

OFF THE MAP: MEMORIALIZING TRAUMA IN 21ST CENTURY DOMINICAN IDENTITY

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Susan Sci in “(Re)thinking the Memorial as a Place of Aesthetic Negotiation,” notes that for a memorial to continue to be relevant, it must be able to “engage visitors in a process that is both cognitively stimulating and affectively touching” (43). This affectivity, in turn, should create a response that is a coterminous “experience of memory” (43). But, what happens when a monument has been abandoned or forgotten? Do the memories it was intended to provoke fade as well? For the Dominican Republic the 31 years of Trujillo’s dictatorship and the recovery of memories during that period would take another thirty years to surface and become part of the national discourse. Even now, public, individual and official attempts to “lay bare” the terror and trauma of the trujillato are complicated by competing versions of the past, of memory and of the present. This study examines two monuments constructed after Trujillo’s death to commemorate two key events: 1) the unsuccessful plot to overthrow Trujillo in June 1959 and; 2) the site of his assassination on May 30th, 1961. The stories of these monuments and the heroes they honor are complex, contradictory, and contested memories of contemporary Dominican identity.¹

In June of 2012, the “Raíces” tourist agency in Santo Domingo began offering a unique tour of the city called “La Ruta del Chivo” (Tour of the Goat) (www.raices.com.do/ruta_del_chivo.html). Over a period of three hours, members of the tour travel around the city, visiting sites related to the 31 years of Rafael Trujillo’s dictatorship ranging from various public works projects he built to locations such as his former residence, now the National Library. The tour culminates in one of the most infamous places in contemporary Dominican history, the site where Trujillo was gunned down on May 30th, 1961. The monument, however, as noted by Ezra Fieser, a Miami Herald reporter, is “rarely visited today,” and is strewn with litter and the flotsam and jetsam of the nearby shore. Edwin Aristy, from the “Raíces” agency, explains that it is for this very reason, the neglect of such

monuments, that the tour was created in order to “reclaim this time for the young people,” lest these memories be lost to the past (qtd. in Fieser).

Susan Sci in “(Re)thinking the Memorial as a Place of Aesthetic Negotiation” notes that for a memorial to continue to be relevant, it must be able to “engage visitors in a process that is *both* cognitively stimulating *and* affectively touching.” This affectivity, in turn, should create a response that is a coterminous “experience of memory” (Sci 43). But, what happens when a memorial has been abandoned or forgotten? Do the memories it was intended to provoke fade as well? What about purpose driven memorials focused on the recovery of specific pasts? Who decides and why? So too, how is access to these sites determined? Which comes first, the collective desire for public memory or an official push of some sort that brings the space into being? For the Dominican Republic, these are central questions, especially in terms of remembering and recovering the almost half century of repression known as the *trujillato* and how Trujillo’s legacy continues to define, or not, what it means to be “Dominican”.

My thesis rests on the conviction that monuments are social and cultural texts that operate both within and outside of time and space. As texts, they are meaning dependent, but not univocal in signification. Indeed, it is the interstices between and among all these various complexities of memory and forgetting, trauma and healing, history and future, truth and hope that are the most “meaningful” in terms of identity and place. Because memory also implies its counterpart, forgetting, I am interested in how purpose built memorials can fade, either through neglect or intention, from Dominican historic patrimony. In *History, Memory and Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur, in his reading of Pierre Nora, argues that for Nora, memory replaces history in contemporary experience, giving rise to the concept of the “national memory,” in which “the solidarity of the past and the future” is replaced by “the solidarity of the present and memory” (410). Moreover, as this move toward the present replaces a historicized past, Ricoeur emphasizes how the focus on the present and what he calls, “narratives of commemoration,” have effectively disengaged memory from the past and made it coterminous with present concepts of “identity” (410). This reading of Nora is very complicated because it signals an end of history and a rise of commemorative memory that exists independent of time and space. Ultimately, however, Ricoeur concludes, history “still prevails, even as it attempts to

understand the reasons why it is contested by commemorative memory” (411). It is this give and take between interpretations of the past and present, which seem to be vying for the Dominican future, that plays out through memorials and monuments that seek to recapture lost pasts/memories of the struggle against Trujillo.

