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ARTICLE

Co-curation and New Museology in Reorganizing the Beit Gallery at the Mutare Museum, Eastern Zimbabwe

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Abstract The Mutare Museum in Eastern Zimbabwe reorganized an ethnographic collection in one of its galleries in 2016. This article will look at the processes by which traditional drums as part of this collection were reconfigured and ascribed new meanings derived from their everyday ritual uses amongst the eastern Shona community. As one of the curators involved in the researching that led to the co-production of the exhibition I will demonstrate how we utilized new museology and co-curatorship in integrating multiple perspectives from the community on socio-cultural uses of traditional drums. The paper will also show connections between the community and the drums which were previously viewed as static and mute objects. Collaborating with the community in reorganizing drums in the Beit galley will be presented in the paper as a strategy embraced in decolonizing the museum practice.

INTRODUCTION

This paper will look at how the Mutare Museum in Eastern Zimbabwe reorganized traditional musical objects in an exhibition wherein new meanings associated with their everyday use were generated. Zimbabwe formerly known as Rhodesia was a British colony from 1890 up until 1980 when it gained its political independence. Museum making in early Rhodesia were at the impetus of the mining interests of the British South African Company (BSAC) – a company formed to take over the natural and mineral resources as well as land in Southern Africa. The BSAC's expansionist agenda in Southern Africa was associated with a growing number of colonial scholars/scientists whose interests were to study, collect and appropriate the natural facets of the new colony. They desired to build up a base of basic scientific archive for perpetuating the control of resources and entrenching colonial political power (Chipangura, Bond, & Sack, 2020). The work of corporate companies, interest groups and pseudo- scientists such as BSAC and the Rhodesian Scientific Association dominated the efforts at establishing the first museums in early Rhodesia. Consequently, ethnographic objects were appropriated from source communities during the colonial period and were deposited in museums (Chipangura et al., 2020). Objects in colonial museums were presented in dioramas for scientific inquiry devoid of their meaning or connections with local communities. In essence objects were displayed as part of an ethnographic gaze which meant that certain spiritual values at the cornerstone of their making and use were diminished and ignored. It is on this same premise that the Mutare Museum was established and opened during the colonial period in 1964 with collection practices that

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aimed at classifying, categorising and othering indigenous Shona cultures. The Mutare Museum is a product of Western modernity which deployed ethno-centric approaches in knowledge production. This intellectual tradition complemented by biased museum representation marginalised the knowledge systems of the local populace from where cultural objects were appropriated from (Chipangura & Chipangura, 2020). In 2014, The Mutare Museum received a generous grant from the Beit Trust (UK) to use towards the reorganisation of ethnographic objects in the Beit gallery. This ethnographic collection comprised of traditional Shona drums, pottery, sledges, baskets, mats and traditional games.

In the paper, I will specifically consider the reinterpretation of traditional Shona drums as this was observed from their ritual uses by eastern Shona community. Importantly, in coming up with a new exhibition agenda entitled '*Traditional Aspects of the Eastern Shona*' we adopted 'new museology' as a concept. Although Peter Vergo's (1989) notion was developed thirty years ago it is just being adopted in Zimbabwe. Virgo's ideas gave us a theoretical framework, which allowed us to collaborate with communities and this in turn informed how the drums were reorganised and subsequently presented in the museum. Co-curatorship through collaborations and embracing of indigenous ontologies and epistemologies was used in developing this exhibition. (Mallon 2019; Schorch, McCarthy, & Durr, 2019). It was by engaging with the eastern Shona community ways of knowing using co-curatorship as a methodology that socio-cultural processes associated with uses of the drums were validated. Ontological perspectives in developing the exhibition were thus embraced drawn from collaborations with the communities driven by responsibility, respect and reciprocity. Ontological understanding mattered because it laid open the nature of reality by demonstrating the types of relations that existed between drums and ritual processes previously ignored by the colonial museum. I was involved in the research and reorganisation of this exhibition as a head curator in the archaeology department at the Mutare Museum. The other team members comprised of our director, assistant curator of archaeology, curator of antiquities, marketing officer and two exhibition designers.

