



MULTILINGUAL ACADEMIC JOURNAL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



The Role of Zimbabwean Museums in Creating National Identity during Post-Colonial Era: A Case Study of Zimbabwe Military Museum

Nelson Jagero, Walter K. T. Chisedzi, Nevermore Sithole & Shadreck Simbarashe Chitima

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/MAJESS/v4-i1/2047>

DOI: 10.6007/MAJESS/v4-i1/2047

Received: 21 February 2016, **Revised:** 16 March 2016, **Accepted:** 07 April 2016

Published Online: 19 May 2016

In-Text Citation: (Jagero et al., 2016)

To Cite this Article: Jagero, N., Chisedzi, W. K. T., Sithole, N., Shadreck, & Chitima, S. (2016). The Role of Zimbabwean Museums in Creating National Identity during PostColonial Era: A Case Study of Zimbabwe Military Museum. *Multilingual Academic Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 4(1), 46–56.

Copyright: © The Authors 2016

Published by Knowledge Words Publications (www.kwpublications.com)

This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) license. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this license may be seen

at: <http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/legalcode>

Vol. 4, No. 1, 2016, Pg. 46 -56

<https://kwpublications.com/journals/journaldetail/MAJESS>

JOURNAL HOMEPAGE

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
<https://kwpublications.com/pages/detail/publication-ethics>



The Role of Zimbabwean Museums in Creating National Identity during Post-Colonial Era: A case Study of Zimbabwe Military Museum

Nelson Jagero¹, Walter K. T. Chisedzi², Nevermore Sithole^{3*} & Shadreck Simbarashe Chitima⁴

¹Professor, Chuka University, Faculty of Human Resource and Education P.O. Box 109 Chuka Kenya, ²Kent M. Weeks Archives Hall, Africa University, P.O. Box 1320, Mutare, Zimbabwe,

³Technical Services Librarian at Africa University, P.O. Box 1320, Mutare, Zimbabwe, ⁴Lecturer in Archaeology, Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies at Midlands State University, P. Bag 9055, Gweru.

Email: jageronelson@yahoo.com, walterchisedzi@gmail.com, chisedziw@africau.edu
nchardz@gmail.com, sitholen@africau.edu, chitimass@msu.ac.zw.

Abstract

The study evaluated the role of Zimbabwe Military Museum's (ZMM) exhibitions in the creation and portrayal of national identity during post-colonial period. The research focused mainly on the museum's collections, themes, events, interpretation and presentation of exhibitions in portraying Zimbabwe's identity after independence up to present. This was done on the basis that most of the displays at ZMM pursue colonial ideologies whilst at the same time undermine African identity. The researchers used a qualitative research approach; the data collection methods and instruments included interviews, focus group discussions and desktop survey. This was performed in order to obtain ample information and testimonial evidence concerning audiences' perceptions of the Zimbabwe Military Museum's programs in relation to national identity. Research findings demonstrated that the ZMM does not systematically provide for

¹ Professor, Chuka University, Faculty of Human Resource and Education P.O. Box 109 Chuka Kenya, Email: jageronelson@yahoo.com

² Kent M. Weeks Archives Hall, Africa University, P.O. Box 1320, Mutare, Zimbabwe, Email: walterchisedzi@gmail.com ; chisedziw@africau.edu

³ * Corresponding Author, Technical Services Librarian at Africa University, P.O. Box 1320, Mutare, Zimbabwe, Email: nchardz@gmail.com; sitholen@africau.edu Corresponding Author

⁴ Lecturer in Archaeology, Cultural Heritage and Museum Studies at Midlands State University, P. Bag 9055, Gweru, Email: chitimass@msu.ac.zw

exhibitions that may address and create national identity, but instead it focuses on exhibitions that pursue colonial ideologies; in effect, colonial traits are evident in collections, themes, events and interpretation of displays. In conclusion if the museum does not take action and redress colonial traits, the audiences will continue to disengage, get distant and withdraw from the museum and its activities.