While the reasons for building monuments and memorials vary, there is general agreement among most scholars that these places and structures are a way of keeping memory alive in the present. Nora describes them as “lieux de mémoire,” “places of memory . . . that become symbolic elements of the memorial heritage of any community and, ultimately, crucial centers of national memory” (*Realms* xvii). A key element of these collective memories, however, is how well they are woven into a national story where they serve as “connective tissues,” between past and present, individual and community (Hite 1-4). Rafael Trujillo was very aware of how integral such constructions of memory places were to his “political liturgy,” as the supreme ruler of the Dominican Republic from 1930-1961 (Derby 5). Santo Domingo became “Ciudad Trujillo,” countless monuments were rededicated in his name, or that of a family member, and he undertook massive public works projects, many of which were included in a lavishly produced book, *La Arquitectura Dominicana en la Era de Trujillo* (1949). Along with photos and plans that detail the building of roads, bridges, and even hotels, Gazón Bona, the author and one of Trujillo’s favored architects, narrates these constructions in a tone bordering on that of a sycophant whose final proclamations number the reasons that Trujillo be awarded the title of “Primer Arquitecto de la República” (73). By all accounts, along with the ubiquitous photo of “El Jefe” in every Dominican home, at the time of his death there were “eighteen hundred sculptures” of Trujillo throughout the country, many of which were either destroyed or left to deteriorate after his assassination on May 30th, 1961 (the *ajusticiamiento*) (Roorda 95; 97). Yet, these physical reminders of the past would, and continue to, serve as contested sites of Dominican national identity. Nor was there the kind of widespread looting that would usually accompany the end of a dictatorship. Rather, nothing happened; no pillaging, no celebrations, nothing. Between Trujillo’s status as a mythic figure capable of surviving even death and the very real fear of retribution by his family and compatriots, the majority of Dominicans “responded with inaction when it came to the physical environment” (Roorda 95). Even once

the Trujillo family was forced into exile and the city returned to its former name of “Santo Domingo,” most of Trujillo’s remaining monuments either deteriorated or simply were forgotten. In the interim, there was, what Andreas Huyssen would describe as a “socially produced amnesia” throughout the Dominican Republic well into the late 1980s (6).

The few memorials that were constructed to commemorate the events and heroes of the anti-Trujillo struggle were almost exclusively done on an individual rather than state level. Dedé Mirabal, for instance, the only surviving sister of the “Butterflies”, “who were murdered by Trujillo’s men in 1959, began in 1965 to quietly, but resolutely, organize and collect items of importance to the sisters at their home in Salcedo, which would become ‘La Casa-Museo Hermanos Mirabal’” (Mirabal 315). It was not until the 25th of November 2000 that the Dominican government officially recognized the museum and the remains of the three sisters as an extension of the National Pantheon devoted to the heroes of the Dominican Republic (320). The 1996 election of Leonel Fernández marked a clear departure from the past 30 years that had been dominated by Joaquin Balaguer, Trujillo’s former close ally and aide. In his inaugural address, Fernández emphasized concepts such as *civil society*, *common good*, and *governability* which, for him, hinged on a tolerance for differing opinions and an end to corruption (Fernández).

Among the many projects undertaken during this period, the most ambitious were begun under the auspices of Luisa de Peña Díaz, former director of the Columbus lighthouse museum and one of the founding members of the Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana. Working with other foundations, including those to honor the memories of Manolo Tavárez and the Mirabal sisters, Peña Díaz, in 1995 began what would be a decade long journey to create the museum. Along with the usual controversies that plague such endeavors, Peña Díaz and her colleagues had to deal with an almost constant barrage of protests from Trujillo’s family and supporters ranging from scathing editorials in local newspapers to legal action. On a visit to the Holocaust museum in Washington D.C, Peña Díaz recalls, she was warned that she would face strong and, often hidden, opposition to her project but she should continue in spite of these obstacles. Ultimately, in direct response to the museum, Trujillo’s grandson, Ramifis (Ramifito) Domínguez Trujillo, created the Fundación Rafael Leónidas Trujillo