Collaborations and co-curation will be presented in this paper as decolonial strategies that we adopted in giving the community an equal voice in the process of reorganising the drums. In presenting this collaboration, I argue that by engaging with the community in co-creating and designing the exhibition, our museum supported living Indigenous cultural practices and subsequently transcended beyond being a storage house for mute objects. Indigenous ways of knowing and thinking therefore represents an active and emergent social and cultural transformation by indigenous people in the remaking, adapting and revision of western museological frameworks that once informed the colonial museum. Reconfiguring meaning using indigenous ontologies and epistemologies meant that spiritual dimensions of drums were catered for just as much as their physical dimensions. In light of this, I agree with Golding and Modest (2019, 94) who argue that co-curatorship entails "taking an interest not only in objects as things but also in the people, changing practices and belief systems that lend them meaning. The co-created exhibition at the Mutare Museum now focuses on the traditional aspects of eastern Shona people wherein drums are juxtaposed with videos recordings showing how they are used during ritual performances. Henceforth, by embracing multi-vocal and innovative curatorial approach through a reinterpretation of traditional drums I posit that the Museum managed to decolonise and unsettle tainted museological practices that were inherited from the colonial period. In terms of museological practice, this exhibition also points to the need for a new museology in

Africa; one that embraces communities as respected knowledge bearers. Most importantly this demands a deep respect for local knowledge that was so disparaged in colonial times. In contemporary co-curation projects Indigenous communities are subjects, not merely objects of study or sources of information, but active players in curatorial practices.

COLONIAL CLASSIFICATIONS IN THE OLD BEIT GALLERY

Using the decolonial perspective in rethinking colonial classifications at the Mutare Museum was part of an emancipatory project configured by a direct and closer connection to practices and indigenous forms of knowledge. Importantly, in coming up with a decolonised exhibition we integrated the idea of doing research with instead of on the people. Thus, our 2014 museum team saw that museum objects cannot be disconnected from the past but rather are enduring symbols that connect the past with the present and future, as McCarthy, Hakiwai and Schorch have argued (2019). This view is in contrast with how colonial ethnographers amassed drums which were later displayed in the old Beit gallery without an appreciation of where they came from and their original uses. During the colonial period, museum curators were endowed with tremendous authority in configuring ethnographic objects thereby othering Indigenous knowledge systems. However, in the decolonial turn, the curator is no longer a lone expert and a voice of authority but rather a facilitator of community engagement and collaboration (McCarthy, Hakiwai, & Schorch, 2019; Onciul, 2019). Collaborations have therefore transformed ethnographic museums from being places that were once regarded as displaying 'others' to locations of cultural revitalisation, community voice and empowerment (Onciul, 2019, 160) (Figure 1).

Located in Eastern Zimbabwe, the Mutare Museum is one of the five museums under the administration of the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ). The museum was established in 1964 and is a by-product of colonisation which started in 1890. Zimbabwe, formerly called [Southern] Rhodesia, obtained its independence in 1980 from Britain. The other museums in the country are: the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences in Harare which specializes in archaeological and ethnographic collections, the Natural Museum in Bulawayo that looks after natural history collections, the Military Museum in Gweru that is assigned with the role of looking after military collections and the Great Zimbabwe Museum in Masvingo which specializes in the conservation of dry stone structures.

The name Mutare is an indigenous Shona word which mean the river of metals (gold). During the precolonial period indigenous communities used to mine alluvial gold within this river which was later to be named Mutare. Hence the city museum also derives its name from this river as well as the city itself (Mutare).

Whilst I argue that the Mutare Museum's system of displaying ethnographic objects was informed by colonialism and a view of the African 'Other' as less than human in a way that reflected the marginalisation of certain communities, during the reorganisation of the Beit gallery we were able to reconfigure the collections and give them new meanings. The Mutare Museum has five permanent display galleries namely: Eastern Districts, Mezzanine, Transport, Boultbee and Beit. The Beit gallery measures approximately 224 square metres and it contains a wide range of exhibitions that covers themes related to the traditional aspects of the Shona culture in Zimbabwe. Shona is the name widely

Figure 1. Showing The Mutare Museum. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

given to the indigenous population in Zimbabwe and is constituted by people who speak one similar language also called *Shona*. However, the *Shona* language itself is not homogenous because within it are different dialects that vary from region to region. Eastern Zimbabwe is constituted by the *Manyika, Ndau, Jindwi, Hwesa* and *Karanga* speaking people. In this paper, I use Shona as a general umbrella term for all different communities found in Eastern Zimbabwe. Therefore in presenting this collaborative and co-produced exhibition, I acknowledge the fact that although communities are by nature internally heterogeneous, they are bonded together by of some sense of commonality either in history, culture and experiences (Golding and Modest (2019).

