

IDP MUSEUM: A PANACEA FOR THE PRESERVATION  
OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN AN INSURGENCY  
BEDEVILLED REGION

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### Abstract

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in northeast Nigeria have since 2009 been chased away from their communities and their villages destroyed as a result of the Boko Haram insurgency. The cultural heritage of the IDPs has suffered destruction, hence, there is the need to bring together and document their cultural identity for preservation, display and interpretation in a museum. The IDP museum would, therefore, be able to promote and grant access to different publics, thereby providing congenial platforms for both the IDPs and the general public to appreciate and identify with traditional motifs, artefacts, and other iconic cultural materials, which explicate meanings in the lives of the people.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, Material culture, IDPs, IDP museum, Insurgency, Boko Haram

### Introduction

Cultural factors influence the genesis, lifetime and demise of an insurgency. Given the circumstance of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in northeast Nigeria and the fact that their identity is attached to their way of life, this article highlights the meanings of culture and cultural heritage as defined by some scholars and organizations, and how such effort could be deployed to remediate the dire straits the IDPs have found themselves. In view of the fact that their present condition is as a result of the Boko Haram insurgency in the region a brief account of the term 'insurgency' will be given and a description of the condition of the IDPs would be highlighted. The article will also define and present guidelines for the establishment of an IDP Museum

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in Borno. In doing this, we will discuss the benefits of such a museum to the IDP themselves and the communities and then conclude by highlighting the general issues of IDP and the benefit of documenting and preserving their cultural heritage.

### Culture, Cultural Heritage and Insurgency

One of the major characteristics that distinguish humans from animals is the ability to think, come up with ideas and creatively produce things. These human abilities are products of culture; culture, therefore, stands at the centre of human existence. Having laid this foundation, it becomes necessary to explicitly define culture. Culture is generally defined as the way of life of a group of people - the behaviours, beliefs, values and symbols they accept which are passed on from generation to generation. Michael Richardson defines culture as the totality of all that characterises humans, which includes the tools and objects we create, the structures and institutions we fashion, the concepts and ideas we develop and the way they take shape as customs and beliefs (2). Culture is the learned and shared human models of living; it is mankind's primary adaptive mechanism (Louise Damen 367). Every aspect of human existence revolves around culture; hence, it becomes a key tool for continued existence. It is a fragile phenomenon that is constantly changing and could be easily lost (Sunday Ododo 5). So many factors are responsible for this changes and sometimes culture being completely lost resulting from culture contact, natural occurrences, technology, modernization, population size, unforeseen events such as war and insurgency and so on.

UNESCO defines cultural heritage as the "legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generation." Cultural heritage is grouped into two categories - material and non-material cultural heritage also referred to as tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The tools and objects humans create (that which the eye can see) such as pots, farm implements, buildings, clothing, jewelleries and so on fall under material or tangible cultural heritage while customs, values, behaviours and beliefs (that which exists in the mind and is invisible to the human eye) fall under the category of non-material or intangible cultural heritage.

The Boko Haram insurgency in northeast Nigeria has displaced and destroyed cultural heritage of the region since 2009. Merriam Webster Dictionary defines insurgency as "a usually violent attempt to take control of a government" (Merriam Webster, <http://www.merriam->

webster.com/dictionary/insurgency). Insurgency is an armed rebellion against a constituted authority such as a national government. These insurgents have launched several attacks on the entire northeast of Nigeria, Borno State being the worse hit. These attacks have brought destruction on lives and properties. In some instances, towns and villages have been razed down completely. At the time of writing this article, insurgents have made so many local government areas (LGAs) in Borno State uninhabitable and have left the inhabitants with no option than to flee their roots for refuge in the safest available places in neighbouring states and in some cases in countries such as Cameroon and Chad with the majority being in Maiduguri, the Borno State capital. The most commonly applied definition of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is the one coined by the former UN Secretary-General's representative on IDPs, Francis Deng, and used in the guiding principles on internal displacement. It holds that internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border (OCHA 6). These people are referred to as the internally displaced people (IDPs).

