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Archeology Collections of the Uganda National Museum: Preservation and Commemoration of Our Cultural Heritage

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Introduction

In the basement of the Uganda National Museum are the archaeology collections which contain historical and archeological materials. These include human remains which can provide evidence of the past populations that lived in Uganda and how those people subsisted and interacted with their environment. These collections also contain animal remains and scientific materials which have also helped researchers in their study of the past and their construction of evidence of modern Ugandan society's cultural heritage. The collections contain both cultural and scientific materials that were first collected during colonial rule and in archaeological work in 1914 by surveyors and geologists. This essay will provide an inventory of the archaeological and historical artifacts in these collections, and evaluate the challenges and political issues entailed in the curation of human remains as part of the cultural heritage in the Uganda National Museum.

For the purpose of this essay, I consider "heritage" as something that is created and influenced by the specific needs and desires of the social groups who will utilize and embrace that sense of heritage.¹ Turnbridge and Ashworth contend that "heritage is a created phenomenon continuously recreated as new according to changing attitudes and demands. Authenticity in the heritage model derives from the experience of the consumer and specifically

¹ J. E. Turnbridge and Ashworth. *Dissonant Heritage*. John Wiley and Sons, Chichester, 1996, p.8.

from the extent that the product satisfies whatever expectations the consumer has of the past.”² This essay will explore this perspective in different periods within Uganda, as concepts of heritage have been changing with the fluctuations in governing structures in power at varying times over the past decades. In particular, I will examine the period after 1986 as a turning-point in heritage development within Uganda, and will analyze the ways in which archeological remains – specifically human remains – have been utilized within the cultural politics of heritage construction. In the course of this discussion, I will provide an inventory description of the human remains that are maintained in the collections of the Uganda National Museum, and assess current politics on human remains in other African countries, such as the neighboring countries of Rwanda and South Africa. I will conclude with recommendations that emphasize the great importance of ethical considerations which archeological researchers should follow when exhuming human remains and undertaking their curation.

Researchers from different places of the world have been collecting cultural artifacts in many parts of Uganda. Among the cultural artifacts are human remains and places constructed as heritage sites because of the cultural significance associated with the collected materials. Many people during the colonial era (before independence) did not know the value of these sites and of the collected materials. Only in the period from the 1980s onward has a majority of Uganda’s citizenry focused upon the significance of the cultural and historical heritage of their ancestors and the importance of developing heritage sites within the country.

Archeological remains are regarded as sources of evidence. As objects of inquiry such artifacts constitute the record of past lifeways and events that are vitally important to the heritage of Ugandans. Yet, as Peers emphasizes, even as points of evidence such artifacts and human remains should be treated with respect and due reverence and not be mishandled in the manner of their storage in research and museum collections. Ideally, human remains should also be returned to communities for reburial and those communities should receive reports of what knowledge was obtained through the study of the remains.³ Maintaining human remains and

² Ibid. 10-11.

³ Laura Peers, “Repatriation -- Again for Science?” *Anthropology Today*, 2004, pp. 18-19.

related artifacts in museum collections for extended periods has at times resulted in protests and political debates concerning appropriate methods of curation and analysis.

Uganda's Heritage Development

The region of East Africa has experienced intensive efforts in the collection and analysis of fossils concerning the development of humankind. After 1980, much work has been carried out by paleontologists, archeologists, and physical anthropologists with a focus on analyzing the origin of the genus homo. In the period after 1986, related developments in national and cultural heritage management were influenced by the Uganda government's efforts to collect and repatriate the remains of persons killed in recent warfare. The Uganda Museum also created an exhibition on "Great Apes" and the prehistoric development of humankind. Such exhibitions raised questions and protests that they appeared to imply that only peoples within Africa developed from primates, and that such biological evolution theories were not equally applied to the peoples of Europe and the Americas. These concerns and protests occurred because the Museum exhibition images and texts only depicted persons of African heritage as descended from "apes," with a resulting objection that the exhibit promoted deleterious stereotypes.⁴

Most of the collections in the Uganda National Museum were analyzed and dated in American and European laboratories. Development of concerns for cultural and historical heritage within Uganda was delayed because of decades of political instability within the country. For example, before 1980, the government under President Idi Amin Dada expelled all Asians from the country and prohibited other foreign citizens from conducting research within Uganda. It was not until after 1986 that Uganda began to concentrate on structural developments in which cultural and historical heritage became important concepts within Uganda's growing economy.⁵ The following discussion will sketch the history of Uganda's evolving concerns with cultural heritage.