During the colonial period, cultural objects collected from colonised people were alienated from their original contexts and reassembled in exhibitions in museums. Placing and displaying of these objects in museum galleries was influenced by colonial assumptions that source community interactions should go no further than visual observation. Moreso, Africans were not allowed to perform their rituals which were feared by colonialists who were apprehensive of African prophets that stirred and led rebellions across the continent. In fact museumising was a tool of capture that did not only serve colonial curiosities but was also a mode of disconnecting Africans from their sacred religious objects that could potentially influence future uprisings. Subsequently, African traditional songs were banned during the colonial era as they were used together with African drums to stir insurrections, rebellions and resistance to colonial subjugation (Ranger, 1967, 1970). Once the drums were asported and placed in museums they served a dual function in that they became objects of colonial ethnographic investigations and captured 'trophies' meant to block rallying points of insurgencies.

Thus, within this discourse, the museum was overwhelmingly used as an institution to propagate the colonial ethnographic gaze contrary to the socio-cultural histories of the objects which hinged on certain African community values and beliefs.

For the Mutare Museum, the Beit gallery in its old format before it was reorganised in 2016 comprised transport accessories in a glass case on the immediate left side of the entrance. Opposite this display were zoological displays comprising an animal tree and two cases with different kinds of insects. Next to this was a display of traditional beehives containing live bees. Along the length of the gallery, there were a variety of mixed objects including geological displays and different types of traditional objects. Close to these, was a display case with beads, head rests, snuff boxes and a portrait of a traditional chief adorned with symbols of chieftainship, such as badges and ceremonial artefacts. In this old set up displays in the Beit gallery did not represent any coherent or meaningful story. Indeed, one could easily think this was a store room because the gallery had a mixture of a lot of different types of exhibits with no clear-cut objectives and or specific themes. Thus ethnographic objects were exhibited in a manner that conformed to the traditional practice of presenting objects exclusively for visual observation (Chipangura & Mandizvo, 2015). This practice dehumanized and took away the human agency in the story which was part of the colonial aim to portray culture as coincidental and not a result of rational, thoughtful and strategic human action. In Zimbabwe, just like in many other African countries, objects in national museums were removed from their original context, robbed of their function and taken out of time and place to be incorporated into new frameworks of meaning and significance (Kingston, 2008; Rein, 2019). Once they were dislodged from their true symbolic contexts the objects were sorted according to principles of materiality, authenticity, analogy and functionality (Rein, 2019, 130). This type of scenography did not do justice to the social biography of the collection, which cannot be understood in terms of a single unchanging identity, but rather, by tracing the succession of meanings attached to the objects as they move through space and time (Edwards, Gosden, & Phillips, 2006). In many cases just like at Mutare Museum colonial exhibitions often removed human history from material culture on display by presenting objects as cold and lifeless and disregarding their meaning and purpose which are intimately tied to human stories (Catlin-Legutko, 2019, 41). During the reorganization of the old Beit gallery we were conscious of the fact that objects connect people, places and events and also represents histories of continuity and change (Mallon 2019) (Figure 2).

CO-CURATION AS A DECOLONISED EXHIBITORY STRATEGY

Africa was partitioned by imperial powers who sat during the Berlin conference between 1884 and 1885. The major players during the conference were Great Britain, Germany, France and Portugal. As a result, colonisation of African territories which began soon after 1886 was spearheaded by these countries. Hence the development of museums in Africa coincided with the spread of colonialism and imperialism, and became part of a system that validated and justified oppression, dispossession and racial prejudice, where the study, collection and presentation of local cultures were seen as a key aspect of exerting power and control over locals (Dubow, 2006; Foucault, 1998; Lord, 2006). Museum construction was an integral part of the expansion of European capital and the establishment of political control, aspects that were always associated with racial prejudice as well as social and

