How Can Building Memorial Museums Help Divided Societies Secure a Lasting Peace in the Aftermath of Genocide?

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In recent decades states have rushed to commemorate genocides through museums and memorials, with the expectation that this will bring healing and reconciliation. However, the extent to which genocide museums actually contribute to lasting peace is uncertain. In this essay I discuss how genocide museums attempt to bring reconciliation through remembrance, education and empathy, however, I argue that they often fail in the absence of constructive state narratives and policy.

Firstly, I provide an overview of how genocide museums promote peace, and introduce two case studies, including the Tuol Sleng museum in Cambodia and the National Museum of the Holodomor Genocide in Ukraine. Then, I discuss how the Tuol Sleng and Holodomor museums contribute to reconciliation in three domains, including political reconciliation and nation-building, personal reconciliation and education, and judicial reconciliation and international recognition. Finally, I consider the general limitations of genocide museums in creating lasting peace.

Museums can promote reconciliation in societies divided by genocide. Bockers et al. (2011, p. 81) suggest that successful reconciliation after

conflict is characterised by strong community bonds, social justice, and nonviolence. Genocide museums can support this through facilitating empathy and education (Jinks, 2014, p. 425). They provide a place of memorialisation, where affected individuals and communities can reconcile with their pasts and remember those that were lost. Additionally, they encourage visitors to empathise with victims and understand of the causes of genocide, therefore aiming to create lasting peace through education (Jinks, 2014, p. 426). However, museums can also "obstruct" reconciliation through their politicised and selective versions of history (Clark, 2013, p. 119). Museums can therefore positively or negatively contribute to three forms of reconciliation including political reconciliation, psychological reconciliation, and judicial reconciliation.

This essay will focus on the museums of Tuol Sleng in Cambodia and the National Museum of the Holodomor Genocide in Ukraine. Firstly, the Tuol Sleng genocide museum is located at the site of Security Prison 21, a former school in Phnom Penh that the Khmer Rouge used to torture and kill political prisoners. The museum opened in 1980, only months after the end of the genocide, and was left largely untouched by Vietnamese curator Mai Lam (Hughes, 2008, p. 321). Jinks (2016, p. 57) asserts that Tuol Sleng and its sister memorial site, Cheong Ek, are the "basis of remembrance and education by the Cambodian people" and are crucial in ongoing memorialisation of the genocide. Secondly, the National Museum of the Holodomor Museum opened in 2006 in Kyiv to memorialise the Ukrainian famine of 1932-1933. The Holodomor, which occurred as a result of Soviet collectivisation policies, is a highly contested case of genocide. Although Stalin's policies caused the deaths of millions of Ukrainians, many question whether there was intent to destroy the Ukrainians as an ethnic group, as is required by the UN's definition of genocide (Andriewsky, 2015, p. 36). However, a large number of scholars today support the Holodomor's status as a genocide and the genocide narrative is firmly entrenched in Ukraine's past and present (Andriewsky, 2015, p. 35). President Yushchenko opened the Holodomor Museum on its 75th

anniversary (Jarosz, 2021b, p. 232). The museum and law were part of Yushchenko's larger program to remove all Soviet influence from Ukraine, following the fall of the Soviet Union and deteriorating relations with Russia (Jarosz, 2021a, p. 3). The museum is particularly divisive given the lack of consensus on the genocide itself.

These two museums provide an interesting comparison, as both commemorate vastly different types of genocides, approach genocide memorialisation in varying ways, exist in distinct cultural contexts, and yet have had similar outcomes on reconciliation. Reconciliation has been unsuccessful in both countries, with Cambodia still experiencing political, social, and economic instability as a result of the genocide, and Ukraine and Russia at war with relations at an all-time low. Analysing how these different museums have contributed to this failed reconciliation will create an understanding of the limitations of genocide museums more generally.

