹⁶ AUHRM, "Concept Note."

¹⁷ The prioritization of the Ethiopian Red Terror is probably due to the fact that Ethiopia is home to the memorial. Otherwise the 50,000 victims of that event are far less than the 3 million victims of the Biafran War (1967-70). Already the inclusion of the Rwandan Genocide is explained by the 10th anniversary. The slave trade was perhaps a common experience for all African nations, while the South African Apartheid received a global attention more than any other atrocity in recent times. It was equally marked by the heroism of Nelson Mandela.

¹⁸ Alex de Waal and Rachel Ibreck, "Alem Bekagn: The African Union's Accidental Human Rights," *African Affairs* 112, Issue 447 (2013): 191-215; 194.

¹⁹ AUHRM, "Concept Note."

- Enable African citizens to understand the workings of African governments and the African Union in responding to genocide.
- Facilitate opportunities to discuss and promote their involvement in democratic citizenship.
- Serve as a research and documentation hub for African human rights atrocities.²⁰

Indeed, the lack of sufficient awareness in Africa is perhaps one of the reasons for the persistent conflict in the continent. By contrast, the Western world, with its fair share of conflicts in history, has developed a formidable *memorialization profile* evident in memorials, museums and education. In fact, a certain education that targets communal memorialization is actively promoted as part of the awareness campaign on the effects of conflicts. Despite constituting in itself part of memorialization, the erecting of memorials must be accompanied by a memorialization process that is expressed in the form of civic education. Unfortunately, in most African countries memorials and memorialization are rarely matters of state interest. In a country like Nigeria, atrocities like the Biafran War, Iva Valley Enugu massacre of 1949, and so on are not sufficiently memorialized.²¹ The result is a historical dissonance that makes present-day conflicts possible.

Education is certainly part of the objectives of AUHRM as evident in the second aim of promoting the knowledge of how governments respond to genocide, as well as in the third and final aims of facilitating democratic discourses and promoting research and documentation. Yet the practical means of promoting such education beyond the center appear to be largely absent. This is however taken up as part of the 'components' of the memorialization project. Apart from the aspects of research, documentation and publications, AUHRM proposes an educational component that consists of:

A mass atrocity awareness and prevention online education module, to be developed by researchers at the AUHRM center, in consultation with a group of experts. This education module will seek to add to the growing body of mass atrocity crime education, but focused on African contexts and perspectives. It will focus on both awareness and prevention and link history to modern human rights norms and institutions. It will educate new generations about past failures in the wake of mass atrocities and provide them with the practical knowledge and policy tools to ensure a different outcome when faced with similar situations in the future.²²

²⁰ AUHRM, "Concept Note."

²¹ In fact, it is the case that sometimes the government is not just complicit in its disinterestedness, but also in its active suppression of public historical discourse. It is more convenient to teach and promote national unity and peaceful co-existence, but it is more sustainable to allow citizens to be confronted by a non-pleasant historical past in order to learn enduring lessons on the consequences and effects of conflicts. I must commend the Center for Memories in Enugu which has taken up the particular project of memorialization in Southeastern Nigeria, with emphasis on the Biafra War, the Asaba massacre, Iva Valley massacre, and so on. These historical events affect the Igbo identity and communal memory.

²² AUHRM, "Concept Note."

AUHRM recognizes that its attempt at pursuing memorialization through education is novel as far as Africa is concerned. Yet there are two problematic issues in the proposed education module. First is the idea of an online platform in a continent where innovative pedagogical forms, such as *e-learning* and *blended learning* are far from being normative. This is a question of what effective education modules work in most parts of Africa. Second is the problem of a certain centralization of the educational approach. There is no appeal to AU member-states to re-create the education modules in a way that is adapted to their local contexts and history. Such centralization is symptomatic of a homogenous conception of Africa, which non-Africans have often been accused of. It is rather disappointing to perceive such understanding within AU. Indeed, almost every African country has experienced terrible conflicts in the past 60 years, in one form or the other. Besides the symbolic, initial four events that were prioritized by the AU, these other atrocities that are spread all over Africa ought to be accounted for, particularly in the educational curricula of the respective states.

