

International Training Programme Conference support grant 2024 Final Report

ICMEMOHRI CONFERENCE 2024

African Memorial and Human Rights Museums building A More Sustainable Future For Peace, ICOM, Kigali, Rwanda.

Organized in collaboration with ICOM Africa, ICOM Nigeria, AEGIS Trust, Goethe institute and IRIBA centre.
At the Kigali Genocide Memorial, Rwanda.



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Introduction

B.Tech Microbiology, M.Tech Environmental Microbiology.

Beatrice Adeola Bamigbade, A Conservator at the (National Commission for Museum and Monuments) National Museum of Unity, Ibadan, Nigeria.

The purpose of this conference was to acknowledge colonization, to explore decolonization and see where it would lead in the future. Furthermore, the use of graphic novels, literature and performing arts in addressing dissonant histories and events in memorial museums were discussed extensively. It was necessary attending this conference because it helped me acquire new skills, share knowledge, and network with other museum professionals at the conference.

I decided to attend this conference because it is addressing more sustainable approach for peace in Africa, a new trend in African Museums. The use of literature, graphic novels and performing arts will promote more inclusive museums that will encourage younger generations to visit the museum regularly. Knowledge acquired at this conference will be shared with the ITP global network and colleagues in my museum.

I applied for funding from the ITP because I didn't have the financial backing to fund my trip. My institution is a not-for-profit institution, hence it was pretty difficult to access funds from my institution.

ICOM sponsored my food and transportation in Rwanda.



Beatrice at the Unity Museum, Ibadan, Nigeria



<https://museum.ng/>

<https://icmemohri.mini.icom.museum/icmemohri-2024-conference/>

Conference experience

- Before participants arrived in Rwanda, the Aegis Trust had started an International Conference in Rwanda (26-28 July) at the Merriot Hotel, in Rwanda. The theme was *Listening and Leading: The Art and Science of Peace, Resilience and Transformational Justice*. On the last day of the *Listening and Leading* conference, the ICMEMOHRI started its conference (on 28th July) by anchoring the last session at the Aegis Trust conference. The roles of *Memorial and Human Right Museums* was discussed.
- The second day (29 July), the conference started with a tour at the Kigali Genocide Memorial Museum. The tour gave details of why the genocide happened, the people that instigated the genocide, the group of people killed, and the recovery after the genocide. These exhibits also curated the roles played by religious and political leaders toward the peace Rwandans are experiencing after the genocide. Dr. Kiprop Lagat, A director of Culture in the Ministry of Culture and Heritage, Kenya, gave a keynote speech on Memorial and Human Right Museums in Africa, after the tour. The second session of the day had three discussants talk about *Views on Decolonization*. The first, was Nath Mayo Adediran, a retired Director of Museums at the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria. Mayo's topic was *Views on Decolonization: The Identity Question*, the second discussant was Catherine Cole, a former Director of Planning for the Nunavut Inuit Heritage Centre, Canada, her topic was *Decolonizing Museums, Reconciling Relationships*. While the third was Hanna Pennock, her topic was *Decolonization of Museums in different parts of the World*. The third session was a talk anchored by Assumpta Mugiraneza, co-founder and Director of the IRIBA centre for Multimedia Heritage in Rwanda, with two panellists, the topic was; *Colonial History and Education in Museums in Rwanda*. The last session for the day was *Member's Views about Decolonization* and the three members were; Gege Joseph, Muthoni Thang'wa, ICOM, Kenya, and Helen Jarvis, moderated by Ophelia Leon. I love Gege's views about decolonization. She said there is no hard and fast rules about decolonization. Gege believes the solution to decolonization lies in inclusive process in central African communities. She believes Africa is the solution to African's problems, therefore, we need global African solution to decolonization.
- The sessions we had for the 30 of July were discussions that I had longed for. The first session focussed on the use of literature, performing and narrative art forms to shape content, presentations and storytelling in African Museums. This session was followed by a workshop with Raul F. San Miguel. The workshop enlightened participants on the use of autobiographical comics and new media to relate the personal experiences of victims in memorial and human right museums. This workshop was the best session I had because Raul took us through a work he curated. He used synopsis from a book *The child is me* by Claver Irakoze to curate his work. The exhibition used comics and literatures to pass across information about the genocide. Raul used comics and new media to relate the