Molina in 2008. The mission of the Fundación according to the web site, “consiste en llevar a cabo el decoroso proceso de complementar los anales del siglo pasado con la justa restauración de los 30 años mutilados a nuestra historia patria correspondiente al periodo conocido como la ‘Era de Trujillo.’”² It is only a virtual museum, however, because under the 1962 “Decreto 5880,” “manifestaciones tendentes a exaltar, promover, or reivindicar la imagen del dictador” were prohibited in perpetuity (Quiroz).³ Ramifito and his supporters, however, continue to challenge the law most recently in April of 2013 (Pimentel Muñoz).

The struggle to preserve conflicting interpretations of history greatly complicates attempts by Dominicans to understand the past and present and the place of memories in contemporary Dominican identity. Although, ideally, the 1962 decree was designed to put an end to any public veneration of Trujillo, it represented a kind of absence or erasure similar to the oppressive tactics of the previous 31 years of the *trujillato*. In both cases, there was a clear limit to what the state would and would not allow to be remembered and celebrated. The fact that his grandson would suggest that the law be repealed based upon his “right to free expression,” indicates how contentious this history continues to be even in the present (Medrano). Indeed, as Katherine Hite notes, in the wake of major violence, the official memorial work of a nation becomes focused on projecting a “unified, strong state” (4). Yet, for the Dominican Republic, there is a risk that the memory work is incomplete until there is an understanding that every act of memory “carries with it a dimension of betrayal, forgetting, and absence,” and thus, even the voices of Trujillo’s family are woven into the fabric of Dominican identity (Huyssen 4). No wonder, then, that the “place” of monuments and memorials in contemporary Dominican experience continues to be a source of conflict on a local, national, and international level.

Monumento-Mausoleo de la Expedición Patriótica de Junio de 1959

When the Metro system in Santo Domingo was inaugurated officially on the 29th of January 2009 by president Leonel Fernández, a small, free “Hall,” was also inducted at the “La Feria/Centro de los Héroes,” station (Fig. 1). Located in the same general area as the “Monumento-Mausoleo de la Expedición Patriótica de Junio de 1959,” this “Sala Memorial,”

was created as one of the many “trabajos de rescate” (works of rescue) of the Dominican Republic’s “memorial history” (www.museodelaresistencia.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=198:sala-memorial-heroes-de-constanza-maimon-y-estero-hondo&catid=48:sala-memorial-heroes-de-constanza-maimon-y-estero-&Itemid=85).



Figure 1. Entrance to “La Sala del Museo.” April 2012. Photo: Steve Bromberg.

In the center of the small space there is a theatre, which shows a series of brief films covering the heroes and the events of two ill-fated days, the 14th and 20th of June, 1959. On those days, 198 men from 7 countries that included 151 Dominican exiles landed first, by plane at the Constanza airport in the mountains, and then, on the 20th, disembarked from boats at two Northern coastal areas, Maimón and Estero Hondo. By the 20th, Trujillo’s military was fully

aware of the attack and captured, killed, or tortured the majority of the men. At the entrance to the hall, there is a small replica of the statue that stands at the center of the above ground “Monumento-Mausoleo” where the remains of the anti-Trujillo martyrs can be found (Fig .2).



Figure 2. Replica of “Angel de la Libertad” in “La Sala” April 2012 Photo: Steve Bromberg.

When my husband and I visited the subterranean museum in April of 2012, the young caretaker, Elvin García, immediately turned on the power and began our tour of the photos and memorabilia (Fig. 3). Along with prototypes of typewriters, guns, and other ephemera used in planning the coup, it was the large photo reproductions of passages from the journals and letters of the insurgents that seemed most important to our young guide. He paused in front of a brief letter by Dr. Antonio Mota to his mother in which he bids his family farewell, carefully reading its content to us.⁴ While much of Elvin’s conversation followed the prescribed “Guía

didáctica” that is provided for docents, the care and reverence with which he read the letter seemed personal.⁵ Later, during my interview, I asked him why he was so moved by the letter. It was important, he said, because, it, along with the other personal items, enabled the public to have “una conciencia de quienes fueron estas personas que lucharon para la libertad del pueblo dominicano”.⁶ Ultimately, he concluded, the museum was important because “ayuda a reflexionar para que no haya otro tirano”.⁷



Figure 3. Display case at “La Sala” April 2012 Photo: Steve Bromberg.

