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Community museums and rethinking the colonial frame of national museums in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we present the Marange Community Museum as an empirical example of how decoloniality can be approached within the museum practice. We argue that the Marange community made use of indigenous ontologies and epistemologies in establishing their museum where rituals and cultural objects are connected in use and in an ongoing dialogue. Ritual processes associated with burials of chiefs and rain petitioning ceremonies are discussed in this paper as inseparable from the physical fabric of cultural objects on display in the Marange Community Museum. We also posit that the way in which this museum was formed is an empirical illustration of how the museum practice can be decolonised because it embraces collaborations with community members. Hence, a decolonial perspective represented by a community museum acknowledges that objects are not mundane but rather represent the coming together of a multiplicity of factors and it also questions the binary division between tangible and intangible heritage knowledge production.

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Introduction

This paper examines the emergence of community museums in Zimbabwe as alternative forms of cultural displays and as active decolonial strategies. Our focus is on the Marange Community Museum (MCM) located in Eastern Zimbabwe, approximately 65km southwest of Mutare town. The data used derives from the research that we conducted between 2017 and 2018. MCM was opened in 2013 as a local history museum and contains displays that include a variety of traditional artefacts and various regalia related to the Marange chiefly lineage. The museum was started using resources from the local community with a view to recording and presenting the cultural practices specific to the Marange area. We argue that the formation of MCM represents an active and emergent social and cultural transformation by indigenous people in the remaking, adapting and revision of western museological frameworks that are still embedded in national museums in Zimbabwe. Seen in this light, the formation of MCM is grounded within indigenous curatorship that reflects work done by indigenous people in which western practices are altered to suit

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community needs (McCarthy 2019). MCM is also a site of cultural practice, a living heritage site where ritual processes associated with burials of chiefs are illustrated through narratives. The paper will also look at indigenous curatorship practices at MCM relative to expert-driven discourses used at the Mutare Museum, a nearby national institution under the administration of the National Monuments and Museums of Zimbabwe (NMMZ). By doing this we will illustrate how a decolonial agenda for museum practice can be approached, by moving between colonially informed ethnographic classifications at Mutare Museum to community-driven curatorship at MCM. We argue that the establishment of MCM exemplifies a decolonising practice which provides a pathway beyond the limitations of national museums by using specific local ideas (McCarthy 2019). This paper will also highlight that although most national museums in Africa are still regarded as offshoots of a colonial process, community museums have stepped in to give priority to social aspects and are providing a meeting place where the cultural identities of particular communities are revitalized (Laely, Meyer, and Schwere 2018; Macdonald and Jennie 2019; Thomas 2019).

A museum for the community by the community

The research we carried out at MCM employed a qualitative research design in which we utilised different sources which included a desk-top survey, museum visits, photography, exhibition analysis, interviews and open discussions. Our desk-top survey revealed that there was little work on MCM apart from field reports done by Chipangura (2015) and McLaren (2014, 2017). During our numerous visits to MCM between 2017 and 2018 we had conversations, interviews and open discussions with community members and local tour guides. Therefore, through unstructured face-to-face conversations, we captured a range of data pertaining to how this museum was formed, how indigenous knowledge was used and various representations displayed in the exhibitions. In addition, we also conducted an in-depth visual analysis of the themes on display. In adopting these methods, we argue that a community museum can provide a more inclusive participatory model for communities which is largely absent in the national museums in Zimbabwe. This is because whereas national museums are considered to be repositories of national heritage community museums incorporate community perceptions as both a process and an experience. We further argue that since community museums are more inclusive in nature they can be regarded as contact zones (Pratt 1992; Clifford 2007) that have evolved beyond easily definable arenas of national heritage protection into spaces for dialogue and intercultural exchange, bringing together communities and establishing ongoing relations. In this regard, contact zones act as sources of indigenous knowledge and catalysts for new relationships within and between communities (Peers and Brown Alison 2003, 5).

The Marange Community Museum (MCM) located in Marange communal lands, Eastern Zimbabwe was opened in 2013 as a local history museum with displays that mainly depict the history of Marange chiefly lineage, together with their traditional and artistic objects. The museum is positioned at the foot of Makomwe Mountain, which is also a cultural and religious hub of the Marange community (McLaren 2014). This museum began as a community-initiated project spearheaded by Rodwell Marange who used his own resources to record and present cultural practices specific to the area. Accordingly, McLaren (2014, 12)

argues that displays in this museum symbolise the prestigious standing of traditional chiefs as religious figures who unite the community. Over and above its traditional repository function this museum is a living heritage site where festivals and other social activities are hosted from time to time. Basically displays at MCM portray various aspects of identity of the community and seek to celebrate their cultural richness, creativity and resourcefulness.

