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DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE AND HERITAGE STUDIES

REINTERPRETING COLONIAL HERITAGE: THE RHODES NYANGA HISTORICAL EXHIBITION AND SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL TOURISM IN ZIMBABWE.

BY

NATHAN MACHARA B222881B

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SUPERVISOR: MRS. ZIMUCHA-SAGIYA

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how the Rhodes Nyanga Historical Exhibition (RNHE) in Zimbabwe reimagines colonial heritage, and what this means for national identity and cultural tourism. Rooted in Postcolonial Theory and Authorized Heritage Discourse, the project investigates how colonial and indigenous histories clash, merge, and function within the museum. It examines the impact of these narratives on visitors and postcolonial heritage management as a whole. Methodologically, the study relies on qualitative data. The researcher combined semi structured interviews with museum staff, local residents, and both domestic and international tourists, direct field observation, and document analysis of institutional records and published studies related to the RNHE. This multi-layered approach captures both the institutional intent and the raw visitor experience. The findings point to a clear imbalance. While the RNHE serves as a vital educational tool, colonial history remains highly structured and dominant. By contrast, indigenous and resistance narratives feel fragmented and secondary. This distortion directly shapes how people view Zimbabwean identity. Interestingly, international tourists often praise the museum as balanced, whereas domestic visitors frequently voice emotional disconnection and frustration over representation. Furthermore, local communities remain largely excluded from curatorial choices, leaving indigenous knowledge systems underutilized. Ultimately, the RNHE highlights the ongoing struggle to decolonize museum spaces in Zimbabwe. To foster truly sustainable cultural tourism, the museum must actively involve locals, rebalance its historical narratives, and embrace participatory curation.

Declaration form

I, Nathan Machara, a registered student pursuing a Bachelor of Science Honours Degree in Culture and Heritage Studies at Bindura University of Science Education, do hereby declare that this dissertation, titled "Reinterpreting Colonial Heritage: The Rhodes Nyanga Historical Exhibition and Sustainable Cultural Tourism in Zimbabwe," is entirely my own original research. I certify that this work has not been previously submitted, in whole or in part, to any other institution for the award of any academic credit or qualification. Throughout this study, I have fully acknowledged and referenced all external sources in strict compliance with university academic regulations. Furthermore, I affirm that this investigation was carried out in full compliance with the ethical guidelines stipulated by Bindura University of Science Education, as well as the professional codes governing Culture and Heritage Studies. I fully acknowledge that academic malpractice, including plagiarism and data falsification, carries severe disciplinary consequences.

Student's Name: Nathan Machara

Signature: Machara

Date: 10/06/26

Permanent Address:

Southlea Primary School

P.O. Box GN 31

Glennorah

Harare

Approval form

The undersigned certify that they have supervised Nathan Machara for this research titled: Reinterpretation of Colonial Heritage: The Rhodes Nyanga Historical Exhibition and Sustainable Cultural tourism in Zimbabwe. The research is in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Science Honours degree in Culture and Heritage Studies at Bindura University of Science Education.

Student's Signature.....Date.....

Supervisor's Signature.....Date.....

Chairperson's Signature.....Date.....

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated first and foremost to my parents Mr and Mrs Basira, whose unwavering support, encouragement, and belief in education made this academic journey possible. I also dedicate this work to my academic supervisor, whose guidance, critical insight, and patience significantly shaped the direction and quality of this research. Special appreciation is extended to my industrial attachment supervisor for providing practical insights that enriched my understanding of museum practice and heritage interpretation. Finally, I dedicate this work to myself for the perseverance, discipline, and commitment required to complete this study, and to all individuals who supported me throughout this journey.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

RNHE – Rhodes Nyanga Historical Exhibition

AHD – Authorised Heritage Discourse

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

Colonial heritage remains a tricky and heavily debated topic in Zimbabwe. While a lot of the museums, monuments and exhibitions were built back in the colonial time, majority of them focused on the European side of things and pushed local histories aside (Ndoro, 2001). It is a fact that after the 1980 independence, such places turned into venues where different marginalized groups would throw around accusations about the past. Up until now, debates still revolve around issues of identity, memory and even history presentation. That is why, up to now, Zimbabwe is still struggling to narrate the colonial heritage that will incorporate many voices and be "readable" by all Zimbabweans.

The Rhodes Nyanga Historical Exhibition (RNHE) really exemplifies what the problem is in Zimbabwe. The museum, which was erected during the colonization, was basically a shrine to Cecil John Rhodes and the emigrants (Patheram, 1974). Inside its walls, for a long time it was the story of the White only. Post independence the museum has been trying to change its exhibition. Staff members and curators have included narratives about local people, histories before colonization and the liberation war (Thondlana, 2015; Thondlana & Nyamutowa, 2022). This transformation at RNHE is hardly isolated, in fact many museums worldwide are also on the same journey trying to portray colonial history more justly.

RNHE and such places have great potential for use to help boost tourism in a sustainable manner. If museums open up to more voices and engage people from the local community, not only can they be conveying history in a more powerful way but also bring income to the nearby locations. But there are still issues as people keep on disputing about the manner in which colonial history should be represented. They keep on questioning who are the ones telling the stories and to what extent local communities really benefit from heritage tourism. Due to these issues, RNHE a proper case study. It reveals the relationships between changing colonial

exhibitions, Zimbabwean identity, and the ways heritage tourism can be advantageous for the country.

This research also speaks to Zimbabwe's Education 5.0 setup, directly. Education 5.0 is about innovation, industrialization, and community involvement (Muzira & Bondai, 2020). Within this system, heritage sites like RNHE can contribute to the country's development. Museums that employ innovative ways of telling history can blend cultural preservation with artistic endeavors, digital storytelling and small businesses. RNHE if it can work on the diversification of its narratives and cultural representation, it stands the chance to invite more visitors and at the same time support the local industries that center around Zimbabwean culture and knowledge. Doing this is aligned with Zimbabwe's vision, which is to use education, culture, and heritage to serve the country sustainably.

1.1 Background of the study

The legacy of colonialism still largely impacts how history is managed and presented worldwide. During colonial times museums monuments, and heritage sites were constructed First and foremost to showcase the values and worldview of the European colonizers, often at the expense of local histories, cultures, and knowledge systems which were left out (Smith, 2006). In numerous colonized countries, these places were not simply repositories for old artifacts. In fact, Bennett (1995) believed that they were employed as tools to endorse colonial powers. They achieved this first by controlling the narrative to be shown and second by determining which stories were unworthy of being told. For this reason, many postcolonial nations are still facing difficulties today about narrating, safeguarding, and exhibiting colonial heritage as they are intertwined with issues of politics and cultural changes.

The topics on reinterpreting and decolonising museums and heritage sites have been expanded worldwide. Per studies done by Coombes (2003), Harrison (2013), and Lonetree (2012) still quite a number of museums repeat the power relations of the colonial era by predominantly telling Eurocentric stories, This way leaving out indigenous voices and experiences. To meet this challenge, heritage organizations in such countries as New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa have adopted methods that are more participatory and community-oriented. These

methods/instruments aim to incorporate voices that have been historically marginalized into heritage interpretation (Smith, 2002; Schmidt & Pikirayi, 2016; Lahdesmaki & Turunen, 2023). They concentrate on inclusiveness, narration of various stories, oral traditions, and joint curation. Today, they are regarded as essential elements of decolonised heritage practice. Delivering heritage is a tough issue in Africa as museums there have adopted colonial interpretive methods that were introduced during the colonial period. Study after study has shown that colonial museums in Africa portrayed African societies through the eyes of the Western anthropologist and imperialist. This made indigenous cultures look like they did not change, they were primitive, and they were only secondary to colonial civilising discourse (Coombes, 1994). Independently, many African countries tried to turn their museums into places where national identity, cultural pride, and postcolonial understanding were being created. Though, a lot of researchers think that museums still experience problems when it comes to getting out of the colonial mode of operation (Ndwandwe, 2009). Due to this distortion, debates continue to rage about which stories are told, whose voices are given prominence, and how museums can become agents of social inclusion and cultural change.

Zimbabwe's colonial heritage is among its most politically sensitive and volatile issues. This stems from the country's long history of British colonial rule, the displacement of indigenous lands, racial segregation, and the liberation war. Museums and heritage centers during colonial times mostly glorified the colonizers and downplayed indigenous resistance, native histories, and African knowledge systems (Schmidt & Pikirayi, 2016). Independence in 1980 opened the door for Zimbabwe to begin reclaiming and reinterpreting its national heritage to highlight African viewpoints, the history of liberation, and the formation of national identity (Pwiti & Mvenge, 1996; Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008; Mnkandla et al. 2025). Still, the reimagining of colonial heritage remains an uphill task, Mainly at heritage sites and exhibitions which were initially set up based on colonial criteria.

The RNHE is one of the heritage sites where the conflict between the past and present appears to be most pronounced. At first, the site was mainly known for the colonial historical narratives of Cecil John Rhodes and the colonial settlement in the Nyanga area, but the site now tries to include Zimbabwean histories, like indigenous heritage and resistance (Mudzedze, Thondlana, & Nyamutowa, 2022). Still, it is still not clear whether the exhibition has completely changed

the colonial narratives and if indigenous voices have been given equal weight in the interpretive setup. There are also worries about community involvement, the telling of local histories, and the exhibition's contribution to public perceptions of Zimbabwean national identity.

Heritage tourism is now a major driver of cultural and economic development in Zimbabwe as well as in other parts of the world. Sustainable cultural tourism prioritizes community participation, cultural authenticity, and a diverse range of cultural expressions (UNWTO, 2018). So, heritage exhibitions and museums greatly affect visitor experiences, historical understanding, and cultural identity. At the same time, if colonial heritage sites continue to predominantly showcase colonial narratives, they should spread historical inequalities and marginalize their relevance in present-day society (Smith, 2006; Lahdesmaki & Turunen, 2023).

A number of studies have dealt with colonial heritage, museums, and decolonisation in the wider African and Zimbabwean contexts. Yet, very little has been done on the true lamentation and second interpretation of colonial heritage at the RNHE and its relation to national identity and sustainable cultural tourism. In this light, the present research intends to explore the representation and interpretation of colonial heritage at RNHE, the impact of these interpretations on perceptions of Zimbabwean identity, as well as ways in which reinterpretation can bring more inclusive and sustainable heritage practices.