Figure 2. Ethnographic Collections displayed on the floor at the Mutare Museum. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

epistemic violence. Colonialism profoundly impacted on many aspects of life and in the case of these museums it influenced collecting practices, scope of their narratives and curatorial cultures (Ariese-Vandemeulebroucke, 2018). However, of late through co-curation and the development of collaborative exhibitions museums are beginning to challenge the same ideas that they have been known to champion in the past. In doing so museums are taking a leading role in decolonising, revisualizing, presenting alternative stories, interrogating intolerance and stimulating critical public pedagogies (Clover, 2015). Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies have also reshaped collecting and exhibiting practices in museums. Co-curating prioritises social history and the collecting of contemporary cultures in a dialogue with the community (Schorch et al., 2019). Furthermore, in many post-colonial nations sharing power with indigenous communities in the making of museum exhibitions is a methodology that is being used to pluralise, democratise and decolonize relations (Onciul, 2015). At its heart, to decolonize the museum requires active listening to the peoples represented and allowing their voices to be heard (Golding, 2016). As Sandahl (2019, 75) posits:

> decolonizing museum curating involves decoding museum collections from the colonial meanings in which they have been cut off, displayed and decontextualized from where they had once belonged, and in which have been categorised, labelled and transposed into the alien binary hierarchies of Western rationalism and the value systems of colonialism and imperialism.

A decolonial agenda is taken against the background that museums are still viewed by local communities as spaces intimately tied to the process of colonisation. Thus, in the opinion of Catlin-Legutko (2019, 44), "decolonisation means, at minimum, sharing governance structures and

authority for the documentation and interpretation of native culture". Decolonizing practices are collaborative which means that when an idea for a project or initiative is first conceived – it should be in a conversation with the local community to ensure that we are given the permission to pursue the story (Catlin-Legutko 2019). Hence, collaborations need to occur at the beginning and threaded throughout the life cycle of the project. Decolonising museum practices also entails privileging voices and perspectives of local communities in exhibition development just as we did in reorganizing the Beit gallery.

A decolonial museology that engenders a level of self-representation is a necessity, where previously marginalised knowledge can challenge colonially derived curatorial practices and reconnect objects with communities from where they were accumulated (Mignolo, 2011). Elsewhere, Bruchac (2014, 2069) proposes that some of the key decolonizing strategies should include: "critical analysis of social and political relations, collaborative consultation and research design, reclamation of cultural landscapes and heritage sites, repatriation of human remains, co-curation of archaeological collections, and devising more culturally accurate museum representations". Participatory approaches (Simon, 2009) also fundamentally changes the nature of museum exhibition production. In coming up with the new Beit gallery display, indigenous ontologies and epistemologies from the community were used in the storyline with minimum curatorial intervention. Our intervention was only limited to the role of facilitating the presentation of ritual ontologies that undergirded the use of traditional drums and we allowed the community to tell narratives from their own point of view. This it can be argued was part of the ontological turn which dismantled binary divisions between human/non-human, nature/culture, object/subject and importantly respected epistemological worlds of indigenous people (Bormpoudakis, 2019, 546).

In this regard, it can be further posited that museums especially in Africa are being challenged to give up on their authoritarian voice of control to allow communities to speak for themselves. Accepting source communities as experts and research partners can change the museum practice by opening up different ways of knowing and caring for the past (Onciul, 2019). Curatorship has thus evolved from being a strict specialised connoisseurship of individuals to a public service that attend to problems in contemporary communities (Schorch et al., 2019). Elsewhere, museums in the west are becoming socially responsible in their curatorial and public programming and are responding to social issues affecting communities (Bautista, 2013; Janes & Sandell, 2019; Silverman, 2010). These ideas are not new. Karp and Lavine (1991, 12) argued thirty years ago that "the best way to think about the changing relations between museums and communities is to think about how the *audience*, a passive entity, becomes the *community*, an active agent".