The main museum building has seven galleries; the Wonder Room, the Faith Room, the Entertainment Hall, The Hall of Outstanding Achievers, the Presidents' Room, the Craft Gallery and the Genealogy Gateway Gallery. The Wonder Room elaborates the traditional rites associated with the coronation of Marange chiefs in past and present (Mutsago 2017). Histories of African churches that are found in Marange are exhibited in the Faith Room. It presents histories of churches like Johanne African Apostolic Church, which was started in Marange and other western churches active in the area such as the United Methodist Church, Roman Catholic and the Seventh Day Adventist churches. On the other hand, the Entertainment Hall is an exhibition which showcases contemporary Zimbabwean musicians, whose music has had an impact on this community and the country at large. Displays are selected from newspaper cuttings which are pasted on walls, with notable musicians such as the late Oliver Mtukudzi, Thomas Mapfumo, Jah Pryzah, Winky Dee and Aleck Macheso. Moving on, the Hall of Outstanding Achievers contains portraits of individuals from the Marange community who have made significant achievements in various aspects of life and are role models to the community. For instance, the story of Johanne Marange, the founder of Johanne African Apostolic Church is mentioned as well as that of Rodwell Marange who is credited with the idea of this community museum (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Marange Community Museum.

important and well respected by this community, such that one is not allowed to eat an animal that represents his or her totem. Similarly, marriages between people sharing the same totem are prohibited as they are considered to be a taboo (Momberume 2017). Meanwhile, the hut of rituals depicts events like rain-petitioning ceremonies and burial rites associated with Marange chiefs. Objects which are used during the burial process are showcased in the hut of rituals. Next to this is the mediation hut, which showcases cultural objects used by traditional healers and in witchcraft-related activities. Objects on display include horns, owl and hyena statues and winnowing baskets (Rungwandi 2017). The inheritance hut is also part of this cultural village and it illustrates the processes by which objects of a deceased Marange chief are redistributed amongst immediate family members. Objects which are on display in this hut were collected from relatives of former and now deceased chiefs (Momberume 2017). Inside this hut there is a huge musical drum (known as *Ngoma YeNjendura*) that is beaten to announce the death of a chief.

While these displays tell numerous stories about the Marange people and their history, this museum also shows that communities can document and preserve cultural values for themselves and for future generations outside the traditional authorised frameworks of national museums. This we argue is part of a decolonial strategy in which communities are beginning to seek self-representation after having been excluded from narratives of national museums. Indigenous curatorship is important in presenting community values and identities which are embodied in museum displays. However, since Rodwell Marange owns the building which houses displays it can be argued that although the core collection reflects the cultural histories of Marange Community most narratives represented in the exhibitions are informed by his personal standpoint. Thus, in several ways this museum can be regarded as the private collection of Rodwell Marange whose father is a direct descendant of the Marange royal dynasty (McLaren 2014). Given the fact the museum started off as an individual initiative this also means that power and control is still very much vested in Rodwell Marange, and that the community is only occasionally consulted, and not necessarily collaborated with in the exhibition projects.

Meanwhile, MCM is in the same area where surface diamonds were discovered. The Chiadzwa diamond fields are located approximately 18km south of the museum. Hence, apart from displaying cultural objects, this museum also acts as a social agent for change by opening up discussions that challenges bad diamond mining practices in the area. The Marange area is hot, dry and does not receive adequate rainfall and is one of the poorest regions in Zimbabwe, yet it sits on a large deposit of diamonds (Chipangura and Marufu 2019). Diamonds were discovered in the area in 2006 but communities have not benefited from this mineral wealth. The diamond is therefore an object of inequality in Chiadzwa. Some local villagers were displaced to pave the way for the establishment of large scale diamond mining companies. Instead of benefiting from diamonds, thousands of villagers were further impoverished as a result of their displacement and relocation from Chiadzwa to Arda Transau farm which is located 75km north of Marange. MCM is therefore at the forefront of challenging inequalities and bad mining practices by the diamond mining companies owned by Lebanese and Chinese nationals that took over Chiadzwa. We also argue that by actively discussing and challenging a contentious issue of utmost importance to the community, this museum is also a centre of public and civic debate. In this way, MCM is a site where topical issues are examined in a participatory manner

that allows for multiple voices to be heard and, in doing so, plays a role in identifying and delivering solutions to the challenges facing the communities (Chipangura and Marufu 2019). MCM places emphasis on creating a new space for community activities, events, performances and educational programmes. Thus, the museum is used as mode of educational instruction by traditional leaders and local schools. An annual community 10 km marathon is also hosted by the museum with winners in both the male and female categories receiving cash prizes (Regai Chikware, 2018). Other activities that have been held at the museum in the past include; a traditional dance festival attended by more than 200 children from local schools, a meeting by 96 traditional leaders and 7 villages heads, a meeting of local church leaders of all denominations attended by 26 pastors, traditional healers meeting attended by 4 members, a youth day and a day for orphans, widows and the vulnerable which was attended by over 272 participants (McLaren 2014, 20).