personal experiences of victims that witnessed and survived the genocide. I consider it to be the best because the exhibition was explicit and gives closure to young people whose parents aren't bold enough to relate what happened during the genocide. It gives room for reflections and debates in the museum space, enhancing a commemorative objectives and the aim of reconciliation. The second session after the workshop was titled, *Performances in Museums: enlivening space with Movement and Sound*. The topic discussed how spoken words, drama, music, and dance can communicate difficult histories and traumatic experiences. This session had a talk from Prof. Dele Layiwola from Nigeria. He gave an overview of performance, meaning and its impacts. A performance by Aubaine Hirwa, an artist; a second performance by Carole Karemera; the third performance by Cecile Umutoni; the fourth and fifth performances were videos by Maryam Alhanislam and Amarachi, (both Nigerian) with the use of spoken words. *A minute of silence* performance by Aubaine emphasized the importance of performance; it was an enjoyable play that related how the genocide started, its consequences and how Rwandans were able to achieve healing. The use of performances to relate intangible heritage is captivating. Museums can use this to attract the younger generations, who seem to be bored in exhibition spaces in the museum.

- On the 31 July, we had a day tour to Nyamata Genocide Memorial and the Ntarama Genocide Memorial. Our first stop was at the Nyamata Genocide Memorial, it was about two hours from Kigali. Our tour guide was Eric, the memorial was a church and a crime site where over ten thousands Tutsi thought they could find protection on the 7 April 1994. But that was wrong, the Hutus bought down the locked gates with grenades, invaded the church, used their guns, clubs and cutlasses to kill the rest of their victims that the grenade couldn't kill. The Nyamata is a burial site of Tutsi's killed in the church and Nyamata community. This site features the bones, skulls, cloths and personal belongings of all those killed in the church. It was an emotional moment beholding those skulls and bones in their thousands, I had to fight my tears. My friend, Blessing, from the Central Bank of Nigeria Currency Museum, broke down in uncontrollable tears. She didn't have the courage to behold the open burial of the victims. Eric, (our tour guide) confirmed that up until today dead remains are being discovered in surrounding towns and the remains are brought to Nyamata Memorial site for proper burial.
- A trip to the second memorial site, Ntarama Genocide Memorial lasted about 45 minutes. It is a crime site too. It was a church where victims ran to for safety with their belonging during the genocide attacks. Alas!!! They were killed with grenades, clubs, and machetes without remorse. Ntarama has open burial sites too, featuring the skulls, bones, cloths and personal belongings of the victims. Being torn apart emotionally, I didn't fail to observe that the two memorial sites visited were inclusive museums. Ramps were available at the burial sites for those incapacitated, who couldn't use the stair cases, and also the toilets had facilities for people in wheel chairs.

The British Museum



Victims' names on the wall



Wall destroyed by grenade



Mass burial grave at Ntarama

- My experience in Rwanda would be incomplete without talking about the Pentathlon art performance titled *Inherited memory and sorrow* at the Goethe Institute in Kigali. It was a night performance after our day trip. The performance relayed the story of the 1993 Arusha Peace Accord Agreement before the genocide and the genocide incidents. How perpetrators of the genocide killed their neighbours, colleagues and children because of facial discriminations. As I watched, my emotions took a better part of me, I felt those pains and horror. The performers are young people, comprising of a visual artist, violinist and singer. They all have taken the responsibility to share post memories of the genocide since the older generations who witnessed the genocide are too traumatized to tell the story.

I learnt peace has a price. For Rwanda to achieve the peace it has today religious leaders and political leaders accepted they had failed the people, sought for forgiveness, some of the perpetrators came out to confess, sought forgiveness, served their jail terms and were re-integrated back into the communities. Like the Holocaust, Rwandan didn't just say "Never Again" they worked at achieving it, through the "Gacaca" (grass root court) and exhibiting dead remains of the victims at the Memorial Museums.

The conference enlightened us on other means of reaching young people other than the use of collections alone. The use of graphics, literature, comics, poems and pentathlon art performances resonate more with them and they wouldn't find the museum boring. It is time museums around the globe begin to exhibit its intangible collections in collaboration with its various audiences.