The above ground memorial is not, however, as easily accessible as this modest subway museum. First, there is the question of its name. At last count, it had at least three official names: 1) “Monumento-Mausoleo Héroe de Constanza, Maimón y Estero Hondo,” which refers to the three sites where the insurgents landed; 2) “Monumento-Mausoleo de la

Expedición Patriótica de Junio 1959,” which appears on the official postcard of the memorial sold at the underground museum and; 3) “Monumento-Mausoleo de los Héroeos de Junio de 1959,” found on a small flyer that provides the “Himno de los Expedicionarios de Junio de 1959,” along with the contact information for someone wishing to tour the above ground site. Identification of the memorial is further complicated by its geography. The “Fundación de los Héroeos de Constanza, Maimón y Estero Hondo, was founded in January of 1962 “por las madres, viudas y hermanas de los Héroeos, en la ciudad de Santo Domingo” with the support of then president Rafael Bonnelly (“Sala”).⁸ Initially, they commemorated the men at the former fairgrounds Trujillo constructed in 1955 for his own personal “Feria de la Paz,” an elaborate, year-long celebration to commemorate the 25 years of his regime (Fig. 4). In honor of the men and their survivors, the fairgrounds were renamed “El Centro de los Héroeos de Constanza, Maimón y Estero Hondo.” Yet, as Kenneth Foote makes clear, designating a space as a memorial different from where the events actually took place, “omits the ritual of consecration,” which renders the site neutral in terms of memory work for future publics (18). Indeed, in the case of the renaming of the fairgrounds, even with the addition of the photos of the fallen heroes on the walls that bordered the main entrance, the site continued to be more about the legacy of the Trujillo dictatorship rather than the glory of the heroes (González 239).



Figure 4. “Back view of the Entrada Principal” of the Feria de Paz. April 2012. Photo: Steve Bromberg.

Although the “Feria” is clearly marked on most tourist maps, the more recent Monument-Mausoleum is not. Indeed, when we tried to locate the site after visiting the museum, no one seemed to know where it really was, not even our taxi driver. We were continually redirected to the renamed fairgrounds now littered with graffiti and haunted by sex trade workers. When we finally did find it, the Monumento-Mausoleo was closed. Two metal angels in profile, who are mirror images of the “Angel de la Libertad,” stand guard at the entrance. The gate is locked with no information on how to access the tomb (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. Entrance to the “Monumento-Masoleo.” April 2012. Photo: Steve Bromberg.

This expansive memorial sits in the shadow of the main entrance to the fairgrounds and began with support from the government, which, undoubtedly, helped to publicly recognize the events of June 1959 as part of Dominican patrimony. Finally, in 1999, the permanent site was officially inaugurated the 29th of July “para que todos juntos reposen por siempre en un solo lugar y a la vista de las futuras generaciones.”⁹ Designed by Carols Sully Bonnelly (father of the former president), the monument consists of about an acre of land filled with grass and trees, fully fenced with an impressive, somewhat Soviet-style bronze sculpture titled, “Angel de la Libertad,” by the Dominican artist Domingo Liz, at the center. On each side of the angel there is a large tomb that holds the remains of the fallen of 1959, which by June of 2007, became the final resting place for 125 of the 196 men who were killed (Fig. 6). Yet, because it is closed to the public, “its presence is kept uncelebrated” (González 239).



Figure 6. “Angel de la Libertad.” April 2012. Photo: Steve Bromberg.