It is important to stress out that since this museum was formed in 2013 it has also encountered a number of challenges. A key challenge has been lack of financial support as the museum relies solely on private contributions from Rodwell Marange. Crucially there is not enough storage space – the museum looks like an eighteenth-century curiosity cabinet as many of the objects which are not on display are placed anywhere where there is available space (McLaren 2014). Lighting is also very poor because the building is not connected to electricity. Furthermore, the objects on display have no captions and it is difficult to interpret them in the absence of a tour guide. The museum building itself is not fully up to standard to house collections, for example the existing storeroom has no roof (McLaren 2014). Lack of training of the tour guides is another challenge. Unlike the Mutare museum where objects are documented and inventoried, at MCM there is no single inventory of objects both on display and in the storage areas. Moreover, since this museum operates as a private entity run by Rodwell Marange there is uncertainty as to how it will survive if he decides to stop sponsoring its activities. Critically this brings to light the fact that community members are not actively involved in the day-to-day running of the museum and hence it is problematic to define whose interests are being served by MCM. However, it seems clear that MCM is a private collection, and that even though it serves the community the power and authority of how objects are presented is still vested in the hands of Rodwell Marange. For the heterogenous Marange community the museum has provided an opportunity to participate in various activities described above, but few of them are concerned with how objects are collected and presented in the exhibitions.

Ritual ontologies associated with the burial of a chief

The hut of rituals contains objects used during burial events of chiefs and such representations illustrate how indigenous ontologies could inform curatorship practices in community museums. Inside this hut there is the *nhovo yamambo* – a built structure which comprises a reed mat, cow skins and wooden logs known as *hwanza* (Mutsago 2017). Contextual information on how the mummification and burial process was carried out is provided by local tour guides (Mutsago 2017). According to Mutsago, the chief's deceased body was mummified on the *tsarwe* (a raised wooden platform) and a similar platform has been reconstructed at MCM for illustrative purposes. He further notes that during

the rituals and burial preparation procedures news of the chief's death would only be disclosed to his immediate family. His advisors, sons and sons-in-law would then take the deceased body to a nearby forest and construct a *tsarwe* where they would dry the body using firewood in preparation for burial (Mutsago 2017) (Figure 3).

The illustrative ritual hut where the *tsarwe* and *nhovo yamambo* are found is situated approximately 50 m away from the main museum building. The distance of the hut from the museum represents the secrecy and seclusion associated with the actual mummification process, which is undertaken away from living spaces. Moreover, not everyone in the community was supposed to know the exact location where the chief's body was mummified. A distance away also meant that smell of the body during the drying process would not be detected by community members (Rungwandi 2018). In order to mask this smell the sons-in-laws roasted a lamb over an open fire which they would eat during the drying process. The roasted meat was consumed without salt as it was meant to be tasteless and not to be enjoyed as they would be in mourning. The meat-eating ritual was procedural and not necessary a feast (Rungwandi 2018). The lamb was also slaughtered as a way of honouring the spirit of the deceased chief since it is regarded as a calm animal by the Marange community (Rungwandi 2018). Those overseeing the process would also drink beer made from millet (*Eleusine coracana*) and sorghum (*Sorghum* spp). Women were not involved because it was believed that they could not withstand the body drying ritual, and it was a taboo for them to witness this process (Rungwandi 2018).

Rungwandi further recounts that the drying process involved a monitored heating of the body using firewood as it lay on the *tsarwe* for a period of about thirty days. Clay pots were placed beneath the *tsarwe* in order to capture water draining from the



Figure 3. Shows *nhovo yamambo* inside the hut of rituals.

