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Memorials and Memory - The use of memorials and monuments as a part of the process of reconciliation

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Memorials and monuments can help us to create a common history, to keep the past alive. However, when it comes to the process of reconciliation memorials and monuments can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand memorials can ensure a public awareness of our common history, of what has happened. Memorials ensure that misdeeds will not be forgotten too easily; the perpetrators cannot simply demand that the victims forget in the name of the common future. On the other hand, memorials can have the effect that we remember all too well, that we linger in a victim identity, which freezes history and, in this aspect, closes the future. This article analyses the uses of memorials and monuments and describes how memory is an essential part of a process of reconciliation. Memorials and monuments are not static expressions. In fact, monuments can turn into offensive statements, and the question here is how to deal with this? Is the solution to tear them down, to erect counter-monuments or to use them to illustrate the development of history? All these questions are asked in the context of how memorials and monuments can influence the process of reconciliation positive and negatively.

Memorials and monuments as a safeguard against collective repression and forgetting

One of the common features of the literature on reconciliation, be it theological, sociological, or psychological, is that reconciliation requires a recognition of what has really happened, of what it is that has given rise to the need for reconciliation. Seeking the truth is an essential part of a reconciliation process. Here memorials and monuments can be both a constructive and a destructive factor. In general, the process of reconciliation must take the dialectic between the present, the past and the future into account. The process of reconciliation between two groups, whether cultural, ethnic, national or political defined, must contain a vision for the future, for a common coexistence. The future is here defining the present. But this describes only "one side of the coin". Reconciliation implies also that the present must encounter and accommodate the past. Reconciliation is not to be equated with forgetfulness. Reconciliation is not just about looking forward; it is also about finding a way to deal with the past. The question is how to do this without letting the past determine future relations. In short: to enable this dialectic between the present, the past

and the future the process of reconciliation must take the following five phenomena into account: forgiveness, justice, truth, trust and peace. In this article I will focus on one aspect of how to deal with the truth: the potential (and possible "traps") of using memorials and monuments in the common narrative of who we are, where we come from, and where we want to go. To state the possibility of reconciliation as an alternative to either war, conflict, or parallel existence is to claim that history is heritage rather than destiny.

Lasting reconciliation does not take place on the basis of individual or collective repression. One of the ways in which a society can seek to establish a shared understanding of the past and thereby contribute to a possible reconciliation process is through the establishment of public memorials. These memorials provide a safeguard against collective repression and forgetting. However, the aim of memorials can vary quite a lot. Some memorials serve to remember and honor the fallen who fought for a country or who rose up against oppression. These can be grandiose memorial parks, sculptures and huge cemeteries that cannot fail to make an impression on the viewer simply by virtue of their size, or it can take form of a small, unnoticeable memorial stone erected on the spot where a freedom fighter was executed by the regime. In case of the latter, it is necessary to know the history behind the memorial stone in order to understand it. Other monuments serve as a celebration of seminal events that have had a decisive impact on the self-understanding of a nation and/or its people, as well as a monument can serve as a remembrance and celebration of a person, who have changed the history. Barak Obama expressed this rhetorically, when he stated that "Mandela belongs to eternity".[1] However, memorials are a double-edged sword, as they can "freeze" a particular interpretation of history, which can make it difficult to let the future be open for new relationships. Memorials can help us to face the past, but they can also close the future in the sense that we let the past determine the future if we look at history as a "game of repetition".

In the following I will analyze how memorials and monuments are influencing our understanding of not only the past but also of the present and the future. A part of this analysis will consist in a description of three main ways of approaching memorials and monuments: 1) the establishment of counter-monuments, 2) the reversing of the content of a memorial site or monument and 3) the demolishing of the monument or memorial site. I will do this from an interdisciplinary perspective, including historical, sociological and theological analysis of the use of memorials and monuments in relation to reconciliation. Memorial sites and monuments are at one and the same time a historical lesson and a celebration of history. They are not just a "picture" of the past, they are also a living, social, cultural and political voice. I combine insights from memory studies with examples of how memorials and monuments are related to the process of reconciliation. I keep weaving theory and praxis together in my exploration of how memorials and monuments are not just a voice from the past, but also a living, present voice, that in part determines the future. The awareness of the potential double-bind of memorials and monuments helps us to treat history as heritage rather than as destiny. Monuments and memorials can be a valuable resource to navigate in the dialectic between present, past and future in which reconciliation takes place. The story told must be open-ended.

[1] In his eulogy, Obama quoted the words spoken at the death of President Lincoln in 1865: "He no longer belongs to us. He belongs to eternity". See Thomas Andrew, 2013. 'Mandela tilhører evigheden"'. *Jyllandsposten* (2013). Online at https://jyllands-posten.dk/international/usa/article6314325.ece (accessed 2024-02-27).

