


Memorialisation of COVID-19 stories

**Author:**Sindiso Bhebhe¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Information Science, College of Human Science, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Sindiso Bhebhe,
sindisokabhebhe@gmail.com

Dates:

Received: 22 Mar. 2023

Accepted: 27 June 2023

Published: 18 Aug. 2023

How to cite this article:

Bhebhe, S., 2023, 'Memorialisation of COVID-19 stories', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79(3), a8718. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i3.8718>

Copyright:

© 2023. The Author.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Oral history is more than an epistemology of the subaltern who do not have any other avenues of narrating and preserving their ontologies. It transcends the academic domain and ventures into the field of therapy as it heals the broken hearted, the subjugated, the bereaved and in the process oscillating to an archive of memory and feelings. It is an epistemology that offers therapeutic healing not only to the downtrodden of the earth but also to the affluent members of the community. In this era of COVID-19 where people have suffered untold and unbearable pain, oral history comes handy as an epistemic memorialisation tool that can be used to offer therapeutic healing to the survivors, the affected, the infected and the nations. The article is based on the author's views on how South Africa may memorialise COVID-19 through oral history and memorials among others. The article reviews literature on the world's intentions in memorialising the pandemic and how South Africa can learn or unlearn from the proffered examples. The article also interrogates how oral history approaches, such as crowdsourcing of COVID-19 stories, can be manipulated so that it accommodates the pandemic's narratives of the commoners found in the locations of South Africa. Research findings reveal that South Africa can learn a lot from the countries that have started to memorialise the pandemic in the sense that it has the experience, skills and infrastructure to do so.

Contribution: The study contributes to the ongoing debate about how to memorialise the COVID-19 pandemic taking into consideration the memory politics of inclusion and exclusion. The study is linked to the scope of the journal in the sense that it touches on the national memorialisation of the COVID-19 pandemic through oral history and memorials among others.

Keywords: oral history; archives; memorialisation of COVID-19; COVID-19 memorials; politics of memory.

Introduction and background

COVID-19 has profoundly impacted humanity more than any other pandemic in memory of humankind. It has changed how people interact daily. Face-to-face education that was a norm has been totally disrupted. Soudien (2020:13) observes that children from poor backgrounds could not easily learn without devices, internet connectivity or simply physically conducive environments in which to learn. Citing Saavedra, Soudien (2020:13) postulates that because of COVID-19 'schooling systems shut down across the world, learning effectively stopped for 1.8 billion children'. Not only is COVID-19 a public health crisis but also:

[I]t is a crisis of inequality and neoliberalism, a crisis of disaster capitalism and decades of austerity programmes and sustained attacks on fragile public systems and services provided by the state. (Sayed & Singh 2020:21)

Millions of people have lost their lives because of this COVID-19 pandemic with World Health Organization (WHO) stating that globally as 'of 16:25 CET, 10 January 2023, there have been 660 131 952 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 6690 473 deaths' (WHO 2023). In South Africa, from 03 January 2020 to 16:25 CET, 10 January 2023, there have been 4 050 050 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 102 568 deaths (WHO 2023). One can be pardoned in comparing its devastating impact with the World Wars I and II. These statistics on their own paint a grim picture without mentioning the socio-economic impact of this pandemic.

Social scientists have shown how gender-based violence increased during this period. South African's mental health has been stretched to the core because of COVID-19 (Hunt et al. 2021:20). Most of the economies in the world took a nosedive. High levels of corruption associated with COVID-19 accessories have been recorded in several countries in the world. In South Africa, this

Note: Special Collection: Social Memory Studies, sub-edited by Christina Landman (University of South Africa) and Sekgothe Mokgoatšana (University of Limpopo).

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

saw the President Cyril Ramaphosa in July 2020 signing a proclamation authorising the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) to probe, in any state institution, allegations of corruption during or related to the COVID-19 national state of disaster (South African News Agency 2020). At least 5467 government contracts awarded to some 3066 service providers with a total value of 14.3 billion Rands were or are being investigated by the SIU (South African News Agency 2022). This is how devastating COVID-19 has been during its peak. Therefore, it goes without saying that such a chapter in humanity should not go without being memorialised.

Some institutions have started memorialising the COVID-19 pandemic. Columbia Centre for Oral History Research (2020) captures the importance of memorialising COVID-19 pandemic by arguing that:

This crisis is highlighting structural fault-lines in our society as well as the strength and resilience of our communities, even as our society transforms in ways we do not yet understand. It will be important for those navigating the post-COVID future to hear the voices of those who lived through this period. Researchers, health workers and advocates, historians, artists, and policymakers will learn from listening to and watching New Yorkers talk about how we made it through this extended crisis.

