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Visualizing Peace Museums:
A Historical Reflection and Culture-based Exploration

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Abstract

This article explores peace museums, a unique and under-reported genre of museums, discusses the history of peace museums in Europe, identifies common themes of peace museums globally, and focuses on the emergence of culture-based peace museums in Eastern Africa. The aim is to understand how Kenyan ethnographer Sultan Somjee founded 23 Africanized peace museums and the Community Peace Museums Heritage Foundation (CPMHF) based on the African humanist philosophy of *Utu*. Even though Somjee and the CPMHF curators offer a relevant approach to peace museum work, they have not received adequate attention or study in their own right. By distilling their 26 years of research and experience, this investigation examines and critically reflects upon the ways Somjee and the CPMHF act as peace activists, and agents of change by promoting *Utu* values to create lasting social cohesion, resolving conflicts, and fostering reconciliation. This article offers museum educators an alternative approach to peace museum best practices by illustrating how they draw on the peace heritage traditions and knowledge of Indigenous cultures to act as peacemakers in a modern world.

Introduction

Today, peace museums offer a variety of themes and associations with peace and war outcomes globally. Many of these institutions are based on Western European models established during the 1800s and early1900s, which spread globally. This article provides a brief overview of the historical development of peace museums, their current status and a closer look at Sultan Somjee's and the Community Peace Museums Heritage Foundation (CMPHF) initiative of Africanizing peace museums in Kenya. The focus on these distinctive peace museums of the CPMHF brings to light a move away from conventional museum topics about post-war impacts on citizens, victims' trauma, genocide, individual peacemakers, and military history towards cultural peace heritage traditions.

In the next section, the example of Somjee and the CPMHF describes how they utilize the concept of culture to decolonize and indigenize peace museums. They reject Western methods of peacemaking and embrace their own ancient and living peace heritage traditions, as well as a more collaborative approach between ethnic groups. The foundation of these museums is the African humanist philosophy of *Utu*. In doing so, new themes, such as preserving Elder's knowledge, peace material culture, expressive arts, and preserving biological heritage, are introduced to children, youth, and community members. Further discussion ensues about how their Africanized peace museum approach led to establishing the Gulu Community Peace Museum in Northern Uganda and the Community Museums of Peace of the African Child Soldier in South Sudan. The chapter concludes by offering insight about how they utilize *Utu* in participatory processes that build community relationships and the hope of sustainable peace.

Peace Museum History

To begin to understand peace museums in a contemporary context, it is helpful to understand how they primarily evolved as a result of conflicting world politics and wars. The development of peace museums in Europe has shaped their vision of injustices, atrocities, and violence, which contributes not only to their foundation, but their educational approach towards non-violence. Presented in this article is a survey of peace museums globally to identify common themes. In doing so, a noticeable absence of peace museums that utilize cultural heritage appears. The aim of this article is to bring to light the absence of Indigenous peace heritage traditions in peace museum practice by provoking thought among museum educators. The goal is to consider how Indigenous societies have ancient and living peace heritage traditions, which can potentially be drawn upon further in contemporary conflict situations.

Throughout world history, philosophers, theologians, Elders,[1] educators, and artists have actively been pursuing a foundation upon which to build peaceful relations. Diverse Indigenous cultures, religious orders, and political theory create a complicated understanding of what peace actually is. Peace relates not only to diverse cultural beliefs, moral issues, and political assertions, but it is also associated with various social processes, categories, conditions, and activities such as recognition, gender, and education, as well as the environment. Too often in Western academia, however, peace studies remain confined to fields like security studies, political theory, and international relations, neglecting non-Western and Indigenous approaches. Even when a spiritual component is considered, the direct goals continue to be outlined in terms of political outcomes based on situationally specific terms, which "has been the case with Gandhi's struggle for Indian independence, Martin Luther King's civil rights campaign in the United States, and Desmond Tutu's truth and reconciliation commission, which sought to heal the wound of Apartheid in South Africa" (Giesen, 2017, p. 1). Peace can only be properly conceived if the approaches that have led to its conceptual complexity are understood in juxtaposition with one another. However, it would be misleading to suggest I can define or redefine peace within the scope of this article. Rather, in my view as a social science researcher, such an investigation would miss the point since I assume that the term 'peace' is not arbitrarily fixed, but rather is symbolic of a spiritual, ideological, and political struggle for definitions.

The history of peace museums offers various ways to imagine, conceive, and construct peace. Yet, there is only modest literature written about peace museums as a distinct category, and even less about peace museums that apply cultural heritage in their museum practices. Peace museums also represent a large and diverse spectrum of themes and peace associations worldwide. For example, the International Network of Museums for Peace (INMP)[2] published the Museums for Peace[3] Worldwide; it lists 302 museum organizations, of which 84 are in Japan (Yamane & Anzai, 2020). The accumulation of these organizations internationally signifies how the European roots of peace museums have spread throughout the Global North and the Global South. The history of peace museums is also critical to consider because the founders' motivations and visions set the tone for future museums of peace in their exhibits, education and public programs, and the professional organizations that followed in their footsteps. Peace museums that focus on tolerance, human and civil rights, humanitarianism, and peace-related individuals have been overlooked by museum studies scholars, even though since the 1980s, there has been enormous growth in their numbers worldwide (Aspel, 2016).

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[1] In this article, Gregory Younging's (2018) *Elements of Indigenous Style* is used for editorial principles and guidelines for works written by or about Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous style uses capitals where conventional writing does not. It is a deliberate decision that redresses mainstream society's history regarding Indigenous Peoples as having no legitimate national identities; governmental, social, spiritual, or religious institutions; or collective rights. For example, throughout the article, I capitalize Elder, Indigenous, and *Utu*.

Themes, Concepts, and Contents

In Joyce Aspel's book *Introducing Peace Museums* (2016), she addresses the literature gap by asking the fundamental question: What is a peace museum? She describes them as "the repositories of the material culture of peace" and organizations that "bring to light complicated and largely unknown or ignored peace histories" (Aspel, 2016, p.1). Aspel (2016) states peace museums are "characterized both by what they foster: peace cultures and by what they oppose: war and other types of violence" (p. 12). Peace museums, she writes, also "have an interdisciplinary education approach to fostering concepts of positive peace" and "seek to provide a more nuanced, critical evaluation of wars, conflicts, and their effects" (Aspel, 2016, pp. 24-25). She commences her study with a historical narrative about establishing peace museums in Europe and notes the *International Museum of War and Peace* as the first peace museum, founded by Jean de Bloch in Lucerne, Switzerland in 1902 as an anti-war museum. In the following five chapters, she provides a significant breadth and scope of peace museums internationally, including the *Peace Museum* in Bradford, UK; *Kyoto Museum for World Peace* at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan; *Guernica Peace Museum* in Spain; *Dayton International Peace Museum*, in Ohio, USA; the *Nobel Peace Center*, in Oslo, Norway; and the *Casa per la Pace La Filanda*, in Bologna, Italy. Largely, her goal is to "begin a conversation by highlighting a series of peace museums and contributing to a more critical, self-reflexive analysis of their content, narratives, and goals in the future" (Aspel, 2016, p. 22).