⁴ The Great Apes Exhibition in Uganda National Museum (July-September, 2008).

⁵ Andrew Reid, *Recent Archeological Discoveries in Buganda and Their Implications for Heritage Management Policies*. Institute of Archaeology, University College of London, 2000, p. 1.

Uganda's Heritage Institutions before 1962

Uganda attained independence on October 9, 1962. The roots of the new nation's investment in its cultural heritage began before that time, however. For example, the results of early archaeological expeditions in Uganda in 1914 would later inspire Churchill to regard Uganda as a "pearl of Africa." In 1929, researchers uncovered the "Luzira head," which was taken to the British Museum together with the remains of Kibuuka. Although research and the development of heritage institutions within Uganda accelerated after the 1980s, we cannot ignore the potential contributions of archeological work conducted earlier in the country's history. A primary issue and point of later protest concerning those early archaeology projects was that the excavated human remains and artifacts were removed to the British Museum during a time when Uganda did not possess a museum where these artifacts could be safely preserved. Even though the Uganda National Museum was established in 1908 at Fort Lugard, the collections were mainly ethnographic with some historical photographs. This museum was later shifted to Makerere and transferred to the current Kitante Hill location in 1954. Only after the 1962 independence would Ugandans see a few researchers becoming interested in a new approach to heritage conservation within the country.

Heritage Management between 1962 and 1967

Exhumations of human remains started immediately after independence in 1962 and 1963. It is in this period that remains associated with the Stone and Iron Ages were exhumed in Kanstoyre Island. Secondly, in this period kingdoms were abolished within the nation and the system of heritage management changed with only a central government in charge. All the cultural artifacts were taken to the central government and governed by the Uganda National Museum. These changes in heritage management led to new legislation, called the 1967 Historical Monument Act. This legislation gave the National museums a mandate to look after rare objects that contributed to the national identity. At the same time, the abolition of kingdoms was a means of ending ethnic group rivalries and to attempt create a new, unified nation of brotherhood. Unfortunately, these new legislative and regulatory actions focused primarily on the former territories of the abolished kingdoms, and neglected archeological and paleontological sites like Bigo Byamugenyi, Ntuusi Mubende hill (witch tree) and Napark fossils. This limited

focus on the cultural heritage remains within the territories of the former kingdoms contributed to the delays cultural heritage development efforts within the country during this period.⁶ The pace of the development of new approaches to cultural heritage management depended upon such vagaries in governmental structures, political initiatives, and cultural preferences.⁷

Heritage Management between 1967 and 1986

In this period, Uganda was immersed in political turmoil, and little archeological research was conducted. According to the files I managed to identify and examine, some limited excavations were undertaken in 1968 and 1978. Political turmoil was fueled by an insurgence by Amin's regime in 1972, and a resulting departure of many intellectuals, businesspeople, and past investors from the country. This led to a "brain drain," as many experts and professionals went to exile. By 1977, as Kamuhangire laments, heritage institutions were in shambles as external funding evaporated and professionals were in exile.⁸ Once again, heritage management efforts were hobbled and remained underdeveloped until 1986. The period of 1980-86 under Obote II only left the bones of human victims. This was a period when guerilla warfare occurred in the country and thousands of people died in the bloodshed. Nothing on heritage development took place until 1986, when the National Resistance Army took power and promoted new structural developments that ushered in heritage development as a main source of tourism and economic stimulus.

Developments from 1986 to the Present

One of the strategies of the new government was the reburying of human remains and the restoration of traditional cultural assets that had been confiscated during Obote I's regime in 1967. These new efforts were advanced by a 1993 heritage statute that returned assets to the

⁶ Ephraim Kamuhangire, "The Transformation of the Ugandan Cultural Heritage Sector: Challenges and Achievements," *Uganda National Commission for UNESCO 2004*, pp. 61-63.