1.2 Purpose of the Study.

The goal of this study is to examine how the RNHE reinterprets Zimbabwe’s colonial heritage, balances colonial and indigenous narratives, and contributes to shaping national identity while promoting sustainable cultural tourism.

1.3 Problem Statement.

Although Zimbabwe possesses a rich and diverse colonial heritage, institutions like the RNHE remain underutilised as tools for national identity formation and tourism development. A key issue is that many local communities still perceive colonial artefacts as symbols of oppression rather than as valuable historical resources. This has limited the exhibition’s ability to attract

local visitors and to act as a place of inclusive education and sustainable cultural tourism. Existing displays struggle to resolve colonial narratives with indigenous perspectives. This resistance results in contested representations of history. The limited research available has studied how reinterpretation at the RNHE engages with the goals of decolonisation and sustainable development. As a reult, opportunities to transform colonial heritage into a positive force for cultural understanding, identity building, and local economic empowerment remain unrealised.

1.4 Research Objectives.

I. To analyse how the Rhodes Nyanga Historical Exhibition represents Zimbabwe's colonial heritage.
II. To examine the mechanisms used by the exhibition to balance colonial narratives with indigenous histories and resistance stories.
III. To evaluate the practical role of the Rhodes Nyanga Historical Exhibition in shaping contemporary perceptions of national identity.
IV. To assess the potential of the exhibition to contribute to sustainable cultural tourism in Zimbabwe.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How does the Rhodes Nyanga Historical Exhibition represent and interpret Zimbabwe's colonial heritage?
2. In what ways does the exhibition balance colonial narratives with indigenous histories and resistance stories?
3. How does the Rhodes Nyanga Historical Exhibition influence visitors' perceptions of Zimbabwean national identity?
4. What is the potential of the exhibition to promote sustainable cultural tourism in Zimbabwe?

1.6 Assumptions of the study.

The study assumes that visitors to the RNHE actively engage with displays in ways that shape their understanding of colonial heritage and national identity. More so, there is a further assumption that reinterpreting this heritage carries great potential for promoting sustainable cultural tourism in Zimbabwe. The study treats museum interpretation as something that actively shapes what people believe about the past. Additionally, the study assumes that integrating indigenous perspectives can produce a more balanced historical representation. Heritage spaces like the RNHE are assumed to have the ability to evolve their narratives as societal values and expectations change. It is also assumed that improving heritage interpretation can enhance the exhibition's educational and tourism potential while fostering cultural understanding among different audiences.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The study focuses on the reinterpretation of colonial heritage at the RNHE. It highlights how modern museums can move beyond colonial frameworks. It also reveals how these institutions can promote inclusivity, national pride, and socio-economic development. The findings speak directly to heritage experts, policymakers and educators working with colonial era sites who are trying to make those spaces more honest and more relevant.

1.8 Contribution to Innovation and Industrialisation (Heritage-Based Education 5.0).

On a practical level, this research helps to clarify the intentions of Education 5.0 in that it finds heritage to be the most reliable lifelong source of help in bringing about new things and the changing of a society. Heritage sites exemplified by the RNHE are reinterpreted creatively and engaged with by the public in a way to function as engines of cultural industries, digital heritage projects, and local entrepreneurship. Opening up colonial heritage for reinterpretation is an indirect way to the creation of novel heritage items like digital museum exhibitions, guided virtual tours, educational multimedia content, and even heritage-based storytelling platforms that can entice an audience from many cultural backgrounds. Besides that, craft production,

heritage themed tourism enterprises, cultural performances, community-based tourism initiatives which generate income for surrounding communities, are forms of creative industries that are often inspired by heritage sites and events.

Also, the paper emphasizes the role of heritage institutions in fostering collaborations with universities, technology creators, and tourism agents. These alliances can cause pioneering heritage interpretation modes that make the visitor experience more fulfilling. Heritage interpretation can be rejuvenated by the use of digital technology to make it attractive to the youth without compromising on the authenticity of the history. That means, this work raises the issue of support to heritage management both theoretically and practically. Plainly from this work how a colonial heritage reinterpretation can be a tool for advancing Zimbabwe's development at the macro level. If heritage is considered as a development resource and not merely a source of historical record, it is a vibrant resource capable of supporting local economies and industrial development at the community level, that is what Education 5.0 advocates.

1.9 Scope and Delimitations of the Study

The study focuses exclusively on the RNHE in Nyanga, Zimbabwe. It examines the reinterpretation of colonial heritage as expressed through current exhibitions, curatorial practices, and community engagement. While other heritage institutions in Zimbabwe face similar challenges, they fall outside the scope of this research. The study also concentrates on developments from the late 20th century to the present, reflecting the post-independence era of reinterpretation and heritage transformation.

1.10 Limitations of the study.

Several factors may affect the scope and depth of the research. Financial constraints could restrict the extent of the fieldwork and limit the number of participants engaged. Access to data and specific stakeholders may pose a challenge. Participant bias is a potential limitation as curators, community members and tourists may provide subjective accounts influenced by personal opinions, social desirability or political sensitivities regarding colonial heritage and its reinterpretation. More so, the researcher’s geographical location in Bindura may limit regular travel to Nyanga, which constrains prolonged observation and direct engagement with

stakeholders. These limitations are recognised to ensure a transparent understanding of the research boundaries while maintaining methodological accuracy.

1.11 Definition of key words.

I. Colonial Heritage: Refers to the tangible and intangible legacies left behind by colonial powers during and after their rule over a territory (Harrison, 2013).

II. Sustainable tourism: Refers to the tourism approach that promotes the responsible use, interpretation and management of heritage in ways that benefit local communities, preserve cultural identity, and ensure long term educational and economic value (UNWTO, 2018).

III. Reinterpretation: The process of critically revising, representing or reframing historical narratives, symbols or artefacts to reflect contemporary perspectives, often addressing past biases (Ashworth et al., 2007).

IV. Decolonisation: The process of critically challenging and transforming colonial narratives, structures, or symbols to reflect indigenous perspectives and histories (Smith, 2006).

V. Sustainable Cultural Tourism: McKercher and du Cross (2015) define it as an integrated management framework that develops heritage sites for tourism use while ensuring preservation and community benefit.

1.12 Dissertation outline.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This introductory chapter focuses on giving an overview of the study. It outlines how the study will be carried out and provides the background to the research. The chapter also discusses the statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, assumptions of the study, delimitations and limitations of the research, as well as the contribution of the study to innovation and industrialisation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter's main goal is to study literature concerning colonial heritage, reinterpretation, decolonisation, national identity, and sustainable cultural tourism. It provides a detailed discussion of scholarly arguments related to the representation and reinterpretation of colonial

heritage within museums and heritage institutions. The chapter also highlights gaps in existing literature regarding the RNHE and the role of heritage reinterpretation in promoting sustainable cultural tourism and national identity in Zimbabwe.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

The chapter explains how the research was carried out. It outlines the research design, research approach, and the methods used in data collection. The chapter also explains the methods employed in gathering information. Additionally, it also discusses the sampling techniques, ethical considerations, and methods used to ensure the soundness and consistency of the research findings.

Chapter 4: Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion of Findings

Chapter four present, discuss and analyse the data gathered during the fieldwork. The chapter focuses on organising and interpreting the raw data collected from participants and other sources. The data is presented in relation to the research objectives and questions.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations and Areas for Further Research

The chapter presents the summary of the research from chapter one to five. It also summarises the overall findings of the study, draws conclusions, and provides recommendations for heritage management, policy development, and further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on the reinterpretation of colonial heritage in museums and heritage sites, focusing on the transformation of the RNHE in Zimbabwe. Taking on international, African, and Zimbabwean scholarship, the review examines key themes related to colonial heritage, narratives of resistance and identity, museum interpretation, decolonial museology, and the relationship between heritage and sustainable cultural tourism. The chapter also puts the study in appropriate theoretical frameworks that guide the analysis of colonial heritage reinterpretation and its implications for national identity and sustainable cultural tourism. The literature revised in this chapter reveals both developments and gaps in academic understanding, highlighting the need for severe analysis of RNHE as a site of colonial legacy and postcolonial reinterpretation. It ascertains how heritage interpretation shapes visitor perceptions, informs policy and practice, and contributes to sustainable cultural tourism development in the country.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The study made use of two complementary theories:

Postcolonial Theory (Bhabha, 1994)

Postcolonial theory exposes the enduring nature of colonial power hierarchies and the ways in which these structures continue to influence methods of presenting history in cultural institutions, even after colonial rule has been formally dismantled. Postcolonial theorists claim that colonial discourses that are woven into museums most of the time highlight the point of view of the colonial powers (Fanon, 1961). Besides exalting colonial powers, these schemes also misrepresented colonized societies (Bhabha, 1994). Museums, for instance, are sites where the aftermath of colonialism is visible through how their displays rely on European-centered stories that not only portray colonies' rulers as their heroes but also ignore the histories of the locals. The historical influence of Britain's empire over Zimbabwe is reflected in the country's

museums and heritage displays like the RNHE, which at a very early stage praised imperial figures like Cecil John Rhodes." Fanon (1961) draws our attention to the mental and political aspects of colonization. He sees that the only way for colonized people to solve their problems is for them to go back to where they came from and that this will lead to their liberation. Since then, through a postcolonial lens, heritage scholars have extended this notion to the way museums are interpreted. Decolonial scholars today such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) and Mbembe (2021) maintain that coloniality is the reason why knowledge and heritage continue to be interpreted through the eyes of the colonizer even in societies that had been colonized. Given that recent work has confirmed that colonial narratives are still deeply buried in the walls of heritage institutions even though there is continuous work aimed at decolonizing these institutions (Hill, 2024; Reddy & Russel, 2024).

The postcolonial lens is a key perspective that is needed to understand the imaging and remaking of colonial figures' histories during and after colonialism in Zimbabwe for instance through RNHE. It shows how colonial legacy and colonial ideology has largely been indoctrinated through exhibitions and colonial perspectives have been privileged at the expense of experiences and resistance of the other. Postcolonial praxis applied to the RNHE would So entail confronting the dominant narrative by questioning who is the subject of history, how history is presented, and most importantly, which voices remain unheard. Yet, postcolonial theory has its own limits. Particularly, the theory has been instrumental in showing how colonial power relations and unequal representation are aspects of the colonial project (Smith, 2006). Many times, it is seen as mainly descriptive and concerned with discourse and power relations rather than focusing on the details of institutions and daily practices. This way, how heritage is produced, managed and interpreted in museums is seldom shown. Because of this, on its own, postcolonial theory probably cannot reveal how certain heritage narratives get legitimized and sustained through ordinary museum practices. This shortcoming means that a second theoretical set-up needs to be invoked to be able to discuss how heritage narratives within institutions are constructed, authorized, and reproduced.