Part of a de-centralized approach to the education aspect of memorialization should involve going beyond the research, documentation and publication that takes place in AUHRM. There should be a deliberate effort at integrating this education with the primary and secondary levels of education. This is a strategy that is missing in the AUHRM scheme. But then it is important that the next generation of Africans be given the opportunity to make informed assessment of their daily experiences of human rights violation in their respective countries within the context of the education on memorialization of past atrocities. This would help them to question irresponsible leadership and to challenge the abuse of human rights today. A civil space that is defined by active citizenship would then become a more sustainable means of practicing and deepening our democratic institutions and curtailing executive rascality, which is at the heart of most conflicts.

Taking the Discourse on Memorialization in Africa a bit Further

The education module that I discussed above represents one way of ensuring that the objectives of AUHRM is realized in Africa. At the heart of this project is the transformation of conflict as well as the communities that have witnessed these conflicts. I consider memorialization as emerging in three forms, namely a) in the commemoration of atrocious events, b) in remembrance of victims, and c) in the recollection, testimonies or discourses involving perpetrators, victims and other interested parties. I shall further elaborate on these points below:

a) The first consideration of memorialization emerges in the *commemoration of an atrocious event*. This is often communal. The memorialization of the First World War (WWI) has been shown as representing “the largest scale memorialization and commemoration in the world.”²³ Prior to WWI, most events of memorialization are often about individuals

²³ Nigel C. Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 175.

from wealthy families rather than all those who died in the wars. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), established in 1917 with about 1,500 cemeteries spread across 150 countries, was indeed the most robust project of memorialization so far in history. CWGC was aimed at commemorating 1.7 million members of the Commonwealth forces that died in the First and Second World Wars.²⁴ Within the cemeteries, tombs dedicated to 'unknown soldier',²⁵ whether of the British or French servicemen, were aimed at a communal remembrance of those who not only lost their lives during the wars, but their names too. Related to this form of event-centered communal commemoration is the construction of the Cenotaph. The Cenotaph was designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and officially inaugurated during the second anniversary of WWI.²⁶ Originally, the Cenotaph was designed as a permanent monument, but its symbolic nature deeply impressed the people that they insisted on its permanence.

b) The second is the *remembrance and perhaps celebration of the victims*. These victims must be named and not just considered as numbers. Often memorials are built with the names of these individuals. They could not have died in vain. In an exploration of memorialization in which a gendered narrative is called into focus, Anna Reading begins by examining the Biblical person of Lot's wife in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. She admits that a particular interpretation of this story would imply "that women should be wary of disobeying patriarchal authority: if they attempt to witness the destruction caused by it they may themselves be destroyed and forgotten."²⁷ While such an interpretation is 'petrifying', Reading however argues that "Lot's wife is not entirely forgotten – the story of her looking back is embedded in the memories of some."²⁸ There is yet one key problem here: no one knows her name. I do not intend exploring a gendered narrative, rather my interest is on the *naming* of victims. To name victims is to keep the memorialization process authentic. It defies the politics of war and post-war in which the atrocious events are silenced in a bid to foster reconciliation and recovery. Naming victims does justice to the memory of the victims as members of the community. This is necessary because a construction of collective memory cannot be realized with the exclusion of legitimate actors within the history of the community. Later, I shall argue how namelessness implies de-memorialization of the dead within the African existential worldview. In fact, to erase the names of victims in the memorialization process is cause a second injury to the memory of

²⁴Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 175. Hunt's account is based on Mark Quinlan's *Remembrance* (Hertford: Authors OnLine, 2005). See also Mark Quinlan, *British War Memorials* (Hertford: Authors OnLine, 2005).

²⁵Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 178.

²⁶Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 177. The name 'Cenotaph' was taken from the Greek words 'kenos' (empty) and 'taphos' (tomb), while the huge monument that was hewn out of 120 tons of Portland Stone is 35 feet in height.

²⁷Anna Reading, *The Social Inheritance of the Holocaust: Gender, Culture and Memory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 2.

²⁸Reading, *The Social Inheritance of the Holocaust*, 2.

the community. Invariably this would equally imply the emasculation of the dead as if they never existed.

c) The third form of memorialization emerges from the *testimonies of individuals* – whether on the side of the perpetrators and on the side of the victims. Often the accounts might be dismissed based on subjective perspectives of the narrators, but these nonetheless does not render such narratives completely useless in the service of communal memory. In fact, even testimonies of perpetrators known for their record unreliability could sometimes be carefully examined for possible clues to memorial events. This is exactly what Christopher Browning attempts to demonstrate with the case of Nazi Eichmann, where he focuses not on the personality of Eichmann “as the symbol of perpetrator evil.”²⁹ Browning rather focuses on examining Eichmann's “voluminous postwar testimonies as a source for writing Holocaust history.”³⁰ Of course, this approach may be dismissed as an assault on the collective memory of victims, particularly in the case of Eichmann's penchant for falsehood. However, a certain level of dispassionate scientific objectivity is needed to decipher historical truths in such accounts. Besides, the benefit of such objective examination lies in the dismissing the collections of falsehood that actually distort historical memory. In Africa the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) provided a platform for voicing the testimonies of victims and relations of dead victims in such a way that memorialized the events and victims of conflicts.³¹ These commissions, which constitute what is today known as 'transitional justice'³² system, served not only as part of the process of memorialization but also platform for communal healing and reconciliation.