⁷ Op. cit., Turnbridge and Ashworth, p. 6.

⁸ Op. cit., Kamuhangire, p. 62.

kingdoms that had been abolished.⁹ The government also encouraged researchers to engage in new projects, which then led to tremendous heritage development in the country. Uganda is one of the East African countries with a rich fossil record concerning the early evolution of humankind, and this line of research has been conducted by a variety of scholars under the current régime. This diversity of prehistoric and historic cultural resources finally inspired an intensifying focus on the production of the nation's heritage as these resources were now viewed as symbolically significant to people of Uganda.¹⁰

While the government has struggled to develop heritage resources, new laws and regulations have focused on preventing people from destroying these important sites and collections. For example, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Development enforces laws safeguarding intangible heritage of the country. The Ministry of Tourism, Trade, and Industry, which includes the Department of Museums and Monuments, enforces other laws regulating the protection of heritage institutions and sites. All these efforts have been undertaken because of the dangers that were forecast that some community members would engage in conduct harmful to this heritage of the nation. This situation intensifies the interactions of the heads of heritage institutions with the communities that surround significant sites. In this setting, no contemporary community-specified interests have been privileged to trump the interests of the government and society as a whole.¹¹ Cultural politics continue to develop and play out in this circumstance of the interaction between communities and heritage institutions (as agencies of the government) on issues such as ownership and access to sites, uses for heritage resources, and mediating whom should most benefit from those resources. Thus far, the institutionalization of these heritage sites and resources has removed the confusion of ownership and negated claims of communal

⁹ Ephraim Kamuhangire, *A Precolonial History of South Interoceanic Uganda Salt Lakes Region*, Unpublished PhD. Thesis, Makerere University, 1993, p.332.

¹⁰ Op. cit., Turnbridge and Ashworth, p. 8.

¹¹ Alison Wylie, "The Promise and Perils of an Ethic of Stewardship," in Lynn Meskell and Peter Pels (eds.), *Embedding Ethics*. Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005, p.48.

ownership. What remains is an enduring conceptual challenge – to whom does the nation’s cultural heritage belong?¹²

Human Remains the Museum Collections

During colonial rule, human remains found their way into cupboards and storage containers in the many varied museums located within Africa. The collection of these remains was undertaken principally by scientists who wanted to analyze the origins of humankind and to determine the parameters of racial measurements and classifications.¹³ The exhibition of such human remains also focused on these of the interactions of humankind and natural environments.¹⁴ An exhibition on the “great Apes” that is currently displayed in the Uganda National Museum illustrates these trends, with displays of the different stages of human development and behaviour. In Uganda, human remains were exhumed and collected for a variety of reasons. Some were collected as a result of the Luwero guerrilla war that ended in 1986, while others were exhumed under archeological expeditions. One can therefore classify human remains in the Uganda National Museum within three categories. The “Kibuuka God of War” currently on display will form the first category, the old Stone and Iron Age human remains form the second, and the third category includes recent human remains excavated after 1990.

Kibuuka God of War

In the 18th century there were wars among the kingdoms fighting for expansion of their territories. By then, the greatest enemy of Buganda was Bunyoro. The Buganda chief requested Kibuuka to come and help in fighting the enemy. Narratives say in these wars, Kibuuka would

¹² Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “World Heritage and Cultural Economics,” in Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, et al. (eds.), *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/Global Transformation*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006, p. 161.

¹³ Ciraj Rassool, “Towards the Repatriation of Skeletons in South Africa’s Museums.” Paper presented at the South African Museums Association Conference, Port Elizabeth. 2001, pp. 6-12.