Authorized Heritage Discourse (AHD) (Smith, 2006)

This article uses Laurajane Smith's (2006) notion of Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD) to expand the scope of postcolonial theory. AHD is the dominant heritage discourse that defines, interprets and controls heritage that usually favors expert knowledge, the authority of institutions and official narratives, at the expense of alternative or community-based perspectives. Smith (2006) argues that heritage is not a pure mirror of the past but a cultural process influenced by power relations that decide which histories are accepted and which are sidelined. AHD is the discourse that favours the expert-led narrative and frequently excludes the community voices. A sign of this in museum practice is exhibits that continue to show colonial dominate view neglecting indigenous interpretations. For the RNHE, re-presenting the colonial heritage means confronting the AHD by bringing in various voices including those of the Zimbabwean communities whose histories have been left out for a long time. In this way, AHD becomes a tool for investigating the presence of colonial narratives and for changing them to allow the interpretations of heritage to be more inclusive.

The RNHE scenario is an example of how AHD can be used to highlight that colonial histories are still being presented that gives the impression that the only authentic voices are those of curators, historians and other institutional literature, thereby supporting dominant narratives connected to colonial figures.This discourse not only looks at the content of what museums display but also at how decisions for representation are made and whose perspectives are given priority. AHD lends itself to being a supplement to postcolonial theory in that it offers a more practical perspective on the interpretation of heritage. On one side, postcolonial theory unmasks the colonial power legacies and But AHD accounts for how this legacy is upheld by institutional practices, museum professionals' authority, and interpretive structures. This enables the paper to pass beyond criticizing and to consider the ways in which heritage narratives are created and kept in certain situations."

Integrating Postcolonial Theory and Authorised Heritage Discourse In The Study.

The use of both postcolonial theory and AHD together represents a more complete view of the discursive foundation of the colonial legacy and how it is enacted through curatorial authority and institutional practices at RNHE. While postcolonial theory clarifies the ideological and historical origins of colonial representation, AHD helps to uncover how these discourses are

institutionalized through curatorial decisions. The approach taken here helps to avoid viewing the colonial legacy as an inert historical representation and instead considers it as a process that is active in shaping beliefs, through choices of representation and structuring of meaning (Harrison, 2013). Also, since the postcolonial theory and AHD respectively enable one to understand the representation of the colonial legacy and how ideas are represented and interpreted, their combined system helps to articulate the nature of the colonial discourses constructed through the exhibition and its' relation to curatorial practices, while also addressing how they influence change in historical research and education. The setup of combined use of the two theories also highlights the absence of indigenous histories, resistance stories and local postcolonial histories that are often silenced or underrepresented as part of display of the colonialized (Smith, 2006).

Together these two perspectives provide the setup for to establish 'not only of what is being re-presented, but also of how and why certain narratives are privileged over others' (Waterton & Watson 2013 p. 3). These notions form the basis for a decolonized interpretation practice that can consider the experience of different visitor groups to a heritage site in regard to the transformative power of persuasive narratives and mobilize these findings into practical recommendations for decolonized interpretation, including community involvement, the inclusion of multiple narratives and diverse source perspectives, and participatory curation practices (Waterton & Watson 2013 p. 33; Smith, 2006). In a case such as RNHE, this integrated approach is Mostly applicable to as the museum's re-interpretation practices have direct implications for issues of cultural identity, education, and tourism, and This way should act as a destination for historical and national reflection as well as tourism.

2.3 Literature Review.

2.3.1 Global Perspectives on Colonial Heritage and Museum Interpretation

Many leading museums' colonial origins have been heavily criticized for composing only Eurocentric narratives of empire that on one hand, glorify the empire, and However, silencing indigenous histories. Based on Bennett (1995), museum in Europe and former settler colonies

were, in fact, made as instruments of colonial knowledge where, through the exhibition of the colonised people's artefacts and culture, the coloniser's power was justified.

The major focus of such collections was to maintain differences in the hierarchies of the coloniser and the colonised. Although Because of this, this line of criticism strongly supports the unseen, invisible structures of colonial museums, it is major of the western examples and hardly pays any attention to other parts of the world like African heritage institutions which are still sites of these colonial power.

At the same time, Lonetree (2012) focuses on the Indigenous Museum initiative, Mostly in North America, and highlights the role of collaboration in the decision-making process of curation where the indigenous parties' involvement results in the shaping of how heritage is interpreted and displayed. She underlines that such cooperation is not a mere technical change, but a political act of restoring the community's agency, whose histories have mostly been translated through the colonial perspectives. Even though Lonetree's emphasis on decolonizing museums has been groundbreaking, its direct link to Africa should not be underestimated as it might offer new insights. At the same time, South Africa and Namibia have been joint partners of the community collaborative scheme, similar to the situation in North America. Still they are governed by different historical, institutional, and socio-cultural circumstances that separate them from North America (Coombes, 2003; Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008). The dissimilarities arise from the variance in the availability of resources, institutional set-ups, and the..." To atone for this sort of past, the concept of decolonial museum studies have gained ground all over the world as they call for a change in the way museums operate, through recognising and including communities that have been marginalised in different historical periods and provide reinterpretation of objects based on their cultural background (Coombes, 2003; Lonetree, 2012). The example of the reorganisation of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa is a case in point whereby extensive Maori consultation was made for exhibits to be in tune with the indigenous perspectives and histories (McCarthy, 2014). Also, museums in Canada have partnered with First Nations for the reconsideration of their collections, most of which were acquired in the colonial period (Peers & Brown, 2003).

These international initiatives show that reinterpretation is a complex process, involving much more than mere changes in displays; it needs ethical engagement and collaboration with source communities, joint planning of exhibitions, and re-examination of institutional purposes. But, Also nearly all present discussions are tied to institutions that have a lot of resources and are quite advanced in the Global North, and do not really consider the practical difficulties, political environment, and institutional weaknesses of museums in developing countries. So, there is disconnect in understanding how these systems can be tailored to Zimbabwe's situation. This paper so intends to study this divide by looking at how worldwide reinterpretation schemes can be implemented, adapted, or rethought within the particular institutional and cultural environment of RNHE.

2.3.2 African Literature on Colonial Heritage Interpretation and Museum Practice

There has been a great deal of writing on African museums and colonial heritage, but it is rather uneven in what it actually explores. The collections, narratives, and working methods of museums throughout Africa were influenced by colonial goals that mainly benefited European ways of knowing, while at the same time systematically excluding local people and their cultures, a situation which has not simply disappeared at the time of political independence. What the authors of these texts call for again and again is a more inclusive museum approach, one that brings local histories, community engagement and postcolonial realities to the forefront. But, the issue is that most of these works remain at the level of presenting arguments. Only a few are based on real places and produce evidence of how such methods really work in particular museums, and that is exactly the gap that this research would like to fill.

South African writers like Coombes (1994) and Ndwandwe (2009) stress the urgency of museums shedding the old colonial remainings and becoming places for critical discourse. By way of example, he (1994) points out that colonial-era displays tend to maintain unequal power relations by depicting African cultures as frozen in time rather than as evolving, living traditions. Ndwandwe (2009) takes it a step further by saying museum exhibitions should be powerful enough to displace Eurocentric interpretations by giving prominence to voices and experiences of communities that have been sidelined by colonial historiographies. Of course,

these works are significant for their at least somewhat theoretical explorations, but geographically they are mostly limited to South Africa.

More broadly in East Africa, Ochieng' (2015) and Kilonzo (2013) are some of the leading academics who focus on museums of Kenya and Tanzania, which are two countries most affected by colonial rule of Germans and British. Ochieng' is of the opinion that numerous African museums still use the very same categorisation schemes and ways of exhibiting that consider objects as "ethnographic curiosities, " thereby endorsing the colonial dichotomies of "civilised" versus "primitive.". Through a comparative inquiry into African heritage sites, Kilonzo makes the point that if decolonial efforts are to be effective, they should not only target tangible objects but also take into account intangible cultural expressions In particular oral traditions, performative heritage, indigenous cosmologies, etc. which have so far resisted being put into museum-like categorisations. Even with their helpful insights, one can still notice that linking these practices of interpretation to the experiences of visitors and the results of tourism is something that has hardly been done so far.

In looking at Ghanaian heritage establishments, Akyeampong (2011) has charted a very different academic course from his South and East African counterparts by concentrating on how collective narratives of resistance and resilience can undermine colonial frames. Instead of viewing museums as mere repositories of trauma, they can become places where alternative postcolonial futures are dreamt and expressed, a dual role that the RNHE, at least on paper, is also aiming for. Though, this line of work is mainly concerned with the capacity of the institution to deliver. It is questioning the way audiences respond to such re-interpretation strategies, or if this leads to a change of cultural tourism in more significant ways that have been addressed very little. This disconnect between institutional purpose and the actual visitor experience that this research centers on.

Chirikure and Pwiti (2008) propose that African museums collaborate with local communities to produce new interpretations that portray living cultures instead of the unchanged colonial artefacts. They support the use of participatory museology in which the views of the community are the main focus in the exhibition narratives. This method challenges the conventional

museum model and recognizes that heritage is a matter of social construction and of disagreement. It is true that this mentioned method is promoted, though until turning participation into action and the institutional challenges of its implementation have not been sufficiently studied.

There is a consistent call in the literature from museums in South, East and West Africa not to keep indigenous knowledge as a secondary matter or a note in the margin but to start considering communities as co-authors of the stories that are being told. These methods practically overthrow the colonial museum model where the heritage was treated as a living cultural process continuously shaped by present-day communities and not as a mere relic of the past, by taking a lead, authoritative interpretation and categorization. Despite this, a number of empirically, site-specific case studies revealing how reinterpretation strategies work in practice and how they affect both heritage representation and tourism development are strikingly absent.