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[2] The establishment of the *International Network of Peace Museums* (INPM) was an outcome of the first International Conference of Peace Museums, *Bringing Peace to People: Meeting of Directors and staff of Peace and Anti-War Museums and Related Institutions Worldwide, 10 - 12 September 1992* (Van den Dungen, 2017). The conference occurs every three years, and conference presentations and a directory of peace and related museums are published, which has accumulated a valuable body of literature on peace museums spanning twenty-five years. The INPM changed its name to the International Network of Museums for Peace (INMP), to reflect the organizations promoting a culture of peace.

Aspel begins with Jean de Bloch (1836–1902), a Russian Polish industrialist and entrepreneur, who wrote an influential six-volume study *The War of the Future* (1889). His research put forth the idea that solving diplomatic problems by warfare had become obsolete in Europe due to new arms technology, resulting in industrialized societies increasing military armies numbering in the millions. He envisioned wars based on industrial strength, followed by economic erosion, famine, disease, and societal breakdown potentially leading towards socialist revolutions. Bloch's aim was to educate influential people about the potential destructive forces of modern weaponry causing loss of life on both sides of the conflict. He increasingly gained support for a peace movement, including influencing "Russia's Czar Nicholas II to issue a rescript in August 1898, calling for what would be the first peace conference, to discuss arbitration and arms control" (Dawson, 2002, p. 5). Czar Nicholas 11 of Russia extended the invitation for an international gathering at the Hague Peace Conference to discuss "the maintenance of general peace, and a possible reduction of the excessive armaments, which weigh upon all nations" (Aspel, 2016, p. 18, as cited in Prins & Tromp, 2000 p. 59).

Bloch, with the support of Bertha von Suttner (1843–1914), a well-known peace activist and writer of her time, organized the conference, and in 1889, Queen Wilhelmina (1880–1962) of the Netherlands hosted 100 conference delegates from 26 countries (Dawson, 2002), where Bloch presented four public lectures (Aspel, 2016). Although the sessions did not reach an agreement to reduce armaments, they did succeed in establishing the Permanent Court of Arbitration to mediate conflicts between nations, leading to the establishment of the Hague Peace Palace in 1913, a grandiose palace with extensive grounds and luxurious interiors representing "Peace through Justice" and the "Spectre of War" (Aspel, 2016, p. 18). The palace represented an elite undertaking, sponsored by European monarchs and donations by various states. Indeed, Bloch's relationships had an enduring influence after his death, but the ideas he pushed forth, in my opinion, were more about liberal internationalism rather than museums.

Even though Aspel credits Bloch for the establishment of the first peace museum as we have come to understand them, she declined to note that he was an economist by training. His position of peace was based on the perspective of liberal internationalism, which "argued that the economic linkages and technological advances in modern industry required a parallel international political and legal system to protect it against aggressive nationalism and militarism" (Cooper, 1991, p. 207.) He believed that "peaceful competition and co-operation between states was essential to the maintenance of the global economic system" (Dawson, 2002, p. 5). Undeniably, Bloch's assertions about "the catastrophic nature of war proved true" (Aspel, 2016, p. 17) not only with the outcomes of WWII, but also the second half of the 19th century as nations continuously expanded military and naval military armaments, draining budgets and economic resources (Dawson, 2002). Bloch understood increased internationalization of trade was reliant on peaceful relations with other nations. Clearly, he wasn't a pacifist like Bertha von Sutton, but an economist emphasizing co-operation and interdependence, which were necessary for economic solidity and prosperity. Many liberal internationalists shared his concern to maintain the status quo for economic stability, but they did not stress moral reform as did the pacifists of the era (Dawson, 2002).

On the other hand, Bloch's contemporary, the Austrian Baroness Bertha von Suttner (1843–1914), a European pacifist, believed if "the ethical consciousness of leaders and people, in general, could be awakened through education and enlightenment, they would willingly turn against war" (Dawson, 2002, p. 5). Pacifism "is derived from the Latin terms *pace* and *facere*, literally to make peace, emphasizing engagement and activism" (Aspel, 2016, p. 7). Pacifism is a general notion embracing a wide range of views but basically, it is a concept that describes an ethical position morally opposing war and violence as well as a "moral commitment to cooperative personal, social, and international conduct based on agreement rather than force" (Cady, 2010, Pacifism and Peace Meanings section, para. 2). Stuttner became associated with the European pacifist peace movement with the publication of her novel, *Die Waffen neider!* (1889; Eng. trans., *Lay Down Your Arms*, 2014), the story of a woman's suffering through the many mid-19th century European wars. In 1905, she was the first woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Great War of (1914–1918) prompted the pacifist Ernst Friedrich (1894–1967) the emotional stimulus to write *Krieg dem Krieg!* (War Against War) in 1924, a compilation of horrific war images with juxtaposed ironic captions. In 1925, Friedrich opened the second peace museum, Anti-Kriegsmuseum in Berlin, Germany. Essentially, it was an anti-war museum that used images of the slaughter of war put next to war propaganda statements. In 1933, the Nazis arrested Friedrich and destroyed the museum. After fleeing to Belgium, he re-established the museum until the country was taken over by the Nazis in 1940 (Van den Dungen, 1999). Today, his legacy lives on as Friedrich's grandson, Tommy Spree, re-established the museum in (West) Berlin in 1982 (Van den Dungen, 1999).

Even though liberal internationalism and pacifist belief systems don't perfectly align because one is based on economics and the other on ethics, in many respects they are connected historically because they both contributed towards peace movements and the establishment of peace museums in the Global North in the early 19th century. These two initial peace museums, the *International Museum of War and Peace and the Anti-Kriegsmuseum*, created the foundation for peace museums to focus on the outcomes or consequences of war, entrenching two narratives: 1) illustrating the consequences of war, which support the processes of collecting and exhibiting material culture associated with the atrocities of war—i.e., weapons and their impact on people, and 2) promoting individual peace activists' stories of people who worked towards social justice and resistance to war. As such, numerous "peace museums focus on well-known individuals associated with peace and non-violent movements" (Aspel, 2016, p. 11): for example, Henry Dunant (1828–1910), Jane Addams (1860–1935), Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1949), Nelson Mandela (1918–2013), Anne Frank (1925–1945), Jimmy Carter (b. 1924), and Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968) to name a few. In this context, peace museums attempt to build upon the most basic and undeniable human desire of living a life in the absence of war, and with the hope of human beings living in community peacefully. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, 74 peace museums, memorials, monuments, and peace documentation centres blossomed in Europe. Their themes vary, and many represent war resistance, the Pacifist movement, WWII holocaust, Nobel Peace centres and museums, individual peacemakers, and war and peace memorials.