Keywords: Museums, National Identity, Post Colonial Era, Zimbabwean Military Museum.

Introduction

According to Mulindwa et al. (2012), as stated in *The Politics of Memory: The Role of Museums in Africa in the New Millennium*, published in November 24, 2012, by the time most African colonies attained independence they had established national museums, but the majority of these museums were founded by colonial administrators. This does not imply that Africans had no interest in preserving their heritage, but it was due to the fact that the colonial powers controlled and influenced every administration in the colonies. As a result they decided on what to collect and display in the museums, most of which endorsed a sense of cultural and national inferiority of the colonies. However, after decolonization most of the collections, programs, themes, interpretation and presentation of displays in Zimbabwean state museums have accomplished little or no development in terms of creation of national identity. This clearly justifies the existence of a strand highly questioning museums and their capability to address national identity in the post-colonial era.

According to Zedde (1998), as highlighted in *Societies in conflict: Museums and the creation of "national identity"*, the black majority had restricted admission in museums as well as other educational privileges, both reflecting and underlining state policies of discrimination and inferiority of the black people. The white settlers' regime instructed that black Rhodesian culture and identity was not to be displayed in museums, in an effort to strengthen discrimination and foster a culture of inferiority. These policies were extended to collecting, preserving and displaying of black majority material culture (all discouraged and purposefully underfunded). In the post-colonial era, Zimbabwean museums should have taken an active role to redress former policies towards collection, preservation and exhibition of the material culture which characterizes the Zimbabwean society. It is indeed the role of the museums to offer an opportunity for the conscious creation and projection of national identity through various programs and displays so that they become relevant to and representative of the society they serve, especially during the post-colonial period. Therefore, it is from this viewpoint that our research attempts to examine the role that museums play in the creation and portrayal of national identity through collections, research, displays and public programs.

As mentioned above, most of the programs that are run by the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) are still biased towards the colonial era, pursuing colonial ideologies. As regards the Zimbabwe Military Museum, most of the exhibitions, nature of collections, even the themes on exhibitions, interpretation and presentation of displays have been inherited from the white settlers and little or no development has been made to restore national identity. Instead much of its activities and events still pursue colonial supremacy. Most of the collections at ZMM comprise armoured vehicles and rifles among others. Also, there is little interpretation on displays which show African collections as compared to the narration and interpretation accompanying white settlers' displays; even the language used is interpreted in

English. Further, the themes of events, such as temporary exhibitions, do not actually promote national identity on the basis that the museum is still showcasing collections used by the settlers; therefore most of its activities are still rooted in the colonial era.

This obviously raises weighty questions about museums; whose heritage are they preserving and to whom is it presented? Yet, they are supposed to be creating and portraying a national identity which was considered as inferior by white settlers. It is thus evident that museums have a significant role to play in the development of their communities and nations, through showcasing collections and exhibitions that identify and portray national identity, especially during the post-colonial era.

Statement of the Problem

Decades after attainment of independence, Zimbabwean state museums are still rooted in the colonial era. Most of the collections, themes, programs, interpretation and presentation of collections at the Zimbabwe Military Museum have colonial traits and are still pursuing colonial ideologies. Even temporary exhibitions accommodated by the museum showcase collections which were used by the settlers, bearing no relevance to contemporary societies, whilst their themes do not relate to national identity. As a result some stakeholders are gradually withdrawing and distancing themselves from the museum. In fact, due to the colonial traits in collections and the museum's persistence in pursuing colonial ideologies, society at large has developed a lack of appreciation in some of the activities carried out by the museum.

Objectives

The objectives of this research were:

1. To identify what the museum has accomplished in addressing issues of national identity.
2. To make a comparative analysis on what other countries have done in addressing issues of national identity during the post-colonial era.
3. To determine the perceptions of different audiences to the ZMM towards the creation of national identity.

