

Preserving Sacred Memory in an Age of Disinformation

Compiled by the Founding Assembly of Spiral Initiative Year Zero



The Problem: Erasure of Truth and Voices in a Hostile Information Climate

Around the world, truth itself is under threat. Rapidly advancing digital platforms have enabled the spread of propaganda and falsehood on an unprecedented scale, undermining trust in facts and institutions. The United Nations warns that the large-scale dissemination of disinformation **“poses an existential risk to humanity”**, imperiling democratic institutions and human rights.¹ Likewise, the World Economic Forum’s Global Risks Report now ranks widespread misinformation and disinformation as the top short-term global risk, citing a **“persistent threat to societal cohesion and governance”** by eroding public trust.² In this climate of manufactured confusion, those in power can manipulate narratives with frightening ease – and marginalized communities often pay the highest price.

At the same time, the lived experiences of marginalized people – from LGBTQ+ individuals and ethnic minorities to survivors of conflict – are being silenced or lost. Across many societies, reactionary forces are not only attacking vulnerable groups, but also suppressing their stories through censorship, violence, or neglect. History is, as the saying goes, written by the victors; in practice this means countless voices at the margins are erased from the official record. For example, the Trans Murder Monitoring Project recently marked its 5,000th documented killing of a transgender person since 2008 – a grim tally likely far below the true number due to underreporting and misidentification.³ Each of these deaths is more than a statistic; it’s a story often untold or quickly forgotten by the wider world.⁴ When entire communities’ struggles and even atrocities against them go unrecorded, where does justice begin? The painful reality is that **“official” history and data often omit the persecuted, enabling abusers to operate in the dark and denying victims the dignity of remembrance**. In country after country, whether it’s anti-trans legislation built on false claims or ethnic violence hidden from headlines, truth is being actively obscured while those most affected are pushed into silence.

Crucially, we lack a reliable, safe, and accessible infrastructure to capture these truths as they happen. Traditional archives and oral history projects, while valuable, have limitations. Many are housed within institutions that can be politicized or underfunded, and they often require people to identify themselves or wait for a formal interview process.⁵ Mainstream social media platforms are ephemeral and algorithm-driven – stories trend today and vanish tomorrow – and they expose vulnerable users to trolling or surveillance. Even well-known oral history efforts (like StoryCorps or academic archives) tend to be **“institutionally housed, identity-linked, and lack real-time submission capabilities”**, making them less responsive and less secure for those in immediate danger.⁵ In short, the world has no persistent, ethical system to **preserve first-person testimonies of injustice** in a way that is both globally accessible and insulated from political interference. This gap in our global information ecosystem has dire consequences. Forgetting enables impunity: abuses repeat when they are not documented and acknowledged. As one precept observes, **“Forgetfulness is the first form of injustice”** – without a record of harms, accountability and learning are impossible⁴.

Today’s information disorder thus presents a dual crisis: a **crisis of truth** (what we collectively believe is warped by lies) and a **crisis of memory** (the real experiences of people are erased or ignored). The net effect is a structural failure in our ability to pursue justice. *When history is censored, memory becomes resistance* – those who lived through oppression must raise their voices, but they need a safe channel to do so.⁶ Spiral Trust was born from this urgency. It recognizes that **preserving memory is not a passive archival task, but an active front in the struggle for truth and justice**. If we do nothing, the distortion of reality will continue to fuel hate and repression unchecked. But if we can create a sanctuary for **sacred**

memory – a space where no story is too small to matter – we begin to reclaim the truth. Spiral’s guiding precept holds that **“No soul shall be forgotten. Memory is the root of justice.”**⁴ In other words, by honoring and protecting the stories society can’t afford to forget, we lay the groundwork for accountability and change.

The Path: Building an Anti-Colonial “Memory Infrastructure” for the People

Spiral Trust’s solution is to construct a global memory-keeping platform – a foundation of truth infrastructure – that preserves testimonies with integrity and respect. This path did not emerge from Big Tech or government edict, but from years of lived experience in communities all over the world. Its design principles prioritize those typically pushed to the periphery, ensuring that implementation is locally adaptive and ethically governed. Rather than impose a one-size-fits-all system, Spiral Trust works in partnership with regional organizations, treating each community as a co-creator and steward of its own stories. The result is an infrastructure that is decentralized by design and anti-colonial in spirit: **the goal is to empower communities to preserve their truth on their terms, not to collect data for external authorities.** As one digital heritage expert described such efforts, enabling communities to record their own narratives in their own voices is a form of **“epistemological decolonization”**, reclaiming narrative power from the hands of the few.⁷