I. POLITICAL RECONCILIATION AND NATION-BUILDING

Both Tuol Sleng and the National Museum of the Holodomor Genocide have played an important role in nation-building after conflict, contributing to reconciliation and solidarity among national groups. In Cambodia, the museum has particularly been important in legitimising the post-conflict government to promote peace and stability in the country. The Vietnamese memorialised Tuol Sleng immediately after their invasion of Cambodia to demonstrate the Khmer Rouge's brutality. By doing so, Vietnamese interference in Cambodia and the resulting government were seen as legitimate (Brown & Millington, 2015, p. 32). Similarly, in Ukraine, the museum assisted in legitimising Ukraine as its own nation, separate from the Soviet Union. The museum was part of a broader effort to remove Soviet-influenced architecture and symbols from Ukraine in order to allow their development as an independent country (Jarosz, 2021a, p. 3). Additionally, the museum

helped construct a cultural trauma that promoted solidarity among Ukrainians (Zhukova, 2022, p. 2). Through legitimising post-conflict governments and promoting shared national identities, Tuol Sleng and the Holodomor Museum contributed somewhat to stability in Cambodia and Ukraine after conflict.

However, the governments' use of Tuol Sleng and the Holodomor Museum to promote their national narratives has more often led to fracturing relations and prevented reconciliation between political groups. Evidence of genocide at Tuol Sleng and the Holodomor Museum is politicised, decontextualised, and integrated into state rhetoric (Jarosz, 2021b, p. 241; Münyas, 2008, p. 430). As a result, Edkins (2003, p. 172) argues that these museums perpetuate the ideals "upon which the genocides… were themselves based," and are used as an excuse for further violence. For example, the narratives of both museums have been described as divisive, dehumanising, and demonising (Dreyer, 2018, p. 546; Münyas, 2008, p. 433). Both museums have therefore been used to mobilise the populace against people associated with the perpetrator group. In Cambodia, the museum's narrative was initially used to "invigorate popular support" in the war on the Khmer Rouge, and has continued to foster hatred since their defeat (Lischer, 2019, p. 814). Similarly, by equating Soviets and Russians, the narrative of the Holodomor Museum is a "unifying force" against Russia (Zhukova, 2022, p. 19). Additionally, they impede reconciliation by preventing the development of shared truths. In Cambodia, the single narrative results in social ostracism of those who contradict it, and fosters resentment by distorting the memory of individuals (Chandler, 2008, p. 358). The consequences in Ukraine are even larger, causing significant division both nationally and internationally. The genocide narrative has "split Ukraine" by exacerbating interethnic and political tensions among their diverse population (Motyl, 2010, p. 28; Richter, 2020, p. 482). Furthermore, arguments over the genocide definition have contributed to Russia-Ukraine tensions (Zhukova, 2022, p. 9). Kharkhun (2021, p. 151) argues that "instead of fostering justice and reconciliation," the

contradicting narratives in Ukraine have contributed to memory wars that prevent peace from being achieved. Tuol Sleng and the Holodomor Museum have been co-opted by the Cambodia and Ukrainian government to promote their national narratives and foster resentment, preventing reconciliation from occurring.

Additionally, the narratives perpetuated at Tuol Sleng and the Holodomor Museum have obscured current national issues and the guilt of leaders, perpetuating the suffering caused by the genocides and preventing reconciliation. Firstly, memorialisation hides the fact that the government of Cambodia includes many former Khmer Rouge members (Hannum & Rhodes, 2018, p. 341). Tyner et al. (2012, p. 856) suggest that Tuol Sleng is simply a means of absolving guilt of government officials, and Lischer (2019, p. 841) describes it as a "shield for current leaders." Secondly, the memorials restrict discussions of atrocities to only the period of the genocides, obscuring ongoing issues. In Cambodia, Tuol Sleng temporally limits discussion to the Khmer Rouge years, preventing examination of broader geopolitical issues and government corruption prior to and following the genocide (Tyner et al., 2012, p. 862). Similarly, in Ukraine, Holodomor memorialisation is closely tied to Holocaust denial. The national narrative of genocide hides Ukrainian participation in the Holocaust, and has been used to obscure the effects of Holocaust in Ukraine and beyond (Coulson, 2021, p. 7). Moreover, the Holodomor has been used to justify anti-Semitism, and Ukraine continues to glorify Holocaust perpetrators (Dreyer, 2018, p. 561; Katz, 2016, p. 207). Neo-Nazi paramilitary insignia badges continue to be sold at vendors near the museum (Dyck, 2022, p. 39). In both Cambodia and Ukraine, the genocide museums are used by governments to hide their own guilt and distract from broader national issues of corruption and atrocity, therefore preventing healing.

