

Traces of the Past

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. Key findings & highlights

Traces of the Past was a case display and video installation at the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM) that aimed to provide a platform for remembering the lives lost in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda; raise awareness of the Genocide; and support Genocide survivors to share their stories with members of the public visiting the PRM. *Traces of the Past* was a joint project and collaboration between Dr Julia Viebach (African Studies, University of Oxford); Jozie Kettle (PRM); the National Association of Rwandese Communities in the UK; and seven members of the Rwandan community.

Between May 2019 and January 2021, *Traces of the Past* displayed seven objects of remembrance that symbolise a connection to dead loved ones, loaned to the PRM by members of the Rwandan community. The case display was accompanied with a *Ejo Hazaza* (“a better tomorrow” in Kinyarwanda, the official language of Rwanda) video installation, featuring the survivors' stories of loss, pain and resilience shared within video testimonies (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 *Traces of the Past* case display at the Pitt Rivers Museum

An evaluation of *Traces of the Past* was undertaken in 2019-20 to explore the outputs, outcomes and impacts resulting from the display and video installation, by engaging with the experiences and views of museum visitors and the researcher, Dr Julia Viebach. Museum visitors were invited to share their thoughts and emotional responses to *Traces of the Past* by writing a short feedback letter (a total of 74 feedback letters were received); and meetings with the researcher, Julia, took place in order to explore her thoughts and reflections about the co-curated display. The COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges to *Traces of the Past* – in terms of the closure of the PRM for much of 2020 and also due to lockdown measures, we were unable to explore the thoughts and perceptions of members of the Rwandan community – which are therefore missing from this report.

Key outcomes and impacts on museum visitors included:

- Gratitude for this space to remember the victims of the Genocide.
- Raised awareness of the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda through engaging with survivors' stories of loss, pain and resilience.
- Increased understanding about the importance of commemoration.
- Emotional responses, for example, museum visitors felt moved, tearful and experienced empathy towards the suffering of Genocide survivors.
- Increased understanding of the significance of objects of remembrance.

Key outcomes and impacts on the researcher, Dr Julia Viebach, included:

- Provided new perspectives on creative commemorative practices.
- Reinforced the significance of objects of remembrance that are highly personal and materialise everyday moments of the past.
- Provided new perspectives on narratives of memory and informed Julia's research on diaspora commemoration of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.
- Legacy and next steps for *Traces of the Past* include exploring commemoration opportunities through the PRM's new webinar series.

Successes and aspects that worked well:

- Emotional and powerful experience; for example, evoked an emotional response and feelings of empathy.
- High-quality, unique and meaningful display, which stimulated museum visitors intellectually and engaged with them emotionally.
- Partnership and collaboration developed between the researcher, Julia Viebach; the PRM; and members of the Rwandan community to co-curate the commemoration space.
- Supported the PRM's commitment and strategic focus to co-curate content around particularly contested areas of PRM collections.

Challenges and recommendations:

- Disappointment that the case display was situated within a small area of the PRM.
- Suggestion to include additional historical information and a map; and add subtitles to the video installation.
- Given the educational value of *Traces of the Past*, the video could be shared in schools and with young adults to further disseminate important messages around resilience, survival, memory and life.
- The COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions posed significant challenges to *Traces of the Past* – both in terms of the closure of the PRM for much of 2020, and also the challenge this posed to our plans to explore the outcomes and impacts of *Traces of the Past* in more depth (i.e. an evening viewing and focus group with members of the public was originally scheduled to take place in March 2020, however, was cancelled due to the Pandemic).
- Some visitors misinterpreted the purpose of the feedback area and shared their feedback about their whole experience of the PRM, rather than specifically about *Traces of the Past*.

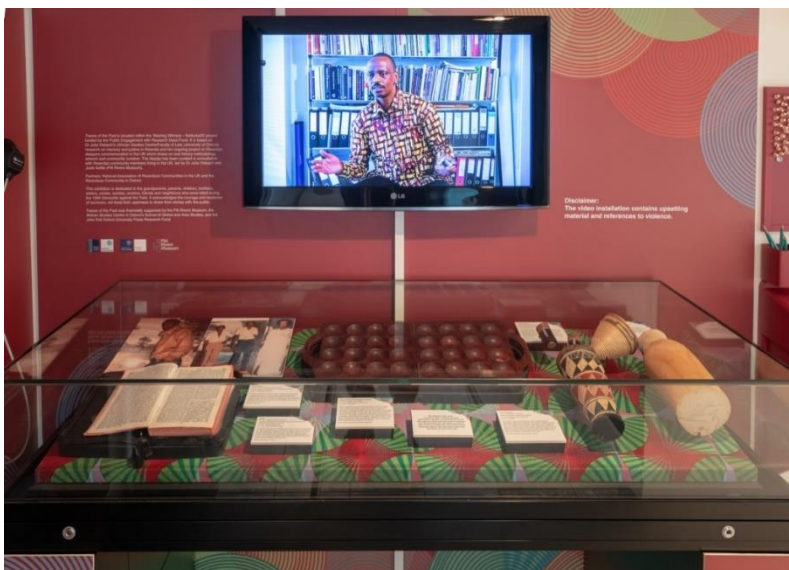
2. Introduction

Traces of the Past was a case display and video installation at the PRM in Oxford that aimed to provide a platform for remembering the lives lost in the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda; raise awareness of the Genocide; and support Genocide survivors to share their stories with members of the public visiting the PRM.

