Jutta Kirsch

Religion and Memory

The Importance of Monuments in Preserving Historical Identity

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Dedication

To Norbert, Levin and Justine, Marvin, Wolfgang and Paula.

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Abstract

This piece of work describes how negative historical events have influenced history to date through commemoration and remembrance. This study takes a text-based approach to research and uses the grounded theory approach to the topic. This is because the specific procedures for data collection and analysis are flexible and allow a degree of latitude within limits. The thesis approaches the subject of memory and monuments from theological, philosophical and architectural perspectives. First the underlying historical reasons, starting positions and the course of the annihilation of the Armenian Christians and later the extermination of the European Jews are presented. They explain that a change in thinking within the global community had to take place in order to prevent further catastrophes. This change in thinking has led to the development of human rights and the creation of memorial sites and memorials that are part of the cultures of remembrance, as well as a variety of ideas and concepts that can be summarised in the collective term 'remembrance cultures'. In particular, in Chapters Five to Ten the Tsitsernakaberd memorial sites in Armenia and Yad Vashem in Israel are analysed and juxtaposed. Both are rooted in the tradition of a biblical and theological base category of remembrance and have a sense of identifying character. The focus is on Tsitsernakaberd, as this memorial site is still relatively unknown. This work will show to what extent historical and political cultures of remembrance are compatible with a biblical theological base category and the secular concepts of the theories of memory.

Chapter One
Overview

1.1 Title

Religion and memory: the importance of monuments in preserving historical identity

1.2 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview and an approach of this study. First of all the background and the problem statement will be explained. It leads to different questions and to the central theoretical statement in section 1.5. The main aim of this thesis and the objectives will be examined in this chapter in section 1.6. Section, 1.7 deals with the methodological basis and should lead to the results of this study. Finally, unless otherwise stated, all the translations from German, Greek, and Hebrew are made by the author of this thesis.

1.3 Background

The twentieth century cannot be sufficiently comprehended without a consideration of the events and the ideological content of the nineteenth century. In contrast to the "short twentieth century," the preceding nineteenth century is referred to as the "long century," already commencing with the French Revolution in 1787 and ultimately culminating in World War I (WWI) in 1914, the "great seminal catastrophe." The British Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm (1917–2012) divides the nineteenth century into three different ages, for example, with the French Revolution ushering in an era of metamorphosis (1789–1848). Furthermore, he defines the periods subsequent to 1849 respectively as the Age of Capitalism and Industrialisation (1848–1875) and the Age of Imperialism (1875–1914), (Hobsbawm, 1995:21).

Under these conditions, the ideological seeds of the nineteenth century would germinate and facilitate the rise of National Socialism and Communist regimes. It must be noted, thereby, that WWI represents the commencement or the entry of the twentieth century, and the end of this epoch is the end of the East-West conflict (Cold War 1947–1989), as metaphorically and vividly depicted by the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989). The term "short century" was originally coined by the economic historian Ivan T. Berend (1930) and has been made popular through the historian Hobsbawm in his work *The Age of Extremes* (1994:11, 17). Among authors subscribing to this classification are Haffner, 1997; Hobsbawm, 1995; Diner, 1999; Kolko, 1999; Mazower, 1999; Jeismann, 2000; Nonn, 2007; Mann, 2008; Koselleck, 2013; Herbert, 2014. Especially Hobsbawm's publication deems this

phenomenon to be the result of an extreme century defined by social unrest and the concomitant circumstances of human suffering of a particularly morally reprehensible nature. Thereby, the time frame of this thesis extends beyond the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, focussing geographically on the memorial sites in Armenia and Israel as well as highlighting the historical background as to how the genocide of Armenians and European Jews could have occurred and what actually transpired during the course of these horrible events.

