

The Challenges of Social, Political, and Economic Change: Multiple Portraits of the Uganda Museum

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Abstract (Summary)

This research study examines how museums are facing social, political, and economic challenges through the use of a case study focusing on the Uganda Museum in East Africa.

The Uganda Museum is undergoing an institutional transformation from a colonial and post independence national museum into a contemporary institution of the cultural heritage of Uganda. Like many of the museums in Africa, it has suffered through decades of neglect because of military despotism, pandemic disease (HIV/AIDS), Diaspora, and economic and political instability. The museum is now seeking independence from government administration and former colonial influences in order to become a semi-autonomous institution better prepared to protect, preserve, exhibit, and conserve the cultural patrimony of the Ugandan people.

The scope of this study includes an examination of the historical development of the museum, as well as its current status as the premier site for Ugandan cultural heritage. Socioeconomic, political, and cultural factors are investigated through a series of narrative portraits, personal interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires that illuminate the complex problems experienced by a post-colonial society as it struggles to redefine itself in today's global culture. The cultural critique of Edward Said's Orientalism and African postcolonial scholar Achille Mbembe provide the Museum is a necessary institution for the inheritance and preservation of the diverse cultures of Uganda.

Aspects of the transmission of culture through oral and performance traditions, sacred and secular rites of passage, and cultural patrimony are studied, focusing particular attention on the impact of loss of the life to generations of Ugandans through the devastation of civil war and disease. The social, political, and economic consequences affecting the lives and culture of Ugandans are also studied as they have impacted the survival of the museum.

The final chapter of the study returns to the basic research question of whether the Uganda Museum is a necessary institution for the cultural inheritance and preservation of Uganda's diverse peoples. The study concludes that the museum is indeed, a necessary and important keeper of the culture. But it is not the exclusive trustee. Culture, defined as a dynamic phenomenon includes myth, song, religion, traditions, and rites of passage. In order for the Ugandan Museum to represent the culture in flux it must undergo a transformation that necessitates meeting myriad

social, political, and economic changes that also challenge the culture in general. The museum will need to consider issues of re-negotiated cultural identity and consider how best to represent the multiple cultures of Uganda. Changes that are currently occurring at the museum that will facilitate this transformation include plans for the development of regional museum sites and cultural villages. Also under consideration is the return of some of the cultural patrimony belonging to the four historic kingdoms of Uganda. (Abstract shortened by UMI.)

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