II. PERSONAL RECONCILIATION AND EDUCATION

Museums play a significant role in encouraging reconciliation in individuals, and promoting peace in the larger community through education. Firstly, Tuol Sleng and the National Museum of the Holodomor Genocide have assisted individuals to reconcile with their pasts and the perpetrators of violence through providing a space of mourning. At Tuol Sleng, the photos of inmates in particular have provided closure to family members of the victims (Brown & Millington, 2015, p. 33). Additionally, the Holodomor Museum has become a place of "personal mourning that brings understanding and acceptance" of the past, and assists Ukrainians in overcoming survivors guilt (Kudela-Świątek, 2020, p. 58). Secondly, the museums have attempted to promote long-term peace and reconciliation through education, empathy, and experience (Bickford & Sodaro, 2010, pp. 78-80). For example, the authenticity of Tuol Sleng is used to combat genocide denial in second-generation victims, and images of the victims promote empathy in visitors (Gill, 2020, p. 66). Similarly, the memorialisation of victims at the Holodomor Museum promotes sympathy and "new forms of social inclusion" (Klymenko, 2016, p. 344). Finally, both museums attempt to call attention to genocide prevention in order to uphold the promise of 'never again.' Frayne (2021, p. 839) argues that Tuol Sleng warns of how genocide can emerge in regular society by expressing the normality of genocide. For example, the museum juxtaposes the familiarity of school corridors and classrooms with barbed wire and metal bedframes. Similarly, the Holodomor Museum focuses on the need to protect future generations through genocide prevention. For example, the museum's Bitter Memory of Childhood statue, which has become an international symbol of the Holodomor, reads "to the dead, the living, and to those yet unborn" as a warning to future generations about the devastation of genocide (Kudela-Świątek, 2020, p. 63). Both museums have helped survivors reconcile with the past and have attempted to promoted long-term peace through education.

However, the education provided by the museums aligns with exclusive state narratives as discussed, erasing the historical complexity of the genocides and discouraging meaningful analysis of the events and causes. For example, Tuol Sleng makes no attempts to engage with the fact that many of its victims were former Khmer Rouge perpetrators, providing a reductionist version of history (Rouch, 2018, p. 49). Similarly, the Holodomor Museum omits the fact that many Ukrainians were perpetrators, facilitating "truth creation" rather than "truth seeking" (Kharkhun, 2021, p. 150). In many cases, analysis of the nuances of the Holodomor is seen as disrespectful to the victims (Coulson, 2021, p. 10). Furthermore, both museums limit atrocities to a single area, excluding the experiences of many affected people. In Cambodia, the Tuol Sleng and associated Cheong Ek memorials are largely portrayed as the extent of Khmer Rouge violence, erasing victims who were killed elsewhere and limiting the atrocities to a single geographic area (Tyner et al., 2012, p. 862). Hannum and Rhodes (2018, p. 343) argue that this geographic exclusion obscures the fact that "all Cambodians live within landscapes of violence" today, preventing proper education and concealing ongoing issues. Similarly, the Holodomor Museum perpetuates Ukraine's exclusionary narrative that they were the only population affected by the Soviets collectivisation policies. Neighbouring countries such as Kazakhstan also experienced significant losses as a result of Soviet-driven famine, however, are overlooked by Ukraine's memorials and thus not included in the reconciliation process (Richter, 2020, p. 481). Neither museum facilitates meaningful education and engagement with the complexities of genocide, therefore limiting the extent that people can learn from the past to prevent future violence.