The relation between story and history

Jewish writer and professor Elie Wiesel emphasizes that in the case of man-made disasters, it is important to remember injustice to ensure that justice will be done – not only in retrospect, but also in the future.[2] Thus, remembrance is granted a positive, forward-looking purpose. For Wiesel, the aim of memorials and monuments is not to keep victims in their role as victims either to gain the right to receive ongoing special treatment or, paradoxically, to obtain the right to act violently against previous or present enemies. In case of the latter, victims are misusing their history as an excuse to act aggressively, while at the same time maintaining the role of a victim internally and externally. Maintaining the victim's perspective can blur one's ethical compass so that one fails to recognize one's actual position of power and the associated ethical responsibility and obligation. Wiesel's point is not to support a particular victim identity, but instead, through the remembrance of injustice, to ensure that history does not repeat itself.

Memorials are a way to incarnate history in time and space. This can be achieved, for example, by linking the memory of a people's fate with concrete examples of the loss of individuals. Within the field of memory research, there is a special attention to the development of a new type of memorial museums, where the focus of communication is on individual stories. Through the manifestation of concrete personal stories, history is made recognizable in a different way than through an overall presentation of history, which both can have an objective and a more mythologically determined character. Both tend to describe history in an abstract way. In a Danish context one example of a communication of history through a series of concrete minor stories is the permanent exhibition at the Tirpitz Museum. The museum describes the German occupation of Denmark in the second world war. It is built around one of the German bunkers placed on the Danish west coast and the architecture is in itself a part of the exhibition. The exhibition tells the stories of several people, from the little girl who heard the airplanes at night, to the engineer and worker who worked for the German occupying power building bunkers, to the German soldier in Denmark, and the resistance fighter who carried out sabotage against the German occupying power.

Simply put, the museum mediates experiences rather than information. The visitor gets a mediated experience of the experience, as the museum "draw the visitor into the story that they are telling, making the visitor play an active role and identify with the story's characters."[3] This new type of museum is not so much concerned with establishing the big cultural, political, and societal overview. Instead, the big story is brought to life and told through a series of minor stories, where the visitor is invited to identify oneself with the individual personal stories and destinies through the expanded use of digital communication. Many of these new memorial museums deals with war crimes and crimes against humanity. The focus here is on portraying the violation of human rights, rather than explaining the political, cultural, and social reasons for why it could happen. The narrative has a well-defined moral purpose: an appeal to never let it happen again. To put

[2] Cf. Elie Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory: Reminiscences* (New York: Summit Books, 1990), p. 187: "Justice without memory is an incomplete justice, false and unjust. To forget would be an absolute injustice in the same way that Auschwitz was the absolute crime. To forget would be the enemy's final triumph."

[3] Amy Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity. Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), p. 24.

it simply, the narrative is more emotional than rational, with more emphasis on identification than on communicating facts.

In her analysis of the rise of the many memorial museums, sociologist Amy Sodaro points out that the moral purpose is not without a certain inherent ambivalence. Firstly, museums have subjected themselves to a political purpose that is determined by a contemporary reading and use of the past. Sodaro points out that whereas we used to orientate ourselves politically based on visions of a future, that we believed would be better, we are now orientating ourselves by reference to the past, which we now use as an explanation and guarantor of our political goals. In this way, the past is interpreted as a point of reference for the future. The battle for history has thus become a political battle – and can no longer be seen as an isolated dispute among historians. We currently see this in Putin's use of history as a political justification for invading Ukraine. We also see it in the coming Republican president Donald Trump's official campaign slogan: "Make America great again", whereby he both mythologizes the past and promises to recreate this mythological past. Sodara describes this use of history very aptly:

> Where once the (glorious) future was the social and political way of ordering and orienting the world and the past was simply tradition that was incorporated into everyday life, today the future is uncertain and the past becomes the primary field for enacting and ordering politics and life. Memorial museums, then, are central to this ordering of our world vis-à-vis the past.[4]

Secondly, the ambivalence towards the moral use of history is justified because it implies that through enlightenment and empathy, we can avoid repeating the atrocities and cruel deeds of history. However, this is a naive reading that does not take the inherent human desire for power and potential evil into account. In contrast, Christianity's realistic view of humanity emphasizes that each individual human being possesses the ability to do radical good as well as radical evil. Evil is not something we can put behind us as a historical event, nor is it something we can exonerate ourselves from. Evil must be fought persistently, both individually and collectively. This does not imply that it is not important to learn from history, but conversely, we must not believe that enlightenment can secure us against the rise of totalitarian regimes – let it be in the form of fascism, Nazism, communism, or any other oppressive and freedom-depriving system. Memory is not in itself a safeguard against the unfolding of human evil. Sodaro puts it this way:

