

ICOA1198: THE MUSEUM OF WAR: ACCELERATING SOCIAL RECONCILIATION IN POST-CONFLICT STATES

Subtheme 02: The Role of Cultural Heritage in Building Peace and Reconciliation

Session 3: Recreating Ideas of Memory

Location: Silver Oak Hall 1, India Habitat Centre

Time: December 14, 2017, 10:10 - 10:25

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Abstract: When a State emerges from a political, social or armed conflict, the process of re-establishing confidence between two parties can become long and arduous. Different versions of the same conflict may be taught, according to the group of individuals, ethnicity, membership of the establishment or indeed the government's agenda. The priorities of a museum institution are study, transmission of heritage and education. They are generally intended to proceed via selection and presentation of tangible and intangible evidence of humans and their environment. In the case of nations in post-conflict situations, to these roles may be added that of agent of reconciliation. This symposium provides the opportunity to reflect how a heritage site can be used as a tool for reconstruction of a country and what it might bring to a state emerging from a conflict situation. In the context of this reflection, we propose to analyse two institutions – the War Museum of Canada in Ottawa and the Genocide Memorial Centre at Kigali in Ruanda. The principal mandate of the Canadian War Museums is to address armed confrontations from a pedagogic and constructive perspective. This establishment is distinguished by the quality of its exhibitions, which emphasise human experience in conflict situations. The mandate of the Ruanda Genocide Memorial, by their own account, is to welcome students and those wishing to understand the events of 1994 through presenting witness statements and offering services for conflict victims. These two very different institutions nonetheless set out lessons worth remembering by any nation seeking to reinforce peace via its cultural heritage. Our presentation will therefore deal with two aspects. Firstly we will see how mankind is best at doing everything to protect sites, whilst at the same time, paradoxically, being the greatest threat. We will explore with the tools developed by these two institutions how to become agents of reconciliation between different groups and opinions. We shall see how to avoid the traps of assimilation and the perpetuation of those stereotypes which reinforce hate directed at a particular group.

Key words: *peace, agent of reconciliation, museum, conflict*

The priorities of a museum institution are study, the transmission of heritage, education. They are generally designed to select witness objects of the history of man and his environment. We also know that when a state comes back from a political, social or armed conflict, restoring trust between two parties can be slow and arduous.

When it comes to conflicts of this magnitude, museum professionals may be faced with thorny questions: What to show and how to tell the story of the conflict (Wahnich 2010)? What methods should be adopted to arouse the desire to learn and understand in the visitor and ultimately to encourage him to continue the dialogue with the past (Fleury 2011)?

These questions led us the following hypothesis: how can institutions such as war museums be tools for social reconciliation? To support this hypothesis, I present two very different organizations: the Canadian War Museum and the Kigali Memorial Centre, in Rwanda.

A common goal: remembrance

The preservation of memory is the predominant objective in both case studies. It is an objective to be attained, primordial, and essential. Indeed, everything is connected with remembrance. To avoid a collective forgetfulness of a serious event in the past, all efforts are concentrated in two simple but priority actions:

1. To raise awareness, to make the visitor think and understand.
2. To take measures to ensure that this never happens again.

It is important to discern the war museum from the memorial. Memorials are not primarily aimed at the direct acquisition of knowledge, but rather at empathy and emotion. They perpetuate the memory of something. Nevertheless, the mandates of museums and memorials can intertwine. On one hand, a museum can be memorial, and on the other hand, a memorial can develop its material heritage, ensuring its conservation and study.

Ottawa

Located in Canada's capital, the Canadian War Museum (CWM) in Ottawa traces the military history of the country and is dedicated to the study and understanding of armed conflict.

Unlike in many other military museums, their work is not subject to the direction of the Canadian Armed Forces, other military or government associations, allowing them to present a variety of views on a subject, in keeping with the Museum's mission.

The CWM presents a permanent exhibition of Canada's history through its conflicts, from the time of the First Nations to today with its participation in the United Nations. Visitors can admire the museum's collection of army vehicles, artillery pieces, uniforms, medals, as well as several works of art, archives, sound and visual recordings. Everything was done to avoid a passive visit for the viewer. In fact, the visitor has to participate in order to access the information. For example, he will have to press buttons, listen to conversations through a telephone, touch replicas of objects, try a costume, enter a period room reproducing a trench, and so on. I chose to talk about this museum because it was praised for the quality of its exhibition where the emphasis is on human experience.



Fig.1- Inside the Canadian War Museum (Ottawa, Canada)

It is important to note that this museum is aimed at Canadians who, for the most part, never experienced armed conflict during their lifetime. It may even seem contradictory to hold a war museum in a nation that has never recently lived through war on its own territory. It is true that it is somewhat paradoxical that a war museum should use stories and objects from wartimes to build a vision of peace.

But, as I mentioned earlier, preserving the memory, remains the most important mandate of this institution. People should be encouraged to ask questions to maintain the collective memory. The museum tells the story to prevent history from repeating itself.