Significance of the Study

This present research may be helpful to the Zimbabwe Military Museum (ZMM) and other state museums as a stock-taking exercise on how far they have gone in addressing the imbalances between presentation of black history and white history, through collections, themes, interpretation and presentation of exhibitions. It may also bring light on the roles that it has in creating and promoting national identity after colonisation. The study will also assist the institution to realise what the public expects from it, helping it to improve on collections, interpretation, and presentation of exhibitions which create a sense of belonging to one's nation.

Literature Review

History of Zimbabwe Military Museum

The Zimbabwe Military Museum focuses on research and other musicological endeavours in the military field, thereby liaising with the army, air force and police. The Museum opened its doors to the public on the 24th of January 1974 as the Midlands Museum, which was changed to the

current name Zimbabwe Military Museum in 1985. The Zimbabwe Military Museum is administrated by the National Museum and Monuments of Zimbabwe. The National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe are governed by a legal framework known as the National Museums and Monuments Act which is Chapter 25:11 of the Zimbabwean Act (nmmz@mweb.co.zw).

Apart from the military displays, there is also the police gallery which exhibits the trend of development in the police, starting from the inception of the British South African Police (BSAP) through to the present Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP). Also the museum has the aviation gallery which includes Rhodesian war heroes who took part during the World War 1. There is an artillery hanger that exhibits a representative collection of artillery pieces by the Rhodesian settlers, World War 1, Federation period and colonial Rhodesia up to present Zimbabwe. The military museum also has the Guinea Fowl Gallery which traces the history of Guinea Fowl and the open-air museum which has the armoured vehicle hanger exhibits and typical armoured vehicles which were used during the Second World War.

Themes and Events at Zimbabwe Military Museum

The Zimbabwe Military Museum has the role of creating and portraying national identity to its diverse audience through themes and events (which are all encompassed in exhibitions). During colonialism themes and events that were brought up in museum exhibitions were Eurocentric in character and generally related to the lives of the notable people of the past. Thus these themes and events asserted notions of white identity, race and supremacy. Smith (2004) states that despite what transpired during pre-colonial period, museum institutions are there to create a common ground among diverse groups found within the margins of new nation states. Thus, museums, in precise, offer an opportunity for conscious creation and projection of national identity through their displays so that they represent the societies they serve, especially during the post-colonial period. However, this seems to be in contrast to what Smith (2004) mentioned, on the basis that during post-colonial period the Zimbabwe Military Museum's themes resemble white superiority, most of the themes on display are mainly of battles which were fought by the whites, whilst some of the themes put on display which show African collections do not construct national identity.

National Identity

McLean (2005:1-4) states that the widening debates on identity have opened up new challenges for the museum profession. At the macro level, the transformation of identity has taken place within the backdrop of decolonization, imperial atrophy, globalization and the decline of the nation-state. At the national level, the challenge becomes one of reconciliation and of promoting national integration within the plurality and diversity of identity. Through the authority vested in them, museums authenticate and promote identities via the presentation of heritage. National museums are implicit in the construction of national identities, and the ways in which they voice or silence difference can reflect and influence contemporary perceptions of identities within the national frame.

McLean (1998: 244-252) also reiterates that the circuit of the culture model ultimately deals with identity. Identities derive from a multiplicity of sources which may conflict. Woodward (1997) has identified a number of factors which need to be addressed when considering issues

of identity, namely difference, social and material conditions, and the ultimate issue, identification, or the positions which people take up and identify with. Identity is often claimed to be fixed and unchanged, thus creating a sense of belongingness. These claims may be based on nature, such as for example, race and kinship in some versions of ethnicity. Often though, the claims are based on an essentialist view of history and of the past, wherein history is constructed or represented as an unchanging truth. Woodward further suggests that, 'the heritage industry seems to present only one version'. In fact, identity is relational and difference is established by symbolic marking in relation to others.