> Violence, atrocity, and genocide continue to rage around the world, despite robust efforts at remembering. Thus we need to understand not only what is behind this urgent need to remember but especially the limits of memory's ability to aid in the prevention of violence, promotion of democracy, and promise of peace.[5]

Commemorative monuments can both create myths and they can remind us of concrete history, as when the American soldiers who died in the Normandy invasion are commemorated through the erection of an almost endless row of white crosses at the American cemetery at Coleville-sur-Mer. Wiesel's insistence on maintaining the historical experience of injustice and hopelessness reappears here: "... the memory of death will serve as a shield against death."[6] But with Sodaro's reflection *in mind,* we must not delude

[4] Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity*, p. 28.
[5] Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity*, p. 29
[6] Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory*, p. 239.

ourselves that memory in itself is a sufficient shield against the rise of totalitarian regimes based on violence and oppression.

The focus on history as a collection of different stories that touches us on a relational and emotional level enables us in a paradoxical way to see history in a broader context. The memory of the Holocaust serves not "only" to avoid the persecution of Jews in the future, but to warn – and call for resistance – against any future genocide, against any crime against humanity.[7] The warning contained in the memory of the persecution of the Jews is thus not linked to a specific people but is universal in its concern. But precisely to avoid the universal becoming abstract, it must be demonstrated in the concrete.

The Memorial Park in Berlin for Europe's murdered Jews consists of more than 2.700 concrete blocks of varying heights, with narrow pathways in between. It is a moving work of art, at once a memorial and a warning of what a mechanistic view of humanity combined with a totalitarian system can lead to. Underground, the monument is supported by a museum that tells the story of a few individual Jews. These stories contradict or rather explore the monument's coldness, conformity and abstraction. Through the erected monument, history is given a face, and we are forced to face history. In other words, the monument helps to transform knowledge of history from a series of historical facts to a history that has been given a body, where the social and the human consequences of what has happened has been taken into account.

With monuments as carriers of memory, the pitfalls already mentioned become clear. The monuments can both cause a stigmatization of the victim as a victim, just as they can bring about a glorification of heroes or events in history, which are thereby granted a mythological status that can be a major obstacle to a long-term solution in a social, cultural, political or religious conflict. This narrows the scope for political action, making it much more difficult to make compromises, as one must be sure not to undermine the myth, which in turn is linked to the need to avoid being seen as a traitor to those who have sacrificed themselves. Mythological history constitutes its own rationale, which can be difficult to penetrate. In the case of Northern Ireland, for example, both loyalists and nationalists have their own myths in which they portray themselves as victims heroically fighting against a superior power and injustice. These myths have implications for today's political and cultural space, as they both maintain and expand one's identity in opposition to the opposing party, just as they keep you loyal to those who have sacrificed themselves for the cause so far. To compromise would be to commit treason. Thus, history is not neutral.[8] From a visit to Belfast, I remember the following inscription on one of the gable murals: "This is dedicated to those who served in our conflict. We forget not."

Many memorials represent an attempt to maintain an identity-bearing memory and are therefore as much directed towards the present and the future as they are directed towards the past. Memorials can serve as a concrete spatial manifestation of a myth; the historical monument is not historical in the sense of a balanced and sober source of knowledge, but rather a glorification of a particular interpretation of history that serves a

[7] Philosopher Hannah Arendt emphasizes that the Holocaust should not be interpreted as anti-Semitism but as a crime against humanity. Jews were not the only victims of Nazi persecution, it also affected gypsies, Poles, communists, homosexuals, and people with special needs.

[8] Northern Irish peace activist and leader of Corrymeela David Stevens has put it this way: "Sacrifice and victimization are important interpretative keys in the way that the past is understood in both traditions [The Ulster Protestant Community and the Irish Catholic Community]. The heroic sacrifices of the past require continuing honor, respect and loyalty.". See David Stevens, *The Land of Unlikeness. Explorations into Reconciliation* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2004), p. 95.

specific purpose. As such, memorials can be directly counterproductive in the effort to establish a shared history that aims to make a shared future possible. The gable murals in Northern Ireland serve largely to reinforce the mythological historiography of the extremes on both sides, which gives both sides the right – if not the duty – to continue the struggle based on their own self-understanding. As a result, the fear of violence breaking out again is just below the political surface. That peace does not automatically imply reconciliation becomes here very clear.

The use of Counter-monuments – The Judensau in Wittenberg

Monuments and memorials do not in themselves guarantee the establishment or preservation of a shared history. Monuments can both support mythological interpretations and question them. Harward Law School Professor Martha Minow draws attention to the phenomenon of counter-monuments, where people deliberately choose to erect new monuments in order to question the previous monuments' interpretation of the past.[9] In a theological context, one of the best-known examples of this is the counter-monument at the *Stadtkirchen* in Wittenberg, where the frieze with the *Judensau* is contradicted by a sculpture embedded in the tiles just below the original frieze. This counter-monument serves multiple purposes. It is both a memorial to the Jews who died during the Shoah, and it is a public confession of sin: that the Church as well as individual Christians throughout history have taken part in the persecution of Jews, culminating in the Shoah. Finally, the counter-monument is a theological objection to interpreting Judaism in direct opposition to Christianity.