Traces of the Past was a joint project and collaboration between Dr Julia Viebach (African Studies, University of Oxford); Jozie Kettle (PRM); the National Association of Rwandese Communities in the UK; and seven members of the Rwandan community. Members of the Rwandan community were actively involved in curating a tangible commemoration space and loaned several objects that embody precious memories of loved ones whom they lost, which were displayed within a case installation. This was accompanied with a video installation featuring the survivors explaining the importance and meaning of the objects displayed. In the videos, survivors shared their experience of surviving the Genocide, what remembering means to them and how they have rebuilt their lives in the UK.

The case display and video installation provided survivors a platform to share their stories and aimed to publicly acknowledge both their traumatic experiences, and their resilience and creativity in building new lives in the UK diaspora. Moreover, *Traces of the Past* aimed to raise awareness of the consequences of the Genocide in order to foster empathy towards the suffering of distant others; and to inspire museum visitors by showcasing how people are able to remake their lives after such catastrophic events. *Traces of the Past* was displayed at the PRM between May 2019 and January 2021 (Figure 2). After the 17 March 2020, the PRM was closed for majority of 2020 following Government advice relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2 Traces of the Past case display and video installation at the PRM



Traces of the Past builds on Julia Viebach's research on memory and justice in Rwanda and ongoing project on Rwandan diaspora commemoration in the UK which draws on oral history methodology, artwork and community curation. The case display and video installation further aimed to develop Julia's collaboration with the PRM and the Rwandan diaspora community in Oxfordshire and London.

Traces of the Past was part of the *Bearing Witness – Kwibuka25* project and funded by the Public Engagement with Research Seed Fund in 2018/19. The project built upon the *Kwibuka Rwanda* ("we remember" in Kinyarwanda) photographic exhibition that was displayed at the PRM in 2018, which delved into the world of survivors working at memorials who have pledged their lives to care, clean and preserve the dead bodies of their loved ones that are often displayed at such sites. *Kwibuka Rwanda* had a significant impact on the Rwandan community in Oxfordshire, London and the Midlands: survivors were moved by the fact that the exhibition gave them space to mourn and honor their dead and they requested a permanent home for the exhibition. *Traces of the Past* aimed to provide this longer term, tangible commemoration space in which members of the Rwandan community could share stories that were most important to them.

Through a case display and video installation at the PRM, *Traces of the Past* aimed to acknowledge the courage and resilience of those who bear the burden of survivorhood; and raise awareness amongst museum visitors about the Genocide in Rwanda and the importance of remembering mass atrocities in a time of elevated right-wing populism and fear of otherness.



Figure 3 Bible. Victims: Tensiya Eliphaz (father), Charles Ukulikiyimfura and Dani Harelimana (brothers), Odette Nyirahabimana (niece). Location: Nyakabanda, Kigali, Rwanda. Lender: Sophie Masereka.

3. Evaluating *Traces of the Past*

An evaluation of *Traces of the Past* was carried out between 2019 and 2020 to explore the outputs, outcomes and impacts resulting from the project, by engaging with the experiences, reflections and views of museum visitors and Dr Julia Viebach.

Project objectives

The key objectives of *Traces of the Past* were to:

1. Create a tangible commemoration space in which members of the Rwandan community could share stories that were most important to them.
2. Raise awareness of the Genocide and how people are able to rebuild their lives after such catastrophic events through sharing video interviews with survivors.
3. Facilitate a collective space that brings together academics, diaspora communities and museum staff to curate together content around particularly contested areas of PRM collections.

Evaluation questions and sub-questions

1. What were the inputs and outputs of the project?
 - i. How many researchers; museum staff and members of the Rwanda community were involved in the curation of the display and video installation?
 - ii. What creative outputs were produced through the project?
2. What were the outcomes and impacts on museum visitors?
 - i. Did members of the public learn about the Genocide and spaces of remembrance?
 - ii. Did the display and video raise awareness of survivors' traumatic experiences, and their resilience and creativity in building new lives in the UK diaspora?
 - iii. Did people feel empathy towards the suffering of those who have been involved in mass atrocity?
3. What were the outcomes and impacts on the researcher and their research?
 - i. What was the benefit (if any) to the researcher involved and/ or their research?
 - ii. What was the legacy of the project?
4. What learning and recommendations can be made for future commemorative spaces; and curated content around contested areas of PRM collections?

The evaluation was both summative (to explore the outcomes and impacts of *Traces of the Past* on visitors to the museum), and formative (to gather learning and identify recommendations to enhance and improve the project in the future).