While the future of the AU memorial at *Alem Bekagn* may remain unsure,³³ the AUHRM has created an awareness that suggests a move away from 'burying history' to devising ways and manners of memorialization. Some of the ideas offered above are aimed at advancing such memorialization³⁴ even at the national levels. Yet it remains worrisome that the lessons from atrocious events of the past are not sufficiently accounted for in Africa,

²⁹ Christopher R. Browning, *Collected Memories: Holocaust History and Postwar Testimony* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), 4.

³⁰ Browning, *Collected Memories*, 4.

³¹ These TRCs would include those of South Africa (1995), Ghana (2002), Congo (2004), Liberia (2006), Kenya (2009), and Togo (2009). The *Human Rights Violation Investigation Commission of Nigeria* (popularly known as the 'Oputa Panel' named after the prominent judge who headed the Commission, Justice Chukwudifu Oputa), which was set up in 1999 by the then president Olusegun Obasanjo to investigate the atrocities of the military junta in Nigeria, also falls into this category. Meanwhile, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia (LTRC) is distinguished among the TRCs by its inclusion of the diaspora population. Cf. Laura A. Young and Rosalyn Park, “Engaging Diasporas in Truth Commissions: Lessons from the Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission Diaspora Project,” *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 3, no.3 (2009): 341-361.

³² The 'transitional justice' system “concerns how states in transition from war to peace or from authoritarian rule to democracy address their particular legacies of mass abuse.” Mark Freeman, *Truth Commissions and Procedural Fairness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5.

³³ De Waal and Ibreck, “Alem Bekagn,” 215.

³⁴ De Waal and Ibreck, “Alem Bekagn,” 214.

particularly in shaping development, democracy and governance in the present and future.

Monumental Human Rights Abuses in Africa and the Failure of Continental Memorialization

The inability to prevent or resolve conflicts in most African nations makes the task of memorialization both difficult and urgent. On the one hand, memorials are built in a post-conflict context as a historical reminder of the event and as a deterrent as repetition of such conflicts in the future. This goes together with the pedagogical and narrative dimensions of the memorialization process. In the many recurring instances of conflicts across Africa, memorialization process is either withheld or dismissed outrightly. On the other hand, the process of memorialization remains urgent because it is a critical strategy in conflict prevention methods. Setting up a monument, creating an educational program around the monument and the history that it reflects, establishing a regular community rite at the monument site,³⁵ and hosting conversations around the monument and its history, are effective conflict prevention mechanisms. The more the process of memorialization, the less the tendency to engage in conflicts and abuse of human rights. Unfortunately, as already mentioned, this is not the case in most African nations even as at present.

Monumental Human Rights Abuses and the Failure of Memorialization: A Case for an Effective Memorialization Culture

Latest reports on human rights violations and conflicts across Africa agree that things are not getting any better.³⁶ Report of the 2019 World Report of the Human Rights Watch provides a thorough account of the situations in all the countries of the world. I shall take up some instances – Cameroun, Central African Republic, Ethiopia and Nigeria – to show the urgency of memorialization in African continent.

The Report observes the precarious situation in Cameroon. UN estimates show that as of August 2018, over 235,000 civilians were displaced in the Far North. This is slightly lower than the 255,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Anglophone North West and South West regions. The Cameroonian account is a bit less that about 378,000 Burundian refugees, scattered in neighboring countries like Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda and Congo.³⁷ Currently, over 25,000 Cameroonians seek refuge in Nigeria,³⁸ thus adding to the already terrible humanitarian crisis in the northern part of Nigeria as a result of the terrorist

³⁵Here I have in mind just like the daily community bell and gathering at the World War I memorial, the Menin Gate at Ypres (Ieper), Belgium.