The point is that by erecting a counter-monument, you are facing history. You are not trying to explain away or deliberately trying to forget that Luther, with some of his writings, also contributed to the persecution of Jews. By keeping the *Judensau* in the wall of the Church and erecting a counter-monument just below it on the pavement, the Lutheran Church acknowledges that Christianity (including Lutheranism) has taken part in the persecution of Jews. The counter-monument is an expression of guilt. It both refers to the atrocity that had happened to the Jews and interprets it in the light of the cross, that it is God's people who suffer. The counter-monument emphasizes the very close connection between Judaism and Christianity: that they are both united in having the same God as father: Yahweh. The counter-monument represents a theological reinterpretation of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, emphasizing that the God of the Christians is also the God of the Jews, which is emphasized both by quoting from the book of Psalms in Hebrew and by writing that God's real name is *Shema Ha Mphoras*. The latter is subtle, as it is a very direct contradiction of one of Luther's writings against the Jews: *Vom Schem Hamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi*, in which Luther equates the Jews with the devil.[10] As recently as February 2020, a private person had filed a lawsuit with the German court demanding the removal of the *Judensau* from the church. The court rejected this claim due to the fact that the church had erected a counter-monument that has changed the context of the sculpture. It now appears as a monument against anti-Semitism. The

[9] See Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness. Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), pp.136-45.

[10] The inscription on the monument reads: ”God's actual name, the reviled Shema Ha Mphorah, whom the Jews held almost unspeakably holy before the Christians, died in six million Jews under a sign of the cross”. In addition, Psalm 130:1 is quoted in Hebrew (”Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord”).

pastor of the church, Johannes Bloch, subsequently pointed out in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that we cannot change history by removing or destroying monuments. Instead, through the monuments, we can be reminded of the potential evil of mankind - and thus let the sculptures stand as a warning against repeating history. The latter is especially true when a counter-monument puts the work into a new context. The counter-monument is both a memorial plaque in honor of the victims and a reminder of the atrocities that man can commit – even in the name of God.[11]

Many memorials serve not only to remember, honor, or even celebrate past events. They are just as much a warning that something similar could happen again – either as a result of human cruelty or stupidity, or as a consequence of the vagaries of nature. As for the former, the memorial can be both a reflection on the cruelty of the past and a call to action, which is why the monument is also a reminder of man's ability to do good. Minow gives examples of memorials that bear a resemblance to modern art happenings as they are designed in such a way that they eventually will dissolve. The message: history requires a current stance. The monument is more than a memory of what was, it is also a reference to what is and what is to come. The monument as a form of happening seeks to deconstruct itself, to go against its own expression, to be acting rather than descriptive or referential. A striking example of this was a twelve-meter-high column in Germany, in the city of Harburg. The monument was a protest and warning against fascism, war, and violence. The column was erected in front of a shopping mall and was designed in such a way that it gradually sank into the ground – eventually disappearing completely.[12] The inscription on the memorial read, here quoted from Minow:

> One day it will have disappeared completely, and the site of the Harburg monument against fascism will be empty. In the end, it is only we ourselves who can rise up against injustice.[13]

Counter-monuments are a way to critically engage with the past without wanting to remove the original monuments. But could there be cases where the desire to achieve reconciliation with the atrocities of the past may encourage a more radical approach to removing the monument rather than putting the monument into perspective and contextualizing it – whether through information about the background of the monument or the construction of a new counter-monument? This is a question to which there is no simple and unambiguous answer. As mentioned, monuments always represent both a past and a present voice. And sometimes the current voice can become so strong that you must consider whether the monument should still have a place in the public space. At the same time, monuments can serve to keep the past alive so that we don't become historyless, believing that we can understand and interpret our place in the world without considering our cultural, religious, and political backgrounds and origins. Finally, on the one hand monuments can provide a one-sided view of history that requires other voices to be heard to avoid building a one-dimensional cultural, religious, and political narrative. On the other hand, ancient statues and memorials can be transformed into a counter-monument that challenge our previous understanding of history and its significance for our time. Instead of glorifying past heroes the monuments are then a reminder of past oppression.

[11] With the latter, I'm expanding the issue to all of humanity, not just Christianity.
[12] See Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*, p. 142.
[13] See Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness,* p. 142.

However, one must remember that we cannot judge past actions by our contemporary moral standards.