Additionally, there are several other limitations to the education provided by the museums that limit their ability to bring reconciliation. Firstly, neither museum presents sufficient factual information on the genocides. Tuol Sleng prioritises authentic experience over education and is therefore primarily image-based, leaving visitors confused due to the lack of contextual information (Hughes, 2008, p. 325). Similarly,

Jarosz (2021b, p. 236) describes the Holodomor Museum as commemorative rather than informative. Secondly, Tuol Sleng in particular has been criticised for its focus on the outcome rather than causes of the genocide, ignoring the intent and structures that led to the Khmer Rouge's crimes (Jinks, 2016, p. 57). Tyner et al. (2012, p. 856) state that Tuol Sleng presents the past itself, but "not the processes through which the past is produced." As a result, the museum fails to consider why ordinary people commit violence and therefore does not educate about how to prevent future violence (Williams, 2021, p. 16). Finally, Tuol Sleng is criticised for poorly targeting local populations. Locals perceive the museum as a tourist destination, and therefore do not use the site as a place of education (Hannum & Rhodes, 2018, pp. 342-343). Additionally, a large portion of Cambodia's population is rural, and do not have the means to visit the memorial (Kidron, 2020, p. 318). While both Tuol Sleng and the Holodomor Museum promote some learning about the past, this education is poorly communicated and insufficiently targeted to the prevention of future atrocities.

III. JUDICIAL RECONCILIATION AND INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

Museums can provide concrete evidence that a genocide occurred and therefore contribute to justice and increase international awareness. Tuol Sleng played a direct role in the legal processes of justice and reconciliation in Cambodia, as it contained "undeniable evidence" of the genocide (Jinks, 2016, p. 57). This evidence helped link individual perpetrators to their crimes, as seen in the indictment of Comrade Duch, the leader of the S-21 prison (Brown & Millington, 2015, p. 35). In contrast, the Holodomor Museum was created long after the genocide itself and therefore lacks direct evidence. However, alongside domestic laws, the Holodomor Museum has been used to spread the Ukrainian narrative to international audiences to some extent (Klymenko, 2016, p. 352). Both museums encourage comparison to the Holocaust and other European genocide sites to better connect with and educate

international audiences (Brown & Millington, 2015, p. 36; Klymenko, 2016, p. 346). The evidence provided by the genocide museums contributes directly to justice through legal mechanisms and increases international awareness of the genocides.

Unfortunately, this effort to pursue reconciliation and recognition internationally has created a barrier to reconciliation domestically, particularly in Cambodia. The Tuol Sleng museum is primarily targeted towards international visitors and is therefore culturally insensitive, often deliberately excluding the needs of locals (Hannum & Rhodes, 2018, pp. 342-343). Tuol Sleng encourages a Western form of remembrance that is "incommensurable with local conceptions of loss and mourning" (Kidron, 2021, p. 304). Khmer Buddhists, for example, believe that focusing on the evils of the past is detrimental to the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of both the living and the dead (Kidron, 2020, p. 313). Similarly, the continued display of human remains is directly against Buddhist practices of cremation and was described by Prince Sihanouk as "like hanging people twice" (Brown & Millington, 2015, p. 33). Lischer (2019, p. 826) notes that the Western framing of such museums "may unintentionally support a post-conflict power structure that disregards reconciliation." Such an approach threatens the resurgence of violence in communities (Kidron, 2021, p. 293). The Holodomor Museum, on the other hand, is not internationally targeted to the same extent. Memorialisation at the Holodomor Museum is therefore compatible with local understandings of remembrance, and caters appropriately to Ukrainian nationals (Jarosz, 2021a, p. 5). In cases where genocide museums are internationally targeted, such as Tuol Sleng, they risk losing cultural applicability and preventing local reconciliation.