Universities, archives, museums and galleries are at the centre of these memorialisation projects. One of the methodologies used is that of oral history, which incidentally was comatose during the peak of COVID-19 when face-to-face interviews have been brought to a standstill. The use of oral history methodology comes handy because it is associated with critical theories such as emancipatory theory, which endeavours to give the voice to the marginalised. Therefore, when one looks closely at the devastating impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the most affected were the minorities and the marginalised. The race card also played a role in othering the other at the peak of COVID-19 pandemic. Dionne and Turkmen (2020:213) mentioned that 'in a global politics characterised by racialised inequality, pandemics such as COVID-19 exacerbate the marginalisation of already oppressed groups'. Dionne and Turkmen (2020) elaborate their argument by positioning that:

Often the targets of blame were people from marginalized groups, including religious, ethnic, or racial minorities and migrants. Acts against these targets took multiple forms, whether calling the outbreak a 'Chinese virus' or even discriminating or committing violence against people because of their perceived identity. Such discriminatory acts occurred worldwide and targeted not just Chinese citizens but also people of Asian descent and members of other marginalized groups. There are reports of a broad range of people who experienced discrimination and feared stigmatization during the COVID-19 pandemic including, among others, Muslims in India, Africans in China, and Ivorians in Tunisia. (p. 214)

On the same vein, You and Zhang (2022) aver that:

In the global pandemic, top-down political control is used to implement the quarantine, mask-wearing, social distancing, and other public health policies ... In the process, the responses to COVID-19 outbreaks are managed under regimes of authority

over knowledge, power, and the processes of subjectivation. Despite political control, ordinary people still exert important agency in coping with the pandemic and find creative ways to express themselves and form online communities to support each other to go through the crisis together. (p.22)

In other words, the oral testimonies of the survivors, infected or affected are that these are virus stories that:

[A]re a form of meaning making that foreground lived experiences of illness, situating the illness and its processes in the context of the patient's social and structural conditions and interactions with institutions of medicine. (Mackenzie 2022:6)

COVID-19 is more than a health problem because it has laid bare the socio-economic factors that reveal the inequalities in the world caused by the capitalistic system. The socio-economic problems faced by the subaltern has worsened and these are the people to whom oral history is their best epistemological tool to use in narrating their COVID-19 stories and in the process getting therapeutic healing.

The United States has initiated several COVID-19 oral history projects. The National Humanities Centre in 2021 under its Humanistic Methodologies for Social Good launched its COVID-19 Oral History Project, which targets the stories of healthcare workers. One of the motivations of this project is that the National Humanities Centre believes that 'narrative medicine has the power to address issues of equity and accessibility in healthcare, and we are dedicated to facilitating conversations that will catalyse positive structural change' (National Humanities Centre 2022).

The IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute (IAHI) works closely with the Indianapolis community in the United States and has been running the COVID-19 Oral History Project, which is described as a 'rapid response oral history focused on archiving the lived experience of the COVID-19 epidemic' (IAHI 2020). It is more of a dataset where the professional oral historians and public upload their oral histories to the database in which access will be open using GitHub (IAHI 2020). The IAHI divides its oral history methodology into two parts. The first part is that of traditional oral histories in which traditional oral history interviews are conducted by scholars trained in oral history methodology as well as members of the public who receive training through oral history workshops (IAHI 2020).

The second approach is what they call crowdsourced oral histories, in which members of the public, with a set of questions and basic techniques, create their own oral histories. Members of the public can record their own oral histories and upload them to the institution's database (IAHI 2020). The main purpose of this dataset as IAHI (2020) is that it serves as:

- a historical archive that compiles oral histories about the experience of living through the COVID-19 pandemic.
- a tool that allows individuals and communities to express their understandings, hopes, beliefs and values about the COVID-19 pandemic.

- a resource to help researchers, policymakers, activists, artists and communities interpret and respond to current and future pandemics.