The transformation of memorials and monuments – Spain post Franco

Due to the "Pact of Forgetting" (1975) a collective encounter with the fascist past of the Franco regime has never really taken place in Spain. The Pact of Forgetting was made between moderate Franco supporters and the left-wing opposition to ensure a peaceful transition to democracy after almost forty years of fascism. This meant, for example, that streets and squares were still named after some of the heroes of fascism, which has been an open wound for many of the victims and their relatives, as well as for their children and grandchildren. The first major step to break the collectively imposed silence was the passing of the Historical Memory Law in 2007, where the socialist government obliged local authorities to remove symbols and street names that could serve as a glorification of Franco's dictatorship. The purpose of the law was to acknowledge the victims of the civil war and the fascist regime.

The aim of the law was not to remove historical references to the Franco regime for the sake of forgetting, nor was it to hold the descendants of the regime accountable for the regime's atrocities. Instead, they wanted to avoid the continued heroization of the fascist regime and its leaders. The goal was to give the victims a voice through the introduction of the Historical Memory Law – and thereby also to contribute to a real reconciliation process. Enforced silence suppresses the truth of the violence of the fascist-regime, which victimizes the victims once more. Critics of the Historical Memory Law, on the other hand, argued that the law would instead lead to renewed confrontation rather than reconciliation, as the implementation of the law would cause the conflict to blow up again. However, imposed silence and forgetting is to the benefit of the perpetrator, where there is no reckoning with the past and the truth about the past is suppressed in favor of achieving peace. Thus, reconciliation is not the right word for this approach as reconciliation requires the ability to embrace the past.

Ever since the Historical Memory Law was passed, the law has been at the center of the struggle between the bourgeois and conservative forces on the one hand and the leftist and more secular forces on the other. One of the street names that was changed in 2017, ten years after the passing of the law, was Calle del General Yagüe in the capital of Madrid. Yagüe was known as the "Butcher of Badajoz". He was responsible for the mass execution of up to 4000 people when he took the city of Badajoz in 1936. The street has now regained its original name: Calle de San Germán – but not without much controversy. The then conservative government in Madrid initially refused to implement the law.[14]

The Historical Memory Law made a political discussion about how to deal with Franco's monumental tomb: El Valle de los Caídos – The Valley of the Fallen – possible. It was erected by Franco as a "victory monument to honor the 'heroes and martyrs of the crusade'", but the only two people named in the mausoleum are Franco himself and José Antonio Primo de Rivera, the leader of the Spanish Falange movement.[15] The monument, which is blasted into the rock and is larger than St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, has very much served as a "place of pilgrimage" for supporters of Franco and the military regime. The monument has not primarily been a place to commemorate the repression and the

[14] See Kasper Kloch, "Hovedrengøring af historien". *Weekendavisen* (19th of February 2016).
[15] Cf. Kasper Kloch, "Glemslens pagt opsagt". *Weekendavisen* (24th of September 2019).

violations of the human rights. Instead, it has provided a space for a continued glorification of Franco and the military regime. In the eyes of the Spanish right wing, Franco was the main reason that Spain was not turning into a communist regime, and he is therefore seen as a national savior, a father of the country, rather than an oppressing dictator.

There are hundreds of wooden boxes containing the remains of the victims of the Franco regime in the side wings of the basilica. The bodies of the opponents of Franco were first thrown into mass graves after they had been brutally executed. They were then dug up, thrown into large wooden boxes, and collectively deported to the side wings of the basilica as a final demonstration of power and insult to the victims.[16] The relatives of the victims could not resist this double insult of the deceased: first the mass grave, then the collective deportation of the dead to Franco's memorial. Descendants of the victims have been fighting not only for the identification of their relatives in the mass graves but also for getting the possibility to give them a proper and public burial. It is a struggle that is still ongoing. Purificación Lapenã, who has become known for her ongoing struggle to find the remains of her grandfather and her grandfather's brother, both killed by the Franco regime, obtained court permission in 2016 to open the side chapel of El Valle de los Caídos to search for the boxes with the bones of her grandfather and his brother. Finding the bones and having the opportunity to rebury them is to move their fates and stories out of the anonymous mass graves – and thus change history by reclaiming their individual stories in public. This might lead to an opportunity for reconciliation. Imposed forgetfulness will surely not.

The bones of Francisco Franco and José Antonio Primo de Rivera were exhumed in 2019 and 2023 respectively and reburied in lesser known, less grandiose tombs in Madrid. The purpose of this was to prevent El Valle de los Caídos from continuing to appear as a mausoleum to the honor of Franco. The response of the mayor of Madrid to the exhumation and reburial of Primo de Rivera demonstrates clearly that the political and cultural past in Spain is still highly inflammatory. The mayor describes the supporters of the Historical Memory Law as: "... all those who understand politics as opening up the wounds of the past rather than trying to create a future for all of us."[17] The desire of the Spanish Prime Minister in 2019 Pedro Sánchez, to transform El Valle de los Caídos into a museum that would accommodate both sides of the civil war has not been realized, despite reburials and the renaming of the site to Valle de Cuelgamuros based on its geographical location. Perhaps, as Spanish historian Santos Juliá suggests, this is not possible either. His suggestion is instead to let the monument decay and thus diminish in importance.[18]