¹⁴ David van Duren, et al., *Physical Anthropology Reconsidered: Human Remains at the Tropenmuseum*. Amsterdam: KIT Tropenmuseum, 2007, p. 6.

kill the enemy from the clouds. However, Kibuuka had a weakness for women. It was after revealing this secret to a woman whom he had captured from the enemy's side that she went and told the other warriors of his weakness, eventually resulting in his demise. A legend developed that Kibuuka fell from the clouds to a muvule tree and that he was not buried until the colonial period, when his body was found in the tree and the remains were collected and taken to the British Museum for scientific study and dating.¹⁵

After independence was attained, the remains identified as Kibuuka were brought back to Uganda by one of the Ministers of Education in the Buganda government, who claimed the remains for future study. Later these remains were given to the central government of Uganda under the Historical Monument Act of 1967. These remains since then have been curated in the Uganda Museum's history and archeology gallery.¹⁶ The political claims currently surrounding these remains have been shaped by the demands of many of the Buganda, who want their ancestors to be reburied in a respectful manner. Buganda visitors have continually challenged why their ancestor's remains lies in the National Museum on display under glass. This led to the storming of the Museum, which occurred between November 17 and 20 in 2007. The Buganda claimed that they wanted their ancestors back, and the radio news media reported the incident extensively to broad audiences nationwide. The Buganda contended that their ancestor was not treated with due respect by being displayed as a collection. They also claimed that the proper burial place of such an ancestor would serve as the location for important ceremonies and rituals, but they are instead denied access to their ancestor as they cannot even get chance of visiting the Museum whenever they wish to convene such ceremonies and key rituals. However, according to the law regulating antiques in Uganda, once remains are collected and brought to the Museum and put on display, those remains are deemed to be owned by the Museum and can never be removed from the display. It should be noted that this law has not been enforced consistently. The reburial of the "Luwero triangle" victims that occurred in 1991 showed that this law has been set aside on occasion. Even though this law remains on the books, social views and

¹⁵ This account is provided in tour guide explanations to visitors about the death of Kibuuka and how he reached the museum.

¹⁶ Uganda Museum Archaeology/History Gallery.

opinions can change and make such a regulation out-dated. The Uganda National Museum should follow the South African Museum's strategy of listening to people's views as to the appropriate handling and management of such cultural heritage resources. For example, when protestors requested for the closure of a diorama display they found objectionable in the South African Museum, the administrators acceded to their demands and closed the exhibit.¹⁷ The static laws in Uganda have had the effect of disturbing individuals who visit the particular gallery for prayers. The Museum should note that not every individual can afford to pay entrance money to attain access to the Museum and its display of their ancestors' remains. Many people in Uganda believe that they can obtain blessings by praying to the remains of Kibuuka. The Museum staff has often found money on the gallery, placed there by different people who conducted prayers. One must again ask -- to whom do such cultural heritages resources rightfully belong? Is it an ethnic group, a descendant community, a national government, all citizens of the country, or even an international community?¹⁸

Stone Age and Iron Age Human Remains in the Museum Collections

Records say that a site like Kanstyore Island was excavated in 1961, 1962 and 1967. My interest here while retrieving recorded data of artifacts focused on the human remains that were excavated from the island. As a cultural site, the island holds significance for the history of the country as a source of early Stone Age artifacts. The sharp stones that were kept with these remains resemble ones on display within the Uganda National Museum. Some of the artifacts collected from the island were also used for carbon dating of the period. The collected materials provided evidence of the human creativity in prehistory and also represented cultural resources valued by current and future generations. Most of the human remains consist of crania, mandible, and leg bones. My concern with these remains, shared by many researchers in similar circumstances, is the very long time period these remains have been curated at the Museum without any review and analysis. There are no records of assessment, meaning that over this period these bones are just laying in Museum boxes for no particular research purpose. First of

¹⁷ Available at www.museums.org.za/sam/resource/arc/bushdebate.htm

¹⁸ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, p. 161.

all, the current condition of the artifacts is poor, as they have deteriorated and fragmented due to a lack of care. Due to the politics surrounding human remains in the world, one would think of taking them back to the community for reburial. However, some of the stakeholders, such as Dr. E. R. Kamunhagire, the former Commissioner of Museums and Monuments Department, have not agreed with the appropriateness of reburial in such cases. He states:

The island's heritage has lost value because the current community does not know its history. Even though these would be taken back to this particular community, it would carry no meaning. This is because by the time the excavations happened, the people living in this place are not the same today, it being part of the refugee camping area. The landscape of the place has also changed meaning that there are no relics of the excavations that can be found on the site. Therefore Kanstyore has no socio-economic value to the surrounding communities as they don't know the cultural significance of the site.

