

## CONFERENCE REPORTS

### Conference report: 5th Afrika Association for History Education (AHE) International conference 02-04 August 2023

**Venue:** Kenyatta University (Kenya)

**Organisers:** Professor Johan Wassermann (*University of Pretoria*), Dr Denise Bentreovato (*University of Pretoria*), Dr Mary Nasibi (*Kenyatta University*), and Mr Aidan Lawrence (*University of Pretoria*)

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The 5th Afrika Association for History Education (AHE) international conference held from 2–4 August 2023 brought together history educationists from Africa and globally. The three-day conference was global, with participants from Britain, France, Portugal, and Africa. The African countries represented included South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, Eswatini, Angola, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya. The attendees ranged from secondary school teachers to university lecturers, history education researchers, and curriculum developers. Among key attendees were the UNESCO associate project officers from Paris, Ms Heather Mann and Mr Ngandeu Ngatta Hugue of the UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa.

The Kenyatta University Vice Chancellor, Prof. Paul Wanaina, opened the conference. In his address, he underscored the place of history education, especially its role in reshaping the future. The guest speaker, Prof. Erick Masinde of Africa International University, set the tone and direction of the conference. His talk was anchored in the conference's theme: politics, policies, and practices. He argued that studying history should transform leadership, research, and nation-building. The subject is vital in policy formulation, enhancing national consciousness, and creating a just and equitable society and a national culture. He contended that history should be studied using an interdisciplinary approach and that educators of the discipline should be engaged in formulating theories of history education. The presentation was motivating, engaging, and an eye-opener on the place of history in societal development.

The AHE co-chair, Doctor Denise Bentreovato (*University of Pretoria*), delivered the

first keynote address which focused on history education for African renaissance and global citizenship: “Colonial durabilities and the promises of repositioning Africa in world and global history”. This presentation allowed the delegates to think about African history and where Africa positions itself on the global stage. It brought up gaps and silences in the continent’s history and the curricula of other countries.

Professor Maurice Amutabi of the Technical University of Kenya delivered the final keynote address. His paper was entitled “Teaching history and historicising historical facts historically”. He emphasised the importance of presenting African images in history positively. Using examples from the United States of America, he explained how they recreate people’s ideas to have a positive impact, especially on leadership. He argued that we can decolonise the portrayal of African images in history books and even media through embellishment. This placed history education within the Kenyan context and helped the audience to draw a link between the Kenya situation and the case in their own countries.

The conference used a blended model, with about ten papers being presented online compared to twenty-nine face-to-face. The presentations were split into fourteen panels, with twelve running concurrently in two different venues. This allowed the delegates to select which panels they would like to attend based on their research interests. These themes allowed for numerous academic discussions following the presentations.

During the parallel sessions across the three-day conference, papers focused on the specific aspects that sparked insightful debates and discussions that left the delegates and the attendees with many interesting points of view to consider moving forward.

The presentations were dominated by the sub-themes on democracy and social cohesion, silences, and invisibilities in African history education and the related sub-theme—decolonising history education in Africa and beyond. The participation of secondary school teachers, both locally and internationally, was a vital feature of the conference. The papers they presented dealt with issues related to teaching the subject in terms of their preparedness and the gaps and biases in history curricula and textbooks used at the secondary school level. Their presentations created a lot of interest and discussions and provided an opportunity to learn what happens in the history classrooms in Kenya and Africa.

Although there were presentations on all the sub-themes, some areas in the sub-themes needed to attract paper, including the following: contemporary politics, government policies, issues of truth, citizenship education, lifelong learning and sustainable development, African consciousness, African renaissance, and lessons from COVID-19 and other pandemics. Other omissions were on in-service teaching and creative and innovative

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practices in history education. These areas need to be researched for future presentations in history education conferences.

The strength of the conference was adequate time assigned to presenters, unlike in other meetings where people are given ten minutes or less to discuss their papers. The additional strength was the calibre of people it attracted. Getting teachers to attend conferences, make presentations, and even contribute to discussions is rare. Third, there was a workshop and a book launch at the meeting. Dr Bentrovato organised the seminar on teaching to prevent atrocity crimes in Africa and the promises of the pedagogical use of the general history of Africa. The book launched was *Teaching to prevent atrocity crimes: a guide for teachers in Africa*. To crown it all, the group visited the Nairobi Museum, where there was much learning on Kenyan history. However, the conference faced one shortfall: failure to ensure that only registered participants presented their online and face-to-face papers. It has been difficult following up on no payments to date. Time management was also an issue which affected the smooth running of some activities.

Generally, the conference successfully fulfilled its objectives of providing a unique forum for scholars, teachers, and curricular developers to share and deliberate on various issues in history education about politics, policies, and practices in Kenya and other African countries. It created awareness of the imperative role of history in education. It led to the conclusion by educationists who were not historians that it should be made a compulsory subject in the curriculum. This conference encouraged continued collaborations and networking and the creation of new linkages for improved research in history education among individuals, institutions, and nations. One significant outcome of this fifth conference will be establishing the AHE-Afrika Kenya chapter.