The reasons for this lack of accessibility are complicated by what constitutes the official history of the Dominican Republic during and after Trujillo. Clearly, for Dominicans, Ricoeur’s acknowledgement of memory as “coterminous” with the present makes this site essential to the national narrative. Yet, the restricted access to the Monumento-Mausoleo signals a critical disjuncture between memory and the public that renders it invisible: “memorials by themselves remain inert and amnesiac, dependent on visitors for whatever memory they finally produce” (Young qtd. in Parr 15). A further layer of conflict concerns how smaller sites that also memorialize this failed coup have fared. The “Monumento a los Héroes de Maimón,” in Puerto Plata, for example, since its inauguration in 2004, has turned into a “vertedero” (garbage dump) in which the memorial, the flags of the June 14th movement, and the surrounding grounds

exude “un ambiente de pestilencia nauseabunda” (“Delicuentes”).¹⁰ Five years later, in 2013, the monument was still abandoned and seemed no closer to protection than before despite calls by Dominican intellectuals to restore, revere, and restrict access to the site (“Monumento”) (<http://hablandoclaro12.blogspot.com/2013/06/monumento-los-heroes-del-14-de-junio-en.html>). The “Monumento a los héroes de Maimón y Estero Hondo,” in Santiago de los Caballeros, has met a similar fate. The “Monumento” was established in Santiago’s Metropolitan Gardens during the tenure of José Enrique Sued (2002-2006). In the city’s blog, “Santiago.net,” for May of 2014, the state of the monument is described as one of such complete abandonment that a visitor wishing to honor the heroes of the 14th of June would be shocked by its condition (“Dejan”) (<http://desdesantiago.net/tag/maimon-y-estero-hondo/>).

Gated or not, each of these sites is reminiscent of what Maria Tumarkin refers to as “traumasces,” which are “precisely the places that reminds us that the past cannot simply be erased or, for that matter, simply reconstructed” (18). The capture, torture, and execution of 196 of the 198 men in the service of what many saw as freedom from tyranny not only failed, but fueled Trujillo’s paranoia, exponentially compounding the bloodshed and fear in the months following the disastrous coup.¹¹ In spite of repeated attempts by recent local and national politicians to reawaken and recognize the contributions of these men to freedom from tyranny, the politicization of the monuments to the heroes of Constanza, Maimón and Estero Hondo, challenge notions of permanence and history. Whether because of fear, disbelief, or neglect, these are failed attempts to capture events that most Dominicans seem unwilling to acknowledge. Ultimately, the question becomes one of communal memorialization and how the aesthetic and empathetic bond between a memorial and the wider public is formed. Until there is consensus on the meaning of these homages to Dominican history and identity, no amount of official inaugurations or convocations will bring these events and these traumas into the national narrative. Perhaps what is missing is the negotiation between past and present, remembering and forgetting, and the understanding of how such events “continue to impact society beyond the losses they eulogize” (Sci 42). The Monumento-Mausoleo may be part of the National Patrimony of the Dominican Republic, yet, its role in memory work and national identity remains to be defined. Ultimately, like the “Sala Memorial,” the Monumento-Mausoleo

needs an opening, physical or cultural, that can allow Dominicans to mourn and contemplate “the injustices (and) to question what has changed, what has not changed, and what must change” (Hite 118).

Los Héroes del 30 de Mayo

Another contested memorial is the “Los Héroes del 30 de Mayo,” located on the 30 de Mayo highway where Rafael Leónidas Trujillo was assassinated on May 30, 1961. Like the Monumento-Mausoleo, the sculptures are absent on tourist maps handed out at the airport, found in hotels, and available online. Like the Monumento-Mausoleo, the history and controversies surrounding the “Monumento a la Justicia, Héroes del treinta de mayo,” clearly mark it as a “traumascape” that serves as a reminder of “violence, suffering and loss (where) the past is never quite over” (Tumarkin 12). Moreover, the continual interplay between past and present, disgrace and veneration, brings with it an “incommensurability of representation,” that complicates how these traumas are remembered (Parr 34). How does one celebrate a site of assassination, especially where, for some, the violence was in the service of the greater good? Does such a place honor the victims or heroes of the violence and who decides?

