

**UMSAEP UM-UWC Linkage Report
Visit of Professor Ciraj Rassool to UMSL
Submitted by Andrew Hurley
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Overview

This document serves as the final report on the visit of Ciraj Rassool, Director of the African Programme in Museum and Heritage Studies at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), to the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) campus between October 19 and October 31, 2017. Funding for the project was approved and funded in September 2015, on the basis of a proposal submitted by Andrew Hurley, earlier that year titled, “UWC-UMSL Collaborative Museum Studies and Cultural Heritage Curriculum Initiative.” The focus of the collaborative initiative was refined in late August 2015 during a two-week visit to UWC by Andrew Hurley. Professor Rassool’s visit to UMSL produced the first tangible output of the collaboration, a workshop exploring museum strategies for interpreting the forced relocation of marginalized urban populations. The visit also established a framework for continued collaboration between the Museum Studies programs of the two universities.

Background

Collaboration between UMSL and UWC in the fields of Heritage and Museum Studies dates to 1993 when Charles P. Korr, Professor of History at UMSL, began working with partners at UWC and the Robben Island Museum to interpret the role played by football on Robben Island Prison during the apartheid era. This collaboration culminated in a film and book on the subject in 2007 and 2008, respectively. Possibilities for subsequent collaboration were revived following the establishment and maturation of formal museum studies programs at both institutions. Given the parallel educational missions of these programs--training students for careers in museums and heritage organizations--initial communications between Professors Hurley and Rassool focused on the development of shared curricular activities. These ideas were articulated in the proposal submitted to the UM-WWC Linkage program in early August 2015. Later that month, Professor Hurley visited the UWC campus to identify fruitful areas of curricular collaboration. Over the course of that visit, it became apparent that the obstacles to collaborative teaching were many: discordant academic calendars, time zone differentials, unique online instructional platforms, limited financial resources for student exchanges, etc. While the pursuit of teaching collaborations was not entirely abandoned, it was decided to reorient the partnership around research and public programming. A committee comprised of faculty from each campus was charged with the responsibility of developing and implementing a permanent collaborative framework.

Project Goals

In light of the redefined agenda, Professor Rassool’s visit to UMSL was organized around the following objectives:

- Implement public programming building on intellectual and experiential strengths of the two Museum Studies units.
- Develop a framework for further research collaboration.

Activities, Achievements, and Outputs

Public Programming

Professor Rassool played a lead role in conceptualizing, organizing, and implementing the Memorializing Displacement workshop, held at various locations in St. Louis, October 26-28, 2017. The purpose of this workshop was to join scholars and museum professionals from South Africa and the United States in discussions about how museums in each country have interpreted the tragedy of forced removals and relocations of urban populations. In South Africa, these removals occurred under the auspices of the Group Areas Act. With the fall of the apartheid regime, museums emerged as the primary institutional vehicle for integrating the memory of these events into nation-building processes. In the United States, similar removals occurred as a result of post-World War urban renewal policies but there has not been the same level of museum attention to such events. One of the objectives of workshop was to consider how innovative interpretive strategies employed by South African museums might be applied in the United States.

With the assistance of Professor Rassool, we were able to identify leading museum experts affiliated with UWC's African Programme in Heritage and Museum Studies, as either faculty or former students, and secure additional funding to fly them to St. Louis for the purpose of participating in the workshop. The Missouri History Museum and the Center for the Humanities at Washington University joined the UMSL History Department as co-sponsors of the event, ensuring wide outreach into the community of heritage and museum professionals in the St. Louis metropolitan area. Professor Rassool and the three other South African guests were featured in the opening plenary session, which highlighted innovate museum practices in post-apartheid South Africa. Professor Rassool also facilitated the final session of the workshop, which aimed to jumpstart commemorative projects about displaced communities in the St. Louis area. The workshop, attended by approximately 100 people, fulfilled the intended objectives and local follow-up meetings have been scheduled to carry the initiative forward.

Teaching Collaboration

To advance further teaching collaborations within the constraints noted above, Professor Rassool shared teaching responsibility with UMSL instructors in two graduate courses. In one of these two classes, Professor Rassool was joined by Professor Leslie Witz, Chair of the Department of History at UWC, who was also in town to participate in the Memorializing Displacement workshop. The purpose of these joint teaching ventures was to familiarize UWC faculty with the capacities of UMSL students and UMSL's museum studies curriculum.

An outcome of these successful class visits was an agreement to conduct occasional telecommunication conferences between students and faculty on the UWC and UMSL campuses in conjunction with courses.

Research Framework

To craft a framework for joint research in the field of heritage studies, Professor Rassool participated in the following activities during the course of his stay:

1. Visits to museums and cultural sites

Professor Rassool conducted on site visits to several museum and heritage sites in the St. Louis area that offered openings for academic inquiry. These included the Laumieier Sculpture Garden, the St. Louis Art Museum, and the City Museum. During the visits to the Laumieier Sculpture Garden and the St. Louis Art Museum, Professor Rassool also met with affiliated staff. Possible topics of investigation arising from these visits included the role of public art in historic commemoration, museum acquisition policies with regard to African cultures, and the defining characteristics of city museums.

2. Meetings with UMSL faculty

Professor Rassool met with most members of the faculty of the History Department and Museum Studies program in order to learn about current faculty research interests and projects. These meetings included both individualized and group meetings. Professor Rassool, along with Professor Witz, also met with Joel Glassman, Director of International Studies and Programs at UMSL.

3. Presentation at History Department Colloquium

To familiarize UMSL faculty with Professor's Rassool's research interests, Professor Rassool delivered a paper, "Biography, Anthropology, and the Dead of History," at the History Department Colloquium on October 21st.

4. Debrief Meeting

On October 29, Professor Rassool joined myself, Professor Witz, Professor Maris Gillette, Directory of the Museum Studies Program at UMSL, and Laura Westhoff, Chair, Department of History, UMSL, to devise a joint research agenda. Agreement was reached that collaborative research, primarily involving contributions from Rassool, Witz, Hurley and Gillette, would focus on the theme of "Unwanted Histories" in an international context. Through an examination of case studies in the United States, South Africa, and possibly other international sites, research would compare how cultural agencies, museums, and heritage organizations address aspects of national pasts that collide with contemporary political agendas. This conceptualization would include the subject of forced urban displacement, but could accommodate additional topics as well. The nature of the collaborative enterprise was not fully settled as it was left open as to whether essays would be co-written or singly-authored and then compiled in a joint publication.

In either case, it was decided that an international conference, most likely an annual meeting of the Association of Critical Heritage Studies would serve as the venue for the first formal presentation of scholarly work conducted under this rubric. Publication(s), most likely a special edition of a journal such as the *Journal for Critical Heritage Studies* would follow. The timeline for this endeavor was estimated at 2-3 years.

Additional discussion involved the possibility of producing a Handbook of best museum practices on interpreting urban displacement that flow directly from presentations and discussions at the Memorializing Displacement workshop. This handbook would include contributions from both South African and United States workshop participants.

Next Steps

- Maris Gillette, Director of Museum Studies at UMSL, will attempt to secure funding to visit UWC campus to meet with Museum Studies counterparts at UWC to secure broader faculty participation in UMSL-UWC partnership and move collaborative teaching and research projects forward.
- Teleconference sessions with faculty and students in Museum Studies program at both campus as unit within courses during the UMSL Fall 2017 semester.
- UMSL faculty to serve as dissertation readers for UWC Ph.D. students during 2017-18 academic year.
- Drafting of essays in accordance with “Unwanted Histories” theme.