The history of the twentieth century is decisively affected by the disaster and tragedy of two world wars and unprecedented crimes such as the Armenian genocides (Aghet) and the Holocaust (Shoah). The seminal catastrophe (the first genocide conducted against the Armenians) can be interpreted as a door opener for one of the darkest epochs in history. The conflict between religion and the former policy by *völkisches* thinking, which included racial ideology and extreme nationalism, led to ethnic tensions and to genocides perpetrated on ethnic groups, such as Christian minorities and later European Jews. There have been numerous studies focussing on WWI and the first genocide as well as the conflict between religion and extreme ethno-nationalist thinking. These studies include the works of Wippermann, 1998; Kuhn, 2004; Poewe, 2006; Hexham, 2011; Hexham and Poewe, 2014; Stangeland, 2013; Krumeich, 2015; Hesemann, 2015. Some aspects in these works address racial ideologies and the conflict between religion and policy. The manner in which religious and political ideologies tackle history (such as what happened under the Young Turks and National Socialism) will be explained in the next chapters. This topic is reminiscent of Orwell's (1903–1950) concerns in his classic novel *1984*: "He who controls the past, controls the future. And he who controls the present, the past" (Orwell, 2008:298). Orwell points out the principles behind the expansion of State and religious power in order to take control of the historical past and to reinterpret history again with the aim of shaping the future in a direction that gives the appearance of freedom. Moreover, Orwell notes that totalitarian systems and parties work on adapting the past to the present. To keep resistance at bay, manipulative structures are secretly created which always run according to the same patterns. In this regard, his opinions parallel

those of Karl Marx (1818–1883) who sees history in interpretation of the philosophers (Marx, 1845; cf. Berger, 2005:54–55). However, Orwell's work is as current as ever, because he focussed not merely on totalitarian systems per se, but also on supposedly liberal democracies. In particular he warns that power systems, even in their liberal aspirations, are not unlike wolves in sheep's clothing, intent on reinterpreting history to present political aims, all the while presenting themselves as freedom-loving, but in fact totalitarian to the core (Orwell, 2008). Nevertheless, the goal is to reshape and suppress these different power interests.

The phobia of possible future repetitions became a process of reflection. This was reflected in changes to education, training, and research in schools and universities. At the same time, public memorials and monuments were erected under the banner "Lest we forget." The overall goal was to involve the population by perceiving, remembering and commemorating. Thus, it became a transformational process intended to raise a new awareness of a process and facilitated a coming to terms with the past and purification to ensure the will for peace (Assmann, 2018:35–37). In short, reflection is important in understanding the process of coming to terms with the past in the areas of politics, culture, and in religion, and will be discussed in Chapter Three with the topic "Process of coming to terms with one's past in West Germany." Indeed, Germany has become the test case with regard to the process of coming to terms with one's past instead of continuing the cycle of revenge and hate (Frei, 2005:69).

In Chapter Four, the theories and functions of the memorial culture are presented in order to prepare the various aspects for the central theme and to incorporate the results of the investigations into the research. This modern and new theory occurred in both democratic Jewish and Christian circles after the wars of the twentieth century. At the same time, the educational work and the process of coming to terms with the past was embedded in various societies through a new world politics and ideological theory orientated around human rights (Dolinger, 2016:ix). Access to knowledge by virtue of coming to terms with historical events became a priority and, over time, created new educational methods, training departments and areas of expertise. In turn, it spawned a flood of scientific literature and documentation. In retrospect, it must be said that remembering, learning and commemorating these tragic events has developed into a successful discipline and shown positive effects in dealing with history. The literature has been instrumental in contributing to the valuable cultural-scientific practices of remembrance (Erll, 2011:173).

Research and contributions from cultural-scientific, historical, sociological and theological studies, which arose across disciplines from the university environment, have contributed in greater depth. Under the collective term "culture of remembrance," historical memory research has become a trans-disciplinary topic and has grown into a megacategory. The questions arising here concern how a culture of remembrance in utilizing theoretical methods can prevent atrocities and genocide in the future, and they examine the extent to which historiography as a learning tool is able to remodel soci-

eties. All of these theoretical and diverse foundations of memory research cannot be included in this research as a focus, for they are simply too many and too complex. A few basics of memory theories can be read as background information in Appendix One.