2.3.3 Zimbabwean Scholarship on Colonial Heritage and Museums

In Zimbabwean universities and research institutions, a number of researchers have investigated how colonial legacy continues to influence the arts and cultural resources sectors. Scholars including Ndoro and Pwiti (1999) maintain that colonial heritage still dominates the governance of cultural resources in Southern Africa, Mainly through the heritage institutional setups that were inherited from colonial regimes. They argue that museums and other heritage agencies continue to prioritize conservation methods and historical accounts centering on colonial experiences to the detriment of indigenous knowledge and community points of view. In the same vein, Chirikure and Pwiti (2008) state that heritage management is not authentic unless communities are actively involved and local values are recognized, rather than the use of museum-based methods only. Moyo (2018) studies heritage tourism in Zimbabwe and states that colonial heritage sites generally draw international tourists more than local ones since the interpretation of these sites mainly connects with the tourist's knowledge of global colonial histories than with the tourist's present-day Zimbabwean identity. These observations of the tourism sector are quite useful; but, the research does not explore ways of reopening the sites that would reverse these trends of visitors. In the same way, Muzerengi (2014) mentions that

Zimbabwean museums are facing difficulties in combining academic views to history with making education of local people their main priority.

In fact, Chipangura (2015) explains the introduction of indigenous history and symbols by highlighting the inclusion of the resistance heroes and historical figures as well as the colonial artefacts to be viewed when talking about the cultural and social setup which these efforts are made are a breakaway from colonial exhibiting practices of Zimbabwean museums. Exposing indigenous cultural identity and asserting the right to control history through reinterpretation of colonial heritage is among the key issues which are raised by these types of studies. But, an in-depth discussion of the degree of visitor understanding brought about by these initiatives has yet to be carried out. In his article, Ndoro (2001) draws the attention of the readers to Truth is the vestiges of colonial rule still permeate the settings of the presentation of history in African heritage sites and museums. He further points out that the colonial times still frame archaeological discourses in Zimbabwe and that efforts for the nation's heritage have been insufficient in incorporating indigenous knowledge systems. But, he does not include discussion of a design for actively dismantling these legacies in individual institutions.

In their article Mudzedze Thondlana and Nyamutowa (2022) provide an analysis of the issue of RNHE decolonization. They discuss the museum as a site of conflict between colonial heritage retention and postcolonial demands for inclusivity. The first museum was a monument to Cecil John Rhodes, That's why the first layout was the colonial memorial one. The subsequent additions were the pre-colonial archaeology liberation war and community leaders like Chief Rekayi Tangwena (Mudzedze et al. 2020) segments. But, the authors highlight that the depiction of colonial history is still quite dominant as far as the visitors are concerned. This is mainly because of the nature of the museum's origin, its collections, funding and long institutional history. As them, RNHE finds itself in the dilemma of negotiating a way to remember the colonial past and at the same time striving for decolonization. But their research mainly deals with a narrative of construction of the exhibition and also the evolution of the institution while they do not say much about what visitors, local communities and the museum staff actually think of these stories. And, they do not delve into how these alterations influence national identity and/or the making of sustainable cultural tourism. By conducting research on

the stakeholder views and the broader significance of heritage reinterpretation at RNHE, this thesis essentially aims to plug this gap.

Muringaniza (2002) delves into the thorny legacy of Cecil John Rhodes by examining the controversies over his tomb in Matopos National Park. He describes colonial heritage as "heritage that hurts" since colonial sites cause very different reactions in Zimbabwe. For some people, such sites as Rhodes' grave represent oppression and dark history, but for others, they are important historical records and sources of tourism. The author sees this disagreement over the meaning of heritage as one of the ways in which heritage is never a fixed thing but is dependent on variables like politics, identity, and memory. Per him, the right thing to do is not to get rid of colonial sites altogether but to find ways of changing their interpretation so that they acknowledge not only their historical importance but also the injustices inflicted through them. Muringaniza's publication is First and foremost concerned with memorial places and the debates about who owns them rather than with how museums actually convey these stories to exhibition-goers. Besides, it also does not relate reinterpretation to the building of a national identity or to cultural tourism sustainability - these being key RNHE concerns today. By investigating stakeholders' perspectives on how RNHE is dealing with colonial heritage, this study attempts to fill in the gaps mentioned here.

In general, Zimbabwean researchers have uncovered a notable shortcoming in the literature. While they acknowledge the issue of colonial narratives (Mostly institutional ones), they rarely conduct empirical studies on how reinterpretation can be carried out in practice and (more importantly) how these contribute to identity formation and tourism development. Through this work RNHE will be dissected at length not only from the point of view of interpretive approaches but also of stakeholder involvement and experiences.

2.3.4 Research Gap

International, African and Zimbabwean literature of course offer good models for decolonial reinterpretation yet the research is very scanty on how the ideas are put into practice in such cases as Zimbabwe heritage sites. More studies are needed on how a decolonial heritage reinterpretation at RNHE can influence visitors' perceptions, contribute to the formation of

national identity and lead to sustainable cultural tourism development. Most of the current research only talks about the present practices without looking into their effect on visitor perceptions and tourism development. These gap points to the necessity of conducting research that would look at both museum stories and stakeholder perceptions at RNHE.

Initial research topics include colonial heritage, museum decolonisation, and heritage tourism in Zimbabwe. A handful of studies have investigated colonial heritage reinterpretation at RNHE and its influence on national identity formation as well as sustainable cultural tourism development at the same time. And, stakeholder perceptions In particular those of visitors and local communities have not been given much consideration.

2.4 Chapter Summary

What the literature clearly shows is that RNHE is the point where these international debates intersect: a colonial era institution in a postcolonial country where the tension hasn't yet been fully resolved between what it was originally designed to glorify and what it now has to represent. It has drawn attention to colonial heritage as it is shown and challenged in museum settings not only around the world but also in Africa. The articles present both success and failure in giving a new meaning to colonial heritage that will express indigenous communities and national identity, Mainly in Zimbabwe. This information goes toward shaping the theory and practice of this research, which examines RNHE as a place of heritage reinterpretation and sustainable cultural tourism.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This volume details the research techniques employed to investigate how the colonial heritage is reinterpreted at RNHE and its implication for sustainable cultural tourism in Zimbabwe. It discusses the blueprint of the research, the subjects of the study, the method of data collection, the way of data analysis, and the ethical measures that were taken, etc. Because colonial heritage refers to an amalgamation of meanings, values, and contested histories, this research adopted a qualitative method of research. Qualitative techniques are an excellent way to probe into how people understand heritage and figuring out different opinions of museum staff, visitors, and members of the local community. This method allowed getting extended accounts of the colonization stories at RNHE and how different groups interpreted them. To collect the data, three instruments were utilized: semi-structured interviews, unmediated observation of the exhibition and visitor interaction, and document analysis of museum records, guides, and academic sources. Combining these three instruments enabled the results to be re-checked and provided a comprehensive understanding of institutional operations, visitor experiences, and community viewpoints. Because of this, the method paves the way for a more profound understanding of the reinterpretation of heritage at RNHE in a postcolonial context.

3.2 Research Design

The nature of questions being asked largely determined the research design for this study rather than methodological conventions. Colonial heritage interpretation is a topic that raises contested meanings, competing memories, and institutional dynamics that cannot simply be reduced to measurable variables. A qualitative case study design, focusing exclusively on the RNHE, was As a result the best setting since it is not the typical heritage research choice, but rather, it gave the possibility for the type of in-depth, contextualised study that the topic needs. Yin (2014) believes that case studies are very effective in research that aims at understanding complex social processes in specific institutional settings, and the RNHE, as a place where colonial and indigenous histories are still being actively disrupted, fits that description.

Using a qualitative research approach, this study attempts to uncover the social and cultural aspects of heritage interpretation. Qualitative research gives scholars the whole depth to dissect meanings, experiences, and viewpoints, which is why it is mostly suitable for research involving heritage narratives, cultural identity, and museum interpretation. Employing this method, the researcher examined the manner in which the colonial past is exhibited at RNHE and how various stakeholders interpret and respond to these stories.

The study employed the case study design focusing solely on RNHE as a major field of research. The case study strategy gives the researchers an opportunity to carry out an in-depth and situated study of a particular event within its natural environment. Yin (2014) observes that case studies become very handy when investigators aim to comprehend complex social processes and interactions within specific institutional or cultural milieus.

Thanks to case study research design the investigator was able to trace the historical progression of RNHE from its inception and the way in which its exhibition stories have developed, to its current role in Zimbabwe's heritage and tourism arena. Since the study targeted only one heritage site, it was possible to provide detailed findings on how the colonial heritage is interpreted and also how strategies of reinterpretation could make it more meaningful to local communities.

Besides a case study design, the research also adopted the component of heritage interpretation analysis. This is the study of the way in which historical stories are constructed and displayed in museum exhibitions and also how the audience reacts to these stories. Employing this method, the researcher was able to work through the exhibition texts, visuals, and interpretative materials at RNHE with a view to drawing out the main themes and viewpoints.

Drawing from qualitative techniques as well as case study research design, the study delivered an all-round examination of the restyling of colonial heritage and the extent to which this could help in sustainable cultural tourism as well as the building of a national identity.

3.3 Research Methodology

Winter (2013) hold the view that qualitative research forms the core of critical heritage studies. It offers a means for scholars to explore meanings, cultural values, and historical renditions that cannot be quantified by quantitative methods. The approach here was mainly qualitative, aiming to reveal how colonial heritage stories are made, understood and felt at the RNHE. By looking at interpretations and experiences, qualitative research uncovers the influence of heritage stories on public perception of history and identity on a very profound level.

The main pillar of the research method was a mix of semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. This set of methods not only diversified the research but also enabled triangulation of evidence and comparison of information from different sources. That's why, the research was capable of providing a more authentic and dependable narrative of how colonial is represented at the exhibition. While interview transcripts revealed individual emotions and recollections, direct observation was used to verify these in the actual exhibition, and document analysis offered the academic perspectives and the institution's history. In fact, such a thorough examination of evidence was indispensable as colonial heritage is frequently the subject of debate and different stakeholders/ parties can have divergent views.

3.4 Population of the Study

Population refers to people and institutions that have features which are relevant to research, from which samples can be drawn. For this study, the population was the people who work, visit and have a historical connection with RNHE. These people were selected since they each interact with the exhibition in different ways, and That's why they have different opinions on colonial heritage presentation and interpretation. Knowing their opinions provided an insight into the construction, communication, and reception of colonial accounts at the site. The use of various stakeholder groups helped to validate the research findings and protect them from being influenced by the institutional bias.