Along with the establishment of peace museums and their increasing numbers, professional conferences aligned in 1992 with the first *International Conference of Peace Museums*, initiated by Give Peace a Chance Trust and the University of Bradford's Department of Peace Studies. The conference, entitled *Bringing Peace to People: Meeting of Directors and Staff of Peace and Anti-War Museums and Related Institutions Worldwide, 10 - 12 September 1992,* published summaries of all the presentations and a directory of peace and related museums (Van den Dungen, 2017). There were two outcomes of the conference. First, the *International Network of Peace Museums* (INPM) was established along with the decision to create a United Kingdom peace museum. Later, the INMP changed its name to the International Network of Museums for Peace, indicating the intent of peace museums is to promote a culture of peace. Since then, the INMP conferences are held every three years in "Asia or Europe but none in Africa or America owing to absence of, or weak applications to host a conference" (Van den Dungen, 2017, p. 14). Most significantly, at each INMP conference, a volume of presented papers has been published. In doing so, the organization has accumulated a valuable body of literature on peace museums spanning 25 years.

Peace museums are educational sites that foster a peaceful culture by presenting both a place and space for visitors to view, learn, and participate in activities to promote peace. They also provide an opportunity to publicly communicate information, ideas, history, and examples of peace-related themes (Anzai et al., 2008) although the INMP network's aim is to generalize and unify 'Museums for Peace.' At the same time, the organization has diluted its focus on peace museums through its expansion to include war museums. These organizations claim to promote peace by focusing on the adverse outcomes of war, which are destructive to human beings, the environment, and the economy. In many ways, broadening the INMP membership puts the emphasis back on violence, which has already had a tremendous amount of attention. Even so, the question remains: How do peace museums perceive peace and encourage a culture of peace in society?

In the 20th century and in the wake of decolonialization, the breakdown of tyrannical regimes, and the struggle for independence, freedom, and justice, museums that deal more with human rights issues are classified as “peace related museums rather than peace museums per se” (Van den Dungen, 1999, p. 701). Aspel (2016) reasons peace museums challenge the justification of war argument validating that “particular acts of violence were necessary to end conflicts or meet threats to security” (p. 23). She posits peace museums are illustrating and emphasizing the consequences and outcomes of wars in many ways: for example, to

1) present alternative stories

2) re-write historical events by including silenced groups to address historical responsibility

3) discuss how complicated reasoning decided the consequences of motives using methods of destruction, i.e., indiscriminate civilian bombing

(Aspel, 2016, p. 23)

Van den Dungen (1995) asserts peace museums are concerned with telling the counter story of war by “documenting and analyzing individual and collective efforts to prevent war and laying the foundations for a world without war” (pp. 65–75). Inclusively, it appears that peace museums express the outcomes of war and the impacts on human beings.

A brief survey of peace museums based on the Anzai Science & Peace (ASAP) office list of museums for peace is presented here. Although this survey is not complete as more peace museums are constantly evolving, this work provides an overview of the diversity of themes of peace museums worldwide:

- **Canada:** The *Living Peace Museum* (LPM) is an online museum offering exhibitions, historical information, and educational resources. The LPM is committed to awareness and understanding of peace heritage traditions and encourages culturally diverse interpretations of peace locally and globally in partnerships with cultural communities. An online museum may offer the public more access to information than traditional forms of museums as sites to visit.

- **Chile:** The *Villa Grimaldi Peace Park* is a National Monument located in the former Terranova Barracks, known as the *Villa Grimaldi.* The park commemorates the lives lost in their defence and struggle for human rights, and symbolizes a place of spiritual recollection. An *ombú* or 'tree of hope' grows as a silent witness to the atrocities committed in Villa Grimaldi.

- **India:** Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) peace museums established between 1948 and 1966 include the *Gandhi Memorial Museum, Gandhi Smarak Sangrahakaya, Gandhi Smiriti* and *Darshan Samiti,* and the *National Gandhi Museum and Library*. The *No More Hiroshima: No More Nagasaki: Peace Museum* is an example of the catastrophic effects of a nuclear bombing on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan to discourage the atomic war between India and Pakistan.

- **Iran:** The *Tehran Peace Museum* evolved as a response to the war with Iraq (1980–1988) when Iranian military and civilians suffered from chemical weapons attacks, resulting in a generation suffering from these consequences for the rest of their lives. The aim of the museum reflects Iranians' desire to seek a peaceful environment for generations to come.

- **Japan:** Notably, 65 peace museums in Japan expose the first atomic bombs that decimated the populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War II. These museums symbolize Japanese citizens' call for peace after the nuclear bombings. The most prominent peace museums are the *Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum*, *Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum*, and the *Kyoto Museum for World Peace* located in Ritsumeikan University as well as smaller activist centres, such as *Grass Roots House at Kochi*.

- **Republic of Korea:** In the Republic of Korea, there are 10 peace museums, memorial sites, and peace parks. The *No Gun Ri Peace Memorial*, founded in 2011, refers to a civilian massacre committed by United States forces from July 25 to July 29, 1950, and the victims' trauma. Today, the *No Gun Ri Peace Memorial* and education centre associated park gives voice to survivors' stories.

- **Kenya:** The *Community Peace Museums Heritage Foundation,* established by Sultan Somjee, presently includes 16 rural peace museums. Their goal is to learn how ethnic cultures utilize the African humanist philosophy of *Utu* and peace heritage traditions in times of conflict. The CPMHF aims to strengthen the cultural foundations that commemorate living without violence among rural Indigenous societies. The objects of the museums evoke historical remembrances of peace through programs and exhibits expressed through language, arts, and nature.

- **South Sudan:** The *Community Museums of Peace of the African Child Soldier,* founded by Lamudak Okech, implements Somjee's methods and strives to heal the people abducted as children by rebel forces in Northern Uganda and South Sudan. The museum is grounded in recalling and practicing Indigenous peace heritage traditions to reconcile the families, clans, and generally the whole society.

- **Northern Uganda:** Curator Francis Odonyoo founded the *Gulu Community Peace Museum*. The museum based its methods on Somjee's theory of utilizing *Utu* for peace and reconciliation among Indigenous groups in conflict. The museum uses Acholi storytelling, dances, and ceremonies as a tool for peacebuilding since time immemorial.

- **Pakistan:** In Islamabad, the Interfaith League against Poverty established the *Children's Museum for Peace and Human Rights* to promote investing in a peaceful culture rather than war and weapons of mass destruction.

- **Sri Lanka:** The *Sahajeevana Center for Coexistence* presents the "various attempts to achieve peace through political reforms" between 1815 and 1994 (Sahajeevana Centre Blog 2017).

Modern interest in peace museums seems to be increasing every year and includes over 300 peace organizations comprising museums, art galleries, and libraries worldwide. Six thematic areas can be identified across their visions of peace: 1. post-war impacts on citizens, 2. victims' trauma, 3. genocide, 4. individual peacemakers, 5. military history, 6. cultural peace heritage traditions. Overall, it appears that peace museums tend to be envisioned as a response to violent acts in history, war outcomes, or extraordinary individuals that have led peace movements. It is also apparent that only a few peace museums include Indigenous peace heritage traditions, including the CPMHF community peace museums in Kenya, *Gulu Community Peace Museum* in Uganda, the *Community Museums of Peace of the African Child Soldier* in South Sudan, and the *Living Peace Museum* in Canada. Therefore, there is an evident gap in the literature on culture-based peace museums that needs to be addressed.

