

## WAR MEMORIAL MUSEUM AS A TOOL FOR FOSTERING PEACE AND RECONCILIATION IN NIGERIA.

Ogonda Justice Nyema, Owajionyi L. Frank

Department of Architecture,

Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt

Email: [wonderlandconcept@yahoo.com](mailto:wonderlandconcept@yahoo.com), [owajifrank@yahoo.com](mailto:owajifrank@yahoo.com)

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**Abstract:** War Memorial Museums conceptually are public memory sites meant to display military history, war artefacts, and showcase real war efforts and experiences as well as commemorate sacrifices made by fallen heroes. The idea behind this scheme transcends a mere reasoning of conservation but a conscious attempt towards answering questions of how the War Memorial Museum should subconsciously solve conflict-based complex social problems. There is a growing trend from the 20<sup>th</sup> century which saw the development of commemorative traditions around Europe, America and Asia by which social groups and nations remember, commemorate and attempt to resolve memories of horrific experience of war. (Whitmarsh, 2001). In theory and practice, the design of war memorial museum, the functional layout of spaces and how they interact with exhibit displays will express the intended message to visitors. The purpose of this paper is to commemorate the sacrifices of martyrs of the Nigerian-Biafran civil war as well as use the Civil War Memorial Museum as a tool for fostering peace and stability among warring factions, ethnic or religious groups. The civil war which broke out on June 1967 spanning through to January 1970 which saw the massacre of over 500,000 to 6,000,000 people within a 3year interval. The true estimate may not be known since there is no accurate baseline for comparison with both the pre-and-post conflict figures does not follow sound statistical data. (World peace Foundation, August 7, 2015). Case studies both physical and online reveals that War Memorial Museums by design should be designed with the symbolic character in mind, light and openness of spaces will provide visitors ample space and time to observe and subconsciously partake in the war by visual experience and relate with the struggles as it were. War Memorial Museums are places of honour, homage and remembrance. An allusion in support of this finding is a bold inscription on The Museum of Pacific War in America which reads 'We inspire our youths by honouring our heroes'. (Richard Zelade, 2011) Such views are in consonant with many museums of war, in many Nations. Honouring heroes is the beauty of history and memory, and of not repeating the

same ‘mistakes’ (Matthew Allen and Rumi Sakamoto—War and Peace; War memories and Museums in Japan)

**Keywords:** Museums, memorials, military, artefacts, social problems, commemorate, symbolic character, heroes, martyrs, sacrifices, war, functional layout.

## INTRODUCTION

Museums are primarily for preservation and exhibition; thus it becomes imperative to address this research paper as one before technically cutting through intricate details to unravel the essence of War memorial museum as well as portray the symbolic character of War memorial museums. A museum is an institution that conserves a collection of artefacts and other objects of artistic, cultural, historical or scientific importance basically for public viewing and learning through exhibits. Similarly, a war museum is a building which houses war artefacts, war-based literature, war collections of military operations for conservation, exhibition and learning purpose. War is a difficult topic to interpret in museums owing to their dynamism as such the use of metaphors in relaying the message of the museum into to will be imperative and expressed via symbolic concept and also apprehended through use of themes. According to Zeckiyeye Cildir and Ceren Karadeniz; The main feature distinguishing human beings from other living creatures is the capacity to conceptualize the world and the ability to communicate through these concepts symbolically. A tour through a War Memorial Museum facility elicits various fascinations for different visitors—some visitors seek new knowledge about the war, some seek affirmation of preconceived understandings, and some simply want to revel in the sensory experience of military exhibits both locally or foreign made. Some visitors carry one or another polarized opinion about the wars or the combatants. Bias in favour of one side can continue long after the end of a war, and such biases can lead to museum exhibits that are unbalanced, or even worse, incorrect. (Michael P. Rebman, B.A.)

Aside from conserving and exhibiting artefacts, War memorial museums play important role in educating people on not just the evils of war but also on the importance of peace.

Museums play a significant role in commemoration. Their displays confer legitimacy on specific interpretations of history, and attribute significance to particular events (Noakes, 1997) Andrew Whitmarsh posits that the commemorative aspect of war memorial museums directly affects their style of interpretation, He continued by stressing that war museums have

often been accused of glamourizing war through the depiction of “heroes” and their portrayal of death. Contrary to this claim, the idea behind this dissertation is never to glorify war but to X-ray the consequences and experiences of war via visual appreciation of War Museum collections.

This paper focuses on War Memorial Museum and their symbolic importance as a national shrine of honour, homage, remembrance and a tool for national unification and the study will draw upon literature from museology, history and related disciplines. This study is mainly attributed to the Nigerian civil war experience and its concomitant effects on the Nigerian society, bothering on ethnic, political and religious dimensions and on reconciliation, unification and peaceful co-existence. There is an existing National War Museum in Umuahia, Abia State, annexed by the popular Ojukwu Bunker which was an administrative engine room of the defunct Republic of Biafra even though it is functionally and aesthetically inadequate when compared to modern contemporary War Memorial Museums around Europe, America and Asia. War memorial museums have not only presented people with wartime experiences but also a wide array of opportunities embedded in the presence of the facility.

Museums and Galleries are institutions which carry responsibilities to the society and have potentials to affect community life positively. Today’s museums are shaped by social, economic and educational changes and how they provide visitors with acculturation, learning, socialization and rehabilitation opportunities. This is where the underlying psychological effect of museum visit comes to play- the visual and sensory experience of studying objects and imageries takes the visitor on an experiential feel of the wartime struggles. Museums of memory in this context are spaces that can serve as a catalyst for both healing and advocacy just as Olalekan Akinade (2005) asserts that The museums (war museums) of the world must aim at promoting peace.