The magnitude of the social phenomenon of IDPs is a daunting humanitarian challenge (Sudha Rajput 1). The study and the issues of those internally displaced, remain less understood than the issues of other displaced populations, such as refugees or asylum seekers, owing to this 'internal' nature of this crisis. Displacement touches and adversely magnifies a range of issues at multiple levels, individual, social, economic, legal and political issues (Rajput 3). However, this article seeks to identify the cultural heritage of IDPs in northeast Nigeria with a view to documenting and preserving them in a purpose-built museum for interpretation and education of the general public. The intention here is that the destruction of their communities does not eliminate their identity and culture which the museum can interpret for other people and the communities to appreciate.

This unfortunate event of displacement has affected the lives and properties of these IDPs because they have completely been alienated from their culture which is a vital component for their survival. Culture is made out of whatever we produce in the course of our social lives to serve different purposes. Houses and homes tell who we are. They mirror practical needs, comfort and contemporary ways of living as well as reflect communication, reception and adaption of ideas of how to live and how to interact in social groups and as individuals.

The way we build our houses, the way we eat our food, the way we establish work patterns, practice religion or create art are integrants of culture. The results of this is the production of cultural evidence such as pots, tools, clothes, building, etc., which differentiate human species (Richardson 3). Humans consciously or unconsciously attach significance to everything they produce. These products are embedded with layers of intangible attributes which is translated to everyone that comes in contact with it. For example, a building carries the identity of who created it, the history of how it was built, when it was built, the materials used in constructing it, the story about the people that lived in it, etc. This kind of significance is what provides the people linked to this building a collective identity. As a result of the insurgency, the IDPs have lost their cultural evidence - their material culture which makes them unique as a people.

The displacement of communities has brought about the discontinuation of artisan activities which promote their culture and improve their economic status. Many of the people from the displaced communities were involved in the production of arts and crafts but because they are now in camps, struggling to survive, their artistic practices have been halted. Similarly, their food culture has also suffered heavily because they are now forced to eat what is cooked in the camps for their sustenance. Their psychological state has changed as a result of loss of their communities, identity and their present condition of living.

In view of the dire situations the IDPs have found themselves are of the view that they can be creatively engaged to sustain their livelihoods through the revival and reinvigoration of their cultural heritage. Artisans will be encouraged to produce handicrafts that will not only improve their economic condition but also identify and promote their culture to feel some sense of belonging. Historians and religious leaders in the respective communities can be contacted to document the cultural beliefs and narratives of their traditions. These practices will enable the displaced people to promote their culture which can also create village craft/craft centres. The camps will become centres of activities and cultural formation/transformation. New cultures can emerge. This approach can be used to build up better community of displaced people and, by extension, to build a better country. In doing so, the value of the people and their culture are not lost to history and meaningful ideas can influence future generations. Many lives have been lost and properties destroyed by the insurgents, however, the focus will be on the living. They can be able to live a better life by building objects of cultural value, make music, etc., where such cultural heritage can be housed in a museum to promote and interpret their culture for other people to appreciate.

## Modalities for Setting up an IDP Museum

The International Council of Museums defines a museum as: A non-profit making permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment." (ICOM, <http://icom.museum/the-vision/museum-definition>).

Museums are treasure houses for the human race; they store the memories of the world's peoples, their dreams and their hopes (Timothy Ambrose and Crispin Paine 6). An IDP museum in Borno will, therefore, be a welcome development both for the IDPs and the rest of the community. In setting up a new museum in any community there are certain criteria to follow. It is important to meet the established guidelines in order to maintain and sustain the museum for generations to come. Museums serve their communities in a variety of ways.

## Public Trust and Accountability

The museum is a good steward of its resources held in public trust and should identify the communities it serves and makes appropriate decisions in how it serves them. Regardless of its immediate communities it serves, the museum strives to be a good neighbour in its geographic area; hence, it strives to be inclusive and offers opportunity for diverse participation. The museum should be committed to providing the public with physical and intellectual access to the museum and its resources as well as placing education at the centre of its role. The museum must also comply with local, state and federal laws, codes and regulations applicable to its facilities, operations and administration. The museum should be committed to public accountability and is transparent in its mission and its operations.