The story of Trujillo’s assassination on Tuesday the 30th of May at 10:00 pm on the then named “Avenida de Jorge Washington,” is well known. Bernard Diederich, a foreign correspondent working in Haiti at the time, wrote one of the first detailed descriptions of the assassination in English under the original title of *Trujillo: The Death of the Goat* (1978). The most widely read version in Spanish is, perhaps, found in the Nobel Prize winning writer Mario Vargas Llosa’s 2000 novel *La fiesta del chivo* (*Feast of the Goat*). Most recently in 2006, the Dominican historian Juan Daniel Balcácer published the most detailed and authoritative version yet, *Trujillo: El Tiranicidio de 1961* (*Trujillo: the Assassination of a Dictator in 1961*). In all of these versions, the basic facts remain the same. Trujillo, unaware of the plot, was headed to his home in San Cristóbal, “Casa de Caoba,” about a half an hour west of Santo Domingo riding in his Chevrolet Bel Air. A group of men led by Antonio de la Maza and Antonio Imbert overtook the car and began wildly shooting at Trujillo and his chauffer, Zacarías de la Cruz. By all accounts, it was a chaotic and violent scene as Trujillo drew his weapon only to be shot and

Zacarías, shot in the head, disappeared in the tall grasses next to the highway. By this time, the assassins, panicked and fearful, had loaded Trujillo's body into the trunk of their car and sped away. The second phase of the assassination, the complete overthrow of the *trujillato* however, never happened. Along with a lack of communication, confusion, and fear, there was what Lauren Derby identifies as a mystical quality about Trujillo that made it impossible for anyone, even the coconspirators, to believe he was truly dead (204). Short of actual proof, the coup ended as quickly as the assassination. The aftermath for all, however, was deadly, as Trujillo's secret police went door to door in search of the assassins and their aides-de-camp. When, at 4:45 pm of the following day, May 31st, the official death of Trujillo was announced, "there was no call to arms, no communiqué from a civil or military junta declaring finis to the Trujillo era" (Diederich 173).

Three months later, the first memorial was erected on the site, not by supporters of the May 30th "heroes," but rather by a group of women from Trujillo's political party, "Partido Dominicano". The Funeral Monument was constructed in the form of a cross, with an inscription that read "Benefactor y Padre de la Patria Nueva" (Balcácer 418). Within less than a year, however, the Funeral Monument was torn down and replaced with a triangular shaped base and a plaque that read simply, "Gloria a la Gesta Libertadora del 30 de Mayo" (418). This plaque, however, was vandalized, and then replaced again, by the government. Until 1980, according to Balcácer, the site was a garbage dump, when, once more, there was an effort to erect a monument in honor of the men who killed Trujillo that culminated in a twisted metal sculpture with a figure representing Trujillo drawn in red, the color of blood (420-421). In 1993 the most recent monument was created by Silvano Lora, a local sculptor, and funded by the "Fundación Héroes del 30 de Mayo". Set back from the highway, the monument consists of two large and imposing sculptures separated by a small rectangular plaza (Fig. 7). Constructed of concrete and overlaid in black and gold ceramic mosaic, each piece has a specific function according to Lora's explanation found on a black marble marker to the right of the memorial. The larger of the two, with its back to the Caribbean Sea, depicts a blindfolded person, whose expression and outstretched hands are a reminder of the impersonal nature of torture when the victim has lost even "la única arma defensiva" of looking into his captor's eyes. The smaller

sculpture, Lora explains, is of a human figure rising from a votive flame as a reminder of the human cost of resisting Trujillo and, ultimately, overthrowing him.¹²



Figure 7. “Memorial a los Héroes del 30 de Mayo” April 2012 Photo; Steve Bromberg.

In 2009, a Dominican writer, José Rafael Sosa, posted an editorial on his blog about the decay of the monument, “Un monumento nacional por cuidar” (<http://josersosa.blogspot.com/2009/08/un-monumento-nacional-por-cuidar.html>). Along with photos of the sculptures, Sosa included two close-ups: one which shows the deterioration of the mosaic on the back of the larger piece; and another, of the smaller sculpture, with blue plastic sheeting around the human figure and an empty gallon jug stuffed into the flames. One year later, the Dominican House of Representatives undertook a renovation of the sculpture along with the installation of the plaque based upon Lara’s interpretation of the symbolism of