APPROACHES IN NEW MUSEOLOGY AND EVERYDAY USES OF SHONA RITUAL DRUMS

The idea of a 'new museology' (Vergo, 1989) is a discourse around the social and political roles of museums that encourages new communication and new styles of expression in contrast to classic, collections-centred museum models. According to Watson (2007, 13) "if we understand "old museology" to be characterised by an emphasis on the professional collection, documentation and interpretation of objects, then "new museology" is community focused with emphasis on community needs". Thus, the relationship between communities and museums is amplified in new

museology in which communities become equal partners as well as controlling agents (Message, 2013). New museology questions the idea of museums as storehouses and deconstruct power relations between museums and communities (Stam, 1993). This concept recognises the social and political role of museums and does so by encompassing meaningful community participation in curatorial practices (McCall & Gray, 2014). Within the formulations of new museology museums are regarded as stewards of objects keeping them on behalf of local communities rather than being sole voices of authority in displaying and interpreting those objects (Peers & Brown, 2003).However, while some curators are happy to allow communities to temporarily act as co-curators some are critical about the way in which being an expert is portrayed in these activities and feel that their expertise is trivialized. Discussions on new museology have been recently extended to encompasses the notion of curatopia. Schorch et al. (2019) define curatopia as an imagined future for an ideal socially and politically engaged curatorial practice. They argue that "curatopia explores the ways in which the mutual, asymmetrical relations underpinning global, scientific entanglements of the past can be transformed into more reciprocal, symmetrical forms of cross-cultural curatorship in the present" (Schorch et al., 2019, 2). Thus, curatopia as a concept looks at an emerging active reciprocal relationship between indigenous communities and museums.

Whereas the old museum was imagined as a building the new museum in cooperates community perceptions and is imagined as both a process and an experience. Elsewhere, the concept of the contact zone formulated by Clifford (2007) and Pratt (1992) has allowed museums to evolve beyond easily definable, geographical arenas of interaction into becoming places for dialogue and intercultural exchange that bring people in contact with each other and establishes ongoing relations. According to Peers and Brown, (2003, 5) "artefacts function as 'contact zones' as sources of knowledge and as catalysts for new relationships – both within and between these communities". Museums as contact zones brings communities together who were formerly spatially and politically separated through colonialism. Therefore, at the Mutare Museum there was paradigm shift in that we discarded our colonial outlook and adopted a new museological practice through collaborating with the community and generated new meanings for traditional drums. From the outset we worked with the community whose indigenous ritual ontologies determined the ways in which the drums were presented in the exhibition. We video recorded ritual ceremonies where the drums were being used and this helped to bring to fore alternative community epistemologies and ontologies which were absent in the old museum display. We gathered that apart from the drums the community also used several other instruments to give rhythm to their songs during the ritual ceremonies. They used *mbira* thumb pianos, *marimba, hosho*, hand and leg rattles and flute type instruments.

TRADITIONAL SHONA DANCES AND RITUAL ONTOLOGIES

Various types of traditional ritual dances were performed by the community using the drum as an important musical instrument. An example is the *chimaisiri* dance which was said to have been originally associated with hunting ritual ceremonies but it is now a social dance for beer parties, other joyful occasions and funerals. *Mhande* is another indigenous dance which was performed during rituals accompanied by a drum beat. The ritual ontologies of the *mhande* repertoire consists of distinctive songs and rhythms used for communicating with the *majukwa* (rain spirits). The rain spirits in turn

communicate with God (*Mwari*) the provider of rain on behalf of the people. *Mhande* performance involves singing, drum beating, hand clapping, dancing and ululation. It was generally believed and accepted by this community that religion is a medium through which some complex problems of this earth especially comprehension of the life after death or life beyond the grave can be addressed. Their whole social structure rests on religious beliefs and that *Nyadenga* (God) the spiritual being is responsible for everyone's destiny. Since God was said to be busy in the spiritual world, he was not accessed by an ordinary man but through spirit mediums – *midzimu* which can be family, clan or territorial levels. Thus, they believe that when a person dies his/her spirit wanders about until it is given permission to come back and protect its children. Ceremonies are held which give these wandering spirits permission to come back. Only a fully-grown person who has children can become an effective spirit medium. These ancestral spirits help and guide the families in their day-to-day lives. The spirits of the dead are believed to convey any message from the living to God and as such are central to the religion and belief of the community. Against this background, we used collaborative co-curation in identifying similarities between drums used by the community during rituals and those found in our museum collection. These drums are cylindrical in shape, open and narrower at the bottom than the top. They were made from hardwood and top covered by animal skin secured on both sides with wooden pegs (Figure 3).