Evaluation methodology

Multiple evaluation tools were used to gather data and evidence for the evaluation. A summary of the different approaches is provided below:

Evaluation tool	Description	Number of responses
Feedback letters	<p>Feedback letters (see Appendix 1) were used as a creative method to invite museum visitors to share their thoughts and emotional responses to <i>Traces of the Past</i>, by writing a short letter. When writing their letter, visitors could choose to address their message to the victims, survivors, researcher or museum staff.</p> <p>Visitors were invited to write their thoughts in their letter, and could either pin their letter to the notice board or post a private letter into the box provided. Guidance was included next to the case display to encourage visitors to share their comments and responses (see Appendix 2).</p>	<p>Number of feedback letters received: 74</p> <p>Out of a total of 74 feedback letters, 37 feedback letters referred specifically to <i>Traces of the Past</i>, while 37 referred more generally to the museum or to other displays in the museum.</p>
Meetings with the researcher and Public Engagement with Research Lead(s) at the PRM	Meetings with Dr Julia Viebach, Jozie Kettle (Public Engagement with Research Officer, PRM) and Jessica Croll-Knight (Public Engagement with Research Officer, PRM) to develop the evaluation tool for the display; explore their thoughts and reflections about the co-curated display; and reflect on the feedback letters received from museum visitors.	Number of meetings: 7

Data protection and ethical considerations

When collecting data and evidence for the evaluation, the following key ethical procedures and data protection standards were followed:

- The feedback letters included details about how respondents' data would be used and for what purpose; and who was conducting the evaluation. Contact details were provided if respondents had any questions about the evaluation. We emphasised that all responses would be anonymised and would not be attributed to any respondent.
- Guidance was also included next to the case display explaining the purpose of the feedback letters and how the responses would be used.

- Respondents were given the choice to either add their feedback letter to the pinboard next to the display, or could keep their response private and not share this with other museum visitors by posting their letter into the feedback post box.
- Pinboards of photographs, messages and thoughts is a method used in Genocide memorials, and it was important for us to be aware of this and culturally sensitive – given the sensitivity of this topic (i.e. no ‘smileys faces’ or rating comment cards). The evaluation approach used for the display invited museum visitors to share their thoughts in a letter, and was therefore, a much more culturally sensitive method and deemed as an appropriate way to explore people’s thoughts and responses to the display.

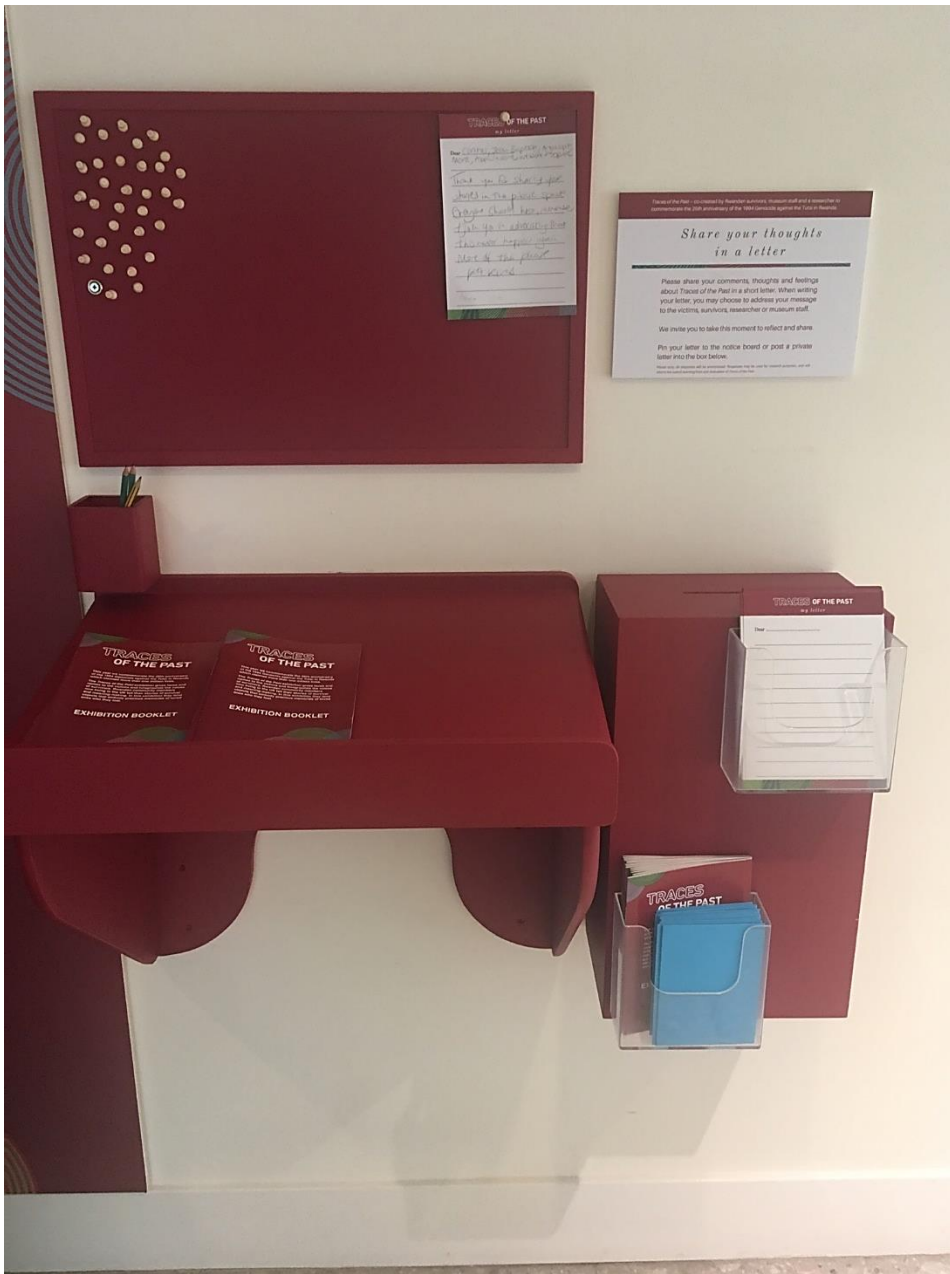


Figure 4 Feedback area next to Traces of the Past display - inviting museum visitors to share their thoughts by writing a feedback letter

