

## Selected Q&A

### Episode 1: Museums, Memorials and Memorialization after Atrocity – Communicating a Form of Ongoing Justice?

**Question from Ronald A. Nathan:** How do victims and their descendants of the transatlantic slave trade find justice?

**Professor Araujo's Response:** This is a very broad question. Full justice will never be made. But symbolic measures (museums, monuments, memorials, education programs, affirmative action) and financial and material programs to redistribute wealth to the populations of African descent are palliative measures that can bring justice.

**Question from Anonymous:** What is your opinion about removing paintings and murals that depict Native Americans or African Americans in a negative way?

**Professor Araujo's Response:** Another broad question. My opinion is that racist representations of black and indigenous populations must be reexamined and reconsidered. They should not be displayed in the public spaces such as public buildings, schools, etc, without any explanation. The best option is to put these paintings and murals in museums where they can be contextualized. But again, the concerned communities should decide.

**Question from Sylvie Kandé:** Could the speakers address the toppling of the statue of Schoelcher, an abolitionist, in Martinique?

**Professor Araujo's Response:** A long topic to address. Protesters who toppled down Schoelcher's statue are protesting the fact that he has been represented as the man who redeemed enslaved people in the French colonies. When demonstrators take his statue down they are voicing the view that they are tired of seeing statues honouring white abolitionists presented as redeemers, as the ones who gave enslaved people the gift of freedom, whereas black people were those who in many ways liberated themselves.

**Question from Sia Demba living in London, originally from Sierra Leone:** In memorializing events after atrocities, how can you carry out effective research and tell a factual story of enslaved Africans with distorted history told by the west and the distortion of historical evince.

**Professor Araujo's Response:** Effective research must be undertaken in archives that hold documents about the period of slavery. This research is usually conducted by academics, but many black citizens are interested in genealogy for example. To tell the factual story, we need more collaboration between historians and other scholars with members of the community. And we need to disseminate the facts to the public.

**Question from Adem, Justice for All:** Asking personally, not for my NGO: when is the dismantling of monuments a form of erasure of history instead of constructive debate on the good and bad of history? Triumphalism is in the mind of the beholder. New memorial should open minds

and create balance, but aren't we concerned that destruction of older heritage leads to forgetting and creates precedents in which non-favoured views are banished from the public square?

**Professor Araujo's Response:** Statues were removed all the time, during the French Revolution, during the American Revolution. Nobody is encouraging destruction of heritage, but pro-slavery statues are contested heritage, they are not neutral. Therefore, communities can well decide that it's time for them to go. They can be placed in museums, for example, where they can be contextualized, and transformed into powerful teaching tools.

**Question from Jonathan Bill Doe from Ghana:** Can you throw more light on what you mean by contextualizing monuments? What would be the standard of the contextualization?

**Professor Araujo's response:** In some cases, contextualization means the addition of a plaque explaining that the individual portrayed in the statue was a pro-slavery individual, etc. For example, all statues of pro-slavery men that remained to this day in the public space did not have any plaque stating that the men memorialized in the statues defended slavery and/or were slaveholders. Contextualizing may be also displacing the monuments to a specific location where viewers can get more information about why these monuments were created and whose views they represent.

**Question from Anonymous:** Commemoration is not celebration. Yes, communities' voices matter in what to display in public, but authoritarians around the world impose their vision of history using not only stone monuments but insidious social media technologies. Surely it is the current crop of authoritarians we should be worried about and not the figures from the past. This issue is inherently divisive-- we see how polarized the USA is on this. How can it be constructive as well?

**Professor Araujo's Response:** Commemoration can be celebration. See what I responded above. Authoritarians around the world have usually built monuments celebrating their feats. This was the case of many monuments in the former Communist countries in eastern European. It is also the case of Confederate monuments commemorating men who lost the Civil War that was fought to preserve slavery. Removing monuments will obviously not end bigotry and racism, but it is a necessary step in many contexts. Being constructive is also to memorialize past atrocities with memorials, monuments, and museums commemorating the victims of these atrocities.

**Question from Jamie Gemmell, University of Edinburgh, UK:** How do we maintain momentum for these actions? How do we move from the "first step" of toppling monuments to further acts of reparatory justice?

**Professor Araujo's Response:** I don't have a prescription on what should be done. But as I mentioned above: "symbolic measures (museums, monuments, memorials, education programs, affirmative action) and financial and material programs to redistribute wealth to the populations of African descent are palliative measures that can bring justice."

**Question from Barry van Driel:** Thank you for your question Barry and great to connect to you again. Regarding this Memory Activism in museum [the Johannesburg Holocaust and Genocide Centre]- how do you support the process of young people actively engaging with past histories and present injustices? That takes a lot of work and there are risks.

**Ms. Tali Nates's response:** Our education programmes are at least 4 hours long and include a deep study of history of the Holocaust and of the Genocide in Rwanda through first an interactive workshop, then a visit to the core exhibition which is also done in an interactive way (with an individual workbook for each student) and finally a debrief and connections to present injustices. Part of our core exhibition speaks about lessons for today - from the survivors themselves (those whose stories were explored in the exhibition; sometimes also those who the students meet and discuss with) and also looking at some of the challenges South Africa is facing today. One of the challenges we deal with is Xenophobia and Afrophobia.

It does take a lot of work as you rightly observed but generally speaking the students understand the connection, and the reflections we get from them are really enlightening and encouraging. We are evaluating every programme and I will be happy to share with you examples from the evaluation we are concluding now of the first year since our opening (March 2019-March 2020).

**Question from Anonymous:** When communicating information about the Holocaust, how do you avoid the (anti-Semitic) frustration that the Holocaust gets "too much attention"?

**Ms. Tali Nates's response:** I will borrow directly from IHRA's new resource: Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust: "The Holocaust was a watershed event in world history, spanning geographic boundaries and affecting all segments of the societies it touched. Decades later, societies continue to wrestle with the memory and historical record of the Holocaust in ways that intersect with our contemporary realities. Teaching and learning about the Holocaust is an essential opportunity to inspire critical thinking, societal awareness, and personal growth. Yet this massive topic can also pose challenges to educators due to its traumatic nature, broad expanse, and intersection with challenging human dynamics including racism and antisemitism."

Just to add, that in the South African context, it is very effective to be teaching about the Holocaust first and then about the establishment of the United Nations and the passing of the 'Convention for the Prevention and Punishment for the Crime of Genocide' and the 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (9 and 10 December 1948) and that despite the war, the genocide and the lessons from it - Apartheid began in the same year, is very effective. South Africa only signed the declaration 50 years later, on 10 December 1998.

**Question from Margaret Sanford:** In museums, the role of transformative experiences and activism falls on frontline workers. How do museums and historic sites better support frontline workers through these dialogues and very specific pressures?

**Ms. Tali Nates's response:** Thank you, Margaret for your important question. Indeed, the team at our Centre, is working hard and continuously reflect, innovate, learn and change. The process never stops. Support for the education officers and education volunteers is essential and is offered through ongoing training, reflective meetings, brainstorming and learning, debriefs and conversation circles. For example, during this challenging period of the pandemic, we asked other experts in the field to offer our team supportive counselling through a once in 2 weeks 90 minutes process of facilitated conversations to support all of us.