## Mission and Planning

The museum should clearly portray understanding of its mission and communicates why it exists and who benefits as a result of its efforts. In this regard, the museum should strive to focus its mission on the cultural heritage of the IDPs in northeast Nigeria. All aspects of the museum's operations are integrated and focused on meeting its mission. The museum's governing authority and staff thinks and act strategically to acquire, develop, and allocate resources to advance the mission of the museum. The museum engages in ongoing and reflective institutional planning that includes involvement of its audiences and community. The museum establishes measures of success and uses them to evaluate and adjust its activities.

## Collection Policy

The museum will organise its collection policy to focus on acquiring both tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the displaced persons. Hence, the museum owns, exhibits, or uses collections that are appropriate to its mission. The museum legally, ethically, and effectively manages, documents, cares for, and uses the collections. The museum's collections-related research is conducted according to appropriate scholarly standards. The museum strategically plans for the use and development of its collections. Guided by its mission, the museum provides public access to its collections while ensuring their preservation. The people of Borno are generally considered as having rich cultural heritage. Consequently, some of the areas of collection acquisition for the IDP museum may include the following:

**Shelter:** in the context of internal displacement, the Geneva-based Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has explored the concept of "house" from the perspective of those displaced (Roseline Achieng17), where the house is seen to symbolize material, cultural, social and economic dimensions of those displaced. In that respect, the concept of "house" extends from a mere physical structure to one that includes property rights, shelter, security and a sense of belonging and identity (RoselineAchieng17). The shelters of the displaced persons are a pure product of vernacular architecture. Constructions were done with strips of wet mud obtained from a mixture of mud, straw and rice husks. Models of their houses and compounds can be produced with the help of the artisans for display in the museum. The fact that such models and history of their houses are displayed in the museum gives them a sense of belonging and identity.

**Textiles:** items of textiles in the form of woven fabrics, tie and dye as well as embroidery are popular among the communities. Many types and designs of caps are made by the people from the displaced communities. This is a thriving economic venture for the people which the museum can also promote through the establishment of a craft village within its confines.

**Pottery and Ceramics:** pottery and ceramic wares are popular among many of the communities. Bama, which is one of the most affected communities, is famous for the production of pottery with an established pottery factory. Similar factory can be replicated in the museum for the communities to appreciate and tangentially benefit from.

**Fibre Crafts:** items of fibre crafts include locally produced mats, fans, trays (fai-fai), storage containers, baskets, etc. This is an area that is

also rich among the communities which the museum can use to display and promote the culture of the people.

**Metal Works:** many of the communities are known for the production of iron implements for farming and other activities. Many kinds of jewellery are also made by smiths using gold, silver, bronze and other forms of metal. Many of the items can be acquired by the museum as part of its collection for the purpose of display and interpretation.

**Wood Works:** items many IDPs make from wood include mortar and pestle, stools, slates, handles for tools such as hoes, diggers and knives.

**Calabash Decorations:** They have very unique styles of decorating their calabashes which mostly serve domestic and decorative purposes.

**Leather Works:** They produce shoes, bags, wallets, water bottles, etc., from animals' hides and skin.

**Intangible Cultural Works:** The IDPs have rich music, oral traditions and other cultural representations that require documentation and interpretation in the museum. These aspects of their culture will display the richness of their heritage and identity.

### Education and Interpretation

This is an important function of a museum through which it reaches out to its audience. The museum clearly states its overall educational goals, philosophy, and messages, and demonstrates that its activities are in alignment with them. The museum understands the characteristics and needs of its existing and potential audiences and uses this understanding to inform its interpretation. The museum's interpretive content is based on appropriate research. Museums conducting primary research do so according to scholarly standards. It uses techniques, technologies, and methods appropriate to its educational goals, content, audiences and resources. The museum presents accurate and appropriate content for each of its audiences and demonstrates consistent high quality in its interpretive activities. It should assess the effectiveness of its interpretive activities and use those results to plan and improve its activities.