³⁶These would include the 2017/2018 Report of the Amnesty International, the United Nations Human Rights Report 2018, and the 2019 World Report of the Human Rights Watch (HRW). I shall use the HRW 2019 report for the instances I shall provide in this section of the essay.

³⁷Human Rights Watch, *2019 World Report* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2019), 102.

³⁸Human Rights Watch, *2019 World Report*, 115. ⁷⁴Here I have in mind just like the daily community bell and gathering at the World War I memorial, the Menin Gate at Ypres (Ieper), Belgium.

activities (Boko Haram and ISWAP). The complexity of the Cameroonian case is, on the one hand, as a result of the activities of the Islamic fundamentalists that raid the Chad Basin region.³⁹ On the other hand, the refugee problem is further caused by the political crisis between the government and the Anglophone Cameroon (the separatist Ambazonia enclave) that has degenerated into unimaginable bloodletting within the region. The inability to handle the crisis and to learn from history has caused the near-collapse of that region with killings, maiming, and all forms of criminality happening there at the moment.

Already the statistics on the refugee crisis in different African countries point to the deplorable level of historical memorialization in most countries. This is very clear in the Central African Republic. UN report puts the number of IDPs at a staggering 642,800 and refugees at 574,600 as of 2018.⁴⁰ Part of the problem is caused by the renewed fighting between the Revolution Justice (RJ) forces and the National Movement for the Liberation of the Central African Republic (*Mouvement national pour la liberation de la Centrafrique*, MNLC). There are also reports of multiple clashes in the Ouaka province between the Anti-balaka militias and a faction of the Muslim Seleka rebels, that is the Union for Peace in Central African Republic (*L'Union pour la Paix en Centrafrique*, UPC). Thousands of people, mainly civilians, have died from these conflicts which bring to focus our lack of attention to the lessons of past conflicts and skirmishes.

One of the volatile zones in terms of conflict in Africa is Ethiopia though there seems to be some shifts in the narrative. Unfortunately, the situation was improved as a result of the new leadership in Ethiopia and not by a memorialization process. This means that if this leadership should consider a memorialization strategy, it could do even much better, and produce better results. The question that now confronts everyone is whether or not these recent peace moves will be sustainable. Despite this 'new dawn' it is clear that the headquarters of the AU has had a fair share of human rights abuse cases. The effects of prolonged conflicts, including the recent inter-communal clash between Guji and Gedio communities of the Oromia and the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) are partly evident in the over 2 million IDPs in Ethiopia.⁴¹ Of course, the emergence of Prime Minister Abij Ahmed in April 2018 brought significant change in Ethiopia's human rights record and a stop to the age-long conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Little wonder he won the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize. Yet a lot still needs to be done in establishing sustainable governmental instruments for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. As suggested in this essay, historical discourses and memorialization processes are ways of going beyond polemics to sustained peace.

Sustainable instruments for peace and conflict prevention are equally lacking in the

³⁹The Chad Basin area affects 7 countries, namely: Algeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Niger, Nigeria and Sudan. This has been the axis of Boko Haram and ISWAP, but Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon are perhaps the most affected by the terrorist activities.

⁴⁰Human Rights Watch, 2019 World Report, 127.

⁴¹Human Rights Watch, 2019 World Report, 216.

approaches to conflicts and human abuses in Nigeria. Apart from the problems created by Boko Haram, ISWAP and other criminal elements, the State has become complicit in the abuse of human rights on many fronts. There are cases of non-release of people who have been bailed, incarceration of journalists, attempts to gag the media, social media and free speech. These are carried out either by the activities of the Military, the Police, the Department of Secret Services (DSS) acting under the direct command of the Presidency, or the sponsorship of spurious bills (Social Media Bill and Hate Speech Bill) by the National Assembly, and so on. More than these instances, is the way and manner in which the 'ghost of Biafra' is being handled in the brutal clampdown on the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) movement,⁴² a group that agitates for secession as part of the lingering effects of the 1967-1970 civil war. The government, particularly under Muhammadu Buhari, has consistently failed to understand the phenomenon of Biafra as that of a corpse that was buried without funeral rites. It haunts until the needful is done. Acting paranoid means the application of forceful suppression of conversation, denial of history, avoidance of reparation and restorative justice, as well as the escape from necessary memorialization.⁴³ Unfortunately, there is no way around this historical and existential event. It cannot be silenced by 'executive order' nor can it be deconstructed in such a way as to be obliterated from the social memory of the people, particularly the directly affected, the Igbo ethnic group. It must be discussed. The event of the war must be memorialized at the national level. Nigerians must be able to claim their history, no matter how unsavory, as part of the strategy of reclaiming their collective identity. These events and the narratives around them must be integrated in the Nigerian cultural and educational curricula.