Ultimately, the next section brings to light a relatively unknown story of how Kenyan ethnographer Sultan Somjee, his field assistants and Indigenous Elders reclaimed the diminishing peace heritage traditions of the African humanist philosophy of *Utu* in order to act as peacemakers in a modern world. "The East African concept of *Utu* is a Swahili word that comes from *mtu*, which means a human being and refers to a set of humanistic values"

(Somjee, 2014). *Utu* is a holistic worldview that is an interconnected belief system, between the Supreme Being, ancestors, Elders, community, and nature. From this perspective, *Utu* underpins the conception of life with the universe as a relational act (Mkhize, 2008). The aim is to describe the development of village peace museums and the CPMHF as an example of museum best practices when collaborating with Indigenous people and communities.

Somjee and the Community Peace Museums Heritage Foundation (CPMHF): An aspect to understanding the Indigenous reconciliation process

Dr. Sultan Somjee has done significant work in Indigenous art education, and in the world of peace museums. Even though, he founded twenty-three uniquely Africanized peace museums and the Community Peace Museum Heritage Foundation (CPMHF) in Kenya, his contributions have been underrecognized. In recent years, some scholars have referenced Somjee's work and the CPMHF (Baker, 2019a, 2019b, 2021; Coombes et al., 2014; Gachanga, 2008, 2017; Gachanga & Mutisya, 2015; Gachanga & Walters, 2015; Karega-Munene, 2011; Walters et al., 2017). Even so, they have not received adequate scholarly attention or study in their own right. Although their vision offers a distinct and important culture-based approach to peace museum work in the world. The peace museums movement that picked up in Europe and Japan after World War II largely centred on memorialization projects showcasing atrocities of war. Somjee, an ethnographer and art educationalist, on the other hand had a different approach in two ways. One was that he worked on deflecting tensions due to contemporary conflicts in eastern Africa. The other was that he looked to the arts as a reconciliatory platform.

In his early professional years, Sultan Somjee worked as a junior researcher at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Nairobi (1975-1976) where he met the famed writer and playwright Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. In 1977, they collaborated on a play called *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (I will marry when I want) at the Kamĩrĩĩthũ Community Education and Cultural Centre (Somjee, 2018). By working with Ngũgĩ, and the villagers and factory workers who were the actors and producers of the play, he comprehended Kenya’s history of political oppression and neo-colonialism through people’s stories of their lived memories. He realized "the power of memory and the importance of keeping it alive" (Somjee, 2018, p. 121). The play triggered the government’s banning of the play and the arrest of the politically outspoken Ngũgĩ', which led to his capture and detention. This clearly sent a message not to challenge the national narrative of history and not to speak out against government policies that included on culture and education. From then on, people’s theatre was banned by the despots. Outspoken intellectuals at the university were imprisoned, and media and art that did not complement the official line were suppressed.

This experience provoked Somjee to become a social activist albeit working underground given the conditions under the repressive regime. The challenge was how he could pass by the government's top-down discourse and implement the Kamĩrĩĩthũ grassroots model, which he called the 'Kamirithũ Way.' Working with an underground resistance movement, he set out to decolonize the academy and structures that stopped him from reaching the grassroot society to practice the 'Kamirithũ Way.' This simply means allowing the people to be the actors and producers of their images, history, and reconciliation events from their recollections and ongoing cultural practices outside the regime's radar.

In the following years, Somjee continued his research at the University of Nairobi by exploring the relationship between material culture and oral traditions of the Bantu, Nilotic and Cushitic cultures of Eastern Africa. While conducting fieldwork, he was collecting and documenting artifacts while living in villages where he initiated community-based participatory exhibitions of his collections. This work built his experience as well as his reputation.

In 1985, he was approached by the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) to conduct research on the promotion of African ethnographic material culture for the art and design syllabus for the 8-4-4 system. In Kenya, the art education curriculum is a byproduct of the British colonial era's educational system, which focuses on European aesthetics and excludes learning about African art heritage. Somjee considered the project to be an opportunity to move away from the colonial-based education system and infuse Indigenous content into art education.
More broadly, he started a decolonizing process in the school system by encouraging students to learn about their own cultural heritage through material culture (1982-1985). He built African material culture collections at the university for training teachers and created smaller resource rooms of objects at schools. As a result, Somjee fostered greater connections to African Indigenous aesthetics across the nation.

The 1990s marked "a volatile decade with massacres and sporadic conflicts raging from Rwanda at the Great Lakes to Somalia on the Red Sea" (Somjee, 2019, p. 1). The ethnic division was a crucial issue. At the time, Somjee was the head ethnographer at the National Museums of Kenya, and he started to think about how the western national organizations' peace-making methods were not working and how Africans should look towards their own cultural heritage for solutions. He considered, how the African humanist philosophy of *Utu* could be applied to settle ethnic tensions and resolve human problems that restored dignity and brought about social cohesion (Somjee, 2014).

Somjee and his research assistants at the National Museums of Kenya, "Buliyar Rigano, Sammi Emwek, Johnston Kasagam and Andrew Cheptum" researched these rich heritage traditions for a year and a half among Indigenous communities (Somjee, 2017, p. 71). What they discovered was that even though *Utu* was repressed during colonialism and ignored by post-colonial government, these time-honoured peace heritage traditions continued to be practiced among the Rendile, Turkana and the Marakwet of the Kerio Valley and the Highlands. In between these years Somjee completed his Ph.D. at McGill University (1995). His thesis, *Learning to be indigenous or being taught to be Kenyan: The ethnography of teaching art and material culture in Kenya*, shows the contradiction between the national art curriculum drawing on Western values and the living Indigenous art traditions.