the work. Perhaps in hopes of reminding the country of the value of the memorial and its place in Dominican history, the president of the Fundación Héroes del 30 de Mayo, requested that 2011 be officially declared the “Year of Liberty” and that the 30th of May become a national holiday (“En República Dominicana...” <http://digitalgroup.info/wordpress/index.php/archives/20205>). One year later, on May 30th 2011, a group of high-level dignitaries were scheduled to hold a special tribute at the site in order to inculcate “la trascendencia de ese hecho como punto de partida de la democracia dominicana” (Balcácer qtd. in Guzmán Then). The only problem with Guzmán Then’s article is that the photo is not at the “Heroes” location but, rather, at the “Monument Mausoleum to the Heroes of Constanza, Maimón and Estero Hondo.”¹³



Figure 8. View of the Lechonera el Monumento” in the background as the taxi driver walks back to his car. April 2012 Photo: Steve Bromberg.

The search for the monument was as difficult as that of the Monumento-Mausoleo. Our taxi driver seemed to have a general idea, but as we sped past the site on the other side of the road, he abruptly stopped and made a U-turn about four blocks up. Located about a mile south of the city center, the sculptures sit back off the highway in front of the Caribbean Sea. Directly on the other side of the four-lane highway from the memorial sits the “Lechonera el Monumento,” a small, open air restaurant featured in Season 8, Episode 17 of Anthony Bourdain’s “No Reservations” series.

At one time, there was a parking area next to the memorial, but it has now been cordoned off so the only way one can get more than a passing glance of it is to illegally park a car on the embankment next to the old lot. The sheer size of the larger monolith is impressive, at 20 by 20 feet. The golden tiles shimmer in the sun and it is difficult not to imagine the chaos and fear that must have defined that night 51 years ago. There is nothing soothing or uplifting about this site. It is disquieting and disturbing, especially with the accompanying text of Lora’s intentions. Yet, less than a year after the most recent attempt to introduce this tribute into Dominican memory, the site was, once again, unkempt, filled with trash, and clearly abandoned (Fig. 9). Even the accent lights that had, at one time, illuminated the sculpture, now dangled precariously over the blindfolded face.

In *Shadowed Ground*, Kenneth Foote discusses how the obliteration of a site is often an attempt to erase tragedy by covering it up or removing it from view. Although the “Memorial a los Héroes” has not been completely desecrated, it is, at the very least, what Foote calls, “stigmatized”. Unlike a sanctified site, sites that are stigmatized are not places where a community can end or release their grief. Rather, such spaces can be a reminder that “open discussion” about that particular event is “taboo” (24-25). Without open discourse, however, the history and meaning of the 30th of May could be lost. And so, each year there are new attempts to memorialize the site. Yet, on some level all have failed, suggesting that although collective memory relies on consensus about the past between often disparate points of view, this monument has never entered into that shared aesthetic space of which Sci speaks. Everyone is in agreement that this was, in fact, the spot of the *ajusticiamiento*, yet, perhaps

because of fear, or pain, or simply the desire to forget, this is a space that is not on the memory map of Dominican experience.



Figure 9. Cordoned off parking area and trash strewn lawn. April 2012 Photo: Steve Bromberg.

Interestingly enough, the monument does seem to have a place in the digital world. Beginning in June of 2010, the “Fundación Héroes del 30 de Mayo” created a Facebook page for the memorial “Héroes del 30 de Mayo de 1961,” which includes a variety of photos, news feeds, and even a blog: <http://paraquenoserepitalahistoria.blogspot.com/>. For the most recent anniversary celebration on the 30th of May 2014, there are poems, radio scripts, and photos from the now annual official pilgrimage to the site. This year the photos include one of the adult children of General Juan Tomás Díaz Quezada, one of the original collaborators both in the June 1959 attempt and the 30 of May 1961 assassination, at the site of the Memorial

(<https://www.facebook.com/pages/H%C3%A9roes-del-30-de-Mayo-de-1961/120791804629852>). Andreas Huyssen warns that the relationship between memory and forgetting may be transforming “under cultural pressures in which new information technologies” may be taking “their toll” (17). Yet, Facebook, especially for this monument and its history, enables viewers to connect without being physically present in the spatial-temporal location where the assassination occurred. They can step in and out of the past, in and out of the trauma, with a simple click of the mouse. They can contribute, “lurk,” make comments and follow the “story” of the site. If, as Edward Said says, we invent traditions in part to remember, then this digital medium allows for people, as a community, “to give themselves a coherent identity; a national narrative, a place in the world” (179).