### Financial Stability

The museum legally, ethically and responsibly acquires, manages and allocates its financial resources in a way that advances its mission. The museum operates in a fiscally responsible manner that promotes

tis long-term sustainability. It is, therefore, important for the museum to have reliable sources of funding in order not to stagnate its activities.

### Building

The museum should have a befitting structure to house its collections. The museum allocates its space and uses its facilities to meet the needs of the collections, audience and staff. The museum should have appropriate measures to ensure the safety and security of people, its collections and/or objects, and the facilities it owns or uses. There must be effective programme for the care and long-term maintenance of its facilities. It should keep the building clean and well-maintained and provide for the visitors' needs. The museum must take appropriate measures to protect itself against potential risk and loss.

### Identify Purpose, Needs and Resources

The museum's success depends on a solid vision, a clear purpose, adequate resources and community engagement. It is important to engage the community and discuss with the leaders in order to get their support and approval. The museum should not have the same mission with another museum.

### Establishing and Sustaining the Museum

Generally, museums are non-profit making institutions. Hence, the appropriate legal guidelines should be followed. Once the museum legally exists, one needs to understand the day-to-day operations of a museum, everything from caring for collections to hiring staff and keeping the museum financially viable. The appropriate museum regulating bodies and associations should be contacted for the museum to become a part of the larger field-wide cause and can gain access to a wealth of resources that will help the museum succeed. The National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) will be of immense help as well as the Museums Association of Nigeria (MAN) and the International Council of Museums (ICOM).

### How can the Museum Preserve Cultural Heritage in the Face of Insurgency?

Acquisition of objects in a situation as this will be by calling on indigenes of the affected areas to donate their personal cultural materials. An archaeological excavation in these areas will also be fruitful in producing material evidence of the people. Surviving artisans can also be commissioned to produce replicas. Some items can also be purchased from local markets. For the non-material culture, that

is, the intangible, the museum can organise cultural programmes, events and activities such as durbars, cooking competitions that features local cuisines, traditional dance festivals, etc. Besides, the elderly should be encouraged to instil those beliefs, customs, norms and practices on the younger ones. Museums provide a range of benefits for the locations in which they are established. These include:

1. serving as the custodian of cultural heritage, thereby helping in its conservation and preservation.
2. serving as a place of collective memory for the community;
3. bringing to limelight the culture and history of minority groups;
4. providing job opportunities for the people who can serve as tour guides;
5. serve as centre for learning for both formal and informal education through direct contact with the objects as well as through learning of crafts;
6. museums develop a sense of identity and fosters unity among people;
7. museums play a vital role in revenue generation in the following ways:
  - the museum attracts tourists, thereby generating revenue for the community it is located through hotels, transports, markets, restaurants, etc. Jobs can also be created through such spending; their spaces such as halls can be rented for events for a fee; tourists' attractions play a vital role in encouraging foreign investors to establish industries in an area. This goes a long way in revenue as well as job creations.

## Conclusion

The museum being an eleemosynary institution has become unpopular in Africa and has suffered extremely low patronage. A lot of work needs to be done in the area of enlightenment. The public needs to be aware of its significance and the role it plays in improving the quality of lives of the public it serves. For it to function properly, it needs strong support of the government. Apart from its cultural and socio-economic benefits, a museum of this nature goes a long way in returning normalcy. As a matter of fact, Borno State has since 2009 when the insurgency began, witnessed a remarkable exodus of IDPs. Establishing an IDP museum will not only attract tourists but will also encourage those that fled the state to return. In the face of the current economic crisis, Nigeria as a country needs to look the way of tourism

as a revenue generator. Rwanda has generated a huge sum of revenue by harnessing their heritage both natural and cultural. This will ease the pressure put on crude oil that has recently witnessed a decline in its price.

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