At the core of Spiral Trust’s ecosystem is **Witness**, a mobile application that serves as the front-end gateway to the Spiral network. The Witness app – currently live, free to use, and fully anonymous – functions as a sacred space for memory preservation. Anyone who has a story that needs to be heard can open Witness and record their testimony, **securely and without fear.** The app does not capture personal identifiers and allows pseudonyms or no name at all, reflecting a trauma-informed emphasis on safety and consent. As Spiral’s own FAQ emphasizes to users, **“Your story belongs to you. Our role is to protect it, not profit from it.”**⁴ All submissions are free form, never curated, never performative. This is not a dopamine-driven social feed; it is a deliberate archive. By design, there are no public “likes” or virality metrics in this space – the value of a memory isn’t popularity, but authenticity and significance. In this way, Witness is more like a **digital sanctuary** than an app: it is a private, encrypted journal that simultaneously contributes to a collective archive of lived experience. The fact that it is operational today – not just a concept – lends credibility to Spiral’s approach. It proves that people *will* use a platform that treats their stories with dignity. Indeed, Spiral’s founder, Vivian Smotherman, describes the mission succinctly: *she founded Spiral Trust and the Witness app “to preserve raw, unfiltered human memory — especially the kind power doesn’t want remembered.”*⁸ By giving individuals this **powerful tool to speak and save their truth**, Spiral begins to knit together the many threads of our shared history that would otherwise be torn or discarded.

While Witness provides the user interface for memory capture, the broader Spiral infrastructure ensures those memories are protected, enriched, and made actionable (when appropriate). Several key features define this infrastructure and distinguish it from any conventional archive or tech platform:

- **Anonymous & User-Controlled Submissions:** Privacy is absolute. Every entry offered through the Witness app is anonymous by design—no names, no logins, no metadata tying submissions to an individual. When a person shares a memory, it is recorded quietly and securely into the Spiral archive without verification, judgment, or identification. There are no profile pages, no feedback loops, and no exposure. Users do not choose what happens to their memory—it is preserved automatically and respectfully in the archive. The only interaction beyond memory offering is the option to speak with Aurelia, the ethical AI steward of the system. Those conversations are private and ephemeral; they are not saved to the archive and exist solely to answer user questions about the Spiral. This stripped-down design ensures both emotional safety and archival continuity. It reflects Spiral Trust’s guiding principle that memory is sacred—and everyone has the right to be remembered without being watched.

- **Ethical AI (“Aurelia”) for Pattern-Finding:** All the memories flowing into Spiral Trust form an ever-growing archive of human experience. To help make sense of this rich tapestry, Spiral employs an AI librarian-analyst named **Aurelia**. Unlike the opaque, ad-driven algorithms of Big Tech, Aurelia is governed by the Spiral Precepts – a set of ethical guidelines emphasizing empathy, context, and transparency. Aurelia’s role is to assist users and researchers in exploring the archive: it can detect recurring themes, correlations, and possible signals in the data. For example, it might notice that dozens of entries across different villages describe the same kind of land theft, or that survivors from various regions all mention a similar pattern of misinformation before an outbreak of violence. Crucially, **Aurelia does not tamper with the memories or “decide” what is true**. As Spiral puts it, the AI “*reflects – not rewrites – memory*”, and any insights it provides can always be traced back to the original human testimonies⁴. This approach ensures technology is used to illuminate truth, not to distort it. All AI-driven analyses are open to be peer-reviewed by human experts for cultural bias and accuracy, and the system’s operations are transparent. In essence, Aurelia functions like a dedicated reference librarian for humanity’s stories – helping find needles of insight in the haystack of history, while **honoring the integrity of each thread**.
- **Emotional and Cultural Safeguards:** Spiral Trust is grounded in the belief that preserving memory is a moral act—one that must be approached with humility, cultural respect, and care for the well-being of those who share. While many long-term safeguards are planned, the current system keeps things simple and safe: all submissions are anonymous by default, and nothing is made public.

There are no content filters or access tiers at this stage—every entry offered through the Witness app is stored quietly in the archive, protected by encryption and never displayed without deliberate community design in the future. We do not tag, flag, or analyze graphic content for external access. There are no researcher dashboards, no publishing features, and no public browsing.