Various authors express theological, Christian and Jewish points of view and critically set themselves apart from abstract remembrance and commemoration. Their views are not much appreciated in public, especially from academic persons with a secular mindset, because they offer a very different kind of commemoration and remembrance for the purpose of building up identity in Jewish and Christian nations. Of particular importance in western Christian societies is *Memoria passionis*, by Johann Baptist Metz (1928). It is a particularly provocative work. Johann Baptist Metz, a Catholic theologian, examines the perception of the world on an *anamnetic* basis (Metz, 2006:227–235). In his view remembrance is dangerous, because in faith, Christians practise the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi* and believing in his love they identify it with the son of God who gave Himself to the oppressed and to the outcasts with the liberating power of unconditional love (Metz, 2006:238, 251). This memory of hope of an unconditional love contradicts the contemporary cultural amnesia that has developed into an abstract cultural idea of primary Hellenistic origin over times (Metz, 2006:239). The danger is that the biblical memory culture, the history of the Passion recedes in favour of the prevailing cultural amnesia. Metz stresses that the anamnestic constitution in the Spirit of Christianity has much more deeper roots and is not equal with historical or traditional memory culture. As an alternative to a secular, universal commemoration and remembrance culture, he takes a stand against merciless oblivion and provides, unapologetically, the experience of suffering from a biblical-theological perspective.

Monuments and memorial sites in public spaces are significant topics in this work. Such sites fulfil their functions as visible stabilisers and supporters of a negative culture of remembrance. Chapters Five to Ten present and analyse the Tsitsernakaberd and Yad Vashem memorial sites. The aim of the presentation is to avoid the burial of the remembrance of the crimes of the twentieth century, but instead to punctuate power in public space to remember the dead and to prevent the forgetting of the past. Menkovic, in her studies, has already investigated the question of which socio-political and political science functions monuments and memorial sites can fulfil and what lessons are to be derived from them. Therefore, in appreciation of her extensive research in relation to power signs, the results of her studies on the fundamental issues and the presentations of problems will be incorporated into this thesis as factual information. At the same time, borders between public and private remembrance cannot always be sharply demarcated, such as, for example, with tombs and memorials for the dead. This kind of remembrance is not mere commemoration with empty rites but is based on reverence, the solemn and the sacred, and finds its expression in sacral architecture (Kulenkampff, 1991:29). The Tsitsernakaberd and Yad Vashem memorial sites not only display political, culturally analytical and aesthetic signs of remembrance but also are deeply rooted in theological and Jewish thinking.

1.4 Problem Statement

What do we learn about religion from the memorial sites of Tsitsernakaberd and Yad Vashem? Although the architectural language and aesthetics seem to convey post-modern and abstract ideas, is there an implicit religious and theological sub-stratum? But what can traditional religions offer the visitor instead of culturally and analytically secular memory theories?

The multi-faceted functions of memorial sites and monuments of necessity, that is, by their very existence, offer many interpretations in order that they may be instrumentalised. As aesthetic creations and as national secular negative sites of remembrance that legitimise themselves in the legal and political sense, monuments are also supporters and stabilisers of political or ideological ideas. As such they serve the purpose of providing factual information, but they also function to remind the viewer (or visitor) of the presence of the *numinous* (Otto, 1963:79–80). As a result they give comfort and hope because of their link to eschatological teaching on the ultimate destiny of individuals and peoples. The idea of the *numinous* is most clearly defined in the memorial site of Tsitsernakaberd.

This leads us to the following questions: while the Holocaust, the murder in its monstrous dimension of European Jews, has become a paradigm for all mass crime, in comparison, the genocide of the Armenians remains in human history as the first little-known genocide in the twentieth century. The Tsitsernakaberd memorial site in Yerevan, Armenia is not only unknown but also "literally" totally overlooked in reality. This aspect makes yet another problem visible, namely that there are no significant accounts or discussions of the Tsitsernakaberd memorial site. All we really have are a few short leaflets written in Armenian and in Russian.