The other type of drum used was semi-circular with a skin stretched over the opening and secured by wooden pegs. It was used during funerals, traditional ceremonies and festivities. By conducting this research, we aimed at bridging the gap between the static object displayed in the museum and similar objects that are being used in ceremonies. Thus, I concur with the view of McCarthy et al. (2019) who argue that museum objects cannot be disconnected from the past but rather are enduring symbols that connect the past with the present and future. In short, it can therefore be argued that at the heart of decolonised museum practices is the privileging of indigenous voices, experiences, knowledge, reflections, analyses, paradigms, cosmologies and worldviews (Chipangura and Chipangura 2020). However, decoloniality is more than just ceding power and authority to indigenous communities through collaborative activities as it is also about changing dominant rationalities and practices especially Western scientific paradigms that structured the establishment of museums in Africa during the colonial period (Chipangura et al., 2019). This is because power in controlling the research process is usually located in the hands of institutions that perpetuates dominant power structures and forms of privileges. Hence, it has been argued that collaborations are merely neo-colonial sites in which hierarchies of power are still present because asymmetric relationships exist between museum 'experts' and community members (Boast 2011). No matter how much we might think of pluralizing knowledge production in museums through collaborations – the intellectual control will still remain vested in the hands of curators Boast (2011, 58). Therefore, even though community collaboration has become a major museum decolonising methodology there is no critical evaluation of what it means in terms of geographies of power (Shelton 2018) (Figure 4).

The New Interactive Exhibition and New Connections

In June 2016, a new Beit gallery exhibition that emerged from this collaborative research was opened at the Mutare Museum. This exhibition was the first wholesome post-colonial display

Figure 3. A visitor using interactive displays in the Beit Gallery. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

designed with the full participation of the community. The exhibition uses both audio and video depictions to illustrate the socio-cultural uses of the drums. Video recordings of ritual activities undertaken by the community using the drums are now a part of the storyline. I thus argue that drums in the museum in their physical formats cannot be separated from beliefs, values and ideas of the community as was the case in the old Beit gallery. Moreover, objects made or modified by man reflect consciously or unconsciously beliefs of individuals who made them or used them and by extension carries belief of the larger society to which they belong (Prown, 1982). Therefore, in the new Beit gallery display traditional drums no longer reflexively mirror cultures of the 'other' instead they are playing an important role in the construction of social relations and new meanings located within community epistemologies and ontologies. The new interactive exhibition depicts indigenous traditional music and musical instruments that are used during a variety of ritual and leisure time performances by the eastern Shona people. Visitors to the museum now have a high degree of association with musical instruments both on display and on the LED screens (see Figure 3). Within this set up, visitors are able to see how the drums are used in Shona traditional ceremonies on video recordings (Chiwara & Chipangura, 2019). Instead of thinking of ethnographic objects as possessing an unproblematic concrete existence that can be apprehended visually the exhibition in the reorganised Beit Gallery allows for multisensory interactions. The introduction of technology also generated nostalgia amongst visitors. I interviewed one visitor who shared his memories of the past upon watching traditional dances that were being shown on screen:

Figure 4. Different types of traditional dances on display in the Beit gallery. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

> I am so excited to see traditional dances on this TV. These remind me of my early childhood back then in the village when we used to attend community ceremonies where such dances were performed. By recording videos of the dances and showing them in the museum, our cultures can be transmitted to children in the urban areas who have never experienced such dances in real time. (Makamure, the Mutare Museum, 2016)

Many visitors were drawn to the gallery dedicated to the religious beliefs of the eastern Shona people, which included videos and audio recordings of songs performed during rain petitioning ritual ceremonies. Observations from the visitor comments book showed that visitors appreciated the way in which the information about Shona cultural practices was presented:

> We are Shona people and we have certain cultural beliefs that are slowly dying because of globalisation. We thank the museum for documenting our cultural heritage and allowing us to interact with it on display using computers (Views extracted from the Mutare Museum visitors comments book, 2016)

Mr Muradzikwa, a school teacher and frequent visitor to the museum as a school trip supervisor, said:

> As soon as I heard that the museum had opened a new display, I had to come from Nyanga [Nyanga is located 94 km north of the Mutare] to experience it and I must say I am happy with this new product. I will encourage more people to visit the museum since there is now something new to look forward to (Views extracted from the Mutare Museum visitors comments book, 2016).