Similarly, it has been suggested that there is no unitary privileged history, only different histories. If we acknowledge there are different versions of the past, then we need to negotiate between them. But by asserting the plurality of positions, the question is whether these are equal or whether one historical inheritance has greater validity. Relating this to museums, Foster (1991: 235-260) suggests that because historical memory is a construction, struggles over the definition of the nation as community will inevitably be marked by struggles over the constitution of an authorized collectively held past. Further, O'Neill (1994: 9-19; 1995) has suggested that 'museums tend to show a past with few internal tensions, without looking at how people negotiate their identity with the prevailing culture'.

Therefore in this context Woodward (1997:1-7) is of the view that national identity is a person's distinctiveness and sense of belonging to one nation, a feeling one shares with a group of people, regardless of citizenship or status. He further states that national identity is not an inborn trait, various studies have shown that a person's national identity is a direct result of the presence of elements from the common points in people's daily lives, these including national symbols, national colours, the nation's history, culture among others. In this context, most African states are made up of different ethnic groups. Therefore it is difficult to come up with one culture, tradition or religion as a nation's identity. However, one has to note that even if there are different ethnic groups, there are certain characteristics that these groups have in common, For instance different ethnic groups made use of bows and arrows, spears, appeasing ancestors, traditional dances and traditional regalia among others. Therefore it is from these common characteristics and elements that we derive a nation's identity.

Museums and National Identity

AFRICOM is an organization of museums which was formed in October 1999 in Lusaka, Zambia. Therefore, it aims to contribute to the constructive improvement of African communities by inspiring the role of museums as creators of national identity and as representatives of cultural cohesion. The AFRICOM organisation was a product of the conferences planned by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in Benin, Ghana and Togo in November 1991 (*AFRICOM, Documenting African Collections*, ICOM report). These gatherings were targeted to address the role and the relevance of museums in the societies they serve, especially in addressing issues which promote culture and national identity on the African continent. From this angle, it is crystal clear that museums are the ambassadors of reconstructing states which are deeply rooted in colonial origins.

Research Methodology

Qualitative research methods were used to obtain data from people concerning the collections,

themes, events, interpretation and presentation of exhibitions at the ZMM. Research tools included desktop surveys, interviews and focus group discussions.

Targeted Population

The population consisted of various groups of people from which data were sought to be collected. The targeted population of this research included the Zimbabwe Military Museum employees (curator), Zimbabwe National Army members, Police force members, Zimbabwe Air Force marshals, war veterans, teachers, and selected members who represent the public. Researchers selected the Zimbabwe National Army and Police force members because the museum houses most of the collections which were used during and after colonization. Also, since most of these uniformed forces members and war veterans took part during colonization and post-colonial period, they have a deep knowledge of the country. Therefore, researchers wanted to identify how they feel and their perceptions towards the museum collections, themes, events and displays in reconstructing and portraying a national identity.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

A sample is a representation from a population for the purpose of determining ideas or opinions of the whole population. Purposive sampling techniques were implemented. Purposive sampling was performed because it was not practical to get information from every single individual in the population; therefore specific groups of people were targeted for this research. The researchers included different groups of audiences on the basis that they have better knowledge about Zimbabwe as a nation and they know how national identity can be restored through various activities done by the museum. A minimum number of 35 individuals were expected to participate in this study. It included the Zimbabwe Military Museum staff (5) mainly the curators (Assistant Curator, Senior Curator), the Zimbabwe National Army (5), Zimbabwe Republic Police (5) including the Officer in charge and other officers, Zimbabwe Air Force marshals (3), War Veterans (5), teachers (5), (2) members from the general public and (3) college students. However, out of all the targeted participants not all of them managed to take part in this research due different reasons.

Research Instruments

Research instruments are tools used for data collection. Interviews, focus group discussions and desktop surveys were used in this study.

Desktop Survey

Desktop survey intended to identify what other scholars have written pertaining the role of the museum in promoting our culture and national identity through exhibitions. This included published and unpublished material in archives in the museums, internet, and reports. The survey was of great importance on the basis that researchers consulted other sources to get to know what had been written or done by other scholars to avoid duplication of research.