This assessment indicates that the history of the region is no longer meaningful to the local community and therefore the remains have no direct relevance to a sense of local heritage and returning them for burial would be pointless. David Van Duuren published an article in "Tropenmuseum" that contests such current politics on human remains and asks question of the significance of the collection of human remains for researchers and communities.¹⁹ Peers argue that the Museum should return these materials to the communities in the form of exhibitions so as to educate the communities on what results were found.²⁰ I am not persuaded by Kamuhangire's argument that "the significance of these remains do not lay in the hand of people" who live in the immediate vicinity. If the cultural heritage of the remains belongs to a broader collective interest of Ugandans generally, the local community is still a part of the collective group. The issue of the change of the landscape does not mean that these remains cannot be reburied. Most people follow the same tradition. No one has taken an initiative to find out whether the current inhabitants would wish to perform spiritual rituals on the excavated

¹⁹ David Van Duuren, et al., "Physical Anthropology Reconsidered: Human Remains at the Tropenmuseum," *Bulletin 375 Tropenmuseum*, pp. 42-44.

²⁰ Peers, pp. 18-19.

mounds and tombs. It remains the work of the Museum to disseminate this information to make their public constituents know about their heritage.



**Figure 1. Crania in temporary Museum containers.
Photograph by J. Nyiracyiza.**

These human remains carry great significance for the people of East African and other places, as they represent an early stage in the development of humankind and how people started interacting with their environment. Studies on these remains were completed a long time ago. Currently they seem to have no significance, as they are just lying in the Museum collections. It would be better for these remains to be reburied and possibly follow Peers' argument of exhibitions on the research results related to the remains.²¹ Archeological expeditions are not to be carried out to just exploit another people's heritage, and rather should promote education and the dissemination and commemoration of those legacies.

Similarly, the materials have a great significance on the archaeological and historical sites of Uganda which are now tourist attractions. These sites present visitors with evidence of the beginning and continuity of human generations, and the type of material culture and environment that existed in the Stone and Iron Ages. These histories have motivated me to

²¹ Peers, p.19.

reorganize the collections and in the future I will separate artifacts in these collections according to more specific criteria. By making the collections more presentable and organized, other non-archaeologists, such as visiting schoolchildren, will be able to access it and understand the nature of the histories represented in the galleries. It would be preferable to incorporate the stored collections into temporary exhibitions, but ethical issues need to be considered to ensure that there are no environmental control problems that can cause the remains to decay. The other alternative would be loaning them to schools and other interested institutions for study. For example, museums in London have designed compact, travelling exhibit boxes which have certain items of relevance to schools. We as museum staff in Uganda should start teaching our communities about the usefulness of such artifacts and check with the Ministry of Education to see if these archaeological artifacts would have meaning as teaching resources within the schools' curriculum. A first step would involve estimates of the funds needed to carry out a feasibility study to see if this would work out in the future. The artifacts and other remains can as well be preserved in school laboratories. We all know that a museum is a depository of materials, but it should not be taken for granted and made a dumping area of all artifacts from the field without any value to the community and nation as a whole.

New Remains Excavated between 1990 and 2006

The Uganda National Museum collections contain another set of human remains. These are skeletons of people that were exhumed under archeological expeditions between 1990 and 2006. These remains are from places like the Kibiro Salt processing village, Bweyorere, and the Kalangala district. Among the special finds in these collections are the remains of an infant, indicated by the size and thickness of the surviving cranium fragments (Figure 2). Conserved in plastic bags, these remains have yet to be analyzed and fully categorized as to specific provenience and time period. The infant remains are accompanied by other unidentified remains from excavations undertaken in 2006 (Figure 2).

Similarly, the collections include human remains from the Kibiro site that were excavated in 1990. These remains were scientifically dated and determined to represent the ancestors of individuals who work in that region as salt processors. These human remains can be separated into two sub-categories. One sub-group of remains have been dated to 900 years ago, and a time

period correlating with the beginning of the salt processing settlement that still exists today. These remains provide the current community and salt processing enterprise with a great sense of heritage, significance, and authenticity due to this long-term continuity of human activities at the site. In view of this context of available evidence, these remain present cultural, historical and archeological significance and should be catalogued, curated, and exhibited appropriately.²² The second sub-group of Kibiro remains includes more recent burials. Researchers determined that some burials dated to less than 100 years ago. This appears to indicate that some excavations inadvertently exhumed burials of the more recent community. This circumstance has led to additional questions concerning the politics of demands for reburial of these remains.