Another interactive experience was installed in the Beit gallery, in which visitors could enter a recreated traditional Shona kitchen hut: the hut retained all the cultural attributes of a typical Shona kitchen, which survived throughout the centuries. Visitors found this experience quite appealing, especially children and city residents who know nothing of the traditional rural homestead (Figure 5). In the comment book, one visitor observed:

> I was quite impressed by the cultural hut section. It is showing the real African culture of many Zimbabweans. The recreated kitchen is exceptional; a lot of creativity has been shown. Keep up the good work you are doing for our children especially those who have never been to rural areas!

A campfire area was also recreated, and visitors could sit and enjoy the night sky view, projected on the kitchen's thatched roof. Such a surreal nocturnal experience captivated many visitors. Another visitor comment read:

> I enjoy sitting in this kitchen near the fire and watching the night stars revolving around the roof. The experience is nice as it gives me a real sense of night life when you are in the rural area.

An elaborate presentation of eastern Shona cultures, cosmology, agriculture, traditional healing, religious practices, music, and community ontologies is another interesting interactive inclusion in the new Beit gallery. Also included in the new gallery is the theme of hunting and gathering that was a common feature among the eastern Shona community since precolonial times. A reproduction of the hunting forest was created where visitors make their way through the immersive set of environment as they journey back in time to the sights, sounds, and smells of the forest. In this small jungle visitors are exposed to various traditional hunting methods that include the falling log trap and hunting nets. Apart from the jungle and hunting implements there is an LCD screen mounted on the wall where visitors are given a chance to evaluate their knowledge on traditional hunting and gathering through a quiz session in the form of a flip book. The renovated Beit Gallery managed to attract visitors in its first month – a significant increase in interest was noted between July and August 2016: a total of 2,826 visitors came to the museum, compared to 1,536 during the same period in 2015. The museum therefore saw an increase of 1,290 visitors during the first month. We believe that this was the result of a vigorous marketing exercise that advertised the new displays. However, digital resources were not implemented in the museum's other exhibition halls, which, being antiquated, have poor attendance. In these galleries, English is the only available language, and many of the objects are randomly displayed on the floor, while the lighting and ventilation conditions are still poor. Although some visitors were fascinated by the interactive interfaces in the Beit Gallery, most of them still expressed the view that the museum needed a holistic change:

> The new gallery is breath-taking, very innovative presentation of traditional aspects of the eastern Shona. However, a lot more work still needs to be done in the other galleries. For example, if you look at the eastern District gallery prominence is given to British settler histories and juxtaposing such colonial incursions with our flora and fauna is such a bad outline. A lot of work needs to be done also in the Boultbee

Figure 5. Traditional kitchen display. [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

gallery as well—we need more research into our liberation struggle and exhibitions that address this, rather than just presenting European made firearms.

CONCLUSION

I have presented a new exhibition at the Mutare Museum which we co-curated with the community by reorganising ethnographic objects in the old Beit gallery. I specifically looked at how ritual uses of drums by contemporary communities in Eastern Zimbabwe informed our understanding of silent biographies of a similar collection that was appropriated and dumped in museum during the colonial period. Conscious of old colonial museological practices that were driven by the ethnographic gaze and scientific inquiries we embraced new museology and co-curatorship in reorganising collections in the Beit gallery. These concepts allowed us to collaborate with the local community in the reinterpretation of meaning and uses of drums. A new interactive exhibition was born out of this collaborative exercise and I have argued that such a practice is one of ways in which the colonial frame of a museum can be dismantled and thereby opening up for multivocality derived from everyday experiences of communities. Therefore, it is important to recognise that traditional drums were not just static ethnographic objects displayed for the sole purpose of the visual gaze. This is because before they were dislocated from their original context they were used in various ritual processes. I have demonstrated some of the traditional dances and rituals performed by contemporary eastern Shona communities in which the drum is the central object of use. Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies of rituals associated with the drums significantly contributed to the new Beit gallery storyline. Practically, the use of collaborative techniques in the making of this exhibition was regarded in this paper as part and parcel of a methodological approach that can be embraced in the decolonisation of the museum practice. END

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