Another example of how monuments can change character is the preservation of the small, ruined village of Belchite, located about 40 km from Zaragoza. The town was destroyed in the battle between Franco's troops and the national rebel army. The town had first been taken by the Nationalists. Republicans recaptured the city a year later, and after fierce fighting – and subsequent mass executions – Franco's forces defeated the city in 1938. After the fascist victory in 1939, Franco chose to leave the destroyed city as a memorial to the struggle and the victory of the nationalists. The City of Ruins, as it was later named, should both bear witness to the "heroic struggle of the nationalists" and stand as a warning

[16] Others interpret it as an act of reconciliation that the monument, which was originally built to honor the fallen on general Franco's side, ended up housing fallen from both sides of the conflict.
[17] See Guy Hedgecoe, "Primo de Rivera: Spain exhumes fascist Falange leader". BBC News (24th April 2023). Online at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-65370223 (accessed 2024-02-27).
[18] Cf. Kloch, "Glemslens pagt opsagt."

against anyone who might dare to revolt against the fascist regime. The consequences, as the City of Ruins demonstrated, would be incalculable. After Franco's death, the city felt into decay. It was no longer a war tourist destination in honor of the nationalist regime. Now, more than 80 years after the end of the civil war, the City of Ruins stands instead as a monument in remembrance of the victims of the civil war and the subsequent violent fascist regime with its systematic repression of human rights. The monument has been transformed from a destination for war tourism to a monument for "Remembrance and Peace". Thus, the purpose of preserving the ruined city has been reversed 180 degrees. In the 80th anniversary of the end of the civil war, Spanish photojournalist Gervasio Sánchez exhibited some of his black and white photographs from the Balkan war in the ruined buildings. Thus, the memorial to the remembrance of the brutality, inhumanity and destruction of the Spanish Civil War broadens its scope as it becomes a universal cry for peace.[19]

Removal of monuments – Raleigh in the South

Back to the question: are there situations where it makes sense to remove monuments from public spaces? This is a question that cannot be answered with a clear yes or no; it depends on the context. In general, you can't change history by removing historical monuments. The desire to remove monuments from public places is often justified by making an ethical assessment of history based on today's premises – and this is basically historically untenable. A distinction must be made between 1) the situation and the context at the time when the remembered events took place and 2) the situation and the context at the time when the monument or memorial was erected, and 3) how we today judge and use history from our contemporary perspective. That said, there may be monuments or memorials that are perceived as downright oppressive by the descendants of the victims, in which case you need to consider how to address this. Is it by contextualizing monuments or memorials through an educational element? Is it by erecting counter-monuments as mentioned above? Or is it by removing the monuments or memorials? We have seen proposals for changing the monuments through construction of a counter-monument, through changing the monument itself, and through the direct removal of the monument or memorial (as, in the simple form of renaming a street). The reason for this was that there were still people alive who remembered the outrageous acts of violence. They were not only forced into collective forgetfulness in the transition from military rule to democracy, but they must also endure the ongoing glorification of the "heroes of fascism". But what about memorials and sculptures that date back generations? Does it make sense to demand their removal for the sake of the descendants of the victims, who may feel offended? Or does it make sense to remove them out of a desire to revolt against a colonial past or slavery, for example?

In his article "Epistemological Crises Made Stone: Confederate Monuments and the End of Memory", theologian Ryan Newson from Campbell University in North Carolina offers an interesting take on how to weigh the pros and cons of removing memorials.[20] His specific starting point is a discussion on how to deal with a local Civil War memorial located at the government building in the city of Raleigh, the capital of

[19] See Mette Haakonsen, "Nogle krige ophører aldrig". *Kristeligt Dagblad* (9th of December 2019).
[20] See Ryan Newson, "Epistemological Crisis Made Stone: Confederate Monuments and the End of Memory". *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* Fall/Winther, 37/2 (2017), pp. 135-151.

North Carolina. Discussion of whether or not to remove the statue had flared up after the massacre in Charleston, South Carolina, on June 17, 2015, where nine African American churchgoers were killed by a white man. Immediately following this, there was a public demand to not only remove the Confederate flag from official buildings, but also to remove the 75-foot-tall monument to fallen Confederate soldiers located in front of the government building in Raleigh. Remarkably, according to Newson, the desire to remove both the flag and the monument came not only from various groups of human rights activists but also from representatives of the political right. Newson states that there were two distinctly different motives behind this, but that they both were united by a desire to erase the past.