4. Evaluation findings

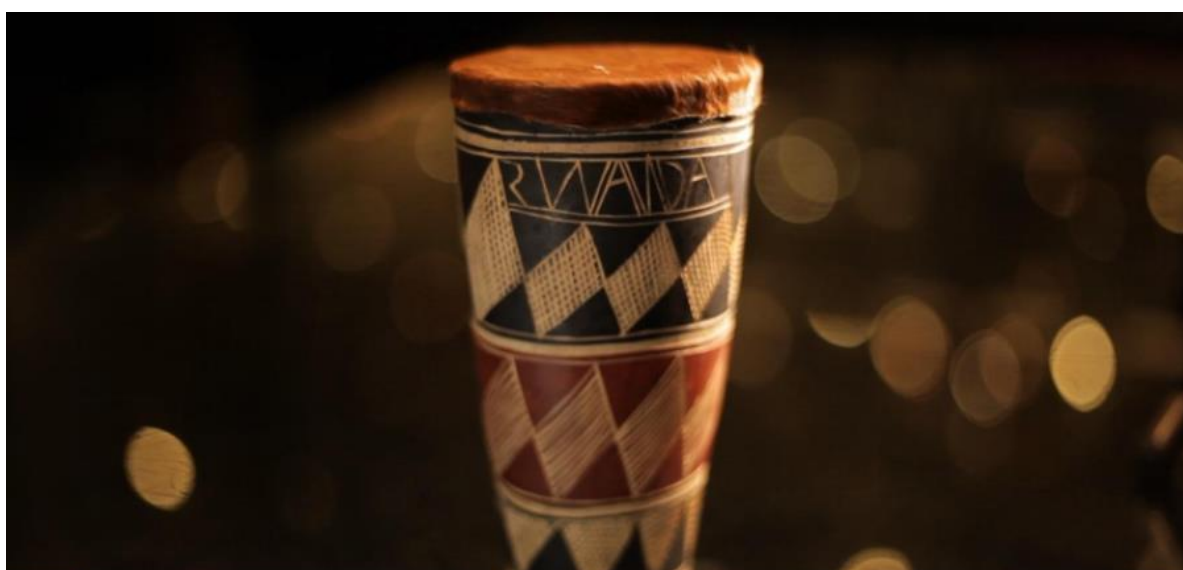
4.1 Inputs and outputs

This first section provides an overview of the key inputs and outputs from *Traces of the Past*.

Key inputs and outputs:

- *Traces of the Past* case display at the PRM displaying seven objects of remembrance and *Ejo Hazaza* video installation, which was also uploaded to the PRM Vimeo webpage: [Traces of the Past film](#).
- Copies of the exhibition booklet were printed and provided at the case display. The [Traces of the Past exhibition booklet](#) was also uploaded to the PRM webpages.
- [PRM webpage](#) containing further information about *Traces of the Past*.
- The following individuals were involved in the design, development and curation of *Traces of the Past*:
 - *Traces of the Past* was a joint project and collaboration between Dr Julia Viebach (Departmental Lecturer in the African Studies Centre, School of Global and Area Studies, University of Oxford); Jozie Kettle (Public Engagement with Research Officer, PRM); the National Association of Rwandese Communities in the UK; and seven members of the Rwandan community.
 - Print design by Katherine Clough, Creative Jay.
 - Video by Film Oxford.
 - Case installation by Adrian Vizer, PRM.
- Funded by the University of Oxford Public Engagement with Research Seed Fund in 2018/19; and financially supported by the PRM; the African Studies Centre, Oxford School of Global and Area Studies; and the John Fell Oxford University Press Research Fund.

Figure 5 Drum (Ingoma). Victims: Angelique Ishimwe, Alida Uwamahoro, Laurence (friends). Location: Kigali, Rwanda. Lender: Angelique Ndamukunda.



4.2 Outcomes and impacts on museum visitors

This next section explores the different outcomes and impacts on museum visitors who engaged with and shared their thoughts about *Traces of the Past*.

i. Gratitude for this space to remember the victims of the Genocide

Respondents experienced a sense of gratitude to the curators of *Traces of the Past*, for remembering the victims of the Genocide and providing an opportunity to hear survivors' stories and what they have been through.

As illustrated in the following quotes extracts from completed feedback letters, museum visitors expressed their gratitude towards the survivors for bravely sharing their stories, deeply personal memories and objects of remembrance. *Traces of the Past* provided museum visitors with a space to remember and reflect; and respondents were grateful to the curators for helping to remember those who perished; and for providing an important reminder to prevent this from happening in the future:

"Thank you for featuring these stories and to the brave and wise people who shared them. May we all learn and grow from their example and work toward a world where this kind of violence is impossible."