### **Engaging with Spaces in War Memorial Museums Via Phenomenological Thinking**

War Museums are designed to create atmosphere of ‘emotion’ and with an approach to effectively represent war. War by nature is dynamic and this dynamism calls for flexibility in museum gallery space design. Typical of the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum where flexibility is seen in the zig-zag configuration of spaces, openness of space and underground

placement of spaces buried in what seems like an earth mound and with the exit bursting forth from the mountain's slope to a dramatic view of modern-day Jerusalem creates an illusion of entombment. The flexible flow of space into spaces as seen in Australian War Memorial Museum, the chaotic configuration of Imperial War Museum and the amoeboid form of the Canadian War Museum all speak volume of the flexibility of spaces aimed at leaving a lasting impression on the visitor. Colour are phenomenal in affecting mood of visitors, thus an interplay of light and dark hues evoke emotional mood swings in different spaces, colours are powerful tools in conveying messages in architecture, these resulting narrative of colour shades of light and dark shapes the visitor's experience and has a psychological impact on the visitor. A walk through light and dark spaces has a way of signifying destruction and uprising and or life and death while spaces designed in undulating order echoes turbulence. Chaotic forms and slanting walls all echoes the shambolic and turbulent eventuality of the wartime experience.

Architects and Philosophers have continued the theoretical debate on the importance of phenomenology in architectural design. Certain Architects have also through their designs and texts been linked to phenomenology, by this they have applied their own experiences and studies of particular culture and context to the design of buildings in the hope of replicating those experiences in others. Hypothetic designs of War Memorial Museums all seem to have deviated from typical public buildings and are now assuming new dimensions of narrative architecture with symbolic characters. Success in creating engaging spaces lies on the apprehension of the storyline and an interpretation via metaphoric concepts in museum planning and design. Museums are peace-oriented and are so designed to stimulate the visitor's attention, emotion, mood, rehabilitate and bring about healing. According to Juhani Pallasmaa, 'Architecture can emerge as the very 'material' existence of human embodied immaterial emotion, feelings and wisdom. Hence it entails multisensory and embodied thought in order to establish the sense of being in the world.

### **The Relevance of Confabulated Architecture in War Memorial Museums**

Confabulation is visualising imageries and scenes through storytelling. Fundamental to our perception, memory, and thought is the way we join fractured experiences to construct a narrative. *Confabulations: Storytelling in Architecture* weaves together poetic ideas, objects, and events and returns you to everyday experiences of life through juxtapositions

with dreams, fantasies, and hypotheticals. It follows the intellectual and creative framework of architectural *cosmopoiesis* developed and practiced by the distinguished thinker, architect, and professor Dr. Marco Frascari, who thought deeply about the role of storytelling in architecture. A prototype model of gas chamber used during the Nazi regime is exhibited in Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum in Jerusalem to give a mental picture of the Jews extermination in Nazi camp, this visual way of telling the story can be adopted and applied by showing 3D models of horrific war scenes typical of the Nigeria-Biafra war. Confabulation will draw together different bits of the story which will be fundamental to our perception, memory and thought. Confabulation is an insightful investigation into architectural narratives.

### **Fostering Peace through Museumification in Nigeria**

The Nigerian experience of war which broke out in 1967 spanning through to 1970 birthed the National War Museum, located in Ebite-Amafor, Isingwu autonomous community in Umuahia, a site notable for its historical importance as regards the Nigeria- Biafra war. Ebite-Amafor in Igbo language means ‘A place of honour’ and the site was chosen because it was the bunker housing the famous shortwave radio ‘The voice of Biafra’ was transmitted from. As well the administrative headquarter of the defunct Federal Republic of Biafra after the fall of Enugu in 1967. The museum gives a mental picture of the war for visitors who did not experience the war and those who did be it civilians or veterans, to relive the war experience. The Museum is the end result of one of several efforts by the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) to preserve the history of our nation. as well as serve as a centre for research and information on warfare in the country. The National War Museum Umuahia was established for the glory of Nigeria and for the purposes of “preserving for posterity, Nigerian war efforts through the ages” (Shagaya, 1987) and for “consolidating the gains of National Unity.” (National Commission for Museums and Monuments, The National War Museum, Umuahia. edited by Dr. Chijioke Onuora)

The Motto of the Museum is “That they did not die in vain, is an allusion to the fact that the museum doubles primarily as a ground for national unification and honour. This is made possible through Museumification of artefacts and collections of war relics. The War museum was categorised into three galleries: Traditional warfare, Armed forces and civil war. The exhibits range from crude war weapons, locally

manufactured war machines and sophisticated Hardware military equipment, Air force and Navy. The museum houses exhibit such as; armoured cars fondly called Red Devils, Bazooka anti-tank guns called 'Ogbunigwe' in local parlance, troop carriers, Alluette NAF helicopter, Minicon (A small bomber aircraft). Relics of Naval equipment consist of assault boats and NNS Bonny. (Olalekan Akinade,2005) Other facilities in the premises are a restaurant located in warship relic and a round hut which serves as a kitchen. Similar to Heidi McKinnon's Proposal of a Museum of Memory: Reparations and the Maya Achí Genocide in Guatemala." She notes that museums of memory, sites of conscience and memorials have developed a clear role in fostering dialogue on peace and reconciliation in many regions of the world where governments and societies have made inroads toward transitional justice.