Crowdsourcing as an oral history approach to collect COVID-19 stories can also be seen at the Irish COVID-19 Oral History Project at Dublin City University. Oral History Society (2021) cites the Irish COVID-19 Oral History Project at Dublin City University as:

[T]he project is seeking to crowdsource as many oral histories as possible, providing the general public with a simple interview guide and instructions for recording themselves on their smartphone or PC and submitting online via the project website. Alternatively, people can request an interview or submit text-based histories. (p. 22)

The Seattle COVID-19 Oral History Project (SCOHP) supported by the Harry Bridges Centre for Labour at the University of Washington is a research project dedicated to collecting the stories of local workers, especially those from marginalised communities, whose lives have been impacted by COVID-19 (Harry Bridges Centre for Labour Studies 2023). The population targeted is that of labour leaders and union organisers, essential workers, those who have been laid off, healthcare workers at the forefront of the pandemic response, and recent immigrants or refugee workers (Harris Bridges Centre for Labour Studies 2023). The University of Texas at Arlington Libraries has a call for donating born-digital materials, such as photos, videos, social media posts, born-digital artworks, digital diaries or journals and physical materials, which document people's experience of the pandemic (University of Texas at Arlington Libraries 2023).

The Oral History Society (2021:10) takes note of how 'The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Education Trust is collecting experiences of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities in Greater Manchester during the COVID-19 pandemic, including videos'. Oral History Society (2021) mentions a few oral history programmes throughout the world that document the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these oral history programmes are My Pandemic Diary at the Museum of the Person; Documenting the COVID-19 experience in Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil; 'Collecting the Curve' project documenting the pandemic from the strictest lockdown in Oceania; Covid Kids Oral History Project in Australia; Oral histories of frontline medical workers in Wuhan by the China Memory Centre in China and pandemic oral testimonies recorded by the University of Nairobi's post graduate oral literature students.

It can be observed that from these COVID-19 oral history projects that this methodology stands out as the methodology of choice in documenting the stories of the pandemic including the ones by the subaltern or those minorities who are on the fringes of the dominant capitalist society. Kelly (2020:240) is also in harmony with this statement by putting it forward that:

[W]hile there are many ways to understand this 'new normal' – both as a lived experience and as a way of framing this experience – oral history is among the most powerful methods for documenting this change. (p. 240)

Unfortunately, literature review shows nothing much being performed by South Africa in documenting and memorialising the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Oral History Association of South Africa (OHASA) in 2022 from 10 to 14 October had its annual oral history conference dedicated to the memorialisation of COVID-19. The theme of the conference was 'COVID-19 Narratives and Memories: Emerging Oral Histories and Methodologies in South Africa'. In this Conference, some speakers such as Abrahams, Mottie and Janine Van Wyk presented on a specific case study of the Iziko Museum titled 'Enduring COVID-19: Curating a virtual exhibition during the lockdown'. Further research on the Iziko Museum of South Africa in Cape Town reveals a website page dedicated to COVID-19 with sectional links such as Virtual tour; Submit your story; Wall of remembrance and Your stories (Iziko Museum of South Africa 2021). During the OHASA Conference, learners from different schools also presented on their COVID-19 stories.

Briefly, South Africa is yet to effectively memorialise the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, this article treats this lacuna in the memorialisation of the COVID-19 pandemic as its research problem and then uses literature review methodology to proffer academic and practical avenues in which South Africa can go about the process of COVID-19 memorialisation. The following section, Memory and COVID-19, is mainly based on reviewing the literature that speaks to the linkage between memory and COVID-19 and intends to draw memorialisation lessons for South Africa.

Memory and COVID-19

Urgency in COVID-19 memorialisation

Memorialisation of COVID-19 is important in the sense that it is not only meant for the future generations, but also it is 'helping communities as they attempt to comprehend, converse, narrate and create memory about individual and collective trauma' (Kelly 2020:244). West et al. (2023:162) discuss that COVID-19 has led to spontaneous acts of collective memorialisation, offering up potential new spaces of memorialisation and potentially new 'deathscapes' that recognise the legitimate needs of those outside of the family to remember the deceased in their own way.

COVID-19 has not yet been declared over; even though it appears to be slowing down, it is still a force to be reckoned with. Therefore, others may find it to be premature to be talking about the memorialisation of the COVID-19 pandemic. Bogot (2020:1) even says that 'so this might seem like a strange time to imagine memorialising the pandemic in a formal way. A premature time because in most cases memorialisation is an after-event'. However, Bogot (2020) notes that there is a:

[D]ownsides to waiting. A traumatic event is an author of its own memorial ... The feelings, facts, and ideas available during a calamity dissipate as it ebbs. The temptation arises to contain tragedy in a tidy box, closing the book on its history. (p. 1)