"Museum staff. Thank you for giving everyone the opportunity to remember and reflect – thank you for giving everyone the ability to remember this and remember the victims."

"Dear Julia Viebach, heart-breaking and terrifying, but full of love and kindness. Thank you to help remember this; we need these reminders to stop it from happening again."

The word cloud below (figure 6) highlights the various words that respondents used in their feedback letter for *Traces of the Past* (with the size of each word representing the relative frequency) – which illustrates the most commonly used words were "dear", "museum" and "thank you":

"To those who were interviewed, your story itself made a difference for me. Thank you for enlightening me and consolidating our need to come together and help. Thank you."

"So important in bringing meaning to something that can feel like something incomprehensible"

"Dear survivors, it is unimaginable what you went through. I am so sorry for your pain and loss. It is hard to think that the contents of a small box or a single item might be all that you have left of a loved one. I applaud your resilience and my prayer for you is that the future ahead is bright and joyful. Thank you for sharing your story."

iii. Increased understanding about the importance of commemoration

Respondents highlighted an increased understanding about commemoration as an important way to remember the lives lost in the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. In particular, respondents emphasised how they learned about the devastating consequences of the Genocide and dangers of racist oppression, violence and denial of human rights and democratic values.

Traces of the Past raised awareness of the importance of memory and commemoration amongst museum visitors, who highlighted that we must learn from history and advocate that genocide should never happen again. Respondents emphasised the need to preserve history and commemorate the victims of the Genocide; and how they had learned about the role of commemoration in providing hope for a future world without violence.

"Dear Museum, thank you for appreciating and preserving history as it should be. Without you our past would be forgotten. It is so vital to not only commemorate our history but to learn and grow from it."

"Dear Survivors, thank you for sharing deeply personal memories that are so painful to recall and share. It is an honour to be trusted with them and it is our responsibility to share and disseminate them and to stand for and with survivors. Your grace, dignity, beauty and courage are profound and an extraordinary tribute to your people and to the family and friends you lost in the genocide."

"Please know how powerful and impact your stories have, how important they are and you are, and how deeply grateful we are for your generosity and bravery. May you be blessed with health, peace and well-being"

iv. Emotional response

Many respondents experienced an emotional response to the survivors' life stories – and in particular, highlighted how the stories were painful and powerful. Museum visitors felt moved, tearful and experienced empathy towards the suffering of Rwandans who talked about their experience surviving the Genocide and explained the importance of the objects displayed.

The word cloud below (figure 7) highlights the various words that museum visitors used to describe *Traces of the Past* that relate to an emotional response (with the size of each word representing the relative frequency):

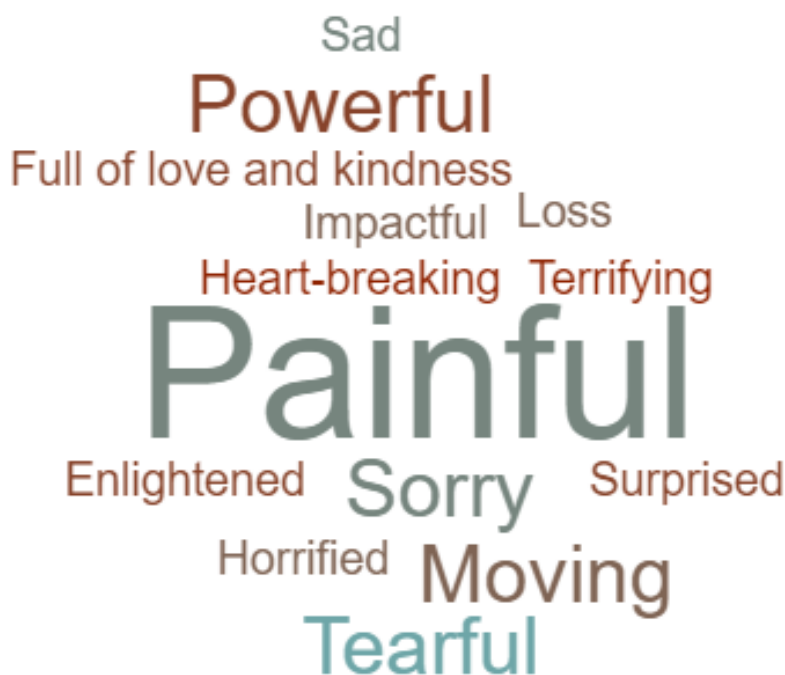


Figure 7 Word cloud – words that museum visitors used in the feedback letters, which relate to an emotional response.

“Dear Survivors, thank you for bearing witness and sharing your stories. I am walking away with tears in my eyes as this could happen to anyone, anywhere if we let divisions be more important than people. Bless you and love.”

“Thank you for sharing this painful part of our human experience. It is important not to forget such tragedies in the hope that this will never be repeated.”

v. Increased understanding of the significance of objects of remembrance

Respondents emphasised the importance of the objects of remembrance in helping them to understand and appreciate the struggles and traumatic experiences of survivors. Museum visitors

highlighted how the tangible objects from the past enabled them to understand the experiences of survivors. These objects came to life through the oral history interviews and respondents experienced empathy towards the suffering of those who are often perceived as 'others'; as one respondent emphasised, the objects *"brought meaning to something that can feel incomprehensible"*.