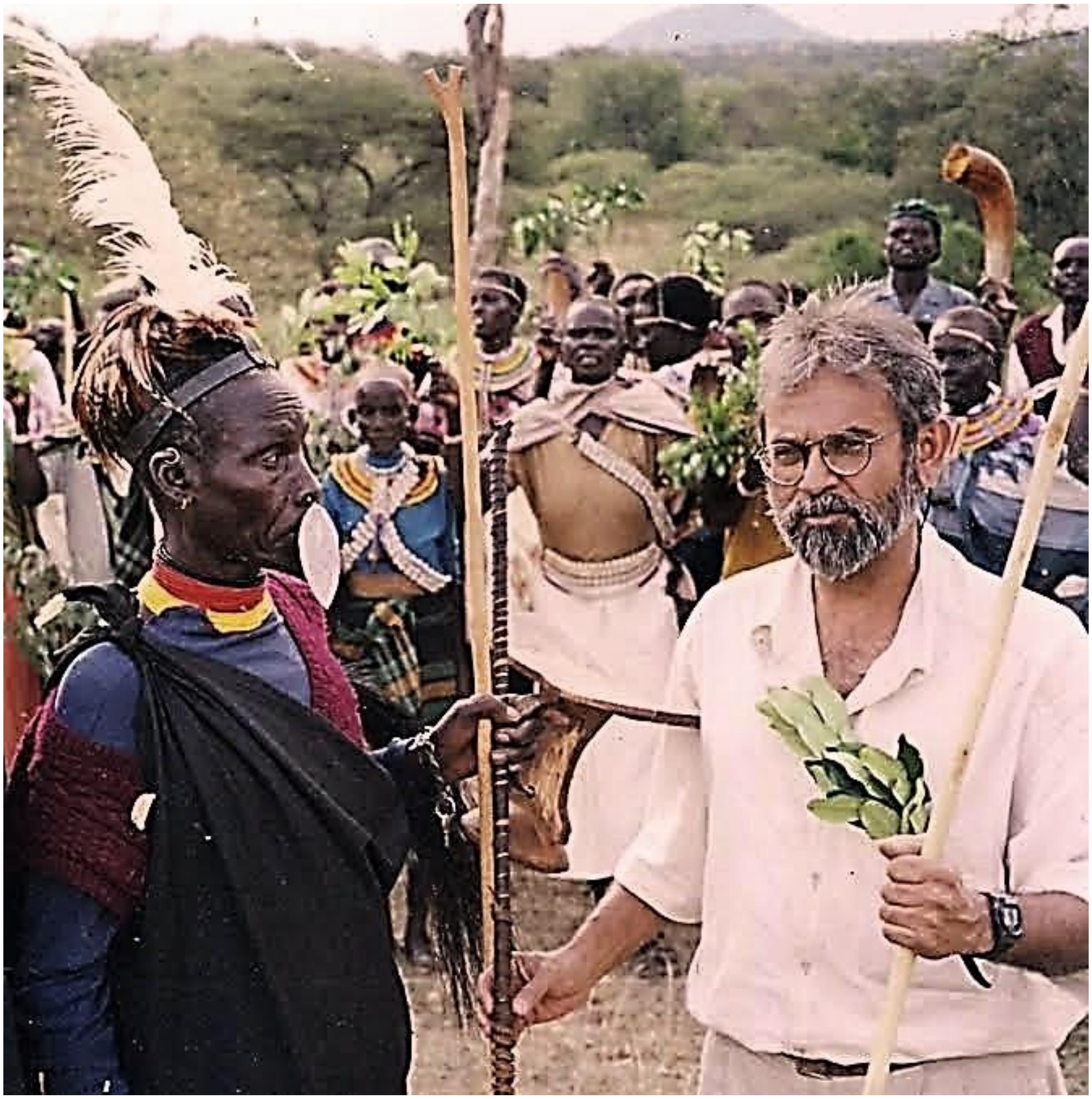

Figure 1. Sultan Somjee and Pokot Elder holding a peace staff.
(Photo provided by Sultan Somjee, n.d.)

From there, Somjee and his research assistants took a decolonizing approach to reimagining peace museums from African and people’s perspectives. “In Kenya, as in other parts of Africa, there is no strong history of museums, making it difficult for the villagers to conceptualize a ‘museum,’ let alone a peace museum” (Gachanga, 2008, p. 158). Somjee applied the ‘Kamĩrĩĩthũ Way’ and offered accessible "community workshops that helped the village people to voice what they envisioned a museum to be" (Somjee, MOA, Presentation, March 13, 2020). The community peace museums developed from people sharing their cultural heritage in talking circles, and the performing arts including, stories, proverbs, riddles, songs, and dances. By sharing their knowledge through oral expressions and body senses, they learned about each other’s valued peace traditions. Various ethnic groups realized they had common ideals through *Utu*, which encompasses a holistic way of life of being at peace with one’s Supreme Being, ancestors, Elders, community, and nature.

Between 1993 – 2003, Somjee trained 23 curators who built peace museums across the country, supported by seed funding from the Mennonite Central Committee. The museum’s architecture simulates a traditional village hut of the local culture. Elder boards collaborate with the curators in education and public programs to disseminate *Utu* values drawing from the collections, community memories and displays.

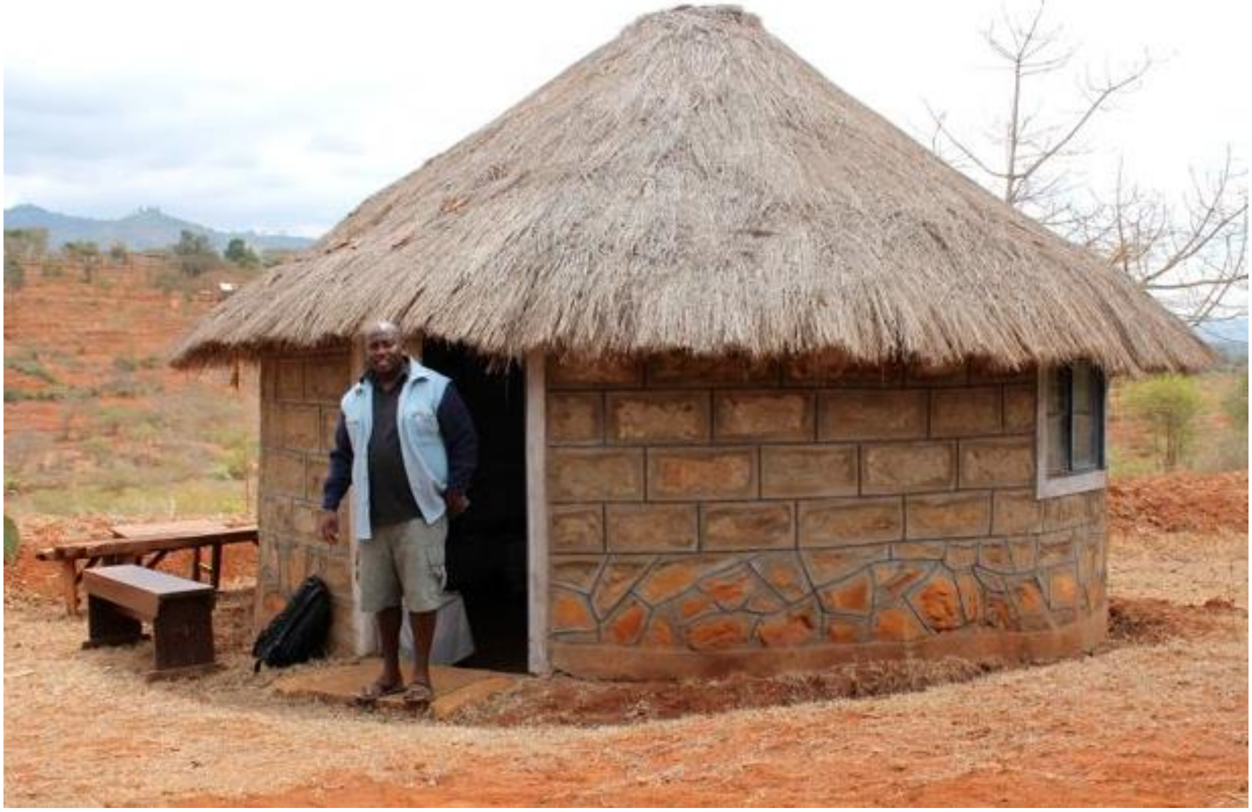

Figure 2. Curator Munuve Mutisya at the Akamba Community Peace Museum.
(photo by K. Baker, 2015)