drying body. The clay pots together with the body would then be carried to nearby Makomwe Mountain and placed in a cave where the chief was eventually buried (Rungwandi 2018). After the body had dried, a drum would be beaten to announce the chief's death to the whole Marange community. The sound produced by the drum would give a signal to the community that: '*gomo rawondomoka*' – a Shona proverb which means 'a mountain has fallen' as the death of a chief was analogically equated with the collapse of a mountain (Rungwandi 2018). Upon hearing this sound, the community would then know that the chief was no more and would gather at his homestead for a period of mourning. A cow was slaughtered to provide meat for mourners and this event was treated more as festivity, in celebration of the life of the chief. The leather skin of the cow was then used to wrap the mummified body (Rungwandi 2018). As the community gathered for the ceremony, they will be singing songs praising their ancestors and honouring their totems. This ceremony was mostly attended by older people. According to Mutsago, in the past during this ritual immoral behaviour such as performing sexual acts in front of people with any person irrespective of their relationship would take place. He elaborated that this was regarded as an integral part of the mourning ritual. Furthermore, the Marange people resorted to this 'immoral' behaviour as a show of devastation on the loss of their chief and as a sign that their world was in disarray. Despite the fact that this may sound offensive, no one was supposed to be offended (Mutsago 2018). In addition, mourners would drink beer throughout the mourning process using containers such as *pfuko* and *mikombe* (clay pots and calabashes).

After the deceased body had dried up and was wrapped in the cow skin, the sons, sons-in-law, village elders, nephews and the chief's advisors would then take the body to Makomwe Mountain for burial (Figure 4). The body was carried on a *hwanza*



Figure 4. Mountain Makomwe where chiefs are buried.

(stacked wooden logs) that served as a stretcher, for easy handling up to the higher reaches of the mountain. According to tradition, the entourage would go up the mountain to bury the chief by simply sneaking away from the settlement without announcing or notifying the mourners (Regai Chikware 2018). The group was led by the chief's eldest nephew who would have been informed by the chief in living times where he wanted to be buried on the mountain. On arrival at the burial site the body was carefully placed in the cave which would be the chief's final resting place after a month long of ritual activities. After the burial, they would then return to the chief's homestead and announce to the mourners that they can now disperse as the full funeral process was completed (Mutsago 2018). It was only at this point in time that the mourners would realise that the chief had been buried. After the burial of the chief, his personal belongings were not be touched for a period of two years. After these two years his close family members were required to consult a traditional healer in order to find out if the chief's soul peace was resting in peace (Mutsago 2018). If it turned out that the chief's spirit was not at peace, the traditional healer would use his mediation objects to consult ancestors on how best to appease the spirit. This process was then followed by the ritual called *kugovera nhaka* – dividing and sharing the chief's belongings amongst his brothers and children. It was also at this time that a suitable candidate to succeed the chief was chosen (Rungwandi 2018).

The in-depth narration of rituals by Rungwandi and Mutsago given above gives a good idea of how indigenous ontologies and epistemologies informed the burial process. Hence it can be argued that by using indigenous curatorship as a decolonial strategy ritual processes are narrated to visitors in a way that accurately connects the objects on display in the ritual hut with these stories. Furthermore, according to Mutsago another ritual ceremony still being used which has a relationship with the museum is the rain petitioning at Makomwe Mountain where the chiefs are buried. This mountain is regarded as sacred by this community and has a variety of indigenous fruits like *nhengeni/sour plum (Ximenia caffra)*, *matamba/natal orange (Strychnos spinosa)*, *nhunguru/ governor's plum (Flacourtia indica)* and *matohwe/snot-apple (Azanza garckeana)* (Mutsago 2018). Accordingly, in observance of the sacred values of this mountain, when eating these fruits, community members are not supposed to make negative comments about the taste no matter how sour or bitter it might be (Mutsago 2018). It is strongly believed that the ancestors would consider such a person ungrateful and make him/her disappear as a form of punishment. The offender would not be seen again until a ritual ceremony was conducted to appease the angry ancestors. Thus it is true that past experiences and the continued presence of ancestors influences the present lives of Marange community (Mutsago 2018). Elsewhere, in other cultural landscapes of Eastern Zimbabwe, it has been argued that ancestors have an active role in guiding and nurturing current generations (Chipangura 2019). Hence community elders often stress the various constructions and usages of the past, in contrast with seeing the past as something that happened and is over. Similarly, at MCM indigenous epistemologies and ontologies concerned with ways of knowing derived from local explanations and worldviews are incorporated into the museum's narratives (Nicholas and Watkins 2014).

Community museums as a decolonising practice

The birth of national 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; Lord 2006; Mignolo 2011; Bennett 2018; Chipangura and Marufu 2019). For this reason, Mignolo (2011) argues that national museums can be decolonized through epistemic and aesthetic disobedience by undoing earlier ways of knowledge production in collection practices and exhibitions. He further asserts that most national museums particularly in African and Latin America still continue to reproduce colonial forms of knowledge and of being (Mignolo 2011). Similarly, we argue that 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 whence most museum materials derived. In this regard, the MCM can be seen as a direct response to this exclusion. In the decolonial moment, the long history of classification, categorisation and interpretation which looked at cultures in colonised spaces either as curiosities or as intellectual subjects has created a situation in which national museums in Africa have to constantly struggle for relevance.