Here some may object that the Second Anglo-Boer War was "the first genocide" of the twentieth century and there is no doubt that the killing of Afrikaners was a tragic event. It is also true that after the end of the war the British embarked on a program of cultural genocide. Nevertheless, whether the tragic deaths of Afrikaner women and children were deliberately planned or the accidental result of a brutal policy is a matter of dispute. On the other hand there is no doubt that the Armenian genocide was a planned genocide from the outset.

Therefore, this thesis contributes to closing a gap in both the literature and popular knowledge. It draws attention to this important memorial site by bringing to light the history of what for many are unknown events together with reflections on their theoretical and aesthetic contents. Another purpose of this thesis is to commemorate the first deliberately planned genocide of the twentieth century as a "door opener" that included persecution and martyrdom for Armenian Christians and other Christian minorities.

To this day, Armenian Christians are struggling to gain recognition for this genocide to escape from isolation and from victim status. The genocide denials vehemently

articulated by Turkey, and the repressions and distortions on the part of the perpetrators, are still serious blockages for a normal relationship between both nations. Again, there is a wound that cannot heal on account of lack of information, pain and unwillingness as well as permanent silence.

Armenia is not only isolated in a territorial sense and internationally, but there is also a gap in research with respect to the personal processing of the past in families and in Armenian society, given that there is hardly any literature to acquire and read about it. In particular, current findings in the research of transmission of traumas to succeeding generations (Bergmann, 1995:28–29; Kellermann, 2009), which may be a necessity for the Armenian overcoming of the past, have not yet been addressed. Because of the long period of silence and death of contemporary witnesses, unprocessed events, such as family secrets, subside under the surface and are difficult to recognise and understand as symptoms. They are difficult to heal because the distinction is no longer possible between one's own past and the ancestral past. The Armenians find comfort, refuge and solace in the memorial site, Tsitsernakaberd, and in their biblical and theological holy writings, as they commemorate with grief and suffering the loss of their family members.

Therefore, an exploration of the memorial site as a visible sign and proof is important because it provides an incentive to derive information from the staging of mourning through rituals and ceremonies that reveal deeper cultural layers and longings of the Armenian nation. The memorial site is therefore not merely seen as a medium and an expression of liturgical and sacral staging of ecclesiastical and political power, for it reveals the very heart and the very soul of the Armenian nation through the identification of myth, symbolism and religion.

A comparison with the Yad Vashem memorial site may therefore encourage further investigation into the effects of traumatic events in succeeding generations in order to move forward in overcoming the past and in healing. Dealing with grief as a collective social experience was initially painful for the Israeli society, but ultimately salutary in the process of coming to terms with the past. Collective memory in culture and religion are essential to the process of coming to terms with one's past. It is not only an historical and a political affair (Boschki, 2011). In the future I hope to do similar research on Afrikaner memorial sites and their importance in history and today.

The questions arising and addressed here in this work concern the strengths and the weaknesses in the process of coming to terms with the past in religious, historical and philosophical contexts. Thereby, the theological views examined will be reviewed with regard to the basic category of remembrance. The extent to which monuments and memorial sites facilitate the supporting of theological and secular views will also be investigated. Currently, efforts are being made in this regard along the path of historical and sociological information. How is this information being interpreted? What measures are appropriate for atonement and reconciliation? These are among the issues to be explored.

Further questions must be asked, for example, as to the architectural features of the memorial site and the theological and ideological contents intended to be expressed. The two memorial sites will be juxtaposed in this investigation, so another question concerns what functions they have in relation to national identity and representation in public space and as a visible culture of remembrance. How do they differ, and how is collective commemoration celebrated and socially perceived? What contribution can memorial sites make in terms of collective overcoming of the past, and what role do their traditional religions play in each case?

