



IATJ 2011 BRIEF **WHOSE MEMORIES COUNT AND AT WHAT COST?**

The Refugee Law Project (RLP), School of Law, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda, in collaboration with the African Transitional Justice Research Network (ATJRN) successfully held its 2nd Institute for African Transitional Justice (IATJ), an annual week-long residential programme with a focus on Transitional Justice issues in the context of Africa. The Institute, which took place from 20th – 27th November 2011, at the Kitgum Peace Documentation Centre (KPDC), Northern Uganda had as its theme: “*Whose Memories Count and at What Cost?*”

What do we remember and how? Why are certain narratives more prominent than others? Is there any such thing as a single truth? Is there a one-size-fits-all in memorialization? How/Must/Should gender considerations matter in memory initiative? How do we remember bones? The politics of truth memories and memorializations; Assessing the nexus between grave crimes, legal proceedings and memorialization; the workings of trauma and resilience after violent conflicts; Africa’s diasporic memories and Monitoring, Evaluating and Reading Impact in Transitional Justice works, were some of the core debates that the IATJ 2011 participants and facilitators critically grappled with in Kitgum.

The 2011 IATJ attempted to answer some of these questions. Due to the powerful, albeit highly politicized role, memory plays in the analysis of the past, which invariably influences the interpretation of the present. The ever-increasing prominence of memorials throughout post -conflict societies in Africa is motivated by the recognition that memory makes demands on us to uncover the “truth” and search for justice. It calls for societies to critically re-examine and reconcile with a painful, often contested past. It gives us an opportunity to record multiple narratives, which can be preserved as a public record in museums and memorials.

Memorialization, where ethically and conscientiously conducted, has the potential to raise awareness of the forgotten, carelessly omitted, or simply neglected past.

This year the RLP and ATJRN consciously chose to locate the Institute in the Northern Ugandan town of Kitgum, which is making strides in its quest to recover from years of protracted violent armed conflict between the Lords' Resistance Army (LRA) and the government of Uganda. Survivors, not only of this conflict but from elsewhere on the continent, graciously shared their memories with us, prompting participants to re-examine preconceptions and assumptions of "victimhood" and the blithe positive attributes ascribed to memory and memorialization as means of healing. The honest heartfelt testimonies called participants to critically reflect on whether our respective field of study – be it transitional justice, peace-building, memory work, etc – are making meaningful contribution to the lived realities of people emerging from conflict and social fragmentations. Other sessions prompted participants to reflect on the politics of memory work, particularly in settings of ethnic or racial polarization; to reflect on the gendered nuances of memory work and historiography, to take stock of the opportunities and limitations of formal juridical/legal processes and their contributions to recording memory – to name but a few.

The Institute invited regional speakers from Centre for Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV), South Africa; Solidarity Peace Trust, Zimbabwe; University of British Columbia, Canada; University of Sydney, Australia; Justice and Reconciliation Project, Uganda; Refugee Law Project, Uganda; and Human Rights Media Centre, South Africa as well as practitioners in the memory and memorialization field to share their experiences and how they localise memory and memorialization policies and practices. The speakers were able to engage analytically and practically on issues that touch on the future. They discussed the limits and risks of memorialization initiatives in post-conflict communities, particularly in Africa but also beyond, particularly if there is naive approach to memory that ignores the potential harms of recalling the past. The Institute used various formats of instruction which included amongst others: lectures, documentary footage, group exercises, interactive sessions, open space, writing and reflection exercises in order to provide multiple opportunities for participants to engage with emerging issues relating to memorialization and transitional justice.

Experienced transitional justice practitioners, academics, scholars, researchers, graduate students, humanitarian aid workers, and policy-makers were drawn from South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Morocco, Tunisia, Sudan, Burundi,

Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, UK, Canada, USA, Italy, Belgium, Australia, and Namibia to participate in the Second Institute.

You are kindly encouraged to keep checking www.transitionaljustice.org.za, and www.refugeelawproject.org, or by contacting **Levis Onegi** on iatj@refugeelawproject.org for further information regarding the IATJ 2012 Institute.