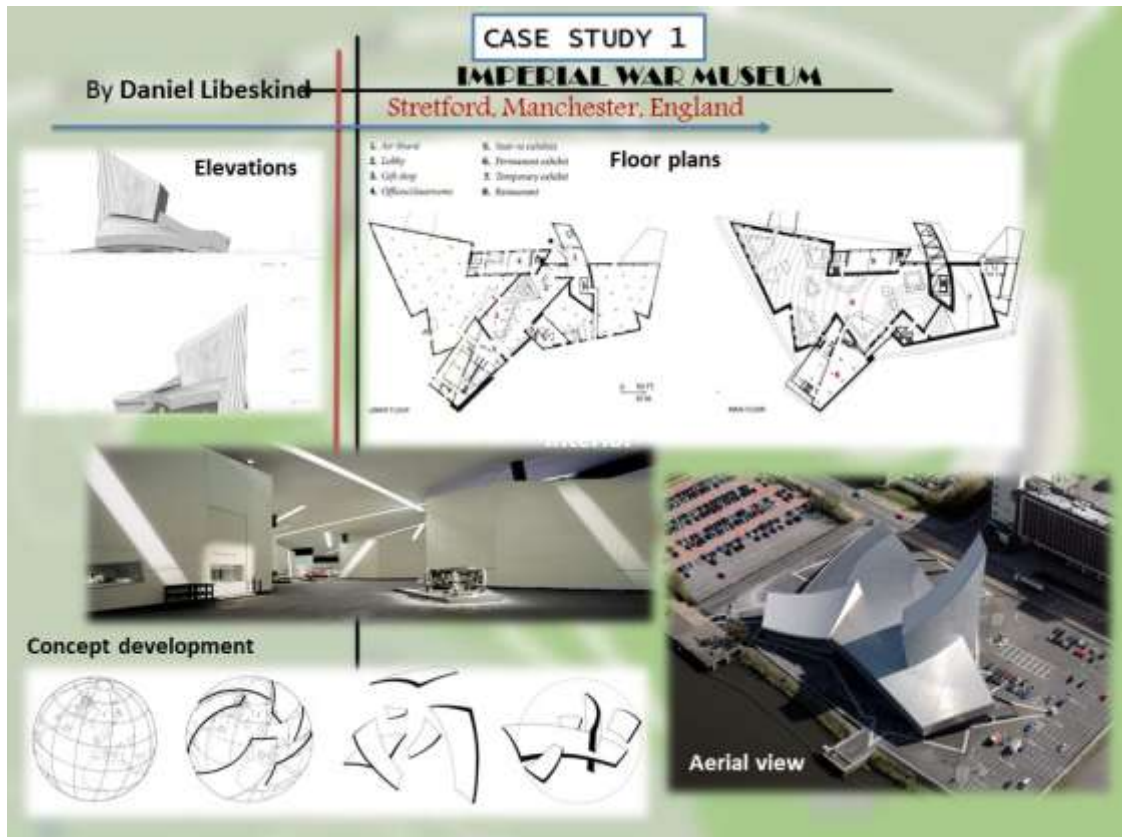
McKinnon posits that, Human tragedies such as genocide and war highlight the necessity of museums in civic life, with their ability to offer spaces to reflect, filter and orient ourselves when faced with suffering and sorrow. Thankfully, Museums have evolved over time into public spaces that have the ability to perform a psychological function in the national grieving process. Museums offer safe and neutral environments for learning and expression. According to an outlined definition of memorials and sites of conscience on the *Journal of Museum Education* by The International Committee of Memorial Museums for the Remembrance of Victims of Public crimes (IC MEMO), Museums of historical memory, sites of conscience and memorials, however, have a specialized role within the broader museum community and a unique mandate to meet some aspects of moral obligation. (IC MEMO 2004).

A well-developed human rights advocacy component is critical to the programming of any museum of memory or site of conscience and thus, sets them apart from many cultural, historical or ethnology museums in a significant way. Such campaigns to safeguard social equality and basic human rights should be considered paramount to reconciliation and nation building in any post conflict democracy, underscoring yet again the unique roles of these institutions within the society.

Equally important in the conception of these museums, sites of conscience and memorials is the ability to forge partnerships between government and civil society, as fraught with tension as the process may prove to be (IC MEMO, 2004) It is the responsibility of Memorial Museum to filter, the various collections of historical events and present

them alongside clear, concise and documentary information for the public, irrespective of the difficulty and how controversial the subject matter may be. Like the Srebrenica Genocide Memorial, the Kigali Genocide Memorial Centre is the final resting place of thousands of genocide victims, relocated from mass graves throughout Rwanda after the 1994 genocide. The cemetery function of the centre fulfils what anthropologist Pat Caplan pinpoints as essential for all nations recovering from violent conflict: finding bodies, performing dignified burials, and allowing space to mourn (Caplan 2007). The museum element of the Kigali Memorial Centre, filled with pictures, objects, and stories of resistance and remembrance, adds a proportion of national healing. Memorial expression in post-conflict societies acts as a facilitator of transitional justice and an agent of reconstructive processes such as cultural and personal healing. These spaces perform these roles differently depending on their goals—private/reflective and/or public/educative.(Ella M, 2018)

## 5. Case Studies



### Appraisal

The Imperial War Museum in Manchester, England, tells the story of how war has affected the lives of British and the Commonwealth citizens since 1914. The design concept is a globe shattered into fragments and then reassembled. The interlocking of three of these fragments—representing earth, air, and water—comprise the building’s form. The Earth Shard forms the museum space, signifying the open, earthly realm of conflict and war; the Air Shard serves as a dramatic entry into the museum, with its projected images, observatories and education spaces; and the Water Shard forms the platform for viewing the canal, complete with a restaurant, cafe, deck and performance space. The Architect imagined a globe broken into fragments and taken the pieces to form a building with three shards that represent conflict on land, in the air and on water. (Imperial War Museum, Studio Libeskind)



### • Appraisal

The Holocaust History Museum occupies over 4,200 square meters, mainly underground. Both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, it



presents the story of the Shoah from a unique Jewish perspective, emphasizing the experiences of the individual victims through original artefacts, survivor testimonies and personal possessions. Safdie treated the building like an Archaeological remnant, to preserve the pastoral character of the Mount of Remembrance. The Yad Vashem is a Prism-like structure that cuts through the mountain with its uppermost edge - a skylight - protruding through the mountain ridge. Galleries portraying the complexity of the Jewish situation during those terrible years branch off this spike-like shaft, and the exit emerges dramatically out of the mountainside, affording a view of the valley below. Unique settings, spaces with varying heights, and different degrees of light accentuate focal points of the unfolding narrative. At the end of the Museum's historical narrative is the Hall of Names – a repository for the Pages of Testimony of millions of Holocaust victims, a memorial to those who perished. From the Hall of Names, visitors will continue on to the epilogue and from there to the balcony opening to a panoramic view of Jerusalem. (Yad Vashem, The Holocaust History Museum, Moshe Safdie)