Interviews

Researchers made use of face to face interviews, on the grounds that they are flexible and they allow clarity on issues that need further clarification. Both structured and open ended questions

were used to acquire data, whereby some questions were sent to the interviewees in advance so that they could prepare for the interview in order to provide accurate information.

Focus Group Discussions

To undertake this study, the researchers also conducted discussions in an interactive group setting wherein participants were free to talk with other group members. The data gathered from participants reflected their opinions or perceptions towards the creation and portrayal of national identity through exhibitions.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussions

Perceptions of the Uniformed Forces

From the interviews and focus group discussions conducted with the members of the uniformed forces, researchers collected data which show that the museum is taking little action in constructing national identity through its collections, themes, interpretation and presentation of displays. It can be noted that the uniformed forces are of the view that only a few collections of African fighters such as Mbuya Nehanda, Sekuru kaguvi, Lobengula among others are showcased, thus it seems as if there are the only people who took part during the liberation struggle; as a national museum it should collect, interpret and present detailed history of everything which transpired during the struggle, especially those events which were accelerated by Africans. It was also stated that only few African weapons which were used by our ancestors were displayed in the museum. Conversely, most of its collections mainly comprise rifles and armoured vehicles which were used by the whites; yet it should show to the new generation all the collections used by our ancestors before the coming of whites. From the collections, themes and events which create national identity African superiority on invention of these collections would also be created, thus also creating national identity.

Perceptions of the Midlands Community (General Public, Students, Teachers)

The researchers selected a few people as representatives of the community. They view museums as places of enjoyment rather than institutions, which provide both entertainment and at same time portraying of national identity. From the results gathered from interviews and focus group discussions, the community is of the view that the exhibitions are still the same for a long period of time. The exhibitions are more of enjoyment rather than instilling any sense of identity to the public; for instance if you visit the museum with your child at the end of the tour he/she would conclude that the displays were interesting with much emphasis on the displays of guns and nothing special about the displays which show African collections. Thus, our study has depicted that the public view museum displays as not addressing any issues which create national identity.

Discussion

From the interviews and focus group discussions, the researchers noted that different groups of people have diverse views in relation to the collections, themes, events, interpretation and presentation of exhibitions at the military museum. The study sought to have an insight on how they think about the museum programs and activities in relation to creation and portrayal of national identity. The curators viewed their collections, themes, events, interpretation and presentation of exhibitions as balanced and also creating national identity. The curators were of

this view on the basis that after independence they removed some of the collections, themes and displays which were pursuing colonial ideologies and replaced them with African collections which show liberation struggle prominent figures such as Mbuya Nehanda, Sekuru Kaguvi, and Mkwati among others. Also they believed that their collections, themes, events and displays create, instil and portray national identity on the grounds that apart from the African prominent figures there are other displays which show African weapons which were used during the liberation struggle (such as knobkerries, bows and arrows, machetes, spears, bombs made from animal waste etc.) apart from guns.

In line with the above, other respondents, such as teachers, think that the collections, themes and presentation of displays to a certain extent present national identity and to another extent pursue colonial ideologies. This is based on the fact that there are some representations of African culture (weapons, traditional regalia), and some representations of the white culture (guns, uniforms, only to mention a few). From the study, it was clear that even though there are displays of both 'black and white' it is not equal; therefore there is need to create balance in terms of collections, themes and displays.

However other groups such as the uniformed forces, war veterans and the public are of the opinion that the collections, themes and presentation of displays as doing little or nothing in terms of creating national identity. Uniformed forces were complaining that most of the collections at ZMM comprise armoured vehicles and rifles; also there is little interpretation on displays which exhibit African collections as compared to the narration and interpretation on white settlers' displays; even the language used is interpreted in colonial language. Therefore, it is deemed that most of its activities are still rooted in the colonial era. It was stressed that there is need to decolonize the museum on the basis that most of its collections were inherited from the white settlers who viewed our culture and national identity as inferior. Hence, in order for the museum to effectively address issues which construct national identity participants suggested their participation in all its activities, this including taking part in collecting and coming up with themes, interpretation and presentation of collections in displays.