There was an emotional intensity surrounding these very personal objects, and one respondent highlighted how it was difficult to fathom that a single item is all a person has left of a loved one. One respondent further emphasised how the objects brought about new meaning to existing objects in the museum:

"Dear Pitt Rivers Museum and survivors, thank you so much for sharing your stories, and the objects of memory that actually bring new meanings to the other objects in the museum. Almost brought tears to my eye!"

"Is always amazing to find piece of yourself in objects of the past, in books, in a photograph"

vi. Other outcomes

Respondents highlighted other outcomes and impacts as a result of engaging with *Traces of the Past*, including: raised awareness of the dangers of oppression and divisions within society and understanding what is possible if human rights are not protected within society. One further respondent emphasised a feeling of connectedness with the survivors' experiences; and highlighted the importance of raising awareness of what has happened.

4.3 Outcomes and impacts on the researcher

The following section explores the outcomes and impacts on Dr Julia Viebach and her research around diaspora commemoration of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

i. Provided new perspectives on creative commemorative practices

Julia emphasised how *Traces of the Past* opened up new possibilities for researching and understanding the value of creative commemorative spaces with objects of remembrance that are chosen by survivors. *Traces of the Past* has informed Julia's ongoing project on community curation and creative diaspora commemoration practices, which aims to move beyond traditional commemorative practices, whereby objects are typically chosen by the state, and are often of traditional items of clothing to commemorate the dead.

ii. Reinforced the significance of objects of remembrance

For Julia, *Traces of the Past* reinforced the significance of objects and testimonies as a creative approach for diaspora Rwandans to share their stories and commemorate the lives lost in the Genocide. Julia reflected on how this process has highlighted the importance of objects, which are highly personal and materialise everyday moments of the past, within her own research on Rwandan diaspora commemoration. In particular, the ways in which these objects were chosen by the survivors and symbolised loved ones; and came to life through the oral history interviews as members of the Rwandan community shared intimate accounts of family life, their loved ones and what the objects mean to them.

iii. Provided new perspectives on narratives of memory

Julia shared how the video installation featuring the survivors' stories opened up different ways of thinking about narratives of memory and has informed her research on diaspora commemoration. For Julia, these video testimonies provided an opportunity for the survivors to share what remembering means to them in ways that differed from conventional oral history methods, whereby videos are often of Rwandans who are still living in Rwanda, and less often the experiences of diaspora communities who have rebuilt their lives in the UK. Julia further emphasised that rather than highlighting the Genocide as a single event within a specific moment in time; *Traces of the Past* has shed light on the realities and complex histories surrounding the Genocide in Rwanda and sparks of violence throughout history over time.

Moreover, the video testimonies further opened up possibilities for Julia to explore a more in-depth analysis of grief and inform her wider research on memory and commemoration. For example, the ways in which diaspora Rwandans shared their stories of survival and meaning-making; spoke about their loved ones; and the differences in the language used and associated with memory.

iv. Legacy and next steps for *Traces of the Past*

Julia is currently exploring opportunities through the PRM's new webinar series, which invites researchers who have been involved in PRM projects to discuss the topic of radical hope beyond the museum; and reflect on their work engaging with different voices and collaborating with external partners and communities. For example, this might involve sharing the *Traces of the Past* video testimonies and facilitating a conversation around commemoration and the different ways of memorialising genocide. This could also provide an opportunity to engage in more depth with people's views and responses to *Traces of the Past*, and could be held around the time of the mourning period of the Rwandan Genocide which takes place between April – July.

4.4 Successes, challenges and recommendations

This final section highlights the key lessons learned through *Traces of the Past*; and explores the key successes and what worked well; and the challenges and recommendations for *Traces of the Past*.

Successes and aspects that worked well

i. Emotional and powerful experience

Traces of the Past evoked an emotional response in museum visitors which served to elicit empathy towards Genocide survivors and what they have been through. This emotional engagement and empathy evoked in a museum context increased people's awareness of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, and their understanding of the complexities and realities of survivors' experiences of the Genocide.

The video testimonies of survivors' stories stimulated emotional engagement and allowed museum visitors to identify with the thoughts and feelings with these individuals and develop an emotional connection with members of the Rwandan community. The personal and story-telling aspect of *Traces of the Past* worked well; and many of the museum visitors' responses referred to the display's focus on personal stories and the emotional stories attached to the objects. For example, respondents experienced an emotional response to the survivors' life stories – and in particular highlighted how the stories were painful and powerful, while some felt moved, tearful and experienced empathy towards the suffering of survivors.

This emotional response and connection to the survivors' stories was highlighted in the following visitor responses:

"Dear traces of the past, I found the voices and stories so powerful and genuine in understanding the pain and loss of the survivors."

"Thank you for sharing deeply personal memories that are so painful to recall and share... Please know how powerful and impact your stories have, how important they are and you are, and how deeply grateful we are for your generosity and bravery."

ii. High-quality and meaningful display

Traces of the Past was a high-quality and meaningful display, which both stimulated museum visitors intellectually and engaged with them emotionally. As evidenced in museum visitors' feedback letters, this was an important, valuable and meaningful display through which museum visitors learned about the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. For example, respondents

described *Traces of the Past* as “important”, “powerful”, “moving” and “great”. The following quotes and word cloud (figure 8) further illustrate museum visitors’ responses regarding the overall quality of the display:

“Wonderful exhibition and video remembering the victims of the terrible genocide and reminding us of the importance of memory! Thank you to the curators and those who shared their stories, memories and the few precious objects of remembrance!”