Nonetheless, the emergence of community and living museums has given rise to new questions beyond the traditional administration of people and objects (Rassool 2018). In any case, a community museum is grounded in the actions of communities rather than established governments (Sweet and Kelly 2019). Therefore there is a recognised difference between a community museum and a national museum in terms of its function. National museums are highly specialised, secular and are driven by academic and professional aspirations (Stanley 2008). In Africa, national museums still function as places where various cultures mix and where the identities of nations are formulated. On the contrary, a community museum is locally accented, self-announcing and self-conscious (Kingdon 2005). Therefore, community museums are anchored in a local culture, and are different from national museums which see things at the level of several different cultural groups (Konare 1995). In light of these differences, we argue that the recent emergence of community museums in Africa can be regarded as decolonial methodology that is being embraced by local people in response to exclusion or misrepresentation in national museums. This view is supported by Boast (2011, 56) who succinctly argues that 'due to frustrations with engagements with existing national museums and a complete insignificance of national museums to the community – indigenous people are creating their own centres of collecting, performance and presentation.'

During one conversation with Mr Rodwell Marange he indicated that on several occasions he tried to get technical support from Mutare Museum on how to set up exhibitions, but this did not yield any results. It was out these frustrations that he decided to proceed independently (Marange 2017). In presenting how indigenous curatorship was deployed at MCM, we also acknowledge the fact that although communities are by nature internally heterogeneous, they are bound together by of some sense of commonality, either in history, culture, and experience or personal characteristics (Golding and Walklate 2019). With this in mind, MCM is sometimes criticised as an individual

personalised project, but the mere fact that it embodies traditional cultural identities can be said to make it representational of the whole community. In this way the museum is a unifying point that brings community members together to share their cultures, history and to preserve and disseminate them using indigenous knowledge systems. Moreover, since some cultural objects originate from the community there is a special sentimental commitment within the community as this museum preserves its cultural patrimony in a familiar cultural atmosphere and setting (Arinze 1998). This is different from disciplinary informed classifications of the collections at the Mutare Museum where there is no community involvement. Accordingly, we argue that the decolonial practice at MCM coalesces around the vision of inclusivity, in which communities have a higher degree of participation and agency in the interpretation of their cultural heritage. Elsewhere, in their study of the Kelabit Highlands Community Museum in Malaysia Sweet and Kelly (2019) also stressed that it represented inclusivity because its formation was not entrenched in institutional hierarchical models as was the case with larger traditional museums.

Generally, community museums are different from traditional national museums because they are developed and managed by the community to safeguard and represent the community's living heritage and at the same time to address local issues by embracing a shared vision for the area (Sweet and Kelly 2019, 59). Community museums are therefore contributing to ongoing debates on how to decolonise the museum practice and clearly, they present an empirical illustration of what it actually means to decolonise a museum. Within this decolonial thinking, we also argue that although African museums were born out of colonialism it is incorrect to see all of them simply as leftovers of former colonial regimes. This is because before colonialism there were local forms of preservation of culturally important objects and these methods can be regarded as precursors to the different forms of community museums and to community ownership (Laely, Meyer, and Schwere 2018, 10). Such kinds of traditional and indigenous forms of curatorship ensured that in an African setting:

the museum was a temple as well as a form – a vigorous meeting place where issues were discussed, where new breakthroughs in political crafting as well as domestic and industrial crafts were invented, tested and put into practice, and where those which stood the test of time were preserved, protected and improved as circumstance dictated (Andah 1997, 6).

In our presentation of indigenous representations in exhibitions at MCM we have argued that community-driven curatorship is a decolonialising strategy which challenge the dominance of colonial ideologies enshrined in national museums. Indigenous ontologies and forms of knowledge are incorporated in the ways in which objects and local histories are presented at MCM. Thus, indigenous curatorship is markedly different from scientific ethos used by national museums as it takes an interest not only in objects as things but also in the people, their practices and belief systems that lend them meaning (Golding and Modest 2019). Henceforth, to decolonise museum practice requires active listening to the people, their beliefs and allowing their voices to be heard (Golding 2016). This view can be read in light of what 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.