Conclusion

Most museums in Africa were established according to colonial influences. Therefore, it is essential for museums to question the structure in which they operate to ensure that they do not retain the colonial traits in their practices, specifically when they claim to have evaded colonizers' cultures. Museums should reconcile identity if they are to make certain that audiences continue to visit their establishments and not consider them as mere places of relaxation. Moreover, objects in museums are cyphers of intellectual ideas and show links with certain persons. Therefore, museums are required to collect, interpret and present objects that reconcile with their audience, so that a sense of ownership and identity is created since they safeguard cultural wealth of the nation.

Moreover, it is the role of the museum to create and portray national identity through exhibitions; thence, the ZMM should undertake programs and events that create national identity. Museums in precise offer an opportunity for conscious creation and projection of national identity through their displays so that they represent the societies they serve, especially during post-colonial period. There is need to consider their themes in relation to national identity on both temporary and permanent exhibitions.

Recommendations

Interpretation and Presentation of Exhibitions at Zimbabwe Military Museum

The Zimbabwe Military Museum should ensure that all interpretations should be balanced in terms of language, so that everybody will understand the message being conveyed by the collections in the display. There is need to provide more information on displays which show African collections so that visitors and various stakeholders would be satisfied by the information accompanying an object; this could create national identity.

Collections at Zimbabwe Military Museum

Since most of the collections at the ZMM mainly comprise objects which were inherited from the white settlers, they are still pursuing colonial ideologies; yet, ZMM should foster the creation and portrayal of national identity in the post-colonial era through its collections. Therefore, the museum should redress its policies towards collections. It should at least cater for collecting objects which construct national identity (which was actually believed by the white settlers to be inferior), whilst the representation of collections should be balanced and suited to the different audiences of the museum.

Financial Resources

There is need to source funds for the collection of objects and the update of themes which create and portray national identity. This is of primary importance, considering that museums are regarded as establishments that have nothing quantitatively to put back into the national treasury; therefore they have always come last in government spending priorities. According to ICOM code of ethics (2001-2004) on 1.9, it is stated that the governing body (NMMZ) should make sure that there are enough funds to carry out activities and programs of the museum. Income generating activities should not compromise the standards of the institution or its public. Therefore the museum should formulate strategies that can pump money into the institution. For instance, the military museum to successfully carry out all its activities, can source funds through fundraising dinners or raffles. From these money generating activities, it can sustain itself and at least bring up a balance in its displays in portraying national identity.

References

- Foster, R. J. (1991). Making National Cultures in the Global Ecumene. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 20, 235-260.
- Hooper-Greenhill, E. (1994). Measuring Learning Outcomes in Museums, Archives and Libraries: The Learning Impact Research Project (LIRP). *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 10(2), 151-174.
- ICOM. (1996). *AFRICOM. Documenting African Collections*. ICOM: Paris.
- ICOM. (2001-2004). *Code of ethics*. ICOM: Paris.
- McLean, F. (1998). Museums and the Construction of National Identity: A review. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 3(4), 244-252.
- McLean, F. (2005). Guest Editorial, Museums and National Identity. Leicester: University of Leicester, Dept. of Museum Studies.
- Mulindwa, P. (2012). The Politics of Memory: The Role of Museums in Africa in the New Millennium. National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe Act.

O'Neill, M. (1994). Museums and the Renegotiation of Identities. *Museum Ireland*, 4, 9-19.

O'Neill, M (1995). Curating Feelings: issues of identity in museums, Canadian Art Gallery. *Art Museum Educators*, 18- 30.

Smith, L. (2004). *Archaeological Theory and the Politics of Cultural Heritage*. London and New York: *Routledge*.

Woodward, K. (1997). *Identity and Difference*. London: *Sage*.

Zedde, K. (1998). Societies in Conflict: Museums and the Creation of "National Identity". *International council of museums (ICOM)*.