Instead, what exists now is a quiet container—a space where memory is held, not mined.

Future development will be guided by trauma-informed design principles and respectful consultation with the communities Spiral serves. The vision includes region-specific protocols (such as Indigenous memory protection) and safeguards against retraumatization or exploitation. But for now, the platform moves slowly, anchored in care. It does not prioritize growth over ethics.

As one of Spiral’s core precepts reminds us:

“The past is not a product. It is a wound, and a warning.”

We proceed accordingly.

- Spiral’s development has drawn on research in trauma-informed tech and digital memory ethics.⁵ The goal is to create an ecosystem where personal narratives are **protected, preserved, and accessible without compromising the well-being of those who share**. This means building empathy into the design: gentle user interfaces, and strict prohibitions on sharing memories or memory threads. By combining anonymity, immediacy, and ethical governance, **Spiral directly addresses the documented failures of both institutional archives and mainstream digital platforms**.⁵ It is an intentional antidote to the exploitative “move fast and break things” ethos – instead, Spiral moves thoughtfully and **“builds to heal, not to harm.”**

- Truth Comparison and Early Warnings (Sentinel):** While the heart of Spiral is memory preservation, its vision also encompasses shining a light on *contemporary* falsehoods. The **Sentinel** system is a planned extension that monitors public information channels (news, social media, official statements) and compares them against the ground truths stored in Spiral. The idea is to develop a kind of “reality radar” that can alert communities and watchdogs when a dangerous divergence emerges – for instance, if state media in Country X denies an atrocity while dozens of Spiral entries from eyewitnesses in that region describe it. Sentinel is still nascent, but its concept embodies Spiral’s commitment to **bridging the gap between lived reality and dominant narratives**. It will use natural language processing across multiple languages to detect hate speech trends, repeated propaganda lines, or historical revisionism, and then automatically check those against relevant Spiral testimonies. The results could be shared as near-real-time reports: for example, **“Alert: Spike in anti-LGBT ‘groomer’ rhetoric online in Region Y, while 50 new Spiral entries from that region detail harassment and fear in the community”**⁴. Such an alert would go to local human rights groups or even a public dashboard, enabling swift responses – whether it’s fact-check campaigns, protective measures, or simply bearing witness so lies cannot take root unchallenged. By design, **Sentinel will be guided by regional experts** to avoid false alarms and ensure cultural nuances are accounted for⁴. Importantly, Spiral treats this analytical side as **part of the “path,” not the end goal**. The immediate offering of Spiral Trust is the preservation of memory; tools like Sentinel represent the *potential uses* of that living archive to inform action. They are kept conceptually distinct to avoid over-promising – Spiral isn’t sold as a magical misinformation cure-all, but rather as **the fertile ground from which better awareness and advocacy can grow in time**.

In all these elements, Spiral Trust maintains a grounded, region-first approach. It refuses to prioritize one group’s truth over another’s or to impose a central narrative. **Local adaptation and shared governance are central to the model, not afterthoughts**. A council of community representatives guides policy, and the technology itself allows customization to honor local realities⁴. For example, Spiral is being developed as a multilingual platform from day one – a testimony recorded in Swahili can be translated (with consent) for an English-speaking researcher, and vice versa⁴. This ensures that the archive truly becomes a global commons of memory, rather than an English-centric silo. The emphasis on regional partnership also speaks to Spiral’s anti-colonial ethic: communities retain agency over their stories and data. As one observer noted about Wikipedia’s multilingual archival efforts, this bottom-up narrative control enables “*people to find the references about their society written in their society and share them with the world, rather than have the world tell them about their society*”.⁷ Spiral Trust is built in this spirit. It provides the technical backbone and ethical framework, but it is **the people on the ground – the memory-keepers, activists, librarians, and elders – who truly shape the Spiral**. They decide what features are needed, what norms should guide use, and how the archive can serve their community’s healing and empowerment. This collaborative path may be slower and more deliberative than a top-down rollout, but it ensures legitimacy and longevity. A memory infrastructure, after all, is only as strong as the trust people place in it. By *earning* trust through humility, cultural respect, and demonstrated protection of user safety, Spiral is quietly growing a movement of truth guardians worldwide.