In 2002, Somjee founded the CPMHF to bring the network of village peace museums together. What makes these community peace museums distinctive is their focus on a grassroots approach to recalling collective memories of the African humanist philosophy of *Utu.* The goal of the organization is to strengthen the cultural foundations that commemorate living without violence among ethnic communities through understanding a variety of cultural peace perspectives. In particular, the CPMHF employs the African humanist philosophy of *Utu* values and Indigenous peace heritage traditions in their museum practice in the following ways:

1) A people-centered methodology is employed to envision and create community peace museums, based on the humanistic values of the reciprocal relationships with the supreme being, ancestors (living-dead), Elders, community, and nature.

2) Museum material culture collections are used to connect people to their cultural peace heritage traditions through memory, language, and the expressive arts.

3) School programs and peace clubs teach *Utu* philosophy, highlighting peace heritage traditions and objects, and promoting peacemaking actions in contemporary community settings.

4) Museum programs support marginalized community members to reconcile with their community.

5) Museum curators work with local community groups to make traditional peace material culture.

Somjee, CPMHF curators, and Elders act as peacemakers during contemporary conflict scenarios. For example, they strive to bring together cultural groups that are in conflict in talking circles. During the peacemaking and reconciliation process the arts are employed as an expression of peace. Elders and community members wear peace material culture, carry peace staffs, sing songs, share stories, and dance, which serves as a reminder of *Utu*, and how to live together in peace and harmony.

In the next decade, the CPMHF cultivated international partnerships with NGOs to develop travelling national outreach exhibits and public programs: *The Great Bead Peace Tree* (2006-2008); *Journeys of Peace* (2013-2014); *Youth for Peace* (2014- 2015); *Tubonge: Women's Peace Material Culture* (2016-2018). The partnerships reinvigorated the peace museums and their strategy of public education. NGOs contributed much-needed funding.

Revitalizing Peace Heritage Traditions through Indigenous Art Education

The Community Peace Museums Heritage Foundation (CPMHF) support**s** indigenizing art education in an inclusive learning context. A key example is the *Tubonge: Women's Peace Material Culture* exhibition, which was a collaboration between the CPMHF, Fredens Hus (Peace House) in Uppsala, and the Swedish Institute in Sweden in 2016. *Tubonge* means 'let's talk or dialogue' in Sheng, which is a popular slang language of the urban youth in Kenya. The exhibition honoured African women as peacemakers, negotiators, and decision-makers in Indigenous communities. The CPMHF Akamba curator and project leader Munuve Mutisya explained the concept of the exhibition,

> Gender equality is the exhibit theme, which combats women's oppression, sexual exploitation, humiliation and killings. The aim is to provide teachers, students, youth, and artists with occasions to learn about how their female ancestors created artistic expressions (material culture, songs, dances, and stories) to generate *Utu* for gender

> and social equality. (Munuve Mutisya, personal communication, July 22, 2017)

Women are the traditional peacemakers of over 42 ethnic groups in Kenya. The exhibit fostered a revival of women's peace heritage traditions and encouraged a contemporary reinterpretation of *Utu* values through the arts. Additionally, the CPMHF curators supported 'person to person' interactions, promoting inter-ethnic and social equality in relationships. Between 2017 and 2018, the exhibit travelled to the Nairobi National Museum, the Community Peace Museums (CPM) Isukha Mulindi in Khayega, Kakamega, Kisii University, Abangusii Women's CPM, and the Osotua CPM in Narok.

In July 2018, the exhibition travelled to the Building Hope Academy School near Narok town. The school opened in 2013, which provided children with access to primary education for the first time. The introduction of standardized Western education marked a shift in children's learning away from being culturally centered. At risk was the decline in cultural heritage traditions within their local community. In 2017, a group of Maasai local widows and students from Lethbridge University in Canada built a traditional Maasai house on the school grounds. The intention was to provide children with a tangible connection to their cultural heritage.

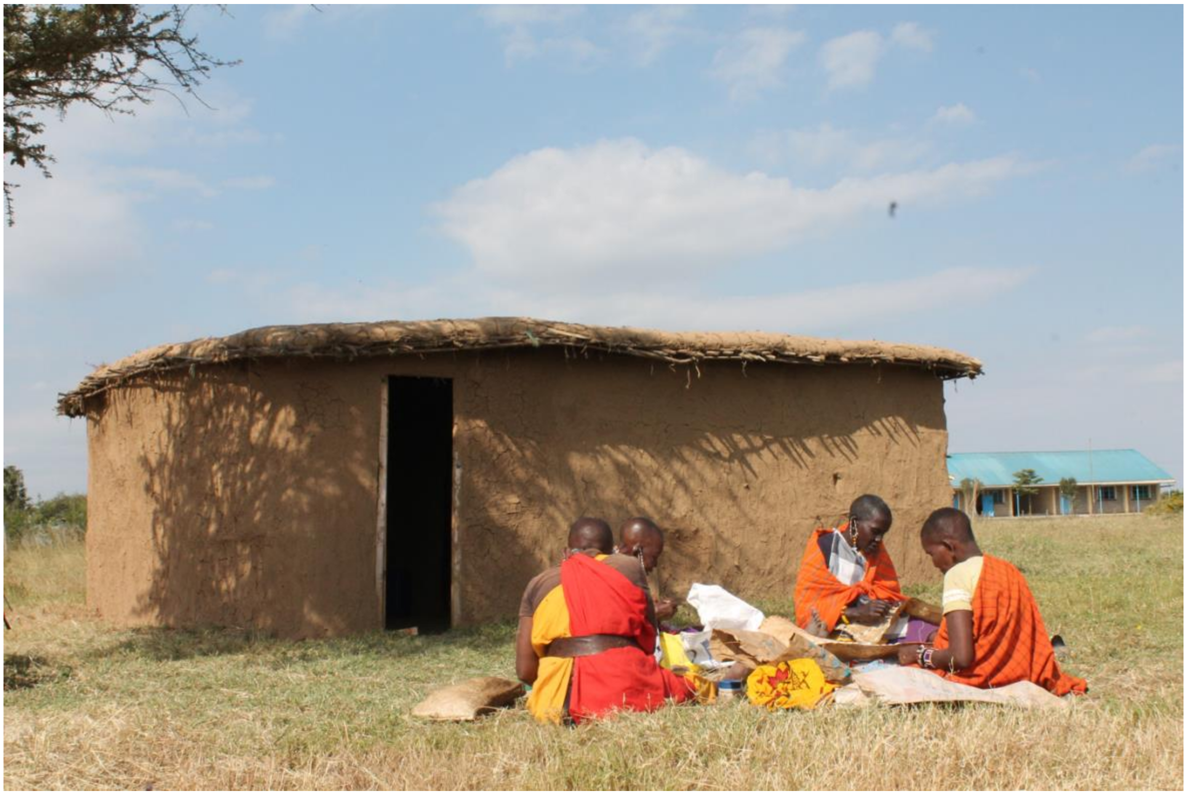

Figure 3. Maasai Women's Group (photo by K. Baker, 2017).