The British Museum



Networking

I met and chatted with a lot of people. I have to pen down the best of discussions. The first chat I had was with Dr. Lagat about the decolonization of collections. He is an anthropologist, he works with the State Department for Culture Arts and Heritage, Kenya. Lagat believes, decolonization means different things to different countries. He is of the opinion that mundane and everyday objects should not be repatriated while cultural and religious objects which the people hold in high esteem should be repatriated to country of its origin.

I wouldn't forget in a hurry my discussion with Muthoni Thang'wa (ICOM, Kenya) the spokesperson of ICOM National Committees. Her talk about colonialism and giving power of heritage management back to the people, is a wake-up call for African Museums that should be taken seriously. After her session, we had a long chat about how African professionals manage collections and tend to shield it from communities (host). That in itself, is colonialism. She said "African Museum professionals must decolonize their thought process with regards to collection management" and give the communities a voice. She spoke about the Ileret Footprint project, in Kenya. A project she hopes will shift the power of heritage monument management to the communities, especially young people and women. I was excited when I heard about the footprint project in Kenya, hence I had to share the story of the ancestral footprints at the hanging lake in Ado-Awaye, Nigeria, a site my museum visited last year. This calls for future collaboration with Muthoni.

I couldn't help but give Assumpta (co-founder and Director of the IRIBA centre for Multimedia Heritage in Rwanda) a tight hug for the impact she had made with the young people in Rwanda. We had a chat after her first session, she told me how the IRIBA Centre bridges the gaps between the older generations that witnessed the genocide and

The British Museum

the post genocide generation. The post genocide generation desire answers, but the generation that witnessed the incidents are too traumatized to tell the story. Hence, Assumpta has resulted to making newspapers, books and other materials that talk about the genocide available at the centre. Also she relies on the oral testaments of people that are bold enough to relate their stories. She believes those stories need to be told for the slogan 'NEVER AGAIN' to become reality. She took up the responsibility of giving closure to the youths.

I also had a chat with Cecile, a young Rwandan cultural consultant, she uses dances and poems to teach children about their heritage. Cecile believes cultural policies and cultural statistics will help to preserve the heritage in Africa. She said through oral traditions; dances and poems, songs and enigma, children will easily be taught past histories.

ITP reunions?

I met an ITP fellow, Chantal Umuhoza, at the ICEMOHRI 2024 Conference in Kigali, Rwanda. She is such a sweet soul. Meeting Chantal felt like hooking up with an old friend whom I haven't seen for decades. The excitement with which we chatted was mind blowing. We bonded so fast. She attended the conference too and we looked out for each other at each session. Hope to see more of you in the future, Chantal!



ITP reunion



Raul's comic/graphic exhibition



Participants at Nyamata memorial

The future

At a time when there seems to be unrest in most parts of the world, my attendance at the ICMEMOHRI taught me that peace is achievable anywhere if Rwanda can achieve peace after the genocide. Through deliberate steps by religious leaders, political leaders and perpetrators accepting they were wrong, seeking forgiveness and charting a new course.

Professionally, I saw how Memorial Museums in Rwanda were able to use (intangible heritage) comics, poems, literatures, pentathlon art performance to reach out to the younger generation born after the genocide. Their parents are traumatised and can't tell this story to the younger ones. Those children need closure, the museums and some NGO's took this up bridging these gaps. These tools can be adapted in museums to attract younger generations who feel they have no place in the museum. It is more engaging and enhances an inclusive museum.

I am glad my museum recently started the use of stage performances to relate ancient history of Ibadan city (where it is situated) to its audience. I will be having a train the trainer session to introduce the use of comics, literature and art performance in the museum. This is achievable by creating inclusive platforms for young people such as visual artists to thrive while the museum staff coordinate this activity.

I exchanged contacts with my new friends. I and Muthoni, a museum consultant from Kenya have started exchanging mails. We have a lot of professional collaboration for the future.

I will be writing more stories on Rwanda and the role the Museums played in ITP's upcoming newsletter publication.

Acknowledgements

My travel to Rwanda, the networking and the new knowledge acquired couldn't have been possible without the support of the Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust, thank you for your generous support.

ICOM Africa supported my food and transportation in Rwanda, I can't take this for granted, thank you.

To the facilitators of the concluded 2024 ICMEMOHRI Conference; IRIBA Cultural centre, GOETHE Institute, Aegis Trust, ICOM, ICOM Africa and ICOM Nigeria, thank you, you all made the conference memorable.