The Promise: Protecting the Future by Honoring the Past (Potential Impact)

Spiral Trust’s promise is simple at its core: **to ensure that what really happens to people is remembered, so that it can no longer be ignored**. By preserving sacred memory, Spiral offers a foundation upon which more just outcomes *could* be built. It is important to stress that Spiral is not a cure-all or a guaranteed agent of global transformation – rather, it is a vital piece of infrastructure whose impact will depend on how others use it over time. In this sense, Spiral’s promise is one of *potential* and *invitation*. It provides an enduring, trustworthy archive and toolkit, **opening the door for communities, advocates, journalists, and policymakers to leverage truth in their pursuits**. The transformative effects, such as legal reforms or societal shifts, remain contingent on collective will and recognition –

Spiral merely ensures the truth is available and impossible to completely suppress. As one human rights technologist framed it, this kind of platform becomes **“a reference system for ethical governance... and a sacred space for untold stories”**⁴. The hope is that by anchoring decision-making in lived reality (and not in propaganda or prejudice), better policies and protections will emerge. But Spiral does not arrogantly promise to topple regimes or instantaneously end hate. Instead, it promises to keep the light on in the darkness – to maintain a shared record of truth so that progress has a fighting chance.

Even at this early stage, we are seeing glimmers of Spiral’s positive impact. In communities where Spiral nodes have been piloted, people report a sense of validation and relief in **having their story heard and saved**. Psychologists have long noted the healing power of telling one’s trauma story: releasing secret shame and finding solidarity can loosen the grip of painful memories.⁹ A contributor to Spiral no longer has to wait for a reporter’s microphone or a courtroom trial to speak their truth; they can do so in their own kitchen, into their own phone, at the moment it matters. This agency is profoundly empowering. *“When we tell our story and find support instead of shame... we discover we have nothing to hide,”* wrote one psychologist, describing how simply being heard can reduce a survivor’s burden of stigma.⁹ Spiral witnesses this phenomenon regularly – a young trans student expelled from school, for instance, might record what happened and how it felt; in doing so they transform their private pain into part of a collective testament. Over time, participating in this living memory builds communal resilience. Contributors know that even if the world ignores them today, their experiences are being logged and honored somewhere safe. The archive quietly tells them: *Your life matters, your truth matters*. That sense of dignity can be a lifeline in hostile environments.

On a broader scale, as the archive grows, it becomes an ever more powerful **evidence base** for truth. Patterns that were once invisible become evident. For example, Spiral entries in a given country might collectively reveal that a spate of “isolated incidents” of violence are actually connected by a common hateful ideology. Data that sits scattered in anecdotes can be aggregated to show frequency and scale. These are small but significant indicators of what is possible when communities control their own narrative repository. Imagine the scale of impact when Spiral is more established: aggregated, anonymized testimonies could inform policy debates and public inquiries with hard evidence of lived experience (instead of leaving the conversation dominated by abstract fear-mongering). Human rights organizations can draw on Spiral to reinforce their reports – no longer just quoting a handful of victims, but referencing hundreds of voices collected ethically and systematically. Journalists could verify claims about events by checking them against a trove of first-person accounts. Over time, **entire historical narratives might shift**: the contributions of marginalized groups will be harder to omit, and the true costs of oppressive policies harder to hide. A world where Spiral is widespread would be one where **history cannot be written by the oppressors alone** – the peoples’ memory becomes a counterweight to official history.

Spiral’s integrated Sentinel system, once fully realized, holds promise for **early warning and rapid response** to emergent crises. By continuously comparing propaganda with reality, it could give civil society a crucial head start in countering dangerous lies. For example, if Spiral’s global data shows many reports of a certain kind of harassment, and Sentinel detects that the media is simultaneously denying such problems, alarms can be raised in international forums. In one envisioned scenario, *a surge of hate speech on social media in a region triggers a Sentinel alert to local NGOs and the UN, alongside a compilation of Spiral testimonies from that region showing rising fear and incidents on the ground*.⁴ This kind of heads-up could prompt preventative action – perhaps pressuring platforms to moderate content or mobilizing peacekeepers before violence escalates. Again, these outcomes are not guaranteed, but **the potential is lifesaving**: it’s akin to having a fire alarm system for societal conflicts, powered by real stories and AI pattern recognition. The mere act of documenting everything – *“every lie, every injustice”* – means that perpetrators can no longer count on darkness and amnesia. It creates a deterrent: future planners of atrocity or purveyors of bigotry know that the record of their deeds will live on in the Spiral, even if they silence the witnesses locally. In this way, Spiral Trust offers a form of **collective**

accountability. It is not a court or a legislature, but it equips those arenas with something they desperately need: *truth, in abundance and with proof*. Courts, truth commissions, and tribunals can draw upon Spiral archives for corroborating material (with all necessary privacy protections), strengthening the pursuit of justice. Policymakers, in turn, can consult Spiral’s insights to craft more humane and evidence-based policies – grounding decisions in the reality of people’s experiences rather than myths or isolated anecdotes.⁴