### Appraisal

The museum's redesign creates the setting for a reconsideration of that past in a city annihilated by allied bombing at the end of WWII. Inside

the wedge a 99-foot viewing platform provides breath-taking views of the city as it is today while the wedge itself points in the opposite direction, toward the source of the bombs, creating a dramatic space for reflection. Says Libeskind, “Dresden is a city that has been fundamentally altered. The events of the past are not just a footnote; they are central to the transformation of the city today.” Inside, in the original, columned part of the building, German’s military history is presented in chronological order. But now it is complemented, in the new wide-open spaces of the five-story wedge, by a new thematic consideration of the societal forces and human impulses that create a culture of violence. (Dresden’s Military History Museum / Studio Libeskind)

### **A Hypothetical Civil War Memorial Museum Design Proposed By the Researcher.**

The researcher proposes an ultramodern War Memorial Museum facility to be built in Umuahia, Abia state, adjacent to the existing National War Museum, Umuahia. The idea is to erect a world class Memorial Museum which will not only be a ground for honour, homage and reconciliation but also to be a focal point of attraction having tourist tendencies to enhance some of the tourism potentials in the state as well as expose the beauty of the culture of the breakaway group to other regions of the country and a subtle approach towards unifying the different ethnic groups and regions. It will also act as a tool to forewarn intending separatist groups on the devastating consequences of war while subliminally presenting peace as an only option for a harmonious coexistence.

### **Design Brief**

Development of design brief is conceived to create the necessary spaces and effects that will present thrilling yet complex challenge: The planning and design of the Civil War Memorial Museum is dedicated to telling, interpreting, and presenting historical events that have shaped the very character of Nigeria. The design brief takes into consideration the two themes of Healing and Remembrance and each theme is woven into, and reflected in the design, as visitors explore the museum, these themes are expressed in different degrees.

### **Components of a Civil War Memorial Museum**

1. Administration
2. Ancillary spaces

3. Theaters
4. Galleries
5. Pool of tranquility
6. Technical Infrastructures/services

- **Administration**

The administration is the control area of the facility which includes the entrance lobbies, reception areas, Visitors lounges, administrative offices, cafe, convenience, conference rooms and staff lounge.

- **Theaters**

The theater provides spaces for looking at or listening to performances. The theater design for this scheme is the Proscenium theater which basically has the stage located at one end of the auditorium and is physically separated from the audience space by a proscenium wall. The design takes into consideration the acoustic balance and the visual and thermal comfort of the audience.

- **Galleries**

Galleries are rooms in which museums display their works, artefacts and other historical relics worthy of exhibition, the Galleries remains the power house of the museum as it holds the fundamental basis for the museum's existence. Gallery spaces are designed commensurate with the size of the exhibit. The relationship between the space, colour, texture, lighting and ambience interact to impact the mood of the visitor.

- **Pool of Tranquility**

This space is essential to the design as provides a serene atmosphere for healing. The pool of tranquility contrary to the ones in residential villas are provided as a solemn space for sober reflection and casting wreaths. The space consists of a pool of water. A conveniently open green space basically earmarked as a commemorative area with an almost unending names of deceased persons as a Roll of Honour.

- **Ancillary/Technical Infrastructures**

The Ancillary/Technical infrastructures are the maintenance and technical support facilities which are integral part of the museum.

### **Zoningin a Museum**

Zoning as a museum Planning Tool, relates to organizing spaces into zones. The zones can be arranged as;

- **Public collection Areas:** Zone with environmental controls and security designed for the preservation of collections and public access

- **Nonpublic Areas:** Zone which is meant for the staff alone with environment controls and security.
- **Public Non- Collection Areas:** Zones created for human comfort, meeting and greeting like Cafeterias
- **Non-Public- Collection Areas:** These zones are basically for maintenance of artifacts, provided exclusively for staffs who undertake this task.

### **Design Concept**

The researcher has developed a design concept which is 'Chaos' with two central themes which are 'Healing and Remembrance', These will be expressed in the design via use of structural elements, plan forms and spatial configuration. The Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967-1970 was a period of serious armed conflict which saw the disintegration of Nigeria, accentuated by some, religious and ethno-political distrust and disturbances leading to the civil unrest and secessionist agitation by the South-Eastern region led by Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu. The design is a narrative architectural piece-A constellation of shards or fragments of the war. This translates into the design via the shambolic configuration which is intended to create a mental picture of the war for the visitor, while a tour through the facility leading all the way to a central space having a pool of water as the essential design element called a 'Pool of tranquility, a solemn space for sober reflection and healing also a space for which wreaths are cast or displayed as a gesture of honor and homage to fallen heroes.

From the aerial view, the elliptical hemispherical dome- 'A tower of hope'- a memorial structure is the central unifying element magnetizing the individual shards and also a constant reminder of the horrific experiences of the civil war in Nigeria. The design adopts forms that represent the chaotic unravelling of the war experience and technically reflects the dynamics of Wars. This concept Narrative and paper does not in any way mean a disrespect to the history of Nigeria as a country and religion or any other beliefs. My case study only looks at how sequential experience and the design element comes together to create certain emotion. The diagrams show the extraction of similarities of design tools and elements used in the design of all the case studies to create similar atmospheric quality.