Figure 2. Skeletal remains of an infant (left) and unlabelled skeletal remains (right) from Bweyore site. (Photographs by J. Nyiracyiza).

Among the human remains of these more recent burials at Kibiro are skeletons that were exhumed between 1988 and 1990 that represent victims of the Luwero Triangle war between the government and the rebels who eventually took over power. Immediately after that war, the government with assistance of Uganda National Museum exhumed and collected the remains of thousands of bodies. Some of these remains were taken to the Museum and others were stored at a local headquarters of the relevant government districts in Nakaseke, Masulita and Kiboga.²³ Community consultations were carried out by the Museum as to the local community's desires

²² Op. cit., Duuren, p. 45.

²³ *A Report from the Briefs on the Matter Concerning the Final Disposal of Human Skeletal Remains in Luwero Triangle*. October 1987.

for the reburial of their deceased family members and ancestors. Consensus on such reburials was obtained and the remains were finally reburied in 1991.

The Challenges of Human Remains Repatriations

As discussed earlier, the refusal of the Uganda National Museum and the central government to honor peoples' requests for the repatriation and ceremonial reburial of the remains of Kibuuka illustrates the ways in which the Museum policies remain biased and in need of reform. The Museum arguments concerning the aesthetic and educational values of maintaining an exhibit display are outweighed by the importance and solemnity of burials and the ongoing commemoration of ancestor burials in Ugandan culture. Similar issues have arisen in the neighboring country Rwanda. Debates developed within Rwanda concerning the museum display of the grave and remains of one of the former kings, King Cyirima Ruzugira, since 1989 and the latter part of the colonial era. Many protested that such museum displays were highly disrespectful to the heritage of the people and that past ruler. In 2002, this debate intensified and protestors articulated the same reasoning as those who challenged the museum display of an ancestor of the Buganda in the Uganda National Museum. Community members emphasized how disrespectful it was to have skeletons of their ancestors displayed under glass in such a museum setting, since, as one of the museum guides observed, "Burial is very important in Rwanda",²⁴

This debate in Rwanda led to an agreement between the minister of culture and the museum director to remove the skeleton and left an empty grave on display. Currently the skeletons are maintained in storage and only the material culture of the grave is presented as in the exhibition to the museum visitors. Observing this resolution in Rwanda, I urge the directors of the Uganda National Museum, as the institutional protector of cultural heritage within the central government, to decide on a comparable solution to the challenges raised concerning the "Kibuuka God of War" display. The Museum can exhibit examples of the material culture history while removing the human remains so they can be treated with appropriate reverence.

²⁴ Pat Caplan, "Never Again: Genocide Memorials in Rwanda," *Anthropology Today*, vol. 23, 1 February 2007, p. 20.

Removal of the skeleton from the display will certainly have an impact on the meaning and significance communicated by that particular display. However, such compromises are a necessary part of a process in which Ugandans confront the specific questions of what parties are most invested in particular aspects of cultural and historical heritage. Another example of such a negotiated solution involved the South African Museum's closure of a diorama that was found objectionable by community members and the Museum's installation of a rock art exhibition to replace it.

In the period of 1988 to 1991, mass reburials of the victims of the Luwero Triangle war demonstrated that the Uganda National Museum can find such solutions and undertake management of cultural heritage remains with solemnity and respect for local communities. The Museum collected the remains and later held consultations with community members on how best to undertake reburials. Key events were convened on June 9, 1991 and a national monument was constructed at Kololo airfield to commemorate the dead and to celebrate their heroic sacrifices in a site referred to as a "hero's acre." A key issue emerged in the design of this commemoration because the design was dominated by inscriptions of the names of NRM soldiers rather than the names of the deceased citizens. This approach echoes the design of the "hero's acre" in Zimbabwe, where an "Unknown Soldier" is commemorated on behalf of the Zimbabwean deceased soldiers who died in the liberation war.²⁵ In Uganda, the hero's acre displays the names of "twenty seven freedom fighters." This emphasis fails to engage with the meaning and sense of heritage held by the communities for their deceased relatives who died as citizens in the war. Similarly a Luwero Triangle monument in Kololo places emphasis on a narrative of praising the combatant heroes, rather than on commemorating those who died in the war. Some people have wondered why a "hero's day" is celebrated with a focus on themes of victory, while solemn commemoration of the deceased is downplayed in such civic ceremonies. Such a focus on celebrating a "hero's acre" and designating civic celebrations of a "hero's day"