Beyond arguing for the need for memorialization and after recounting instances that necessitates memorialization process in Africa, there is need to provide strategies for fostering discourses that keeps the consciousness of the past alive for the sake of a better conflict-free future. Articulating such strategies will be the preoccupation of the final concluding part of this essay.

Re-Imagining a New Way of Memorialization in Africa

In the light of the discourse above, there is need to devise creative and innovative ways of promoting memorialization in Africa. Underlying this necessity is the impact of historical events in the affairs of today. Any nation that ignores the lessons of history does so at its own peril. Events of conflicts and human rights abuses in Africa points to a neglect of history. But the project of memorialization becomes more expedient given our community-consciousness, according to which the living and dead belong to the same African universe. This is an essential aspect of African cosmology. In fact, the traditional African cosmology contains an inherent process of memorialization often expressed in the belief in re-

⁴²Human Rights Watch, *2019 World Report*, 432.

⁴³Examples of the State's paranoia would include the controversies and attempts by the State to suppress the conversations around literatures like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) and Chinua Achebe's *There was a Country* (2012). Recently, the SSS arrest of the author and journalist Chido Onumah for wearing a T-Shirt with the inscription 'We Are All Biafrans', which incidentally is the title of the book he authored on the same conversation is another example of executive paranoia over the 'ghost of Biafra.'

incarnation. The dead are not really dead but are living-dead that can cross over from the past into the space of the contemporary. Re-incarnation is not the focus here, yet it reminds us of the interconnected universe in which we exist. By implication, the dead, particularly those who died as a result of a tragedy that affected the entire community must be etched in our collective memory, not only in the erection of statues but in the 'living memory' of the community. As such, memorialization from a particular, African, perspective is not just a project that advances peace *per se*. It is not merely a strategy of conflict prevention. Rather, it is derived from the inner constitution of African consciousness, namely the African worldview of interconnected of reality.

Grounding the memorialization process in the African identity and worldview is to recognize that when it comes to the cases of human rights abuse, the “precondition of the exercise of moral judgment” is to revisit “the memory of who we are.”⁴⁴ It is a recognition that memorialization is linked to communal identity. This same concern is equally expressed by the erudite Kenyan scholar, Ali Mazrui when he argues that “how human groups identify themselves is partly a matter of cultural memory.”⁴⁵ Although Mazrui's statement is in the context of the positive 'false memory' that is represented by Pan-Africanism, an identity that is constructed in reaction to the evils of colonialism,⁴⁶ yet it does not contradict the African worldview of community-centeredness. From a philosophical perspective, John Mbiti offers the most popular articulation of this worldview in the words: “I am because we are, and because we are therefore I am.”⁴⁷ Mbiti's dictum mimics but reconstructs the Cartesian 'Cogito', shifting it from the individualistic epistemology to communal rationality. In the African view, the 'we' is the ground for the emergence and the flourishing of the 'I'. Thus, “it is the community which defines the person as person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will, or memory.”⁴⁸

In the context of memorialization, the understanding of community is not limited to the living. As Josiah Cobbah observes, “the African worldview places the individual within a continuum of the dead, the living, and the yet unborn. It is a worldview of group solidarity and collective responsibility.”⁴⁹ The incorporation of the dead explains the strong sense of ancestorhood in African worldview. According to the Nigerian philosopher, Ifeanyi Menkiti, the “ancestors are themselves still continuing persons, still very much a part of the living community.”⁵⁰ Menkiti disputes the phenomenon of ancestorship as necessarily an element

⁴⁴Pieter Duvenage, “The Politics of Memory and Forgetting After Apartheid,” 507-518 in Kwasi Wiredu, ed., *A Companion to African Philosophy* [Blackwell Companion to Philosophy] (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 515.

⁴⁵Ali A. Mazrui, “Cultural Amnesia, Cultural Nostalgia and False Memory: Africa's Identity Crisis Revisited,” *African Philosophy* 13, no. 2 (2000): 87-98; 97.

⁴⁶For Mazrui, “Pan-Africanism was born out of the false memory of a pre-colonial united Africa, divided by imperialism. This Pan-African false memory is positive. Within it there may lie the seeds of Africa's economic and political salvation.” Mazrui, “Cultural Amnesia, Cultural Nostalgia and False Memory,” 97.