Meanwhile, 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’. Decolonising practices are collaborative in nature which means that when an idea for a project or initiative is first conceived it should be in a conversation with the local community, and this is exactly what happened when MCM was formed in 2013. However, it should also be acknowledged that long before the establishment of MCM the government of Zimbabwe through NMMZ assisted in setting up community museums in the Matabeleland province. For example, the BaTonga community museum was established in 2000 and has been successful in presenting and preserving Tonga cultural histories. This museum preserves both the tangible and intangible heritage of the Tonga ethnic group found mostly in north western Zimbabwe. The museum has a collection of cultural objects made by the Tonga community and it reflects how these objects are used in everyday practices. In 2002, NMMZ assisted with technical and financial assistance towards the establishment of a fully-fledged museum for the Tonga people. BaTonga community museum is an illustration of how a museum can promote cultural equity by preserving and presenting objects that belong to marginalised cultural groups. Similarly the Nambiya community museum was opened in Hwange in 2006 with the assistance of the government. This museum collects and displays objects that are associated with Nambiyian ethnic cultures. Just like the Tonga’s the Nambiyans are a small ethnic group whose cultural practices are slowly fading away culture hence the idea of a community museum was initiated as a response to this. Meanwhile another government initiated community museum project in the same province is the Old Bulawayo open air museum, which celebrates Ndebele cultures and traditional ways of life. It was established in 2006 and houses a number of cultural objects and traditional attire that are closely identified with Ndebele well-being.

However, what differentiates MCM from these earlier examples is that the community has remained in complete control with no government assistance in its day to day programmes. It is a typical illustration of how the museum practice can be decolonised using community driven curatorship which connects cultural objects to local histories. The in-depth narration of ritual ontologies associated with the burial of chiefs by Mutsago and Rungwandi is a good case in point. Meanwhile, Bruchac (2014, 2069) proposes that some of the key decolonising 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’. It can be argued that MCM, as a local initiative fits within a decolonial framework since it uses indigenous ontologies and epistemologies in the preservation and presentation of cultural objects.

Collaborations, object biographies and meanings

Collaborations are at the centre of decolonial methodologies since they promote engagement over doctrine and multivocality over connoisseurship (Boast 2011). Collaborations ensure that communities are not considered as passive audiences for didactic and authoritative forms of knowledge production but are implicated in an ongoing process of knowledge production and debate as active co-producers (Butler and Lehrer 2016; Danbolt

2019; De Palma 2019; Hansen, Henningsen, and Gregersen 2019). 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). The Mutare Museum is the eastern branch of NMMZ and is the national collector of transport objects and antiquities. The other museums in the country are: the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences (Harare) which specializes in human sciences; the Natural History Museum (Bulawayo) which specialises in natural sciences; the Military Museum (Gweru) which specialises in militaria, aviation and mining; and the Great Zimbabwe Museum (Masvingo) which specializes in archaeology and heritage management (Chipangura and Marufu 2019). The Mutare museum which is our focus in this paper because of its proximity to MCM, has been collecting and exhibiting objects associated with the development of transport in Zimbabwe. Though it also has archaeological, natural history and ethnographic collections, its main focus has been collecting items representing European modernity in the colony. Vestiges of motor cars, railway equipment, and household antiquities form the core of its collection and exhibitions (Chipangura 2018a) (Figure 5).

The formation of the Mutare Museum and many other museums throughout Africa is closely linked with the phenomenon of colonialism (Arinze 1998; Anderson 1991; Bennett 1995). These museums were formed as a result of colonial encounters. They share a common history in terms of their development in that they tend to be the by-products of colonialism and are twentieth-century creations – a period in which their formation came as a result of European imperialism. Exhibitions at the Mutare Museum



Figure 5. Mutare Museum.

have remained stagnant and entrenched in ethnographic classifications which do not represent community perspectives. Consequently, this museum has been exclusively detached from communities whose cultures are presented in their exhibitions. Nonetheless, we argue that objects collected during the colonial period were not created in a vacuum as they represent the coming together of a multiplicity of factors and possess individual biographies (Konare 1995; Kingdon 2005; Mataga 2018; Golding and Modest 2019). Hence museum objects are interwoven with words, proverbs, song and dance and cannot be separated from the original uses derived from their points of origin within the community. In an African context, objects have potency and are treated by indigenous people as living beings which they can touch, smell and taste (Arero and Kingdon 2005; Mataga 2018; De Palma 2019). These objects constitute a part of an interconnected whole and thus we argue that the superficial binary division between tangible and intangible does not exist (Chipangura 2018b). Although these objects may appear mundane within ethnographic classifications, they have individual biographies and carry with them important meanings connected to their ritual and cultural functions located in their societies of origin (Arero 2005; Verges 2014; Golding and Modest 2019; McCarthy 2019). It is against this background that we show the differences between a national museum and a community museum because in the latter ontological and epistemological regimes that gave the object its original significance are prioritized. Furthermore, in a community museum objects are considered to have sociological values and are carriers of data and memories connected to living cultures.