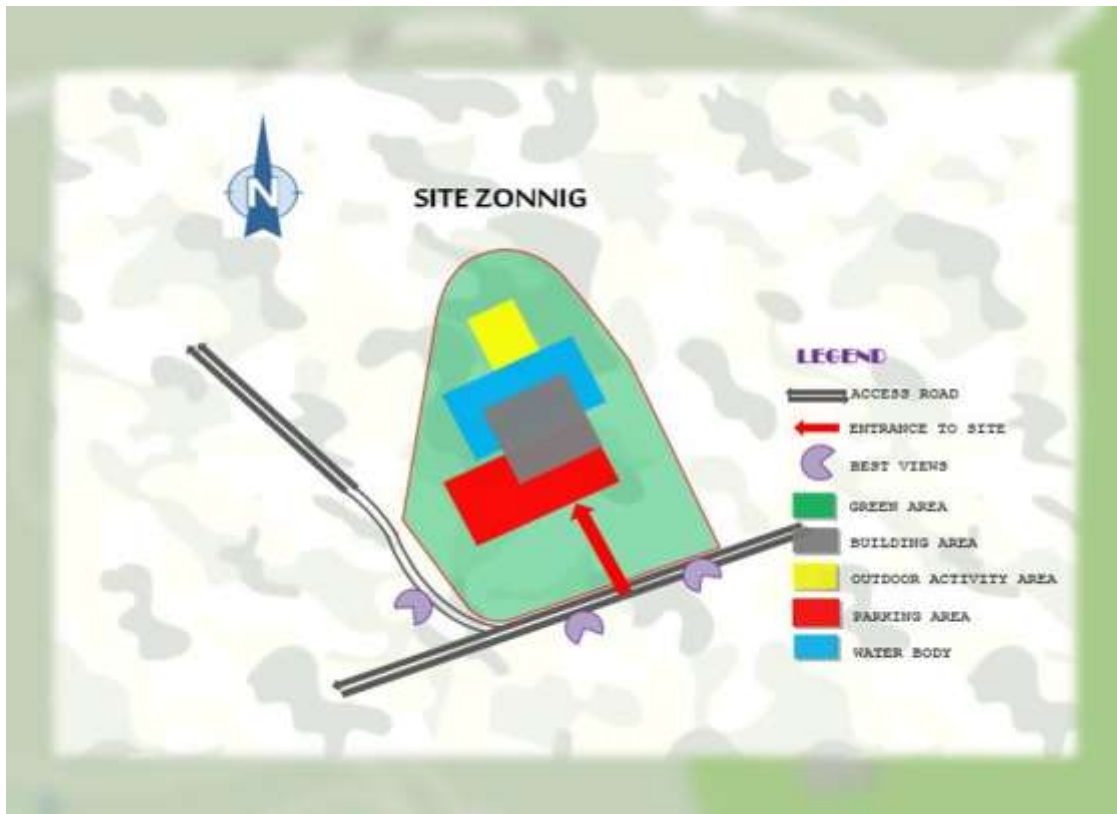


Fig 1. Showing Site Zoning layout of the proposed Civil War Memorial Museum

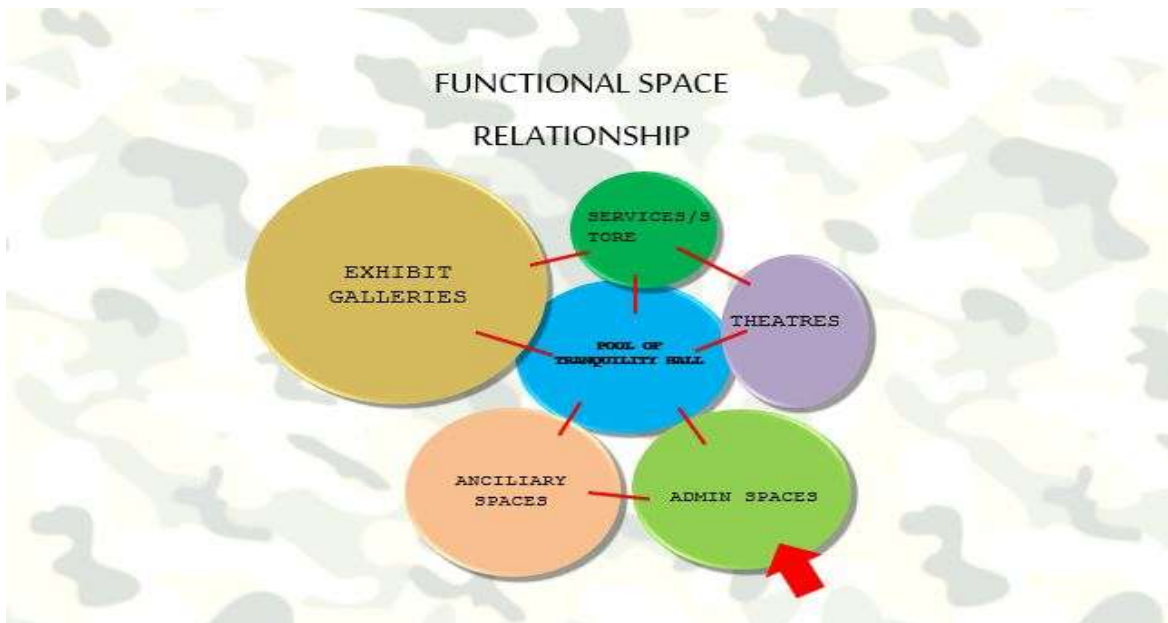


Fig. 2 Bubble Diagram showing Functional Space Relationship of the proposed Civil War Memorial Museum.