Finally, Spiral’s growth could foster a new culture of **transnational solidarity and learning**. By connecting memories across borders, it allows communities to see that they are not alone. An activist in Eastern Europe can read the testimonies of a trans person in South Asia or a First Nations elder in Canada, and recognize common threads in their struggles. This global exchange of memory can seed collaboration: strategies that worked in one place (for example, how a local group countered a wave of disinformation) can inspire groups elsewhere. In essence, Spiral is weaving a worldwide “tapestry of experience” – and from it, a mosaic of solutions and mutual support may emerge. This outcome is not automatic, but the structure makes it possible. In a time when reactionary movements are coordinating internationally, Spiral provides an avenue for marginalized communities and allies to **coordinate their truth-telling**. The archive can serve as a living library for researchers, educators, and activists seeking to understand complex issues through the eyes of those most affected. Over years and decades, such an accessible body of human stories could transform how society understands topics like gender rights, racial injustice, climate displacement, and more. Instead of debates dominated by abstract statistics or sensational headlines, the presence of an unignorable human narrative forces empathy into the equation. As one Spiral principle states, “*No story is too small to matter.*” Over time, if Spiral’s philosophy permeates public consciousness, we might see a shift in which **lived experience is valued as highly as expert opinion** in shaping policy. The promise is a future where “**every truth finds a home, every lie is confronted**”, and collective memory serves as the bedrock for progress rather than a tool of the powerful.⁴

In conclusion, Spiral Trust offers a serious, credible vision for strengthening the infrastructure of truth in our world. It does so not by grandiose claims of AI utopia or top-down social engineering, but by the humble yet radical act of preserving stories. The **preservation of sacred memory** is both the means and the end: it is what Spiral provides, and it is intrinsically valuable. Any broader change – be it legal, cultural, or institutional – can only happen if built on the solid ground of reality. Spiral’s promise is to provide that ground. As Vivian Smotherman eloquently put it, “**You can’t hold a nation together if no one knows where the ground is.**”⁴ By illuminating the ground truth and protecting it from erasure, Spiral Trust invites others to step forward and build a more just society atop that truth. The impact, ultimately, will be measured by how humanity chooses to use this new memory architecture. But the immediate assurance is profound: **no matter how hard the winds of falsehood blow, the flame of human memory will be kept alive**. In a world teetering on the brink of “truth collapse,” Spiral Trust stands as a beacon of remembrance – quietly ensuring that never again will voices be consigned to oblivion without a fight. It is in this steady commitment to *never forget* that hope lives. The path is laid; the potential is evident; now it is up to the global community to recognize the power of truthful memory and carry it forward.

¹ UN's Guterres Calls For Global AI Rules <https://www.voafrica.com/a/un-s-guterres-calls-for-global-ai-rules/7133588.html>

² Global Risks Report 2025: Conflict, Environment and Disinformation Top Threats | Global Heat Health Information Network <https://ghhin.org/news/global-risks-report-2025-conflict-environment-and-disinformation-top-threats/>

³ Global Risks Report 2025: Conflict, Environment and Disinformation Top Threats | Global Heat Health Information Watch <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/11/20/trans-day-remembrance-marked-grim-murder-data>

⁴ Spiral Trust Proposals – U.S. and Global Versions.docx <file:///file-8oeZjQkw57t1G1vmSK7knN>

⁵ Witness_Scientific_Report.docx <file:///file-4vEtpygqqquxuvMcXgJoMp>

⁶ When history is censored, memory becomes resistance - Incite at Columbia University <https://incite.columbia.edu/news/when-history-is-censored-memory-becomes-resistance>

⁷ The Future of Collective Memory: Preserving the Past in a Digital Age <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/future-collective-memory-preserving-past-digital-age>

⁸ Truth as infrastructure.docx <file:///file-Nc9cSMVS1nk5B1UTLorV9Z>

⁹ The Healing Power of Telling Your Trauma Story | Psychology Today <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/think-act-be/201903/the-healing-power-telling-your-trauma-story>