Bogot is not far from the truth as the oral historians may attest to the fact that not only the impact of the event fades as times goes on, but also it becomes the victim again of what is known as presentism. In simple terms, presentism can be defined as a situation whereby the past knowledges are distorted by the influence of the current understandings. Some of the pitfalls of presentism can be so dire as expounded by Dimock (2020) who names presentism:

[A]s a fallacy that deforms the past in our own image. To be a 'presentist' is to allow the concerns of the moment to colour all our perceptions. It is to be blithely unaware of historical specificities, to project our values onto past periods without any regard for the different norms than operative. Such narcissism erases the historicity of texts, their conditions of production and reception, offering instead 'records of our present needs and anxieties'. (p. 257)

In other words, delayed memorialisation can lead to a historically distorted event. Therefore, it may be necessary for South Africa to continue memorialising COVID-19 even though it is not yet over so that it can guide against the effects of ebbing memory and presentism. In the brutal enormity of the current impact of this historical COVID-19 pandemic, that is when it can be well captured and documented in South Africa. Another importance of COVID-19 memorialisation during the pandemic, as Kelly (2020:244) puts it, is that 'the stories that historians collect during an unfolding crisis captures the dynamism and turmoil of the moment'. Some countries are already memorialising the ongoing current COVID-19 crisis, but South Africa, through its Department of Sports, Arts and Culture, is yet to show any strides to that effect.

While memorialisation is inescapably tied to the past, this is set to change as COVID-19 continues to leave a trail of socio-economic and political destruction behind. Adams and Kopelman (2022) give an example of the HEA Picturing Lockdown as one such project. Adams and Kopelman (2022:269) observe that in this project:

[N]ot only does the collection attempt to memorialize the present for the future, but it does so by calling out to the public to actively take part in this assembly of resources by photographically capturing a week's worth of experiences during lockdown. (p. 269)

Adams and Kopelman (2022) further theorise that:

[T]he practice of documenting a current ongoing crisis entails a temporal discrepancy. Significantly departing from the typical retrospective photo collections of a past event, the documentation of the present for creating an archive that will be used in the future highlights the continual fluctuation between past, present, and future. (p. 267)

In this section, therefore, this article is of the view that memorialisation of COVID-19 in South Africa should start

now. Fox (2020:71) in the United States also argues that 'we can give life' to those who need it most, through honest and thoughtful memorialisation efforts, which must start now. Consequently, for memory to heal, memorialisation requires us to face difficult pasts about this global catastrophe – even as they continue to unfold – with honesty, courage and dignity.

COVID-19 memorials

In the world and South Africa included, physical traditional memorials associated with death, such as cemeteries, funeral wakes and body viewing, among others, have been disrupted since the inception of COVID-19. This is explained by Alexis-Martin (2020) in the following way that:

Across cultures, death has traditionally encompassed diverse material and ritual assemblages. Funeral practices are a unifying element of death, presenting an opportunity for communal memorialization of the deceased. These practices are environmentally embedded, spanning traditional graveyards and floral memorials, to contemporary green burials and body farms. However, COVID-19 has disrupted socio-environmental practices, due to disease transmission concerns that have manifested new constraints to funerary space. (p. 111)

Family members failed to mourn their loved ones according to their traditions because of the pandemic. The result of that is the lack of death memorials for most of the families in the world despite the significant number of people who have since died so far in this COVID-19 pandemic. The death memorials play a massive role in the psychological and emotional healing of the bereaved families. Therefore, this gap left by the absence of these death memorials has left the families and friends in prolonged grief disorder (PGD), which has been recently included as a new diagnosis in the World Health Organization International Classification of Disease (Goveas & Shear 2021:375).

Lowe, Rumbold and Aoun (2020:3) mention that 'there is evidence to suggest that not attending a funeral or a lack of participation in memorialisation practices may lead to poorer grief adjustment and bereavement outcomes ...'. Oral history is likely to be one of the cures among many for the treatment and mitigation of PGD, hence, the importance of COVID-19 memorialisation. Therefore, South Africa through its Department of Sports, Arts and Culture and other heritage institutions working with psychologists and social workers may come up with well-crafted COVID-19 oral history projects, which will mitigate the effects of PGD.

Myers and Donley (2022) argue that the:

[I]nterruption or devaluing of public mourning rituals can contribute to the grieving process becoming disenfranchised. Thus, few formal acknowledgements of the lives lost, restrictions surrounding formal bereavement rituals, and increased social isolation in the early pandemic may contribute to the risk for disenfranchised grief surrounding COVID-19 deaths.