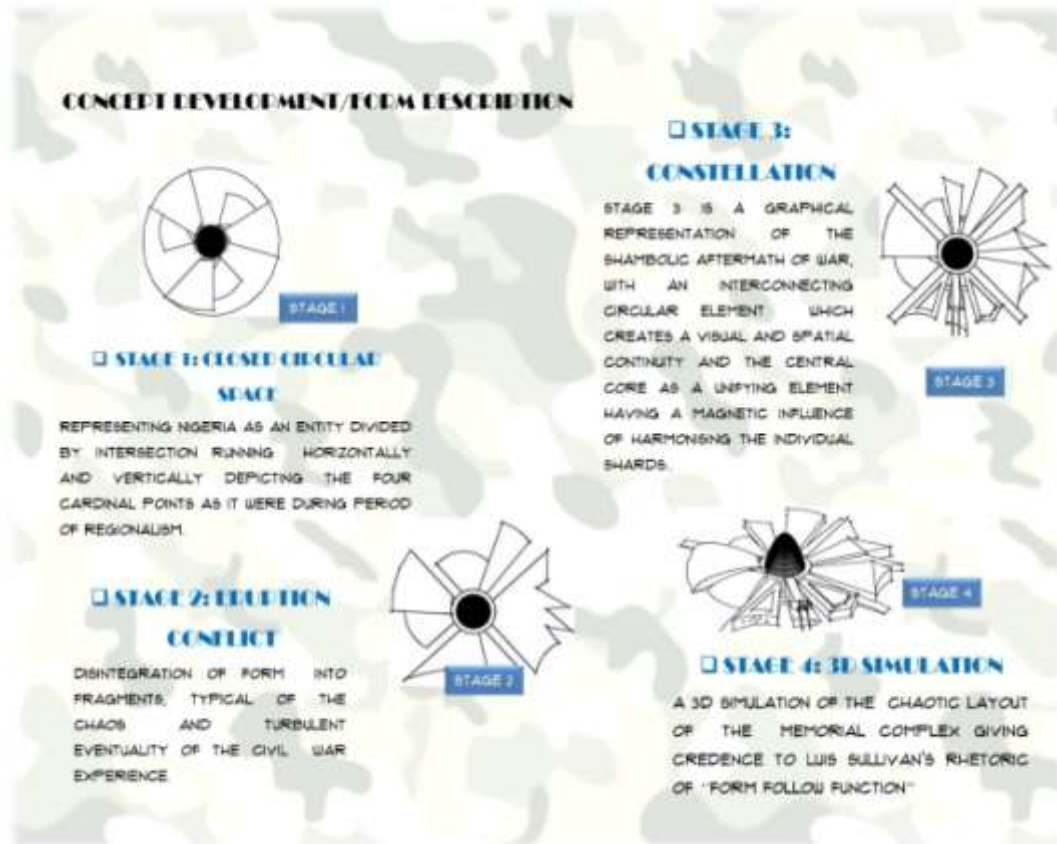
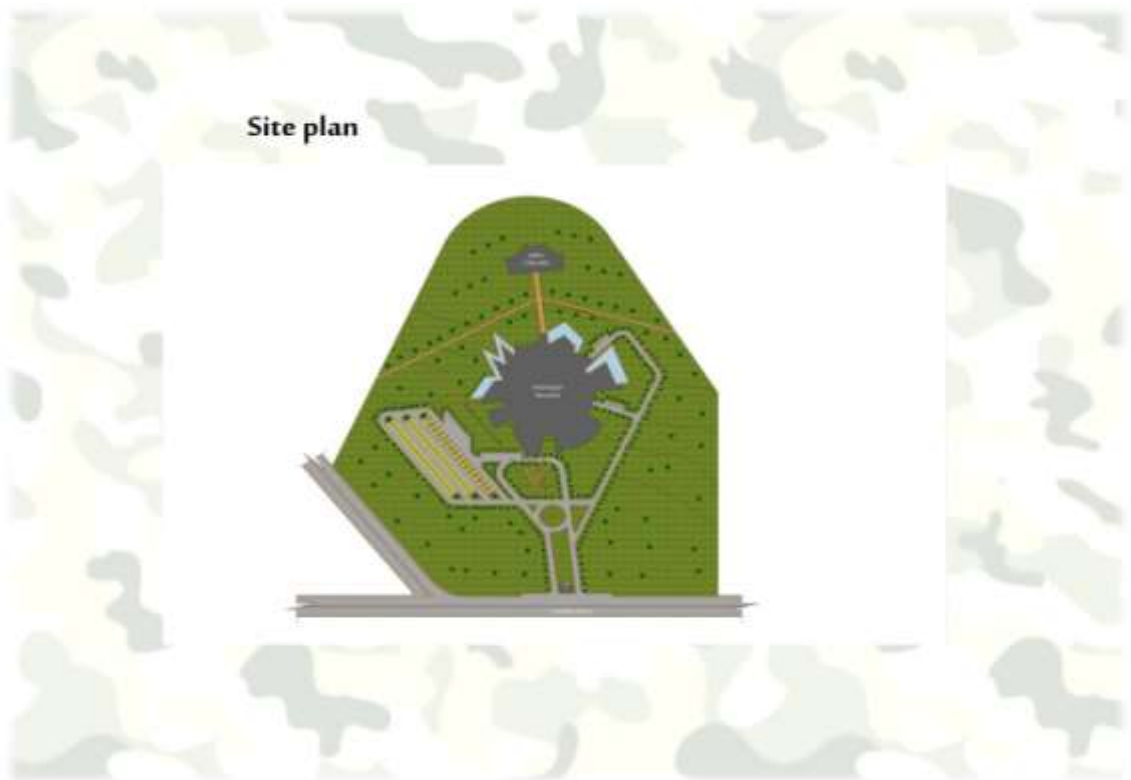
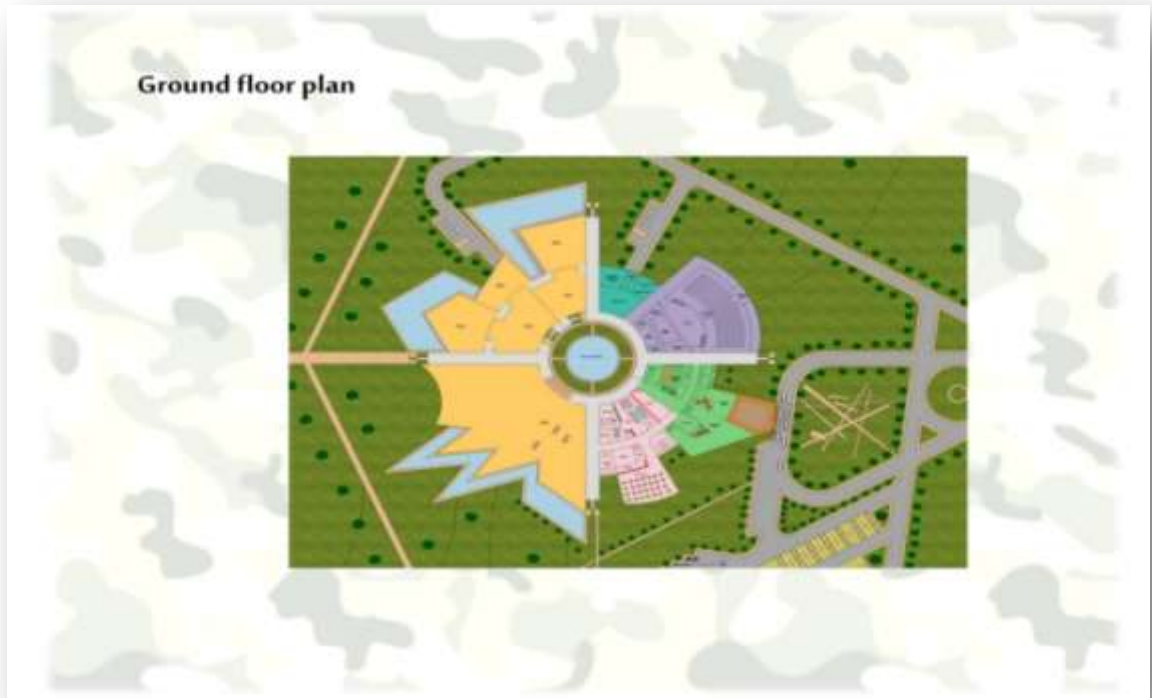