⁴⁷Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 141.

⁴⁸Ifeanyi A. Menkiti, “Person and Community in African Traditional Thought,” 171-182 in Richard A. Wright, ed., *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, Third Edition (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), 172.

⁴⁹Josiah A.M. Cobbah, “African Values and the Human Rights Debate: An African Perspective,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1987): 309-331; 323.

⁵⁰Ifeanyi Menkiti, “On the Normative Conception of a Person,” 324-331 in Wiredu, ed., *A Companion to African Philosophy*, 327.

in African religious worship. Worship in African religion is exclusively reserved to the deities. Ancestors are rather honored, particularly in the libation rites. For Menkiti, the ancestors constitute part of the community of “persons in other world” whose identities as ‘persons’ cease “once the *nameless dead* stage is reached.”⁵¹ The stage of the *nameless dead* implies some sort of disconnection between the ‘living dead’ and the living, without absolutely dis-incorporating the dead from the community. The *nameless dead* does not imply the ‘mortality’ or ‘fading out of existence’ of the dead, it rather indicates the return to the ‘It’ status that had hitherto marked the pre-existence of any person. This refers to the stage of namelessness before a child is born.⁵² To enter the stage of the *nameless dead* is to be de-memorialized.

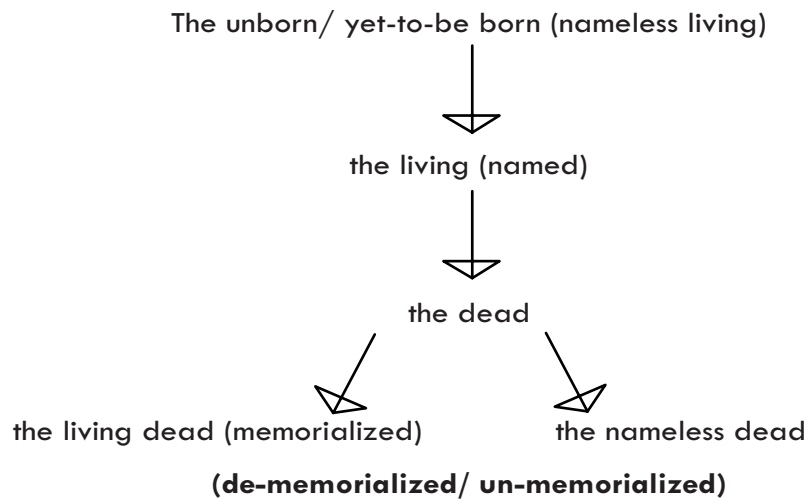
At the stage of ancestral existence, the dead still retain their personhood and are, as a matter of fact, addressed by their various names very much as if they were still at center stage. Later, however, after several generations, the ancestors cease to be remembered by their personal names; from this moment on they slide into personal non-existence, and lose all that they once possessed by way of personal identity. This, for the traditional African world-view, is the termination of personal existence, with entities that were once fully human agents becoming once again mere *its*, ending their worldly sojourn as they had started out – as un-incorporated non-persons.⁵³

There is yet a difference between the *de-memorialized nameless dead* and the *un-memorialized nameless dead*. The first is represented by those persons that are long dead, whose names are no longer remembered or celebrated, but who were at a time memorialized by their family or kindred. It should be understood that this process is hinged on an oral tradition that had its limitations. Of course, the limitations of the oral tradition were compensated with communal legends and folk tales, as well as by the preservation of the name of progenitor (as surnames). Yet, this implies that only a few people make it in the social memory of the community after a long period of time. Children and those who died without contracting marriage, even when they might have died in war or as victims of conflicts, are the most affected by this limitation of the oral tradition. These individuals, when they are never remembered, automatically fall into the second group, the *un-memorialized nameless dead*.

⁵¹Menkiti, “On the Normative Conception of a Person,” 327. Italics mine.

⁵²Menkiti, “On the Normative Conception of a Person,” 328.

⁵³Menkiti, “Person and Community in African Traditional Thought,” 174. This stage which Menkiti refers to as ‘nameless dead’ was hitherto referred to as the state of ‘collective immortality’ by Mbiti in contrast to the stage of ‘personal immortality’, which the stage of the ‘living dead’ or ancestorship. Cf. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 33. Menkiti disagrees with Mbiti on the use of the term since at the loss of their names, these dead persons are thus de-memorialized and consequently dis-incorporated from the community to an extent. In that sense, they cannot form any ‘collective’ (175).