²⁵ Richard Webner, "Smoke from the Barrel of a Gun: Post Wars of the Dead, Memory and Reinscription in Zimbabwe," in Richard Webner (ed.), *Memory and the Post Colony: African Anthropology and the Critique of Power*. Zed Books, London and New York, 1998.

show the ways in which the government's perspectives on recent history strive to emphasize its successful role as a liberating force.

As one can see from these debates, Uganda's heritage legislation and regulations have become outdated. Even operating within these outdated laws, the Uganda National Museum has at times seen the value of negotiating proper resolutions of community concerns with particular aspects of cultural heritage remains. Still, much work and additional solutions remain to be undertaken. For example in Kibiro, community members would greatly appreciate the return of their ancestors' remains, because of the remarkable cultural heritage presented by the fact that residents are still carrying out the same productive enterprises at that site that were started during the time of those ancestors. As in other cultural examples within Uganda, these community members would also likely prefer to have those remains reburied in accessible, respectful locations so they are available for ongoing commemorative rituals and ceremonies.

The position of the National Museum as a presumed owner of materials in its collections is open to compromise, as reflected in the 1986 decision to repatriate remains from its holding. The Uganda heritage legislation on proper procedures is often unclear, as evident in sections 3(1) and 3(2) which state that "the minister may by statutory instrument, declare any object of archeological, paleontological, traditional or historical interest will be protected." In this case, one can not tell if the protection of objects means that they should remain in the Museum or be protected through other means such as through reburial and commemoration as an aspect of national heritage. Due to this, some commentators have concluded that the development of heritage laws has often led to a sense of discouragement within local communities.²⁶ The interests of economic and tourism development within places such as Uganda often takes precedence in shaping particular cultural remains into public and national heritage, rather than deferring to the desires of local communities.

²⁶ Swadhin Sen, et al., "We can Protect our Past? Rethinking the Dominating Paradigm of Preservation and Conservation with Reference to the World Heritage Site of Somapura Mahavihara, Bangladesh," *Journal of Social Archeology* 6(1), 2006, pp. 71-99.

An expanded focus on the interests of local communities in the results of archaeological studies and cultural heritage development will yield significant benefits for Ugandan society. Community members who become interested and engaged in such efforts can provide highly valuable information, such as their knowledge of the locations of endangered facets of cultural remains in their area. Regular consultations with community members will also enhance their interests and investment in the process of conducting historical and archaeological research into their heritage.²⁷ If archeological work is incorporated into aspects of public education, more and more community members will become sensitized on how archeology is related to history and can enhance their knowledge of their own cultural heritage. Public outreach efforts will also help address the fact that not all Ugandans can afford to travel to and visit exhibitions at museums and government centers.²⁸ As in many other regions, it will also be best to limit the instances of salvage archeology as much as possible, so that such disturbances of cultural and historical remains occur only when unavoidable and such excavations should be undertaken with the best informed research agenda and community consultation as can be managed.²⁹

Similarly, when archeologists exhume human remains they should bear in mind the ancestral relationship those remains have to the surrounding community. Archaeologists should also collaborate with the Uganda National Museum to disseminate this information through exhibitions on what findings they have discovered. As Peers has argued, “for those remains exhumed under archeological work, materials should be transported to the museums for analysis so as to replicate artifacts in exact detail and then return to the community for reburial together with the exhibition about what was learnt from the analysis.”³⁰ This will encourage many communities to participate in the protection of their heritage and even Ugandans to start having interest in learning archeology, although it is not yet offered at the university level. As archeologists in Uganda uncover new artifacts, they should make a priority to do all they can

²⁷ Peers, p. 2.