Participatory community contact zone and the other side of collaborations

Visitors to the MCM do not only view displays as passive recipients, but are allowed to touch and manipulate the objects, something which they cannot do at the Mutare Museum. MCM also uses a collaborative approaches in developing exhibitions. As such, community members from Marange are sometimes invited to join and assist in the process of mounting an exhibition. The tour guides explained that this is done to make the local community feel more involved in decision making. For this reason, De Palma (2019, 249) argues that such kinds of collaborative activity can transform museums from being cemeteries of dead objects behind glass into active places where culture is performed through participation of the whole community. Collaborative approaches decentre the authority of museum curators by allowing for an investigative process in which decision-making about knowledge and objects of the past is a shared responsibility (Chipangura 2019; Onciul 2019). Diverse perspectives emerge in the interpretation and presentation of objects in the exhibition informed by indigenous ontologies and epistemologies with more than one significance, origin and or use (Vilches et al. 2015). This was the case in point in the illustration of burial rituals when Mutsago and Rungwandi gave a detailed account on how the process was undertaken together with descriptions of objects used. A decolonising approach that is undergirded by collaborations and community-driven curatorship gives agency to indigenous communities who are able to decide how they want stories to be told in museum exhibitions. Elsewhere, Simon (2010) describes collaborations as fulfilling the mandate of what she calls the 'participatory museum', which is different from a traditional museum in that it involves stakeholders and is central to cultural and community life. The concept of the participatory museum

can be closely linked to Clifford (2007) and Pratt's (1991) concept of the contact zone, which is a force for inclusive, collaboration programmes and the development of mutual interest with all social groups (Boast 2011; Walklate 2018; Dahre 2019).

However, it has been argued that contact zones 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). A critique of the collaboration process usually centres around the location of power in these activities (La Salle 2010; Golding and Walklate 2019; Chipangura 2019). It is for this reason that Boast (2011, 58) argues that no matter how much we might think of pluralising knowledge production in museums through collaborations, the intellectual control will still remain vested in the hands of the museum curators. 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). In the case of MCM it is clear that although this is a community-driven curatorship project – decisions on how the exhibitions are presented rest solely with Rodwell Marange. Literally he is as an indigenous curator who has the power and authority to dictate ways in which this community museum is run. Some community members to whom we felt that their participation in museum activities was limited to social events and that they had no proper say on how objects associated with the Marange chieftainship were presented and interpreted. Baba Makamure a community elder said:

yes, the museum is in our community, but it is not ours because it is treated more like a family business by Rodwell who decides on everything. Even when he is in Harare where he works – the tour guides here have no say on many of the things. They actually consult first by calling him. That's why I am saying we are not entirely part of this museum. It's a personal house and we are only consulted when social activities are hosted because he would want the whole community to participate in the marathon and other performances. (Baba Makamure, Marange, 2018)

During our first visit to Marange Museum in 2017 we had a firsthand experience of what Baba Makamure said with regards to tour guides not making any decisions. It took us more than one hour to be allowed into the museum as one of the tour guides failed to get hold of Rodwell Marange who was supposed to authorize the entry, despite the fact that we were still going to pay entrance fees. When the call eventually connected, Rodwell asked to speak to one of us and he briefly explained the reason he has to vet each and every visitor that comes to the museum. He said he feared for the security of his priceless collection of Marange chiefly materials. Upon being told that we are researchers this is what he said:

it's a good thing that you have decided to carry out research about our museum. I have always been fascinated by my family history and have been collecting cultural materials from my father and grandfathers for a long time. I am part of the Marange chieftainship, and this is what I am trying to display in the museum. The tour guides will also tell you of some cultural and social activities that we do annually for the community. Community members have also brought some cultural objects that are displayed in the museum, but the challenge is that we don't have enough space for everything that is why I selected what you will see on display. I hope you guys will enjoy the tour and we would greatly appreciate your comments on how we can improve. There is a visitor's book where you can write our comments after you have completed the tour. My tour guides will show you. (Rodwell Marange, telephone conversation, 2017)

It is against this background that it can be argued that the limitations of community-driven curatorship are not so different from traditional curatorial approaches, in which the curator controls everything and has excessive power in determining how the story is presented. Based on this observation it can be argued that community-driven curatorship can still produce unequal exercises of power and self-referential knowledge, as the Marange community has no control over how objects in the museum are displayed and presented. Hence, despite the good intentions of using indigenous curatorship as a decolonial strategy it can actually perpetuate the same exploitation inherent in traditional museum practices (La Salle 2010).