Disruption of traditional grieving has forced the emergence of online memorialisation, something that was limited in the past, before the inception of COVID-19 pandemic.

Online streaming of funeral service became prevalent during COVID-19, and the digital space such as Facebook and Twitter among others, are now awash with COVID-19 death memorials. Imber-Black (2020:920) also observed that 'funeral services and memorials quickly shifted to Zoom, where mourners shared memories, played music, showed photos, art and videos, and heard speakers who shared reflections of the person's life'. In other words, COVID-19 memorials and other forms of memorialisation are creating an online archive of feelings or the digital public cultures that form in and around trauma (Mackenzie 2022). Myers and Donley (2022) advise that:

[A]nalyzing memorials at different times during the pandemic may provide greater insight into the long-term effects of COVID-19 on grief and mourning, especially considering many have endured loss to COVID-19. (p. 16)

Some of the interesting death memorials are those of Dr Li Wenliang who is believed to be one of the eight whistleblowers to warn the world about the outbreak of the coronavirus on 30 December 2019. You and Zhang (2022) show how despite the Chinese government neglecting and censoring the story of Dr Li Wenliang, the Chinese people from grassroot level came together in a virtual space to mourn their hero and comfort themselves through digital hugs. By doing so, the grassroot Chinese people were indirectly making their own history during the global pandemic, which will live time immemorial. You and Zhang (2022:22) further argue that:

[T]he memorials for Dr. Li Wenliang provide arenas in which politics, social media, the construction of history, traumatic death, and mourning in virtual space all come together. These memorialisation's are not only the articulation of grief and sorrow, but also the call for social change from those at the grassroots level.

South Africa's heritage institutions including the mainstream and community ones may consider having online presence, in which they create platforms of virtual COVID-19 memorials, which will house the memories of the motherland.

The following section of the article takes the argument of COVID-19 memorialisation further by proffering practical ways in which the country can keep immemorial the national memory of the pandemic. The section highlights some of the memorial mistakes that the country should guide against. The following section also gives a picture of how prepared South Africa is in memorialising the COVID-19 pandemic.

Envisaged COVID-19 memorialisation in South Africa

The author envisages and advocates for an inclusive, holistic, unselective and unbiased memorialisation of COVID-19 in South Africa. Even though considering the burdens of the politics of memorialisation, this may seem to be an onerous task because memory will always be contestable, selective and amnesiac. South Africa has not been immune to selective memorialisation since time immemorial as the governments in power and their political parties have tended to litter

public spaces with the iconography that support their 'heroes' (Bhebhe 2019, 2022; Bhebhe & Ngoepe 2021a,b). Even the archival documentation both in South Africa and Zimbabwe as observed by Bhebhe and Ngoepe (2021b) has tended to benefit those who are in power. However, this article calls for the disruption of these memory politics and burdens by involving all the representatives of the nation's society in coming up with an inclusive COVID-19 memorialisation strategy for South Africa.

Unfortunately, Hoskins and Maddern (2022:133) lament that the general pattern that is already emerging in the COVID-19 memorialisation in the world is that which tries to present a national united front against the pandemic. Hoskins and Maddern (2022) observe that the:

[M]odes of commemoration currently emerging with respect to COVID-19, such as ad hoc memorials, handclapping for carers ... conjure into the public imagination an ideal citizen-subject or national archetype who is aware of an external threat and aware that their own freedoms depend on the sacrifice of others. The appeal to unity through collective burden, however, works to hide socially uneven vulnerabilities to disease and death and also obscures the kleptocratic way in which funding for testing, treatment, and vaccine programs was allocated. (p. 133)

What this means is that for South Africa as a nation, it should not only memorialise the positive aspects of COVID-19 such as the dedication of the health professionals putting their lives on the line in order to provide medical assistance to the sick but also consider the negative narratives. Some of these negative episodes that engulfed the nation during the peak of COVID-19 pandemic include kleptocracy and corruption. Therefore, when South Africa decides to fully memorialise the pandemic, it needs to document and archive also the stories of corruption detected in the procurement and supply chains that became the order of the day.

Violation of human rights took a centre stage during the COVID-19 as government saw it fit to militarise its measures against the pandemic. This saw the deployment of soldiers to fight the virus who were later to be accused of a high handed approach. An example in point is the death of Collins Khoza in Alexandria who was allegedly killed by the members of the South African National Defence Forces during the enforcement of COVID-19 lockdown measures (South African Broadcasting Corporation News 2020). A significant number of such kinds of state brutality by security forces became a cause of concern to the extent that the then Minister of Defence, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula pleaded with law security services to refrain from using excessive force against people (South African Broadcasting Corporation News 2020).