To argue that the memorialization process in Africa must be grounded in African worldview is to highlight the implication of un-memorialization. Un-memorialization signals a communal amnesia of a community's self-understanding. Once the African society abandons its worldview of community-centeredness, then the values that uphold such worldview are set to crumble. The first value is respect – of both the living (elders) and the dead (ancestors). Respect is the guiding principle of conduct in the family, and also a condition for learning in traditional African culture.⁵⁴ Although respect points to the hierarchical nature of the African communal setting, it is at once reciprocated: *Onye fee eze, eze eruo ya aka* (Igbo proverb: “When you honour the king, kingship would one day become your heritage”). The second value is responsibility: “African worldview is tempered with a general guiding principle of the survival of the entire community and a sense of cooperation, interdependence, and collective responsibility.”⁵⁵ The 'survival of the fittest' is never the norm. This explains why Africans consider the community as responsibility for the upbringing of children, families take care of their aged, and the dead (ancestors) are invoked to take responsibility in the affairs of their families. There is a multi-layered solidarity network that makes memorialization an imperative for Africans. The third value is restraint. On this, Cobbah explains thus,

Restraint is the principle that makes communalism within the family and within the wider society possible. This simply means that a person does not have complete freedom. Individual rights must always be balanced against the requirements of the group. The principle of restraint becomes evident in the differing patterns of communication. It is also evident in the sacrifices expected of parents in order to

⁵⁴Cobbah, “African Values and the Human Rights Debate,” 321.

⁵⁵Cobbah, “African Values and the Human Rights Debate,” 320.

provide for their children and sacrifices expected of grown children in order to provide for their parents. In terms of rights, the principle of restraint requires that family members remain flexible in terms of their own rights and always consider the requirements of the group as a whole.⁵⁶

The value of restraint is the control against unbridled individualism that often does not appreciate the initial solidarity that a person had enjoyed in the past. In practice, the principle of restraint does not function in isolation to the other principles of responsibility and respect, solidarity and reciprocity. The dead, particularly the living dead, are not excluded from this network of communal values.

Beyond recognizing the African worldview that undergirds memorialization, there is need to devise creative and new ways of achieving this objective. In doing this, the following areas are to be given further attention: a) the role of the private-sector and non-governmental institutions, b) the media's capacity to serve as an alternative historical pedagogical tool and c) the use of literature to advance the discourse on memorialization. I shall further elaborate on these.

The role of the private-sector and non-governmental institutions

The private-sector, through Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that advance historical and cultural learning and education can help in promoting memorialization within the community. The task here is double: first is that it calls attention to what is hitherto neglected and provides a more intellectually thought out platform for dealing with historical events and discourses. Second, it brings attention of the government to the discourses that are ignored and which has the impact of upturning social cohesion and peaceful co-existence. One example of such models is the work of the Center for Memories (CforM). The CforM is situated in Enugu, South-East Nigeria. Enugu is the former headquarter of the former Eastern region and was by that very fact, the center of the defunct Biafra Republic. The CforM aims at "preserving Igbo history and memories, by learning from the past and building the future."⁵⁷

The Center does the incredible job of reclaiming the Igbo identity within the Nigerian nation. It promotes Igbo language, hosts Igbo museum thus preserving traditional Igbo arts and artifacts. Quite significant is the monthly discourse that gathers *crème-de-la-crème* of Igbo intelligentsia for an engagement with both the past and the present, as well as the future. In this way, the CforM re-captures the Igbo/African cosmology of interconnectedness of reality, in which time (past, present and future) is defined in a non-linear but cyclic form and the community is defined by interrelatedness. While these programmes fit into the memorialization project, the CforM has once again promoted the consciousness of Igbo people and even Nigerians on the need to memorialize the past. The events of the Biafra War, the Iva Valley Massacre of 1949 and the Aba Women's Riot of

⁵⁶ Cobbah, "African Values and the Human Rights Debate," 321-322.

⁵⁷ Center for Memories website, <http://www.centreformemories.org> (accessed 13 January, 2023).

1929. Naming the victims, visiting monuments and discussing the events have become a legitimate exercise within the context of the Center. This is further advanced and intensified by collaboration with other agencies such as *Igbo Conference*, *Biafran War Memories*, *The Asaba Memorial Project*, *South Saharan Social Development Organization (SSDO)*, *The Asaba Massacre Memorial* and so on.