“Thank you for an extraordinarily important, human, ethically engaging and urgent exhibit on genocide and on the dangers of racist oppression, violence and denial of human rights and democratic values.”



Figure 8 Word cloud – words that museum visitors used in the feedback letters, which relate to the overall quality of the display.

iii. Key partnerships and collaborative approach to curating the display

A key success of *Traces of the Past* the partnership and collaboration developed between the researcher, Julia Viebach; the PRM; and members of the Rwandan community to co-curate a tangible, physical commemoration space. The Rwandan survivors were actively involved in curating the video and case display, lending personal objects to be displayed in the case display and sharing their own stories and experiences through the video testimonies. This process of co-curating and developing *Traces of the Past* was different to more conventional approaches to commemorate the lives lost in the Genocide in Rwanda; which often involve a one-off commemoration ceremony; or objects that are chosen by the state. For *Traces of the Past*, members of the Rwandan community were able to decide their own narratives and select an

object that symbolises loving memories. This unique approach to co-curating the display proved to be effective in raising awareness amongst museum visitors about the Genocide in Rwanda and the importance of remembering mass atrocities.

iv. Co-curating content around particularly contested areas of PRM collections

Traces of the Past supported the PRM's commitment and strategic focus to facilitate spaces in which people with varied lived experiences can find a platform to speak and present from their own perspectives around particularly contested areas of PRM collections. The project acknowledges the courage and resilience and survivors, and facilitated a space in which members of the Rwandan community could share stories that were most important to them.

Challenges and recommendations

While there the feedback from museum visitors was largely positive; a small number of respondents highlighted a challenge or barrier to engaging with the display; and provided recommendations to further develop *Traces of the Past*:

- Feeling disappointment that the case display was situated within a small area of the PRM and would have liked to have seen a more prominent space allocated for the commemoration space.
- Additional historical information and a map would have been helpful.
- The video volume in the earpiece was low and subtitles on the video would have been helpful¹.
- Given the educational value of *Traces of the Past*, the video could be shared in schools and with young adults to further disseminate these important messages around resilience, survival, memory and life.

"Dear Museum, disappointed that this 'remembrance' is stuck in the corner- but at least there is thought and consideration with the small show of commemoration."

"This exhibit is extremely timely and relevant and of enormous educational value and consequence. I hope the Pitt Rivers will continue to explore the legacies of the Rwandan genocide and the ways in which survivors rebuild their lives in the UK and elsewhere and reconstitute their communities. Please share the video testimonies with local Oxford schools and beyond. Schools and young adults need

¹ This was a challenge also raised by Julia to the PRM, and subtitles were later added to the video installation.

to have access to these extraordinary narratives of resilience, survival, memory and life. Thanks.

Further reflections and challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions posed significant challenges to *Traces of the Past* – both in terms of the closure of the PRM for much of 2020, and also the challenge this posed to our plans to explore the outcomes and impacts of *Traces of the Past* in more depth through an evening viewing and informal group discussion. However, due to lockdown measures, we were unable to carry out this evaluation activity. We had initially planned to explore the thoughts and perceptions of members of the Rwandan community, however, the impact of COVID has meant that the voices of the Rwandan community and partners are missing from this report. There is potential to facilitate online engagement activity around *Traces of the Past*, through the PRM new webinar series, which could also present an additional evaluation opportunity to explore members of the public's views about the case display and video installation in more depth.

Another challenge we faced with the evaluation was some misinterpretation of the feedback area. Many of the museum visitors who shared their feedback by writing a letter perceived the feedback area to be about their whole experience of the PRM or Oxford University Museum of Natural History, rather than specifically about *Traces of the Past*. While we provided guidance and information about the purpose of the feedback area, out of a total of 74 feedback letters received, 37 feedback letters referred specifically to *Traces of the Past*, while 37 referred more generally to the museum or to other displays in the museum. We further reflected that a potential challenge here could also have been the title of the exhibition, 'Traces of the Past', which some museum visitors may have misinterpreted this or assumed the display was related to all museum objects of the past.

5. Conclusion

In returning to the key objectives of *Traces of the Past*, the following conclusions can be made:

Objective 1: To create a tangible commemoration space in which members of the Rwandan community could share stories that were most important to them.

Traces of the Past brought together Dr Julia Viebach; the PRM; and members of the Rwandan community to co-curate a tangible, physical space at the PRM to commemorate victims of 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. Rwandan community members now living in the UK shared objects of remembrance that embody precious memories of loved ones whom they have lost. The objects loaned by members of the Rwandan community were presented within a case display at the PRM between May 2019 and January 2021, alongside a *Ejo Hazaza* video installation wherein diaspora Rwandans shared their stories of survival and meaning-making. These objects came to life through the video testimonies, as members of the Rwandan community shared their stories in order to publicly acknowledge not only horror and their traumatic experiences, but loving memories and emphasising their resilience and creativity in building new lives in the UK diaspora.