Fig. 4 showing Concept Development/ Form Description.

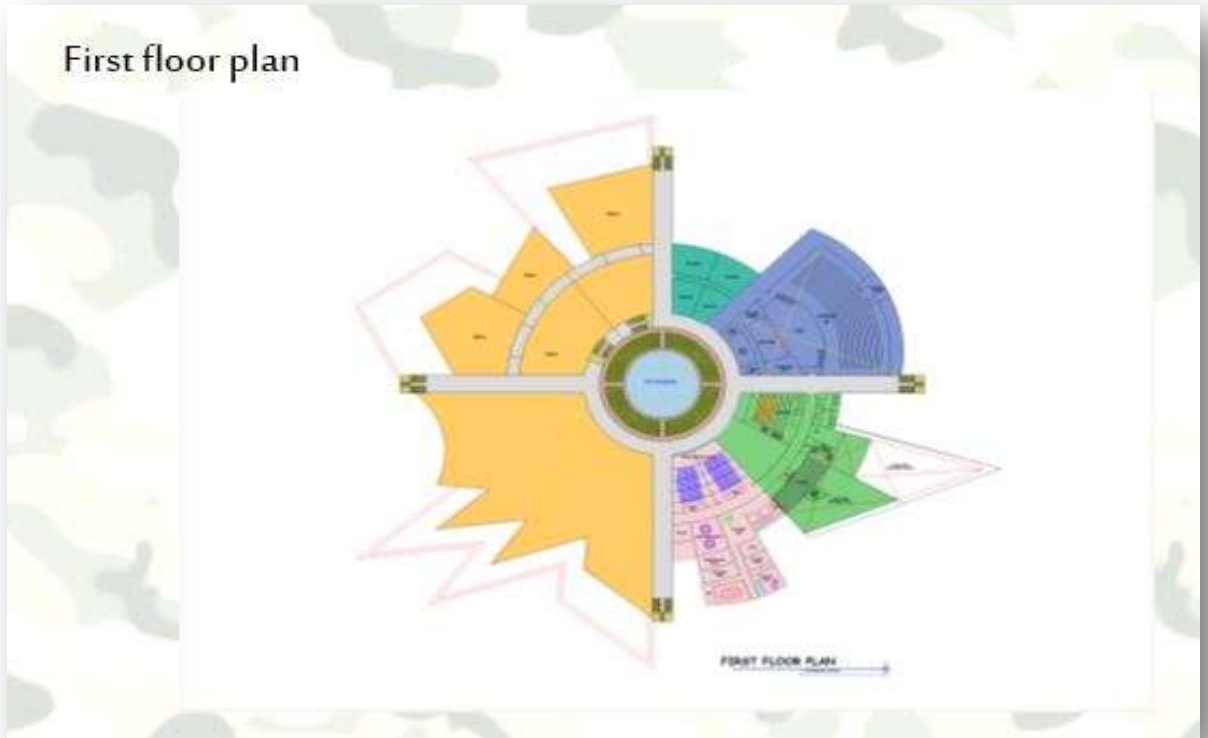


**Fig 5** showing Proposed site plan of the Civil War Memorial Museum

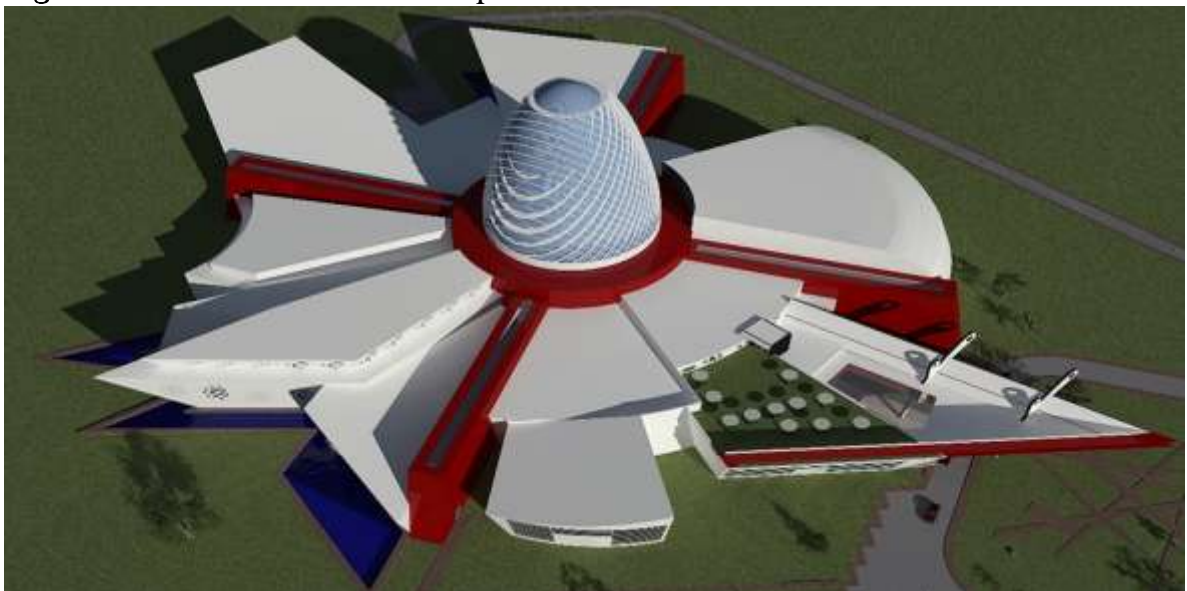


**Fig 6** Ground Floor Plan of the Proposed Civil War Memorial Museum

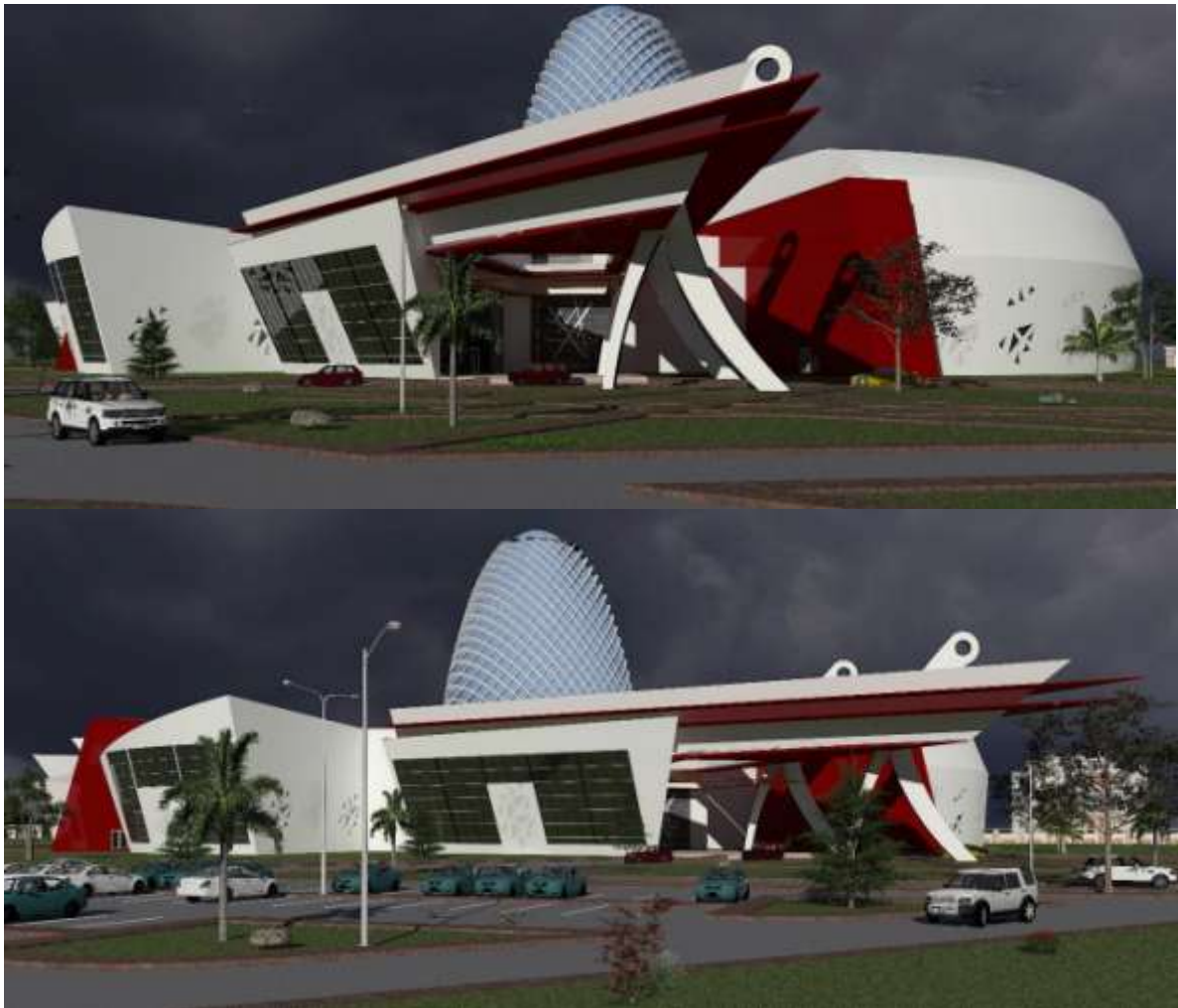




**Fig 7** First Floor Plan of the Proposed Civil War Memorial Museum



**Fig 8.** Aerial view of the Proposed Civil War Memorial Museum



**Fig 9.** Perspective views of the Civil War Memorial Museum.

## **CONCLUSION**

In examining the relationships that coexist between architecture and emotional engagement in War Memorial Museums as regards solving conflict-related complex social problems, this research has found that these dimensions inform one another throughout the museum planning process. This dynamic interplay produces innovative and dramatic museum features that often engage visitors through experience and participation. War memorial museums are typical venues for sensory experiences as they enable visitors peek into history to unearth military war techniques, relive past memories and psychologically present an experiential feel of the struggle as it were especially where the history is complex and the stakes for maintaining peace and justice are high, the tendency to connect with visitors is priceless.

A War Memorial museum as a place for information retrieval, dialogue, and inspiration allows visitors connect to the museum and its content to this end architecture can introduce flexibility through which war memorial museums can offer a balanced view of opposing narratives of the causes and aftermath of war through exhibit, photographs, documents and audio-visuials. War Memorial Museums can facilitate the peace process by subliminally infusing a pacifist mentality on visitors through phenomenological design approach and narrative architectural styles (confabulated architecture).The constant innovation of exhibit design, experience and the ongoing importance of human rights issues and memorialization suggest that this study will be one of many to explore peaceful avenues in reconciliation and fostering peace in the nearest future.

In Nigeria, the War Memorial Museum has not only served as a repository for historical war relics but has contributed immensely in curbing the resurgence of separatist agitations and the craving for peace against the craving for war.

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