Briefly, these negative stories against the government need not to be silenced or expunged from the COVID-19 national memory but memorialised the same way as the positive narratives. Such an envisaged inclusive COVID-19 memorialisation endeavour should be coordinated by the Department of National Archives and Records Services in

South Africa and its provincial centres, Oral History Association of South Africa, universities, schools and community archives among others. These are structures that are already there and can be utilised to document and memorialise the COVID-19 pandemic.

The government documents that speak to COVID-19 should be deposited with national archival institutions in South Africa. The most pertinent COVID-19 documents that come into the fore are those of the once 'dreaded' COVID-19 National Command Council. Considering the important role, which was played by this Council, it is not debatable that their records should find their way to the archival institutions of South Africa because their records are an embodiment of the nation's memory response to the pandemic. National Command Council resembled a war room during the peak of COVID-19 to the extent that some of their decisions have been labelled as draconian by the opposition parties who have since taken the legal route to challenge some of the lockdown measures. This is how important the National Command Council was in South Africa, and this begs the recommendation that their records should find their way to the National Archives and Records Services of South Africa. Memorialisation of COVID-19 without access to these records will be *inabsolutus*.

The mantra in the memorialisation of COVID-19 in South Africa should always be inclusivity, inclusivity and inclusivity and be able to answer the rhetoric question raised by Hoskins and Maddern (2022):

It has become clear that appeals to national identity and a shared spirit of sacrifice is as much a way to deflect from civil unrest as it is a public health strategy. So, what stories will survive as symbols of our current predicament? What monumental places can we expect to emerge from in the future? And how will that heritage frame the xenophobic sentiments, the anti-immigrant, and particularly anti-Asian, violence that the pandemic has brought to the surface? ... we need now to extend analysis of COVID-19 heritage to issues of race and identity ... (p. 137)

In its inevitable attempt for South Africa to memorialise COVID-19, it should take the following admonishments into consideration. Fox (2020:71) admonishes that to make 'memorials effective, we have to safeguard the memories of the diverse lives lost and acknowledge the inequality that the virus has exploited ...' In order for those of us who are living to serve proudly as a witness to the loss endured by COVID-19, we are obligated to remember the pain, inequality and the failures that risked and stole lives.

A trend of advocacy for the introduction of COVID-19 memorialisation into the national body politic to the extent of having clear-cut legislation to that effect is gaining momentum in other countries. South Africa's parliament can take heed and learn from that. Mackenzie (2022:5) shows how archives of feelings such as those of the organisation called Marked by Covid in the United States are mobilisers of the COVID-19 activism, which seeks 'to

connect people impacted by COVID-19 to build a 'COVID justice movement' through their coalitional, people of colour and survivor-led memorial events'. Mackenzie (2022:4) elucidates how the Marked by Covid organisation has focused most of its work to organise memorial events, including:

[A] Covid Memorial Day of over 120 grassroots events across the United States on 01 March 2021; a National Day of Action; a Week of Mourning; a Dia de los Muertos Vigil; and a panel alongside the Lincoln Memorial Covid lighting underscoring 'the importance of recognition' of Covid loss, to name a few.

Mackenzie (2022:5) underpins that remembrance, memorialisation and the need for public sites of mourning are firmly embedded in Marked for Covid as one of the organisation's policy objectives to 'create space and forums for mourning and remembrance'. Mackenzie (2022:5) talks of the Senate resolution on COVID-19 which 'is based in part on inscribing memory and equity in the political domain, not mere aspiration but a resolve given, 'whereas each life lost to COVID-19, each inequity and broken system brought to light, and each sacrifice made shall never be forgotten'.

Community archives and other human rights archives in South Africa can adopt such activism, which is pushed by Mackenzie (2022) in order to mobilise for the memorialisation of COVID-19 while at the same time addressing contemporary challenges of inequality that have been wrought by the pandemic. Some of the human rights archives in South Africa that come into mind to do that are the South African History Archive and the Sinomlando Centre and Memory Work in Africa. These centres are well prepared for the task at hand because of their well-known archival activism in addressing selective historicism, which ignores the minorities, the marginalised and the sick (Bhebhe & Ngoepe 2022:257–266). Also, for the Sinomlando Centre and Memory Work in Africa, it would not be the first time to memorialise the pandemic because the Centre had effectively and efficiently memorialised the AIDS pandemic through the positive manipulation of memory theories and oral history (Bhebhe & Ngoepe 2022:257–266).