The Maasai women's group regularly meet to make beadwork. In the photograph below they are making an *olkila* (women's apron) that is worn like a cape. Traditionally, the apron is made by a mother to prepare for her daughter's marriage ceremony. Once she is married and has a baby the *olkila* is the first material to wrap the infant in after birth. The *olkila* is a significant symbol of peace because it is connected to the womb, which represents mother earth. A mother only needs to yell the word *olkila* and the children will stop arguing. The bead patterns are specifically colour coded to portray beauty and peace, which are one and the same to the Maasai. During the exhibition, the women's group created and presented the *olkila* at a school assembly.

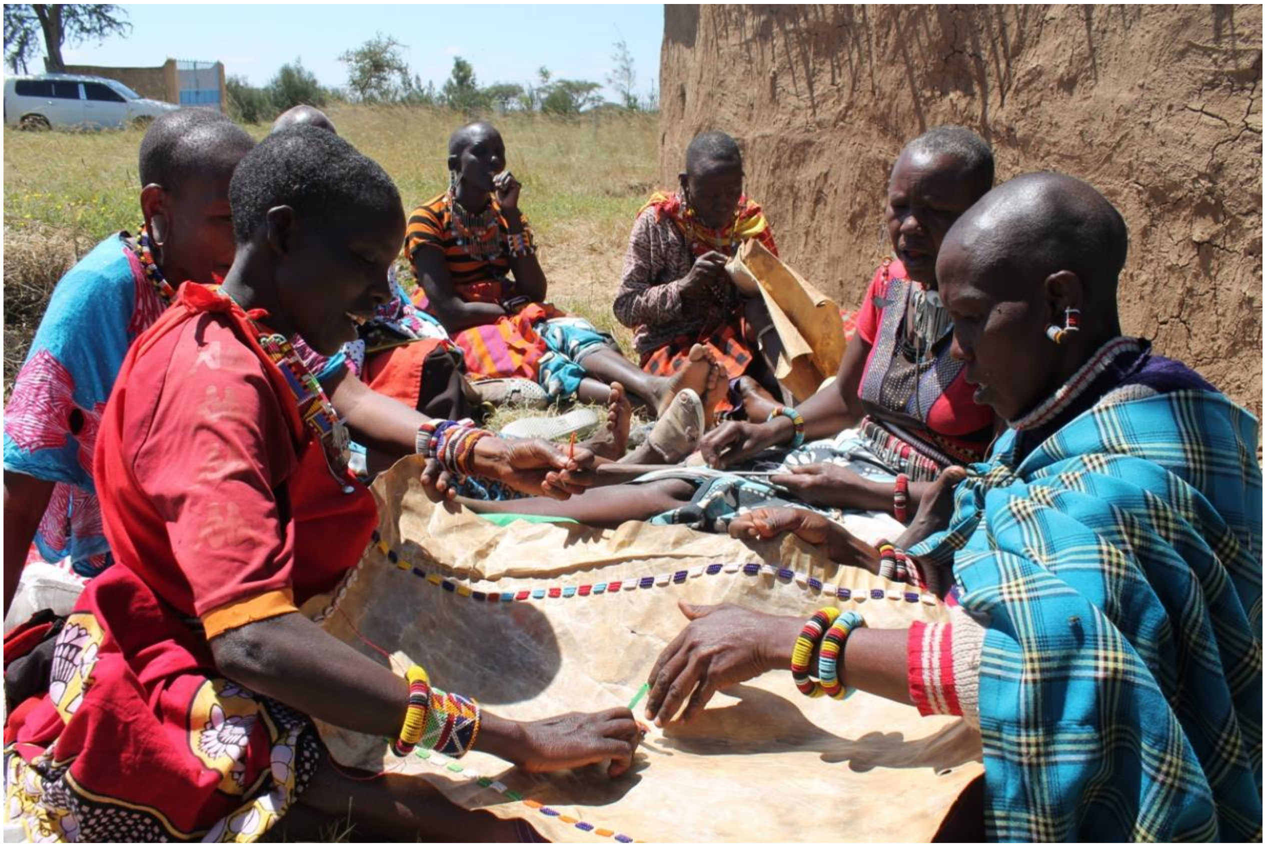

Figure 4. Maasai Women's Group beading an *Olkila* Peace Apron (photo by K. Baker, 2017).