For demographics, the population was the museum staff at RNHE. These persons offered direct data on the exhibition's inception, the changes in its design, and the policies governing the curation. Since they are experts, they not only work with historical narratives and artefacts but also interact with visitors every day. Because of this, they could give good ideas on the interpretation, presentation and communication of colonial heritage to the public. The researcher gave importance to their opinions for the study because they assist in recognizing the challenges and opportunities that reinterpreting colonial exhibitions in Zimbabwean heritage institutions present.

Also, the population was made up of the tourists who were visiting the exhibition as well as Nyanga community members. Tourists were part of the study because they are the main audience of the exhibition, so their opinions gave very important insights into how colonial heritage narratives are interpreted by the visitors. Still, the community members played a significant part in the study too. These people have historical and cultural links to the site, and for them to be part of the discussions on the reinterpretation and decolonisation of their heritage is very important. Besides, local communities hold indigenous knowledge and historical memories that may not be reflected in official museum narratives.

Including the various groups of participants enabled the study to get different opinions on the interpretation of colonial heritage, from the point of view of the institutions, to visitors' experiences and community perceptions. These differing points of view are very important because the professionals who shape heritage are not the only ones. The people who come to and live around it are part of it too. Adding these different voices makes it clear if RNHE is providing a fair historical account or if it is just reiterating the old colonial ideologies. This method, kind of, conforms to the modern heritage management practices that favour community participation and inclusive interpretation. So, the research was in a position to obtain a comprehensive knowledge of how colonial heritage is depicted and the ways in which it can be reinterpreted to promote sustainable cultural tourism.

3.5 Sampling

Sampling is the method of picking a specific group of people from a large population to collect the data needed for the research goals. As Bryman (2016) puts it, a sample is a portion of a population chosen for research in a study. Sampling in qualitative research does not aim at statistical representativeness but rather at selecting those people who can offer rich, detailed, and meaningful information about the topic of the study. This way, the researchers can get an insight into social experiences, personal views, and cultural meanings at a deep level. Patton (2002) remarked that qualitative sampling is in fact very often a matter of choice: the researchers select the participants intentionally as their appropriateness for the research topic and their potential to provide detailed information. Such a choice guarantees that the fieldwork will be able to give unbiased answers to the main research questions.

The choice of participants was based on purposive logic that directly linked to the aims of the study. The research needed voices from three very different positions: those who organize and interpret the exhibition; the visitors; and the people whose histories are being represented. Participants were selected per criteria like their role in heritage management, their experience of the exhibition, or their cultural and historical connection to the Nyanga region.

3.5.1 Sample Size

A total of 16 participants comprised of the sample size. These include museum staff working at RNHE, tourists, and the local community members in the Nyanga area. This selection allowed the study to capture perspectives from individuals who engage with the exhibition in different capacities. Heritage professionals provided institutional perspectives regarding the management and interpretation of colonial heritage, and tourists contributed visitor experiences while the local community members provided indigenous knowledge accounts.

The researcher considered this sample size appropriate for qualitative study, as the goal was to extract deep, nuanced information rather than to produce statistically generalizable results. Qualitative research generally involves smaller sample sizes because it focuses on exploring complex social phenomena in depth. Conducting interviews with a manageable number of participants also enabled the researcher to spend more time analysing each participant's

responses and spotting key themes emerging from the data. Furthermore, the selected participants represented key stakeholder groups relevant to the study, ensuring that the research captured diverse viewpoints and remain focused on the research objectives.

3.5.2 Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling was chosen as the study needed participants who have direct knowledge or experience related to colonial heritage interpretation at RNHE. This method allowed the researcher to focus specifically on individuals who could provide valuable information to the study. In heritage research, purposive sampling is important because it ensures that participants possess relevant knowledge about the site being studied. This method allowed the researcher to gather rich qualitative data relevant to the reinterpretation of colonial heritage.

Museum staff were chosen because of their roles in museum management, exhibition design, and heritage interpretation. Their professional background allowed them to provide insights into institutional decision-making processes and the challenges facing presenting colonial heritage in present-day Zimbabwe. Tourists were selected to provide insights into visitor experiences and perceptions of what the exhibition tells. Local community members were interviewed to capture indigenous perspectives and local historical knowledge related to the heritage site. Gathering data from these three groups meant the study could examine the same exhibition from institutional, visitor and community angles simultaneously.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

3.6.1 Interviews

To collect detailed personal testimonies, the researcher used semi-structured interviews with selected participants. This interview format allowed participants to express their views freely while enabling the researcher to guide the discussion around key research themes. Interviews were useful in capturing personal experiences and opinions that might not be visible through observation alone. During interview sessions, participants were encouraged to reflect on their

understanding of the exhibition narratives and their views of colonial history. The interviews brought out both where the exhibition is doing well and where it's failing.

3.6.2 Observation

Field observation was used to see how colonial heritage narratives are presented inside the museum. The researcher examined the exhibition layouts, the text panels, the placement of artefacts, and visitor movement. This method made it possible to judge how effectively the museum presents its historical data to the public. Observing the arrangements of artefacts, images, and textual explanations helped the researcher to understand the interpretive strategies used by the museum. Additionally, directly observing visitors in the museum provided valuable insights into how visitors interact with the exhibition.

3.6.3 Document Analysis

Document analysis was the third data collection method used in the research. It was used to access background scholarly accounts and institutional information of the site. Bowen (2009) describes it as a qualitative technique where researchers locate, examine, and interpret existing records to produce data that answers the research questions. Document analysis gave historical background and the museum's official position. This helped to put the fieldwork findings in a wider context. Two types of documents were reviewed which are academic sources on RNHE like Mudzedze, Thondlana & Nyamutowa (2022), Thondlana (2015), Muringaniza (2002), Ndoro (2001), and Moyo (2018) and site materials like visitor guides and text panels to see how the museum tells its historical story.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to the research process to ensure the protection, dignity and rights of all participants involved in the study.

3.7.1 Informed consent

The researcher secured formal permission from the management of the RNHE to access the site and engage with staff members and visitors before conducting the research. This ensured that the study was conducted within the institutional framework governing heritage management and tourism activities at the site. The researcher also obtained informed consent from each participant prior to every interview, to ensure they understood the scope of the project, their voluntary participation and their right to stop the interview session without penalty. This process ensured that the research was transparent, authorised, and aligned with institutional expectations.

3.7.2 Confidentiality

Anonymity throughout the data collection process was ensured to protect participant identities. Real names or identifying biographical details were avoided throughout the study. Generic descriptors like “museum staff A”, “community member B”, “international tourist C” or “domestic tourist A” was used to mask identities. Field notes, recorded files and transcripts were treated as confidential academic materials. They were securely stored and kept inaccessible to unauthorised third parties. This ensured that participants could contribute openly without fear of professional or social repercussions.

3.7.3 Cultural Sensitivity

During the data gathering process, attention was given to respecting the cultural values and historical experiences of the Nyanga community. The researcher acknowledged that heritage sites such as RNHE are embedded within broader cultural landscapes that hold meaning for the local communities. As such, the researcher avoided imposing external interpretations and instead sought to recognise and incorporate local perspectives where possible. This was important in the discussions regarding colonial history, where community narratives may differ from official museum interpretations.

3.7.4 Bias Awareness

The researcher was aware of their own position and potential biases throughout the research. Given that the study involves interpreting colonial heritage, the researcher critically reflected on how their background, assumptions, and perspectives might influence data collection and analysis. Deliberate efforts were made to remain objective and neutral, allowing raw participants' voices and experiences to shape the findings. This approach protected the credibility and ethical integrity of the study.

3.8 Validity and Reliability of Research Instruments

To unsure the credibility of the findings required more than careful data collection, it required comparing one source of evidence to another. Throughout the analysis, interview transcripts were read alongside field observation notes and documentary sources, with the researcher looking for consistency and contradiction. Where participant accounts diverged from what was observed on the exhibition floor, or where institutional documents told a different story from community testimony, those differences became analytically important. This approach produced a layered and honest account of how colonial heritage functions at RNHE.

Reliability was also achieved by maintaining clear documentation of the research process, including detailed interview notes and the data collection procedures. The researcher followed a structured approach to recording and organizing data so that the research process could be understood and potentially replicated. Consistency in the interview questions and observation procedures also contributed to the reliability of the findings. In addition, careful data management ensured that the information collected was securely preserved throughout the research process. These step ensured that the results of the study were dependable and trustworthy.

3.9 Data Presentation and Analysis

To make sense of the data collected in this study, the researcher applied thematic analysis. It is a qualitative analytical method that identifies patterns and themes within textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher carefully reviewed interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents in order to identify recurring themes related to colonial heritage interpretation, visitor perceptions, and sustainable tourism. The researcher was able to categorize the data into meaningful themes that reflected the main issues emerging from the study. Thematic analysis also enabled the researcher to explore relationships between different ideas and perspectives expressed by participants. By organizing the data into themes, the researcher was able to present the results in a clear and systematic manner.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter looked at the research design and methodology used in the study. The study adopted a qualitative case study approach supported by three data collection methods: semi-structured interviews, field observation, and document analysis. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with relevant knowledge and experience. These methodological procedures provided a systematic framework for collecting and analyzing data related to heritage interpretation and tourism. The use of multiple data collection methods strengthened the credibility and depth of the research results. Chapter Four will present and analyse the data gathered during fieldwork.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 Introduction

Building upon the approach described in Chapter 3, this chapter showcases, examines and debates the research results. The data derives from three main avenues: semi-structured interviews of museum staff, tourists and Nyanga community members; first-hand observation at the exhibition site; and document analysis of institutional records, exhibition materials, and RNHE-related published studies. Through a thematic structure data shows objectives of the study, the analysis beyond single narratives reveals the unraveling of recurring patterns and contradictions. Results fall into six major thematic areas: the colonial narratives' dominance in the exhibition, the indigenous histories and resistance narratives' marginalization, community exclusion and representation politics, heritage interpretation and national identity, visitor experience and sustainable tourism, and digital heritage and access issues. Plus integrating participant testimonies with non-verbal communication, this chapter determines the extent to which the present exhibition manages the post-colonial Zimbabwe era inclusiveness and decolonization aspects.

4.2 Data Presentation

4.2.1 Demographic Profile of Participants

Distribution of Participants by Category

Table 1.

Participant Category	**Number of participants**
Museum staff	3
Tourists	10
Community members	3

Fig 1

Table 1 presents the distribution of participants who took part in the study. The table illustrates the different stakeholder groups included in the research in order to capture diverse perceptions.