²⁸ Peers, pp.18-19.

²⁹ Wylie, p. 59.

³⁰ Peers, pp.18-19.

through public education and advocacy, to raise awareness of the significance of those new bodies of evidence.³¹

Detailed provenience determinations should accompany all data collection activities. Peers has lamented that “there are problem cases where poor provenance or age of remains makes the connection to descendants tenuous.”³² This is why community consultation is much needed throughout the processes of excavation or exhumation. Researchers in Uganda should consider entering into consultation with source communities to avoid the problems of non-labeled and non-provenienced artifacts in the archeology collections. As Alison Wylie has argued, “archeologists should serve as caretakers of and advocates of archeological record, to ensure its long term conservation and to promote use of record for the benefit of all people.”³³

In view of the recent material condition survey that I undertook in the collections of the Uganda National Museum, I believe it is necessary to update and implement new heritage preservation laws. The collections are not for researchers alone, but for the community as well. We all know that one of the functions of our Museum is to preserve the remains of Uganda’s cultural heritage for future posterity. Therefore, researchers should consider ways to provide sufficient funding to properly curate the remains they uncover and seek to deposit in the Museum collections. We in the Museum staff do our best to curate all items properly, following the procedures of ICOM regarding the conduct of collections management. For example, Marie Malaro defines collection management policy as including an explanation of “why a museum is in operation,” how it can properly conduct its business, and guidelines that “articulate[e] the museum professional standard regarding objects left in care.”³⁴ Such guidelines as these provide our staff with standards for curation and educational outreach to the public.

³¹ Wylie, p.50.

³² Peers, p.19.

³³ Wylie, p. 54.

³⁴ Marie Malaro, *A Legal Primer on Managing Museums Collections*, p. 11.

Among such new regulations should be clear guidelines requiring that primary documentation records accompany the deposit of new items in the collections to indicate all available contextual and provenience information and allow for proper registration of objects within the collections. This will also aid in curatorial functions by providing a broad body of information about the object and a statement of its cultural and historical significance. The stakes are high, as these materials carry the national heritage of the country and carry the significance of human creation and continuity of different generations. With the assistance of Museum staff, a database of the collections should be also compiled and made widely accessible to the public, unless particular descendant communities request some information and remains to be withheld from wide dissemination due to cultural sensitivities. Lastly, archeologists should adhere to the principles of timely public reporting of archeology findings and preservation of archeology records and materials.³⁵

Conclusion and Recommendations

My argument concerning politics on human remains in Uganda raises a number of broader issues, even beyond the understanding of modern practice of archeologists in Uganda and the museum that has acted as depository of these skeletons. In this essay, I have tried to show the challenges in the museum collections structure and how one can minimize those problems. One of the major issues I have raised is that museums have not listened to people's requests and desires concerning the remains of their own ancestors. In this regard, the refusal to honor demands for the repatriation and reburial of Kibuuka's remains illustrates how the government has tended to minimize local community interests in their heritage because of countervailing pressures to develop economic and tourist interests through such public exhibitions.

I recommend that all human remains be taken for reburial. In respect to this, consultations should be made in communities where these exhumations took place. These consultations should include sensitization on the significance the remains to be protected. Researchers should ensure that collections are documented as fully as possible to allow informed decisions to be made

³⁵ Wylie, p. 54.

regarding management and interpretation. Human remains and accompanying material culture items should always be curated with procedures that reflect their significance, solemnity, and the investment of spiritual beliefs in those remains by members of local communities. No research access to unethically obtained remains will be granted by museums, unless the descendant communities have agreed. In instances in which the display of human remains and related material culture is desired by some constituency, an agreement with the descendant communities should be signed to avoid the current upheavals the museum has experienced with the Buganda community. Human remains should only be displayed with appropriate coverings as most cultural groups in Uganda do not allow the display of human remains naked. There are current political upheavals in the northern parts of Uganda where many have lost their relatives and friends. I recommend consultations with the local communities in that region to decide on what to do with the human remains that will soon be collected for burial or reburial. I further recommend that a museum be established, after the cessation of hostilities, in the northern part of the country, to assist in the commemoration of the region's heritage and lost lives.

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