Whether through digital means or open access museums and memorials, the participation of individuals and their personal connections with their past, present, and future remain central. It is the communal memories and traumas and the interplay between these experiences that unite and shape a community’s identity. Official state-sponsored attempts to keep memories alive, even those as important as the Monumento-Masoleo and the “Memorial a los héroes,” are dependent upon a public to create meaning and purpose. What remains for Dominicans is the decision either “to reveal the scars and suffer the effects of remembering or to erase the scars and subvert the memories” (González 227). Much of the memory work surrounding the *trujillato* is recent, but the momentum continues to grow both officially and through private foundations. Understandably, traumascapes “are a distinctive category of place, transformed physically, psychically by suffering, part of a scar tissue that now stretches across the world” (Tumarkin 13). Remembering and memorializing such places is neither simple nor complete. Rather, there is an ongoing shifting of borders between what can be remembered, what must be forgotten, and what remains. On the first anniversary of the assassination, Manolo Tavárez Justo, leader of the 14th of June Movement and husband of Minerva Mirabal, proclaimed that “not until the official recognition of the 30 of May would the nation achieve unity” (qtd in Balcácer 416). As challenging, ambiguous, and contested as these sites are, they are present and are clearly integral to the future of the Dominican identity and expression.

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Notes

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² "...bring about the dignified process of completing the annals of the past century with the just restoration of the 30 years that have been mutilated by those focused on what they call the "Era of Trujillo" of our historical country." <http://www.fundaciontrujillo.org>

³ “All demonstrations aimed at exalting, promoting, or vindicating the image of the dictator.”
<http://www.listindiario.com/la-republica/2013/3/23/270600/Haran-cumplir-la-ley-que-prohibe-elogiar-a-Trujillo>

⁴ A copy of the letter is reproduced in Constanza, Maimón y Estero Hondo, *Testimonios e investigación sobre los acontecimientos*. Anselmo Brache Batista. Santo Domingo: Editora Búho, 2009, 339.

⁵ <http://museodelaresistencia.org/> “Sala Memorial a los Héroes de Constanza, Maimón y Estero Hondo.”

⁶ Interview with Elvin García, April 1, 2012, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. “...an understanding of who these people were that were fighting for the freedom of the Dominican people.”

⁷ Ibid. “...to help us reflect upon the past so that there is no future tyranny.”

⁸ “...by the surviving wives, mothers and sisters of the men killed in 1959”

http://www.museodelaresistencia.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=198:sala-memorial-heroes-de-constanza-maimon-y-estero-hondo&catid=48:sala-memorial-heroes-de-constanza-maimon-y-estero-&Itemid=85

⁹ “So that all of the men can rest forever in one place and in full view of future generations.”

“Monumento-Panteón”

http://www.museodelaresistencia.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=199:monumento-panteon-heroes-de-constanza-maimon-y-estero-hondo&catid=49:monumento-heroes-de-constanza-maimon-y-e&Itemid=85

¹⁰ “...an atmosphere of nauseating stench”

<http://laveraddominicana.wordpress.com/2008/06/21/delincuentes-y-rateros-convierten-monumento-maimon-en-basurero/>

¹¹ Anselmo Brache Batista gives a very detailed account of Trujillo’s response in the days and weeks after the failed coup along with testimonials and photos of men captured, tortured and executed.

¹² “Texto del artista Silvano Lora para una mejor interpretación.” Plaque that accompanies the sculpture on the Autopista 30 de Mayo, April 2012.

¹³ <http://www.listindiario.com/la-republica/2011/5/30/190156/Rinden-tributo-hoy-a-heroes-del-30-de-mayo> Author’s note: As of May of 2014, the photo of the dignitaries standing between the two mausoleums with the Angel in the background has been removed from the site.