4.2.2 Intended and Actual Participant Distribution

Fig 2 illustrates the intended distribution of participants for the study. The researcher initially intended to interview 30 participants comprising 5 museum staff members, 10 local community members, and 15 visitors. The intended sample was designed to capture diverse perspectives from key stakeholders involved in or affected by the interpretation of the exhibition at RNHE. However, due to challenges such as limited participant availability, difficulties in locating community members, transportation constraints, and voluntary participation, the actual number of participants interviewed was reduced to 16. Although the final sample was smaller than originally intended, data saturation was reached as recurring themes emerged across participant responses

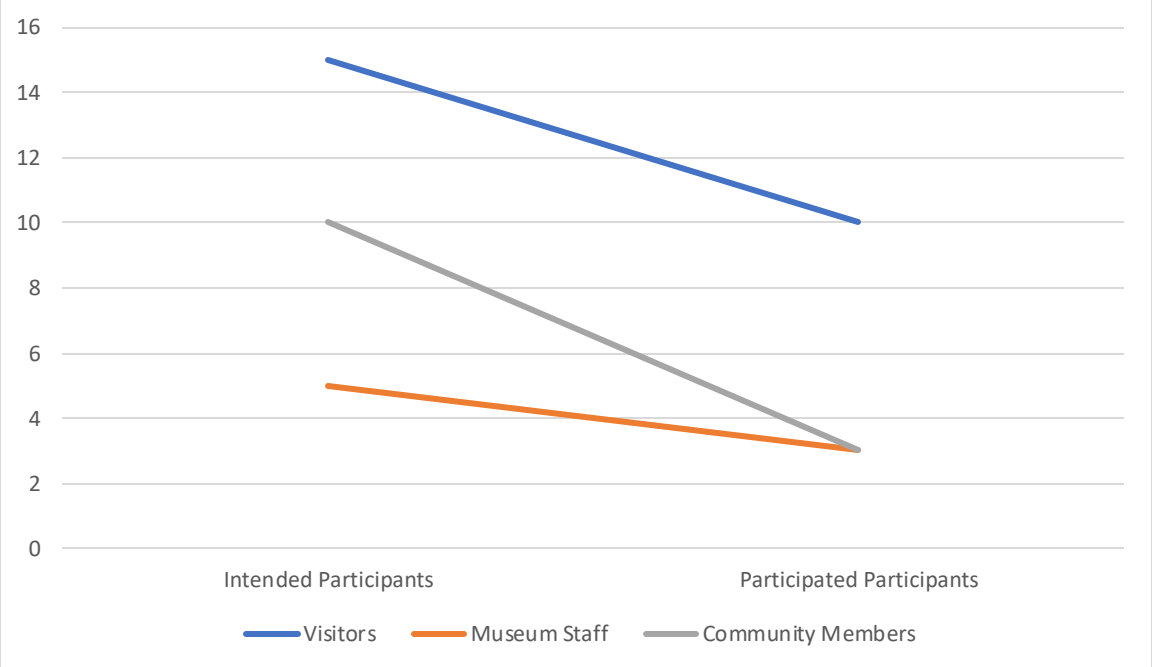

Fig 2

4.2.3 Gender Distribution of Participants by Category

Fig 3 presents the gender distribution of participants across the three participant categories involved in the study. The inclusion of both male and female participants was important and deliberate. This was done to capture diverse perspectives throughout the research process. Gender can influence how individuals experience and relate to heritage narratives. Although some imbalance existed within participant categories, this was largely influenced by participant availability and accessibility during data collection. All available museum staff were male, while more male community members and more female tourists were willing and available to participate in the study. Even so, the inclusion of both sexes strengthened the credibility of the research by ensuring a broader representation of visitor, community and institutional perspectives.

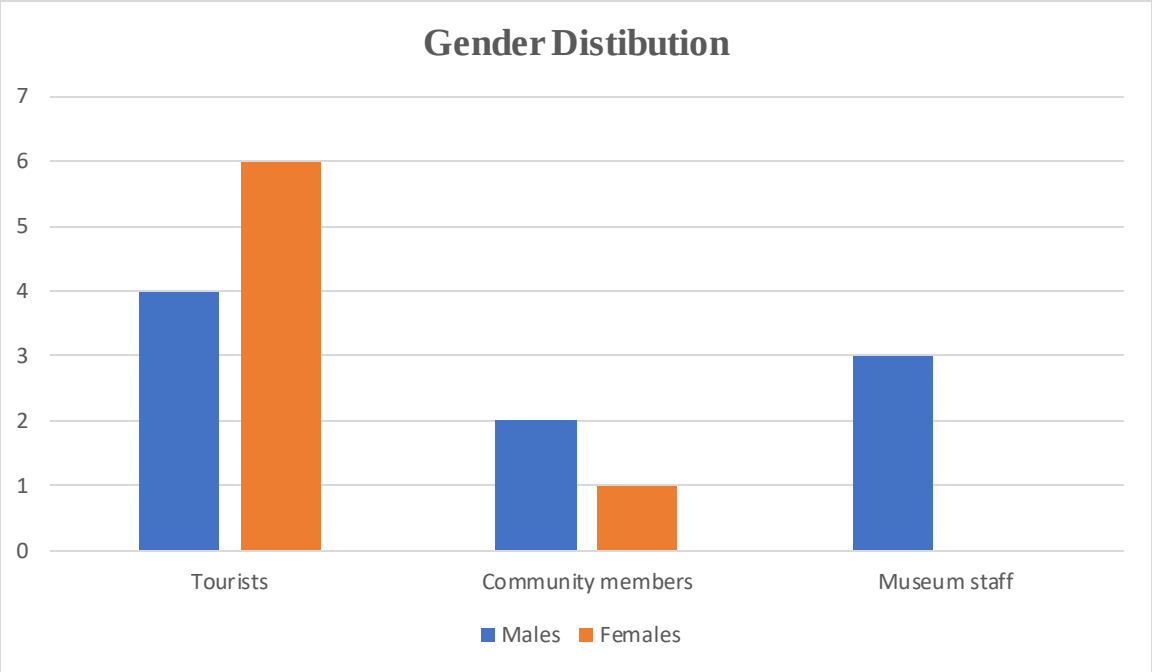

Fig 3

4.3 Findings and Thematic Analysis

4.3.1 Dominance of Colonial Narratives within the Exhibition

A theme that emerged consistently across all three participant groups was the continued dominance of colonial history within the RNHE. Participants across all three groups reached consensus, the colonial era occupies a more prominent and extensively interpreted position inside the museum than any indigenous or resistance history.

Museum staff acknowledged that the exhibition attempts to present a broad historical narrative incorporating pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial histories. Museum staff A defended the current layout, noting:

"The exhibition showcases the region's rich cultural heritage, from indigenous cultures to colonial influences. You'll find artifacts, photographs and informative panels guiding you through the stories of the Nyanga people and their traditions."

Notwithstanding this official push for inclusivity, the actual curatorial architecture tells a different story. In practice, colonial narratives completely overshadow local histories. Museum staff B admitted this structural imbalance noting:

"The exhibition tries to cover different historical periods, but colonial history is often more detailed because there is more documented information available. Indigenous histories are there, but sometimes they are not explored in as much depth."

Museum staff C reinforced this, noting that the exhibition continues to follow a structure that privileges settler history:

"The exhibition presents a wide historical timeline, but much of the interpretation still follows a standard structure that emphasise colonial developments alongside earlier periods. Indigenous histories are included but they don't get as much detail or attention."

This curatorial bias was also visible to visitors. Both domestic and international tourists noticed the fact that the settler history is more organized than indigenous histories. International tourist A shared their view:

"The colonial history is more clearly explained and organised, which makes it easier to follow as a visitor. But the indigenous side feels less detailed and not as strongly presented."

International tourist B echoed similar concerns:

"The colonial history is organised and detailed more than the indigenous history."

Observational findings strongly supported these interview responses. The researcher observed that colonial displays dominate the museum through extensive text, photos, and chronological layouts. Indigenous histories and resistance narratives remain visually secondary and underdeveloped, creating a hierarchy that institutionally validates colonial history. This aligns with Mudzedze et al., (2022), who noted that the museum was founded to preserve Cecil John Rhodes's legacy. They argued that despite expansion efforts, these embedded origins keep colonial memories highly visible. The fieldwork extends their findings, proving this structural dominance manifests on the ground as a tangible narrative imbalance for visitors and community members.

Some participants also argued that the exhibition presents colonial history in a relatively neutral and descriptive manner that limits critical engagement with colonial oppression and violence. Museum staff A reflected that:

"There is an effort to include different perspectives, but the idea of balance can sometimes make the exhibition less critical. Important issues such as colonial violence and displacement are not always explored in sufficient detail."

Similarly, a domestic tourist B argued that:

"The stories feels like they have been softened or carefully presented in a way that doesn't fully show how harsh and damaging it actually was for people."

These responses suggest that the exhibition's attempt to create balanced narratives may unintentionally dilute the realities of colonial domination, dispossession, and inequality. Rather than critically confronting colonialism as a violent and oppressive system, the exhibition often

adopts a descriptive tone that risks depoliticising colonial history. Thondlana (2015), in a documentary analysis of RNHE's interpretive approach, observed that reinterpretation efforts at the exhibition have tended to add indigenous content alongside colonial material rather than reframing the colonial narrative itself. The current fieldwork confirms this: staff, visitors, and community members all noted that colonial history remains the more coherent and developed narrative, suggesting that the additive approach to inclusion described by Thondlana (2015) has not yet produced genuine narrative rebalancing.

The interview transcripts across all three participant groups show that colonial narratives remain more institutionally prominent than indigenous perspectives within the exhibition.

4.3.2 Marginalisation of Indigenous Histories and Resistance Narratives

Another major theme emerging from the field results was the limited representation and marginalisation of indigenous histories, oral traditions, and resistance narratives within the exhibition. While indigenous content exists within the RNHE, many participants argued that these histories remain secondary to colonial narratives and are not fully integrated into the exhibition's central interpretive framework.

Local community members particularly emphasised that the exhibition fails to adequately capture lived experiences, oral histories, and cultural memories connected to the Nyanga landscape. Community member A explained:

"It doesn't really feel like our story is being told by us. It feels like it is being told about us, from the outside, without the real emotions and experiences that we grew up hearing from our elders."