Objective 2: To raise awareness of the Genocide and how people are able to rebuild their lives after such catastrophic events through sharing video interviews with survivors.

Overall, respondents learned more about the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda through the survivors' stories of loss, pain and resilience shared within the video testimonies. These deeply personal stories enlightened museum visitors and raised awareness of the Genocide; of the lives that were taken; and the deeply traumatic experiences of survivors. Respondents were thankful to the curators of *Traces of the Past* – for remembering the victims of the Genocide and providing an opportunity to hear their stories.

The respondents further recognised narratives of resilience, survival and memory within the survivor testimonies; and how these individuals have been able to rebuild their lives after such catastrophic events. There was a significant emotional response to the survivors' life stories in many of the respondents' feedback letters. In particular, respondents highlighted how the stories were painful and powerful, while some felt moved, tearful and experienced empathy towards the suffering of survivors who talked about their experience surviving the Genocide and explained the importance of the objects displayed.

Objective 3: To facilitate a collective space that brings together academics, diaspora communities and museum staff to curate together content around particularly contested areas of PRM collections.

Traces of the Past illustrated the value of the partnerships developed between the PRM, researcher and members of the Rwandan community in order to curate together a museum case display and video installation. The project acknowledges the courage and resilience of survivors,

and facilitated a space in which members of the Rwandan community could share stories that were most important to them. *Traces of the Past* is a vital part of the PRM commitment to facilitate a space in which people with varied lived experiences can find a platform to speak and present from their own perspectives around particularly contested areas of PRM collections. This has opened up new possibilities for unique, commemorative spaces whereby objects are chosen by survivors, which differs from more traditional commemorative practices (for example, in which objects are chosen by the state), in order to curate content together around particularly contested areas of PRM collections.

6. About this evaluation

This evaluation is part of a much wider building capacity programme at the University of Oxford that aims to equip researchers with the skills, knowledge, experience and support to plan, deliver and evaluate Public Engagement with Research activities.

This evaluation will also be written up as a case study, as one of four best practice case studies (one from each of the University's Academic Divisions), to provide inspiration, guidance and ideas for researchers and professional services staff on the evaluation of Public Engagement with Research activities.

For more information about evaluating Public Engagement with Research at the University of Oxford;

- See the current training opportunities; <http://www.ox.ac.uk/research/public-engagement/support-researchers>
- Contact **Dr Annaleise Wood** (Engagement & Evaluation Facilitator, Public Engagement with Research, Research Services): annaleise.wood@admin.ox.ac.uk

7. Acknowledgements

Thank you to those who have shared their thoughts and reflections about *Traces of the Past* by completing a feedback letter. Your time in contributing to this evaluation is much appreciated.

This evaluation was supported by Dr Julia Viebach (African Studies Centre, Oxford School of Global and Area Studies) in the Social Sciences Division at the University of Oxford. Thank you to Julia for helping to shape the evaluation questions, for embedded the feedback area within the case display and for contributing your own creative ideas and suggestions throughout.

This evaluation was conducted by Dr Annaleise Wood (Engagement & Evaluation Facilitator, Public Engagement with Research, Research Services), with support from Dr Lesley Paterson (Head, Public Engagement with Research, Research Services).

The programme to build capacity in evaluating Public Engagement with Research, which these evaluation case studies form a part of, was developed by the Public Engagement with Research Team in Research Services, and supported by the Public Engagement with Research Advisory Group (with representatives from across the Academic Divisions and the Gardens, Libraries & Museums).

Traces of the Past was funded by the University of Oxford's Public Engagement with Research Seed Fund in 2018/19; and financially supported by the PRM; the African Studies Centre, Oxford School of Global and Area Studies; and the John Fell Oxford University Press Research Fund.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Feedback letter

TRACES OF THE PAST

my letter

Dear

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Thank you for sharing your thoughts about
Traces of the Past.

Please either pin your letter to the notice
board, or post your letter into the box.

How we use your data

We will use your data for the purposes of exploring your thoughts, emotions and feelings about the *Traces of the Past* display.

This letter will inform the overall learning from and evaluation of *Traces of the Past*. The results will be published in internal reports and an evaluation case study, and may also be used in research publications. This evaluation is being conducted by Annaleise Depper (Evaluation Officer, Public Engagement with Research) at the University of Oxford. If you have any questions about the evaluation please contact: annaleise.depper@admin.ox.ac.uk.

Please note, your responses will be anonymised and no names will be shared publicly.

If you have a question or comment about *Traces of the Past*, please contact Julia Viebach (African Studies Centre, University of Oxford): julia.viebach@africa.ox.ac.uk.

Appendix 2: Guidance for *Traces of the Past* feedback area

Traces of the Past ~ co-created by Rwandan survivors, researchers and museum staff to commemorate the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi

Share your thoughts in a letter

Please share your thoughts, emotions and feelings about *Traces of the Past* in a short letter. When writing your letter, you may choose to address your message to the victims, survivors, researcher or museum staff.

We invite you to take this moment to reflect and share.

Pin your letter to the notice board or post a private letter into the box below.

Please note, all responses will be anonymised. Responses may be used for research purposes, and will inform the overall learning from and evaluation of *Traces of the Past*.