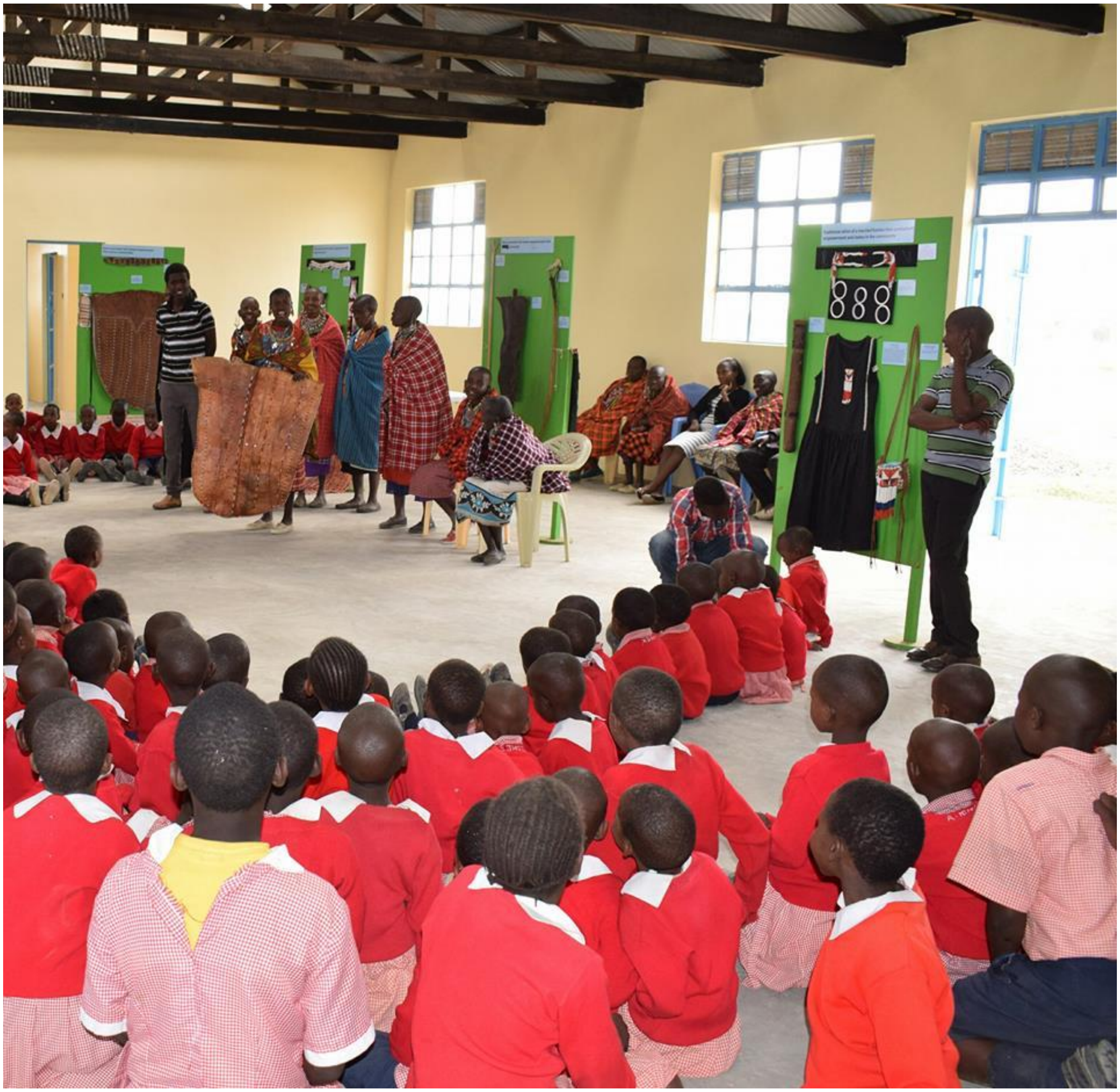

Figure 5. Maasai Women's Group beading an *Olkila* Peace Apron (photo by K. Baker, 2017).

There were two outcomes from the exhibition. Firstly, the Maasai women's group, initiated art education lessons in the classrooms to teach traditional beading artistic practices. The demonstration showed teacher's the value of teaching Indigenous aesthetics in school, which can provide:

(1) a means of sustaining ethnic identity
(2) a continued connection to cultural heritage traditions

(3) opportunities for students to learn about Indigenous kinetic aesthetics
(4) a way of learning about the environment.

Secondly, they decided that the Maasai house would become the *Osotua* Community Peace Museum.

The CPMHF and partner organizations brought together the community participants at the Nairobi National Museum for a conference to celebrate Indigenous women as peacemakers. In August, the Maasai women's beading group travelled to Nairobi to attend the *Tubonge* conference, which brought together women's ethnic groups, youth, post-secondary students, and community members in dialogue and celebration of peace heritage traditions. Each cultural group expressed peace through the expressive arts and their material culture. Hence, the CPMHF created opportunities to inspire people to revitalize the themes of peace through Indigenous relational aesthetics. In this way, the CPMHF organization works towards indigenizing art education.

Conclusion

Today, out of the original 23 museums,16 remain as independent organizations. They maintain their autonomy as grassroots civil societies, to retain their collections and not align with official policies and regulations, which diminish particular views of historical wrongs and Indigenous viewpoints. In doing so, these peace museums survive on shoe-string budgets and their numbers have diminished considerably. Where these peace museums survive, the Elder Boards and curators continue to employ grassroots methods to lessen ethnic conflicts and mistrust to build a civil society that works towards reconciliation.

The CPMHF promotes Indigenous perspectives of peace from a broader scope, which leads toward decolonization and the re-imagining of peace museums. The significance of indigenizing the peace museums in Eastern Africa is that people draw from their own time-honoured cultural traditions. Instead of utilizing Western-imposed methods that have no connection with their cultural environments. As we have learned, the CPMHF employs the African humanist philosophy of *Utu* values and Indigenous peacemaking practices in the following ways:

1. **Talking Circles:** Employs the 'Kamirithũ Way' that employs a 'people to people' approach for conflict reconciliation
2. **Preserving Elders Knowledge:** Establishes Elder Boards who disseminate their knowledge of peace heritage traditions to curators, children, youth, and community members
3. **Peace Material Culture:** Research and collect material culture for the purpose of

using it as a teaching tool to preserve peace traditions through memory, language and the expressive arts

4. **Expressive Arts:** Teaches traditional African expressive arts through drama, songs, dances, and artmaking of material culture which connects people through participatory art methods to encourage reconciliation, healing, and peace and community well-being
5. **Preserving Biological Heritage:** Protects sacred geography sites by maintaining the biodiversity of peace trees and biological heritage; encourages peace with the environment (Mother Earth); sustains environmental conservation for future generations; teaches students and youth Indigenous environmental education
6. **Preserving Indigenous Language:** Revitalizes Indigenous languages at risk through teaching students and youth language skills, stories, proverbs, songs, riddles
7. **Primary and Secondary School Peace Clubs:** Facilitates *Utu* and peace education programs that teach children and youth Indigenous peace heritage traditions through language, the expressive arts, and biological heritage
8. **Traveling Exhibitions and Programs:** Strengthens inter-cultural relationships; Maintains bonds between CPMHF curators; encourages reciprocal international partnerships to offer unique learning experiences for cultural workers; establishes funding for local and national projects

Furthermore, Somjee's theory of applying the humanist philosophy of *Utu* continues to influence a peace museum movement in Eastern Africa and beyond including the: *Gulu Community Peace Museum* in Uganda in 2001; *Community Museums of Peace of the African Child Soldier* in South Sudan in 2014; Living Peace Museum in Canada. These peace museums continue working towards strengthening cultural multiplicity.

Somjee's and the CPMHF's approach offers peace museum educators an opportunity to learn alternative peace education approaches based on 26 years of research focusing on an archive of intellectual, social, cultural, and biologically diverse cultural legacies. The international community of peace museums can learn from the African example in the following ways:

1. Reviewing peace museum's past practices and considering how the African peace museum's model can be catalysts for decolonizing heritage institutions
2. Considering moving away from the focus on post-war impacts toward reconciliation, peace, and healing
3. Strengthening inter-cultural bonds within their organization and with Indigenous groups
4. Fostering international partnership projects with Indigenous Peoples
5. Conducting research on Indigenous peace heritage traditions
6. Developing peace museum pedagogy based on cultural peace heritage traditions to

> foster and promote peace and harmony among diverse world cultures and the natural environment

In a world where violence is unyielding, Somjee's and the CPMHF greatest legacy is reviving the cultural memories and wisdom of peace and sustaining these rich heritage traditions through life-enriching education, collective creativity, and discussion to reduce conflict, enhance relationships and better humanity. The cornerstone is based on *Utu* and a respect for life, not just human life, but all forms of human and non-human. These museums actually revitalize *peace* and move beyond post-war impacts on citizens, victims' trauma, genocide, individual peacemakers, military history, to engaging and presenting cultural peace heritage histories, performance arts, and peacemaking tools. In this sense, they invite museum educators to rethink their approaches to creating peace in civil society.

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