Newson emphasizes that there is a large gap in time between the construction of most Civil War monuments and the event they commemorate: the Civil War (1861-1865). The monuments were primarily built between 1880 and the 1920's. This implies that the monuments had one primary purpose: to support the South's self-understanding as somewhere – where the right to slavery, and the keeping of a distinct hierarchy between the white race and the African Americans, was a cornerstone of society. Newson describes the erection of the many memorials long after the ending of the civil war as a "war of memory".[21] The monuments were erected at a time when there were many lynchings of African Americans in the South. Despite the South having lost the battle for the right to own slaves, they did not obey the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, passed in 1870, which ensured that all citizens of the United States had the right to vote regardless of race, color, or social status (in this case, whether or not they were former slaves).

An example of the South's continued racist stance was the coup in 1898 in the city of Wilmington, North Carolina, where a group of white supremacists overthrew the city government violently, which was made up of both whites and African Americans. The white militant groups rampaged through the African American neighborhoods, killing randomly. The Wilmington massacre was part of a larger campaign in the state of North Carolina, where leading white voices in politics had launched a major smear campaign to remove African Americans' civil rights. What was unique about the city of Wilmington was that African Americans made up more than half of the population and that a thriving middle class of African Americans had emerged, with a wide range of jobs and professions. Politically, a pragmatic alliance between poor whites and African Americans had emerged, which was a further thorn in the side of the white supremacists. The violent takeover of power in Wilmington was carefully planned. Groups of white militias intervened at polling stations to scare African Americans away from voting; leading politicians from the legitimately elected government were given the choice of being deported or killed. The leader of the militant wing of the rebellion, Alfred M. Waddell, was subsequently inaugurated as mayor. Prior to the election, he had issued the following command:

> You are the sons of noble ancestry. You are Anglo-Saxons. You are armed and prepared and you will do your duty.... Go to the polls tomorrow and if you find the negro out voting, tell him to leave the polls. If he refuses, kill him. Shoot him down in his tracks.[22]

[21] See Newson, "Epistemological Crisis Made Stone", p. 140.
[22] See Jeff Wallenfeldt, "Wilmington coup and massacre. United States History [1898]". Encyclopedia Britannica. Online at https://www.britannica.com/event/Wilmington-coup-and-massacre (accessed 2024-02-27).

The many monuments erected *decades after the Civil War* were not so much about honoring the dead soldiers as they were about preserving the South's self-understanding of "Southern virtues". The erection of the monuments coincides with the fact that the South had effectively abolished the requirement for African Americans to have equal civil rights, including the right to vote freely. The South may have lost the war to the North over the right to hold slaves, but in practice they maintained a clear racial division of rights and privileges. Thus, the monuments to the Civil War in the South have primarily served to demonstrate this inequality in social status and human dignity.

The abuse of memorials becomes particularly evident in light of the fact that it was not until almost a hundred years after the massacre that the South's own narrative of the Wilmington massacre was officially disavowed. It had so far been described as a necessary intervention against racial riots initiated by the African American population. In 2000, a nearly 500-page report was published that provided an academically account of the facts surrounding the planning, execution, and aftermath of the massacre.[23]

The many monuments in the South of soldiers in the Civil War appear therefore as a form of silent legitimization of both the South's falsified past and the structural racism that still exists. Movements like Black Life Matters aim to expose and fight against racism in all its various forms, including exposing structural racism. So how is it that the massacre in Charleston led both activists and representatives of the political right to propose the removal of both the Confederate flag and the Civil War monument in Raleigh? Newson argues that activists believe it is necessary to remove the statue in Raleigh (and all other similar statues in the South) to deconstruct the structural racism that still exists. The political right, on the other hand, still according to Newson, does so to remove the reminder of slavery and the South's refusal to grant equal rights to black and white citizens. Thus, the removal of the monument in Raleigh would make it easier for the political right to claim that racism is no longer a structural issue and that it is limited to the wrong actions of individual maniacs. The claim of structural racism would then be dismissed as a form of "outrage hysteria". According to Newson both views are united in the desire to change history through the removal of memorials from public space, which implies a collectively imposed forgetfulness. Newson, on the other hand, advocates for the preservation of at least some of the most significant memorials to the Confederacy and the Civil War. According to Newson the memorials shall serve "as markers of a past that is with us yet" and in this way help us to see the ongoing structural racism in the society.[24] In other words, to claim that there is racial equality in 2017 and 2024 is both an attempt to forget the historical conditions of the Southern revolt and an attempt to deny the continuing impact of racism, visible and invisible, structurally and individually.[25] Newson's response is