Indigenous curatorship, decolonial practices and social change

According to Kaya and Seleti (2013, 33) indigenous knowledge involves participatory perspectives and methods which absorb knowledge and beliefs of local people in the design and management of research projects in their own environment. Thus, indigenous knowledge systems are rooted within local community memory and rely on unofficial discourses that do not normally find space in the conventional museum. MCM was established by Rodwell Marange in 2013 with a vision of making it a centre for cultural learning and preservation of local heritage (Rungwandi 2017). Indigenous curatorship places emphasis on social history and the collecting of contemporary cultures in a dialogue with the community (Mallon 2019; Schorch, McCarthy, and Durr 2019). In indigenous curatorship objects are not treated as frozen in a timeless past but rather they are living beings connected to the present and future in continuous ongoing relationship (McCarthy, Hakiwai, and Schorch 2019). Objects connect people, places and events and also represents histories of continuity and change (Mallon 2019). However, apart from presenting cultural material of the Marange chiefly lineage using indigenous curatorship, this museum has also embraced multivocality as a decolonial practice that highlighted the injustices villagers who were relocated from Chiadzwa were facing.

The disfranchisement of the community, the loss of land and cultural rights to pave way for diamond mining in Chiadzwa has been discussed at Marange museum. Therefore by adopting decolonial practices the museum is also acting as an agent for social change by advocating for the compensation of villagers who were displaced and subsequently lost cultural and land rights. In this way Marange Museum is an active space where topical issues are examined in a participatory manner that allows for multiple voices to be heard and, in doing so, plays a role in identifying and delivering solutions to challenges facing the community. By addressing contentious issues surrounding the mining of diamonds and the loss of cultural and land rights by villagers who used to stay close to the mining fields, the museum set the stage for a possible financial compensation. Eventually, out of the calls that emerged from discussions at this museum, the villagers were financially compensated by the government and the mining companies and the idea of Community Share Ownership Trusts (CSOTs) began to emerge. As a result, the Marange – Zimunya CSOT was formed by the government and the mining companies each contributed 10,000 USD a seed money for community development projects. Therefore, it can be argued that by exploring contentious issues of the utmost importance to the community, the museum has become a centre of public and civic debate and engagement.

Conclusion

In this paper, we examined the establishment of MCM as an empirical way in which the museum practice can be decolonised. We presented this view relative to the Mutare Museum, which is still using colonially entrenched collection classification systems and exhibition practices that exclude community perspectives. We further argued that MCM emerged as an alternative space in which the community used indigenous curatorship to tell stories that are absent in the hegemonic expert discourses presented at the Mutare Museum. We also illustrated the burial rituals that are performed by this community and how they are connected to objects on display in their museum. In this way, indigenous curatorship recognizes that objects are connected to the places, practices and stories that gave them meaning. These objects are a reflection of local history, local culture and the materials of the local community. In presenting our argument, we underscored the idea that indigenous ontologies and epistemologies inform the ways in which the story is told and presented by local tour guides. This we contrasted with the Mutare Museum where objects are static, in displays devoid of any connection with their everyday use in their communities of origin. Through collaborative means the community is also involved in the making of exhibitions at MCM and this we argue is one of the fundamental ways in which the museum practice can be decolonised. By bringing together the community this museum also became a contact zone where dialogue on sustainable cultural heritage practices is invoked. This kind of community participation at MCM is absent at the Mutare Museum, which has maintained a colonial curatorial practice that is collection-oriented. We argued that this illustrates that national museums in Zimbabwe continue, if perhaps often inadvertently, through the permanence of their displays to commemorate the colonial regime without considering the aspirations of indigenous communities. A community museum as a decolonial strategy acknowledges that objects cannot be disconnected from the past but rather are enduring symbols that connect the past with the present and future (McCarthy, Hakiwai, and Schorch 2019).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Patricia Chipangura holds a honours degree in Heritage Studies from the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. She has research interests in the representation of indigeneity in community museums and the connection between objects and their social biographies. In her previous researches she has looked at the emergence of community museums in Zimbabwe as alternative forms of cultural displays challenging the exclusive domain of national museums. Her broader interest is in interrogating how community museums use indigenous knowledge systems to conserve, present and promote cultural values outside authorised national museum frameworks. She is currently pursuing her MA degree in Museum and Gallery Practice at University College London, Qatar.

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