Alternative historical pedagogy through the new media

Another way of promoting memorialization is to use the social media in promoting education and conversation around significant historical events and persons. Today on the social media there are attempts at doing this. There now exist Facebook groups that are dedicated at historical education and conversation, some of which are focused on particular communities. The same is found on Twitter. Handles such as @IgboHistoFacts, @ArewaHistory, and various social media handles of the Amnesty International across Africa, etc. are dedicated to such discourse.

There is today a new consciousness that is provided on such platforms when it comes to historical events and the need to re-evaluate the present in the context of the past. Some conversations that take place on such platforms reveal the African-consciousness of community-centeredness. One must however indicate that the social media is often quite a very complex platform. Simple questions of historical and philosophical natures could spark off engagements that would deviate from civil intellectual discussions to diatribes of ethnic and political natures. The problem stems from the anonymity character of most users, non-moderated nature of the engagement, the limits of written words, as well as the dissimilar interests, moods, contexts and background of the participants. Yet, in the context of the murkiness of social media discourses, some points of convergences that resonate with the community-centered worldview could still be deciphered.

Literature as a relevant method in contemporary discourse

Literature, both fiction and non-fictional accounts remain important in the memorialization project. The attempt to displace literature by social media is non-realistic since literature has equally re-invented itself to fit into the internet revolution through the eBook version. As already indicated, despite the clampdown on Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and Achebe's *There Was a Country*, the lessons enshrined in those books reached the desired audience. If anything, the clampdown further increased the interests in those literature. It is important that Africans begin to tell their stories, while paying attention to honesty to historical facts. Sadly, the politicization of the historical data in literature tend to diminish the equally important embodied philosophies that are contained in the narrative.

Indeed, discourses that memorialize the events and personages in history are promoted by literature. Read in schools and in clubs, the sense of a people's history is further triggered in their response to events of today. I must remark however that there is the a to revive the reading culture across African nations. The task of re-imagining African must consider a learning process that goes beyond the classroom-evaluation pedagogy which motivates students only through examinations and gradings. There must be an extra-curricular

incentive for readership. Book clubs that function in an inclusive manner must be promoted. City libraries need to be rebuilt and maintained. In fact, there is a need for NGOs to equally promote community libraries where government fails. Literature can also be translated into motion pictures as learning materials, and all these methods fall under the memorialization process.

Conclusion

The African Union Human Rights Memorial is intended to serve as a mechanism of memorialization. It is a project that must be re-imagined from the perspective of African worldview, which is essentially community-centered. African worldview requires that the victims of conflicts and human rights abuses should not be forgotten. These individuals should not be cast to realm of the *nameless dead* when there is the possibility of incorporating them without the community under the status of the 'living dead'. The construction of memorials, which transcends the deficiencies of oral tradition, makes this possible. Yet, memorialization goes beyond the symbolism of memorials to involve a broad range of communal education that has consequences on the present and future of the continent. The failure at memorialization process is already evident in the level of conflict and abuse of human rights in most African countries. Departing from conflicts does not only imply the restoration of peace and coexistence, but equally means the unleashing of development, good governance, responsible citizenship and prosperity in the continent. In that sense, the victims of the conflicts serve a double role since the cause(s) for which they died, assumes a new impact in contemporary times. For the victims of the Ethiopian torture camp of *Alem Bekagn*, the victims of Boko Haram raids, and the lives lost at the Biafran War, the value of their lives is taken up in the present to denounce abuse of power, condemn fundamentalism and promote justice and equity.

Since it appears that most governments in Africa are too slow in promoting memorialization because of their complicity in the abuse of human rights and conflicts, it becomes necessary to devise other means of achieving memorialization. Some of these strategies as argued in this essay would include the work of the private sector, the social media and contemporary literature. These methods have a way of subverting the overbearing posturing of corrupt and self-serving governments while at the same time providing spaces for learning for both the government and the public. The intention is to promote a new consciousness in Africa, in a way that is reconcilable with the African cosmology and existential philosophy of community and interconnected of the universe. New consciousness in this regard is one of the ways of inaugurating a new Africa, in which violent conflicts is completely obliterated and human rights is respected. It means a new identity that is built on a 'living' social memory that integrates the past in the present for the sake of a better future. At Auschwitz, Merkel describes the task of memorialization as an "enduring responsibility".⁵⁸ The nature of this responsibility is as true for the Western world as it is for Africa.

⁵⁸Eddy, "Visiting Auschwitz."

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