Additionally, the increasing international focus on both museums has led to a prioritisation of business, commodification, and trivialisation over reconciliation and true justice. Tuol Sleng has become a key tourist location in Cambodia, and as a result the museum is now run more for financial gain than national reconciliation purposes (Sripokangkul,

2017, p. 537). Kidron (2020, p. 321) argues that this business sustains the hierarchical patronage system in Cambodia, and widens the gap between elite and non-elite Khmer. While the Holodomor Museum is less of a financially driven tourist location, increasing international attention to the museum has affected the reconciliation process. Notably, the use of social media to share people's experiences of the museum has resulted in a trivialisation of the genocide, concealing productive discourse and complex understanding of Ukraine's history (Zhukova, 2022, p. 14). As a result of their international exposure, both museums have become a "symbolic replacement of a real justice" (Shuhalyova & Moldavskii, 2019, p. 135). Leaders have used the memorials as an example of their pursuit of reconciliation and justice, without having to make meaningful progress in other areas (Williams, 2004, p. 249). International recognition of the museums has decreased the importance of reconciliation and justice, leading instead to commodification and trivialisation of the genocides.

IV. THE LIMITATIONS OF GENOCIDE MUSEUMS

The Tuol Sleng and Holodomor genocide museums demonstrate the general limitations of genocide memorialisation in promoting reconciliation. Both museums contribute to limited reconciliation and in many cases prove to be a source of further conflict and instability. This failure can be attributed to two problems with the museums themselves. Firstly, the use of genocide museums to perpetuate national narratives is adverse to reconciliation. Hannum and Rhodes (2018, p. 336) argue that governments should not create the narratives of genocide museums but instead be "facilitators through truly public space." Secondly, genocide museums must consider the most appropriate ways of remembering genocide. Western influences often "compel states with difficult pasts to adhere to the prescribed standards of memory," which may be detrimental to local healing (David, 2017, p. 309). Bockers et al. (2011, p. 73) suggest that resistance to forgetting

may impede forgiveness, and therefore there need to be alternate ways of remembering the past that allow reconciliation to occur.

Finally, it must be noted that genocide museums cannot themselves ensure reconciliation. The outcomes of reconciliation in a country depend on much larger structural, political, and sociocultural factors. Reconciliation requires reciprocity, and is significantly hindered by poverty, corruption, and instability (Bockers et al., 2011, p. 80). Genocide museums only promote reconciliation under the appropriate political conditions and with the presence of constructive public discourse (Williams, 2004, p. 249). Therefore, the failures of memorial museums often simply reflect the broader failures of the country. In Cambodia, a lack of education about the genocide more generally means the Tuol Sleng museum has little impact on broader society, and nothing is likely to change under a corrupt government uninterested in reconciliation (Münyas, 2008, p. 423). Similarly, the Holodomor Museum means little in the face of larger animosities and strategic concerns between Russia and Ukraine, and is therefore unlikely to bring peace. Genocide museums can be powerful tools of reconciliation if constructed carefully, however are unlikely to create lasting peace in societies in which national narratives and goals do not support reconciliation more broadly.

Overall, the effectiveness of genocide museums in creating lasting peace is limited. While genocide museums can promote reconciliation through education and empathy, their message often lacks cultural sensitivity and is co-opted by divisive state narratives that prevent reconciliation. Both Tuol Sleng and the National Museum of the Holodomor Genocide demonstrate this, with their failures to promote political inclusion, education, and justice. However, although this failure can be attributed to the genocide museums to some extent, it is also characteristic of larger sociopolitical issues in Ukraine and Cambodia that prevent reconciliation from occurring. The two cases demonstrate that genocide museums mean little in the absence of meaningful government action to uphold the promise of “never again.”

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