Kigali

The Kigali Memorial Centre was built in 2004 on Gisozi Hill, located in the capital of Rwanda. It is one of the many memorials erected in memory of the massacre between Tutsis and Hutu moderates in 1994. Our attention will be given only to the Kigali Memorial, although there are a large number of memorials across the country. The reason I chose to speak specifically about this one is because it remains one of the country's greatest memorials and is the most visited by tourists and foreign dignitaries.

The mandate of the Rwanda Genocide Memorial is to welcome students and those who wish to understand the events of 1994. They also gather testimonies and offer services for the victims of the conflict. This institution permanently presents an exhibition that addresses the causes of the genocide, and its victims. Space is also given to recollection. The building is divided into two floors: the ground level provides visitors with information about the genocide and illustrates the conflict, without blaming any ethnic group, but rather political leaders of the time. Upstairs, the visitor can learn more about the victims of the conflict. Lists of names, accompanied by photos, clothes and bones, punctuate the journey. A room devoted to child victims follow the same type of presentation.



Fig.2- Inside the Kigali Memorial Centre (Kigali, Rwanda)

Unlike the Ottawa Museum, the memorial mainly addresses an audience that directly experienced the genocide, just over twenty years ago. In addition, the main topic concerns a specific ethnic conflict, within its borders, in its territory. This is not about the military history of the country./”

Constructed and managed by the government, its official message states that we are all Rwandans, without reinforcing the membership of a particular ethnic group. According to Celestin Kinamba Misago, former director of the National Museum of Rwanda and professor at the National University of Rwanda:

«Are the instruments of memory put in place by the Rwandan government aimed at bringing the population not only to fight against the ideology of genocide, but also to discover the need to reconcile and to build a united society (...).» (Kanimba Misago 2007).

While the memorial serves the need for reconciliation, to strengthen national unity and to combat the ideology of genocide, the fact remains that reconciling the memory of genocide with the policies of unity and reconciliation was not done smoothly. The actions taken in this direction have evolved considerably over the last twenty three years (Korman 2014).

The Kigali Genocide Memorial fulfils all the basic qualifications of a museum: it serves the society by studying and conserving the tangible and intangible heritage of its environment. Nonetheless, it is called a memorial, because it uses emotion to achieve its purpose of remembrance, while the Canadian War Museum uses education. However, both reach our goal of remembrance. Moreover, they share the same methodological approach which can be summarized in three points:

1. Exposure of the conflict (s)
2. Present of the outcomes
3. Impact analysis.

By following this progression, they pedagogically transmit notions as complete and comprehensive as possible about a nation and its socio-political context. When analyzing the consequences of historical events, it is necessary to try to measure their effects on the participants, in order to allow them to establish links with contemporary issues.

Historical content must be moving and inspiring, clear and comprehensive, important at personal, national and international levels. It focuses on the consequences so that visitors can make connections and grasp the emotion and importance of the stories presented in these establishments.

In short, a clear and educational approach allows the visitor to fully understand why he should remember.

Architecture

Even the architecture of our two case studies were designed to support the memory goal. The layout affects a site dedicated to reflection.

Incorporated inside the museum in Ottawa, the Memory Hall offers a place of silence and rest to the visitors. The walls of the room are covered with white slabs recalling the funerary steles that can be seen in the allied cemeteries in Europe.



Fig.3- Memory Hall, inside the Canadian War Museum (Ottawa, Canada)

In Kigali, it is the Gardens of Reflection which offer the visitor one of the spaces allocated to meditation. A walk amongst vines ensures a place of tranquillity. A torch burns there permanently, a symbol of memory, hope and reconciliation.



Fig.4- Gardens of Reflection, Kigali Memorial Centre (Kigali, Rwanda)



Fig.5- Eternal Torch, Kigali Memorial Centre (Kigali, Rwanda)

These two places allow visitors to reflect on how we all have the personal responsibility to prevent discrimination and mass atrocities.

Visitors

Our two organizations host different types of audiences, such as families, school groups, local visitors and foreign tourists. They also have to deal with a public specific to war-related institutions: veterans, survivors and individuals directly involved in conflicts. They are not the usual visitors to museums.

Indeed, they do not visit these places for the same reasons, hence the importance of clarifying the role of the institution. Their motivations can range from commemoration to prayer, or to understanding the origins of a conflict. «These instruments (for social reconstruction) may contain dividing seeds, cause ambivalent feelings, provoke reactions (...)»¹ (Kanimba Misago, 2007). Indeed, in the early years, in Rwanda, for some groups the memorial was synonymous with maintaining a past that should be forgotten, or it was to maintain a collective trauma or to try to cultivate a spirit of revenge (Kanimba Misago, 2007). The presentation of an object may therefore be perceived differently from one individual to another because they do not share the same culture or vision of the conflict.

Conclusion

To conclude, when we compare these two organizations, what does it mean in terms of reconciliation? While the Canadian War Museum sensitizes the visitor with educational content, a visit to the Kigali Memorial Centre arouses emotion. Both these institutions offer a space dedicated to reflection in order to allow the visitor to ask himself why he must remember, in connection with their permanent exhibitions.

One thing can be said with certainty, and that is that these two places expose and preserve objects that are witnesses of events of the past, and as such must be considered as proofs of conflict. These places serve to present the truth, or at least to answer questions. Having access to the truth allows us to begin the healing process that leads to peace and reconciliation.

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