Community member B stressed the importance of oral traditions and local memory:

"There are stories we grew up hearing about resistance, about how people hid, how they survived during those times, and how the land itself was part of that struggle."

These testimonies expose a gap between institutional heritage representation and community memory, particularly regarding oral traditions and indigenous experiences connected to the landscape. Instead of treating local history as a primary foundation, the curatorial design treats it like a footnote. Museum staff C acknowledged this:

"Indigenous histories and resistance stories are included, but they feel like additional information rather than the main focus of the exhibition."

Similarly, community member C explained:

"You hear about colonial history, but not enough about how unfair it was, how people were chased away from their lands, how they resisted or how they fought back."

Domestic tourist A stated that:

"There are mentions of important people and events, but the full story of what the community went through is not really explained."

The interview data also revealed a major emotional disconnect. The RNHE sanitizes the pain, psychological trauma, and social disruption caused by the colonial rule. Community member C remarked:

"The colonial part is there, but it feels like it doesn't show how much people actually suffered or what they lost."

Community member A similarly stated:

"For us, it was not just history, it was pain, loss and struggle, and that part is not clear."

This implies that the exhibition's interpretive approach prioritises factual and chronological presentation over emotional and experiential storytelling. Consequently, the realities of colonial violence, displacement, and cultural disruption become softened within public historical representation.

Tourists also observed this imbalance. International tourist D explained:

"It doesn't really go into personal stories or lived experiences of people during those times, so it feels more like reading facts than actually understanding how people experienced history in real life."

International tourist E argued that:

"The indigenous histories are definitely there, but they don't stand out as much as the colonial parts of the display."

Participants felt indigenous perspectives remain undeveloped compared to colonial narratives, a finding directly supported by the document analysis. Thondlana (2015) found that while the RNHE incorporated indigenous resistance figures and pre-colonial material, these additions serve as supplements rather than foundational. Furthermore, Muringaniza (2002), argued that the emotional dimensions of colonial dispossession, the pain, loss, and cultural disruption are frequently softened or absent in official heritage presentations because such content does not align with the sanitised, tourism-oriented framing that institutions tend to favour. Community accounts in this study, which described the exhibition as failing to capture "how much people actually suffered", directly reflect this systematic pattern across Zimbabwean colonial heritage sites (Muringaniza, 2002).

4.3.3 Community Exclusion and the Politics of Representation

The fieldwork revealed significant concerns regarding community exclusion and limited participation in heritage interpretation processes at RNHE. Local community participants repeatedly expressed the view that the exhibition represents local history from an institutional perspective rather than through community voices and lived experiences.

One community member B stated:

"People here should be part of telling the story, because no one understands it better than those who live it and carry it every day."

Similarly community member C argued:

"They should involve the community more, maybe even let elders come and share their stories."

These responses reflect broader debates surrounding authority, ownership, and representation within museums and heritage institutions. Participants felt that local communities are treated primarily as subjects of representation rather than active participants in curatorial and interpretive processes.

Museum staff participants themselves acknowledged the need for greater community participation.

"There is a need to update the exhibition more frequently and involve local communities so that their perspectives are better represented." Museum staff C noted.

Museum staff A emphasised the importance of participatory heritage approaches:

"The exhibition could focus on community-led endeavors and incorporate more diverse lens."

The third museum staff B further argued that*:*

"Greater community involvement and more interactive displays would make the exhibition more meaningful and engaging for visitors."

Yet despite the staff recognizing these progressive models, community involvement on the ground remains limited.

Field observations confirmed this disconnect. The researcher observed that domestic visitors were significantly fewer than international tourists. Informal discussions revealed that locals actively avoided the space because they view the exhibition as romanticizing colonial figures.

These perceptions reveal deeper tensions surrounding contested heritage and historical memory. For some local individuals, colonial heritage remains associated with pain, dispossession, and unresolved historical trauma rather than shared cultural identity.

Low community involvement makes the exhibition less inclusive and less relevant to the local people. This problem comes from how heritage institutions were set up in the past. Ndoro (2001) found that Zimbabwean heritage sites have a long history of keeping local communities out of decisions about how stories are told. This practice started under colonial rule and

continued after independence. Muringaniza (2002) builds on this by showing that many contested colonial sites in Zimbabwe still treat communities as audiences who just receive information, not as people who help shape the story. The lack of community participation seen at RNHE during fieldwork matches what these scholars describe. It shows the issue is not just an RNHE problem. It is part of a wider pattern with deep historical and structural roots in Zimbabwe's heritage sector.

4.3.4 Heritage Interpretation and National Identity

The study further explored how the exhibition contributes to understandings of Zimbabwean national identity. Findings revealed that participants generally viewed the exhibition as important in illustrating the historical foundations of identity, particularly through themes of resistance and anti-colonial struggle. However, many participants felt that the exhibition does not fully connect historical narratives to contemporary identity formation.

Domestic tourist C explained:

"It shows that identity is shaped by history and the struggle against colonialism, which is important. But it doesn't fully reflect how people from communities like ours understand that history."

Domestic participant D stated:

"The exhibition shows that resistance is an important part of Zimbabwe's history and identity, but it doesn't clearly explain how that resistance shapes who we are today."

International tourists similarly perceived identity representation as incomplete in the exhibition. International tourist C explained:

"It definitely gave me a sense that resistance and resilience are important parts of Zimbabwean identity."

At the same time, the same participant added:

"I also feel like there's more to that identity than what I saw here."

International tourist E similarly observed:

"It helped me understand that Zimbabwean identity is strongly linked to history and resistance, but I also feel there is much more beneath the surface that the exhibition does not fully unpack."

Community participants argued that national identity cannot be fully represented without incorporating local experiences and community memory. Community member B explained:

"Identity is built from real experiences, not just what is written or displayed."

Community member A argued that:

"It could help people understand who we are as a nation, but only if it includes more voices from the community."

Heritage interpretation powerfully shapes national identity and belonging. However, institutionally controlled frameworks often fail to represent the full complexity of Zimbabwean historical experiences. Document analysis reinforces this concern. Ndoro (2001) noted that national programs consistently struggle to integrate indigenous knowledge systems. This occurs because inherited colonial administrative structures continue to define legitimate heritage long after independence. Muringaniza (2002) argued that colonial heritage sites evoke sharply divergent meanings across communities. What one group views as history, another experiences as an ongoing symbol of dispossession. This fieldwork mirrors this dynamic. It confirms that exhibitions calibrated to colonial frameworks resonate differently with those who still carry the consequences of that history.

4.3.5 Visitor Experience and Sustainable cultural Tourism

The research also revealed several important issues relating to visitor engagement and sustainable cultural tourism. Although participants generally regarded RNHE as educational and historically informative, many criticised the exhibition for relying heavily on static displays and text-based interpretation.

International tourist E explained:

"It is more like reading facts than actually understanding how people experienced history in real life."

International tourist F argued that:

"The exhibition would be much more interesting if it included personal stories, maybe videos, audio narratives, or even interactive displays."

Similarly, domestic tourist B suggested that:

"Adding interactive displays or real-life stories would also make the experience more fun and easier to understand."

Several international participants also highlighted problems relating to narrative coherence and emotional engagement. International tourist E explained:

"It felt like I was moving through separate sections of information rather than following one clear and connected story."

International tourist C stated:

"Colonial and indigenous histories are both included, but they don't feel properly connected."

In fact, the results point to the exhibition as mostly a straightforward fact-delivering show rather than one which relies on immersion and feeling to better connect with the audience.

Domestic tourism participation was rather low and this was confirmed by comparing it to international tourism trends. On one side, foreign tourists, it seems, are not only content with looking at the exhibition but they also spend a good amount of time reading the information written on large text panels. Then again, it was very obvious there were hardly any local Zimbabwean visitors and even those who visited the exhibition were seen mainly to engage with the displays quite selectively. When talking casually, few of the locals thought that perhaps, the exhibition does not relate to the everyday life of a normal Zimbabwean, whereas some of them based their opinion on Truth is having to pay a ticket to enter the exhibition is a financial hurdle. These results emphasize the struggle between tourism growth, making sure the attraction is accessible and the inclusion of the local community.

The materials used in this research are consistent with the events witnessed during fieldwork. Moyo (2018) researched heritage tourism in Zimbabwe and discovered that local visitors are few while international tourists to colonial sites are numerous. One of the reasons is that the

narrative presented at such sites harmonizes very well with the global colonial history but less so with the identity of Zimbabwe today and the everyday lives of the people. Moyo (2018) also indicated that high entrance fees and exhibition contents that target foreign audiences are the main factors that cause local people to be excluded from heritage tourism. Fieldwork performed at RNHE reveals the very same problems happening at the site level. The obstacles that Moyo (2018) mentions for Zimbabwe in total, that is structure pricing, and interpretation, are also evident at RNHE. That's why, this issue - not just in one museum - points out the existence of bigger problems across the whole sector that needs fixing, not only RNHE.

4.3.6 Digital Heritage and Accessibility Challenges

The researcher's observations on the exhibition floor exposed a total absence of digital heritage infrastructure and online accessibility at RNHE. The museum currently lacks virtual exhibitions, web-based digital collections, or interactive multimedia platforms that are increasingly common within contemporary museum practice. During observation sessions, the exhibition was found to rely on text panels and display cases with very limited use of interactive interpretation. There are no interactive screens, digital storytelling interfaces, audio-visual guides or virtual reality engagement tools.

This severe technological absence was highlighted by visitors, who noted that the lack of modern media compromises the impact of history. International tourists recommended technological updates to modernize the exhibition. International tourist B suggested:

"Adding interactive elements, like digital displays or personal stories, would make the experience more engaging."

International tourist A similarly argued:

"Maybe adding more interactive displays or clearer storytelling that connects the different periods would make the experience even stronger."

International tourist D pointed out:

"There is a lot of interesting information in the museum but it's too much to navigate with limited time, establishing an online access would help reach a much broader audience and even attract more visitors."

Failing to build online exhibitions drastically reduces the museum's global reach. Today, museums are expected to provide virtual access to boost education, research, and tourism. Yet, document analysis reveals no mandatory digital heritage policies within NMMZ guidelines. This absence is telling. It proves that the lack of digital tools at the RNHE is not just a local funding issue. Instead, it reflects a nationwide gap in how digital heritage is prioritised. If embraced, digital platforms could easily weave in the oral histories and community perspectives that the physical exhibition currently leaves out.