1.5 Central Theoretical Argument

The central theoretical argument of this thesis is that monuments in the context of collective memory can be shown to promote religious and theological beliefs and practices while reinforcing a sense of identity through history and architecture.

Both Tsitsernakaberd and Yad Vashem as memorial sites are reminiscent of the dead of twentieth-century genocides. They are important supports and pillars of a modern universal memory culture within their respective nations.

The second significant memorial site examined in this thesis is the Holocaust Memorial Yad Vashem, which is the best known and arguably most important of all memorials of this kind. It resulted from the turmoil of the post-war period of the Second World War and the emergence and constitution of the state of Israel, in which Yad Vashem always played an integral part. In fact, this memorial is a major pillar supporting the State of Israel and gives it legitimacy. Indeed this memorial has grown over time and the related exhibition has been continuously expanded. Yad Vashem is an impressive memorial complex and a huge one with a variety of subjects, departments, educational and research centres, as well as sculptures and monuments from the countries of the world.

The exhibition explores Jewish life in politics, culture and religion, in the past and future. Data banks and archives contain more than 60 million pages of documentation, not including photographs. All of this data is available online. Yad Vashem is a national treasure, demonstrating both the pride of Israel's heroism and also the shame of its persecution (Young, 2002:272, 275). Much has been researched about Yad Vashem and a vast literature already exists. My aim in this respect is to explore Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial as a national sanctuary with their abstract shapes and contours, but at the same time it shows, behind the abstract features of Zionism, the religiously practised and pursued Jewish national movement that calls for the re-establishment of a Jewish homeland in the territory of Israel. Both memorial sites must receive this degree of attention in my working hypothesis, given that their respective creators have played down religious symbolism. Indeed, this is the reason why in fact so much religious symbolism appears in it.

1.6 Aims and Objectives

Given the previous argument, my working hypothesis makes that assumption because the creators of the memorial monuments discussed in this thesis have played down religious symbolism. Indeed, this is the reason why in fact so much religious symbolism appears in an implicit rather than explicit form. This must be proven in the course of the thesis.

A further goal of this thesis is to bring forth the evidence for the argument that in the memorial site of Yad Vashem and the memorial site of Tsitsernakaberd a postmodern, universal architecture can be detected that favours abstract policies of remembrance with the intention of promoting the rise of a global universal world order that supports ideological ideas, orientated to humanistic thinking, such as human rights as moral statutes in general. But the roots of these elements go back to traditional religions without the offer of reconciliation and forgiveness in a theological sense. Traditional and proven values are separated from the roots and replaced by an abstract culture of remembrance, which is used for a different purpose. This must be explained. Nevertheless, the focus on this topic demonstrates the extent to which biblical and theological elements are hidden behind the memorial sites in Tsitsernakaberd and Yad Vashem to build up identity in their nations.

The specific objectives of this thesis are as follows: The thesis is based on a systematic classification and should initially provide a historical overview in the first two chapters. Forms of various memorial cultures will be explained in the fourth chapter in order to then investigate the Tsitsernakaberd and Yad Vashem memorial sites in the fifth and sixth chapters. The conclusions are contained in the seventh chapter.

1.7 Research Methods

The instrumental case study is an appropriate tool for this study and is suitable for completion or enlargement. For that reason, it highlights in detail the structure and some specific techniques, which inform the reader, when a holistic investigation is needed (Feagin, Orum, Sjoberg, 1991).

This study takes a traditional approach to research, which means that as far as possible the subject matter is approached without a clear bias or preconceived conclusions. In more modern, particularly American terms, it takes a *grounded theory* approach to the topic, which is similar to that of British social anthropology (Evans-Pritchard, 1951; 1981). In the process it uses both instrumental case studies and rhetorical analysis.

As noted, the basic qualitative approach for this dissertation will be grounded theory (Corbin, Strauss, 1990). This is because the specific "procedures for data collection and analysis used are flexible and allow a degree of latitude within limits" (Corbin, Strauss, 1990:6). The grounded theory researcher must know the system of these pro-