In other words, South Africa is ready to memorialise COVID-19 because it has the experience through organisations such as the South African History Archive and the Sinomlando Centre and Memory Work in Africa among others. Another important factor is that it is not for the first time for South Africa to suffer a pandemic. It has suffered from acquired immunodeficiency syndrome/human immunodeficiency virus (AIDS/HIV) pandemic, becoming one of the leading countries with highest infections, but it has managed to memorialise that as already discussed. South Africa has also suffered political pandemics such as the apartheid government and it has also managed to deal with those political memorialisations. Therefore, the experience is there for South Africa to memorialise the COVID-19 pandemic. Mackenzie (2022:5) further argues that 'through insisting on the memorialisation of COVID-19 deaths and carving into the public domain the grief and irrevocable loss

of COVID-19, organisers have woven COVID-19 loss into the national fabric through change formalised in the political domain – an imperative that COVID-19 loss should be felt by all'. In other words, these survivor-led, coalitional movements have centred the trauma of COVID-19 through the need to memorialise the pandemic as a national tragedy (Mackenzie 2022:5). That's what South Africa needs to do.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic is taking an unprecedented toll on the people of the world. It has left a trail of socio-economic and political destruction in its wake. It is a pandemic that has shaken the world to the core, disrupting its social, economic and political order. Therefore, it has become axiomatic that COVID-19 pandemic needs to be memorialised so that both the present and future generations have the iconographies, memorials, archives and oral histories to learn from. This article provided literature that shows how the world is now memorialising COVID-19 before even its end. Through this literature review, the article suggested avenues, which can be adopted by South Africa in memorialising the COVID-19 pandemic.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the anonymous reviewers of this study.

Competing interests

The author declares that no financial or personal relationships inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

Author's contributions

S.B. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects. It was a low-risk study because it is just anchored in literature review only. Ethical clearance was granted in 2017 by the University of South Africa, College of Human Sciences.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