[23] See Wallenfeldt, "Wilmington coup and massacre".
[24] Newson, "Epistemological Crisis Made Stone", p. 145
[25] Newson puts it this way: "Thus, my first suggestion - scandalous even to myself - is that some Confederate monuments should remain standing precisely as markers of a past that is with us yet, and that to take all of them down would further tempt white persons to forget the past in order to be redeemed from it, or make white people all the more blind to their inherited privilege. Confederate monuments are unique physical places where the wound we so often hide from ourselves - of race, whiteness, and a legacy of racialized violence - is made manifest, made stone. In a society adept at avoiding the structural power of race and whiteness - that increasingly produces 'racism without racists' - such monuments may serve as physical locations where people can point to race's ongoing power, be reminded that black lives have *not* mattered in the construction of society, and even serve as locations where people can gather antiracist energy in a shared public space.", Newson, Epistemological Crisis Made Stone, p. 145. Since Newson wrote the article, the monument has been

remembrance in an ethical and religious light that appeals to self-awareness and a realization of the white inherited privileged rights, which he describes in a Christian terminology as an appeal to the recognition of sin and judgment.[26]

The demand for contextualization is crucial to Newson's argument, otherwise it could just as easily be said that the keeping of the monuments contributes to the continued falsification of history. The desire to tear down the statues is not simply an expression of historylessness, as a general, superficial analysis might suggest.[27] Removing memorials and monuments may be appropriate in some cases, but it should not be done in an attempt to forget history, let alone to deny its continuing impact. But monuments may be of such a nature that their removal is a crucial step in the effort to achieve equal rights for all citizens, to emphasize democracy as the best possible form of government, or to throw off the yoke of colonialism or totalitarianism. That said, history cannot be changed, neither through the erection or removal of memorials. But the impact of history can be.

Memorials and monuments can both be a steppingstone and a stumble block towards reconciliation. It is vital for the reconciliation process, that it both can keep the future open and accommodate the past. Here it is important how the past is represented in the present. I have described three different ways to engage with monuments and memorials: The construction of counter-monuments (Wittenberg), the transformation of the representation of the monument (Spain), and finally reflections pro et contra about demolishing monuments of the past (Raleigh). Which of these alternatives provides the best road to reconciliation depends on the actual context.

The state, government and civil societies must consider carefully what they want when they erect a monument or establish a memorial. What is the purpose of erecting a monument or a memorial? What does the monument or the memorial represent? Is it a warning (never again), a celebration of a past event (establishing of a founding story), or a "sanctification" of old heroes or statesmen? Does it turn history into mythology? Or is it an expression of the vulnerability of life? All said, if the aim of the monument or the memorial is to underline the process of reconciliation it must be able to be interpreted in the dialectic between a universal and a pluralistic reference. "Plurality is the law of the earth" to quote Hannah Arendt.[28] Plurality must, according to her, both refer to equality and distinction.[29] Thus, reconciliation is a process that must take not only the plurality of perspectives, but also the very plurality of human existence into account. With regards to the plurality of perspectives the establishing of a common narrative is important. Mutual understanding must come together with the willingness to create a new, common story, and in this way also a willingness to make history. Reconciliation is not about winning or being right; it is rather about establishing the balance between unity and diversity. One concrete example of the use of this dialectic in relation to the process of reconciliation is

torn down by angry protesters as an immediate response to the death of George Floyd during a violent police arrest in 2020.

[26] See Newson, "Epistemological Crisis Made Stone", p. 146

[27] An example of such a superficial analysis can be seen in the interview with Professor Frederik Stjernfelt. in *Berlingske Tidende* on April 10, 2021, cf. Blüdnikow 2021. See Bent Blüdnikow, "Filosof og professor: Vi må respektere fortidens valg af mennesker støbt i bronze". *Berlingske Tidende* (10th of April 2021).

[28] See Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* 1, p. 19.

[29] Arendt states this point in the following way: "Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same a anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live". See Arendt 2018, *The Human Condition*, p. 8.

Martin Luther King's articulation of the fight for Afro-Americans' civil rights. He kept referring to this as a fight both for humanity (theologically expressed: that all people are created in the image of God) and democracy: that the US Constitution and Declaration of Independence will only be fulfilled when all American citizens have obtained the right to vote and the ability to take part in the democratic process. Thus, it is not "just" a question of obtaining rights for a certain group; the fight for Afro-Americans' human rights is a fight for humanity and democracy as such. Transferred to the use of memorials and monuments, these must also contain this dialectic between equality and distinction, universality and particularity.

Reconciliation is about being able to embrace your past without being paralyzed by it. The truth, or rather, the truths of the past should neither be suppressed nor glorified but understood in its context then and now. Reconciliation must be able to accommodate the past without the past becoming all-determining of the present and the future. Reconciliation must be able to draw strength from the future, in the hope that contradictions can be accommodated without requiring the elimination of the "other". Reconciliation is an alternative to struggle and annihilation. Reconciliation takes place in a continuous movement between present, past, and future – it is a process that never ends, as life, in all its facets, is full of contradictions. Reconciliation processes are a way of dealing with this - on all levels, from individual, to groups, to states, and on the even larger scale, the relationship between God and the human being.

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