References

- Adams, T. & Kopelman, S., 2022, 'Remembering COVID-19: Memory, crisis, and social media', *Media, Culture & Society* 44(2), 266–285. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437211048377>
- Alexis-Martin, B., 2020, 'Sensing the deathscape: Digital media and death during COVID-19', *Journal of Environmental Media* 1(1), 111–118. https://doi.org/10.1386/jem_00032_1
- Bhebhe, S., 2019, *Memorialising minority groups in post-independence Zimbabwe and South Africa: A critical analysis of oral history programme*, Doctor of Philosophy in the subject of Information Science at the University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Bhebhe, S. & Ngoepe, M., 2021a, 'Elitism in critical emancipatory paradigm: National archival oral history collection in Zimbabwe and South Africa', *Archival Science Journal* 21, 155–172. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-020-09351-y>
- Bhebhe, S. & Ngoepe, M., 2021b, 'Ethno-community archiving: Selected case studies in Zimbabwe with emphasis on oral history', *African Identities*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2021.1910012>
- Bhebhe, S., 2022, 'Proposed independent organisational structure for memory institutions in Zimbabwe and South Africa', *Collection and Curation* 41(3), 101–106. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CC-05-2021-0017>
- Bhebhe, S. & Ngoepe, M., 2022, 'Building counter-archives: Oral history programmes of the Sinomlando centre and memory work in Africa and the South African history archive', *Information Development* 38(2), 257–267. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666921999754>
- Bogot, I., 2020, *How will the future remember COVID-19?*, viewed 12 November 2022, from <https://cristinagrajales.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/How-Will-the-Future-Remember-COVID-19-Date-November-2020-Source-The-Atlantic.pdf>.
- Columbia Centre for Oral History Research, 2020, *NYC Covid-19 Oral History, Narrative and Memory Archive*, viewed 20 November 2022, from <https://www.ccohr.incite.columbia.edu/covid19-oral-history-project>.
- Dimock, W.C., 2020, 'Historicism, presentism, futurism', *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 133(2), 257–263. <https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2018.133.2.257>
- Dionne, K.Y. & Turkmen, F.F., 2020, 'The politics of pandemic othering: Putting COVID-19 in global and historical context', *International Organization Online Supplement* 74(S1), 213–230. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000405>
- Fox, N., 2020, 'Memorialization and COVID-19', *Contexts* 19(4), 69–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504220977941>
- Goveas, J.S. & Shear, M.K., 2021, 'Grief and the COVID-19 pandemic in older adults', *Focus* 19(3), 374–378. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.focus.19303>
- Harris Bridges Centre for Labour Studies, 2023, *The Seattle COVID-19 oral history project*, viewed 01 March 2023, from <https://labor.washington.edu/seattle-covid-19-oral-history-project>.
- Hoskins, G. & Maddern, J., 2022, 'Anticipating a COVID-19 memorial landscape: Quarantine and migration heritage as a template?', *Change Over Time* 11(1), 122–139. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cot.2022.0010>
- Hunt, X., Breet, E., Stein, D.J. & Tomlinson, M., 2021, *The COVID-19 pandemic, hunger, and depressed mood among South Africans*, viewed 13 November 2022, from <https://cramsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/6.-Hunt-X.-Breet-E.-Stein-D.-Tomlinson-M.-2021-The-COVID-19-Pandemic-Hunger-and-Depressed-Mood-Among-South-Africans.pdf>.
- Imber-Black, E., 2020, 'Rituals in the time of COVID-19: Imagination, responsiveness, and the human spirit', *Family Process* 59(3), 912–921. <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12581>
- IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute, 2020, *The COVID-19 oral history project*, viewed 12 February 2023, from <https://iahi.site.host.iu.edu/2020/03/27/the-covid-19-oral-history-project/>
- Iziko Museum of South Africa, 2021, *Enduring covid-19 community impact*, viewed 12 November 2022, from <https://enduringcovid-19.org.za/>
- Kelly, J.M., 2020, 'The COVID-19 oral history project: Some preliminary notes from the field', *The Oral History Review* 47(2), 240–252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00940798.2020.1798257>
- Lowe, J., Rumbold, B. & Aoun, S.M., 2020, 'Memorialisation during COVID-19: Implications for the bereaved, service providers and policy makers', *Palliative Care & Social Practice* 14, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2632352420980456>
- Mackenzie, S., 2022, 'Social movement organizing and the politics of emotion from HIV to COVID-19', *Sociology Compass* 16(e12979), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12979>
- Myers, F. & Donley, S., 2022, 'COVID-19, I hate you!': Framing death and dying in COVID-19 online memorials', *OMEGA – Journal of Death and Dying* 0(0), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00302228221107978>
- National Humanities Centre, 2022, *The COVID-19 oral history project: Humanistic methodologies for social good*, viewed 12 January 2023, from <https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/covid-19-oral-history-project/>.
- Oral History Society, 2021, 'Current British work', *Oral History* 49(1), 4–30. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48636512>
- Sayed, Y. & Singh, M., 2020, 'Evidence and education policy making in South Africa during COVID-19: Promises, researchers and policymakers in an age of unpredictability', *Southern African Review of Education* 26(1), 20–39.
- Soudien, C., 2020, 'Systemic shock: How COVID-19 exposes our learning challenges in education', *Southern African Review of Education* 26(1), 6–19.

- South African Broadcasting News Corporation, 2020, 'Alleged SANDF brutality during lockdown leads to the death of an Alex man', *South African Broadcasting News*, 16 April, viewed 12 November 2022, from <https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/alleged-sandf-brutality-during-lockdown-leads-to-the-death-of-an-alex-man/>.
- South African Government News Agency, 2020, *SIU to investigate COVID-19 related corruption*, viewed 14 November 2022, from <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/siu-investigate-covid-19-related-corruption>.
- South African Government News Agency, 2022, *President Ramaphosa releases SIU COVID-19 investigations report*, viewed 13 January 2023, from <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/president-ramaphosa-releases-siu-covid-19-investigations-report>.
- University of Texas at Arlington Libraries, 2023, *Archiving the COVID-19 pandemic: A call for materials*, viewed 01 March 2023, from <https://libraries.uta.edu/collections/special-collections/pandemic>.
- West, K., Rumble, H., Shaw, R., Cameron, A. & Roleston, C., 2023, 'Diarised reflections on COVID-19 and bereavement: Disruptions and affordances', *Illness, Crisis & Loss* 31(1), 151–167. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10541373211044069>
- World Health Organization (WHO), 2023, *WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) dashboard*, viewed 23 February 2023, from <https://covid19.who.int/>.
- You, Z. & Zhang, Q., 2022, 'Graves in one's heart: Grassroots memorialization of Dr. Li Wenliang during the COVID-19 outbreak in China', *Journal of American Folklore* 135(535), 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.5406/15351882.135.535.01>