Overall, participants viewed digital heritage development as important for improving accessibility and visitor engagement.

4.4 Analysis of Findings

All in all, the six themes revealed through thematic analysis quite naturally point to one single issue. Colonial heritage at RNHE is still structurally dominant not because of conscious policy-making decisions nowadays but because the exhibition is working within institutional setups, archival systems, and physical infrastructures, which are the legacy of its original colonial mandate. The reinterpretation of RNHE so far has been adding indigenous features only around the edges of a colonial setting which yet, remains structurally unchanged.

Research Question One: In what ways RNHE features and interprets Zimbabwe's colonial heritage?

Fieldwork data reveals that colonial history continues to receive more space, text, and main props in the exhibition. The problem does not lie only in the number of displays. Museum Staff B gave an example that there is a lot more descriptive and pictorial material on colonial history. This is a point very important. The exhibition is lopsided simply because the collections themselves are lopsided. Settler activities in detail were the focus of colonial systems but the indigenous experiences were hardly recorded. Due to this reason RNHE ends up retelling the

same archival pecking order instead of defying it. In fact, Smith (2006) has labeled this as the continuing dominance of the "Authorized Heritage Discourse". Museum heritage mostly remain shaped by institutional systems laid down during colonial times, adds Harrison (2013). Both these notions are useful in understanding why colonial accounts are still predominant at RNHE

This is, in fact, a very significant illustration of the major debates within Postcolonial Theory. For postcolonial theorists like Bhabha (1994) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), the systems of colonial knowledge continue to have an impact on cultural institutions long after the end of formal colonial rule. The very forms of representation that were colonial often remain deeply rooted within museums, archives, and heritage institutions, Because of this influencing which histories are preserved, prioritized, and legitimized. The ongoing dominance of colonial narratives at RNHE stands as a vivid illustration of how colonial power can be perpetuated through ways of representing, interpreting, and institutionalizing even in postcolonial heritage settings. This inevitably means that indigenous histories and local experiences are still at the mercy of narratives constructed within colonial structures originally.

Research Question Two: How does the exhibition wholey incorporate colonial narrative as well as indigenous figures?

Actually, data from Themes 1, 2, and 3 indicate that the issue of a 'real balance' is far from resolved. Indigenous histories and stories of resistance, although present, are still regarded as secondary elements at best. They are simply the accessories, not the main focus of the exhibition. What is most surprising is that finish the discussion in a unanimous manner, they all point to a major structural flaw. Independent observations of the same shortcoming by separate parties lend credibility to the finding. Besides, institutional documents are consistent with the testimony of people. In an investigation of RNHE, Mudzedze et al. (2022) found that even though the museum has tried to change the message of its displays, indigenous perspectives have been 'added' to the 'colonial' structure of the museum 'rather than placing them at the centre'. Thondlana (2015) also emphasises that decolonisation at RNHE has been a 'step by step process' and not 'voluntary via one major structural change'. The agreement between the documents and people's lived experiences only serves to reinforce that the existing

inequality is not a mere coincidence. Simply put, it is the way the museum was originally planned and that continues to function today.

Themes 2 and 3 are intertwined with each other and So must be considered as one. Theme 2 is about the exhibition's minimising of indigenous historical narratives, Theme 3 is about the performing of the museum role being undertaken without the communities' involvement, yet the two problems are not only different aspects of the same institutional logic but at the same time also mirror the two sides of the same coin. First, indigenous histories are underrepresented so much that the communities who are in possession of those histories have no role, or at least very little role, in determining the content and method of display of an exhibition. But, it is impossible structurally for communities to be better represented in the exhibition if they are still excluded from the decision making about the exhibition. Taking the exhibition to review and undo its narrative imbalance while leaving the issue of community exclusion unaddressed could at best be a partial solution because the discourse of 'heritage participatory' scholarship underscores Really representation and community involvement are inseparably linked (Waterton & Watson, 2013; Smith, 2006).

The staff viewpoints and the exhibition itself starkly diverge was a remarkable result. Even so, the exhibition itself has not been transformed to reflect what they have voiced even though the three staff members are all in concord on this point that there is a need for more community input and achieving a better balance. Such a difference is significant because it actually indicates that the problem is not as simple as staff not seeing or understanding the issue. It is rather that the problem exists at the level of the underlying structural arrangements. The capability to bring about changes in how stories are narrated does not reside with the individual curators or guides merely, but it actually resides with the institution and policy matter. This is in line with Smith's (2006) theory of AHD or "Authorized Heritage Discourse" where control over heritage is exercised by institutions. Workers might be able to recognize the problem, but not change it on their own without the support of the system.

Research Question 3: How does the Rhodes Nyanga Historical Exhibition impact the way visitors view the Zimbabwean national identity?

There is a distinct difference in opinion about the exhibition between local and foreign visitors. Foreign tourists described the exhibition as educational and quite fair. However, Zimbabwean visitors frequently reported a sense of alienation. A lot of them argued that the exhibition did not capture their community's stories or depict the contemporary Zimbabwean identity. This divergence is significant. It implies that the exhibition is more tailored towards foreign visitors rather than locals. This is in line with a common pattern in heritage sites that were developed for colonial and post-colonial tourism, lacking a focus on community education. An exhibition that resonates more with foreign visitors than with local people whose history it represents is failing at its core mission to foster national identity.

Research Question 4: How can the exhibition encourage sustainable cultural tourism in Zimbabwe?

The information from Themes 5 and 6 illustrates that these issues are interconnected rather than distinct. Three concerns were frequently mentioned. First, the exhibitions are chiefly static, Because of this visitors hardly get to engage physically with the content. Second, there is very limited digital infrastructure, thereby restricting accessibility and audience reach. Third, the current entrance fees are a barrier for local visitors. These issues aggravate one another. So, the exhibition largely caters to a handful of international tourists while excluding and becoming less relevant to local communities. Sustainable cultural tourism depends on community participation and local ownership, as UNWTO (2018) and Timothy & Boyd (2020) emphasize. Considering the findings, the exhibition is diverging from those states of affairs rather than converging towards them.

Theme 6 shows that the lack of a digital platform also gates directly to the community exclusion of Theme 3. Digital platforms, oral history archives, community-curated digital galleries, virtual access for those who cannot afford entry fees are the most practical pathways for amplifying community voices within the exhibition. The failure to embark on the development of these platforms is That means not only a technological gap. It is also a missed opportunity for community inclusion.

In short, the information reveals that the issues of RNHE are far-reaching and are entangled with long-standing institutional structures, inconsistent archives, and a system where exhibition control rests with management rather than with the communities the museum intends to serve. Merely addressing one issue will not bring about substantial change. For instance, updating displays will be of no use if local visitors are still unable to afford entry, and reducing fees will be ineffective if the narrative remains unbalanced. The results suggest one remedy: transformation is required in multiple areas simultaneously. Reconsidering the narrative content, engaging communities more, enhancing accessibility, and developing digital tools are the areas that must be tackled together if reinterpretation is to succeed.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The findings can be situated within postcolonial heritage theory. It argues that African museums, despite attempts to decolonize, remain essentially colonial in their interpretive setups. For example, Smith (2006), Harrison (2013), and Coombes (2003) hold that postcolonial museums maintain colonial narratives through inherited interpretive structures and archival systems. Colonial narratives' overwhelming predominance at RNHE is a specific manifestation of these general problems in heritage management.

Indigenous histories and oral traditions' exclusion from the exhibition also illustrates what Chirikure and Pwiti (2008) criticised - that African heritage institutions are unable to properly incorporate indigenous knowledge systems in the museum interpretation. Indigenous perspectives are, in fact, a part of the exhibition but are largely undeveloped when compared to other narratives as per the data.

This paper also resonates with participatory heritage theories stressing community contribution to heritage interpretation and museum practices. Local people shared their strong wishes not only to be more represented but also participate in storytelling processes. Such findings correspond to the current museology approaches supporting cooperative and community-oriented heritage management.

On tourism, the study confirms that the interpretation of heritage plays an important role in not only the experience of visitors but also in the development of sustainable cultural tourism. Visitor engagement and access are hampered by still exhibitions, almost no emotional storytelling, and poor digital infrastructure. In the future, sustainable cultural tourism will necessitate more than just technical infrastructure; it will also call for different heritage narratives that reach audiences today, which will require immersive interpretation, use of technology and inclusive storytelling, to mention just a few.

Besides, the data very much corresponds to the focal points of this study's two theoretical setups. Colonial narratives' dominance exposes AHD's vestiges that elite official histories are validated through professional, expert authority while community memories are relegated to the sidelines. Because of this, confronting such a discourse at RNHE is more than a mere academic debate; it is crucial for the generation of a truly pluralistic, decolonised national consciousness that is constantly reflective of the diversity of the Zimbabwean experience.

4.6 Chapter Summary

The chapter shared, analysed and discussed the data collected from fieldwork at the RNHE. Most of the results indicated that colonial period story still mostly shape the interpretive structure of the exhibition, at the same time, the native histories and the anti-colonial narratives are still a lot marginalised. The research also found limited community involvement, poorly developed digital infrastructure, as well as issues related to visitor engagement and the sustainable development of cultural tourism. And, the analysis revealed that, despite RNHE having significant heritage and tourism potentials, its present interpretive system is quite a hindrance to inclusivity, accessibility, and participatory engagement. The next chapter offers the study's conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Introduction

This last chapter pulls together the discoveries that were first presented and discussed in Chapter Four. That chapter focused on how the colonial past is displayed and felt at the RNHE through the views of the museum staff, members of the local community and tourists. The results showed that it is not just a simple story of a museum stuck in its colonial time. Although some changes to the transformation are visible, big narrative imbalances still exist. Besides, the research indicate opportunities for more inclusive heritage interpretation and sustainable cultural tourism development which are not realised. The present chapter is a recap of the major findings, it also gives answers to the research questions through the conclusions. Besides, it presents the suggestions to make the heritage interpretation at RNHE even better and point out the aspects of the study where more research is required. The empirical findings serves as the basis for the conclusions and recommendations made in this chapter which are further viewed from the perspectives of Postcolonial Theory and AHD.

5.2 Summary of Findings

Representation and Interpretation of Colonial Heritage at RNHE

The study found that RNHE presents Zimbabwe's colonial history through a structured, institutionally controlled narrative. The exhibition incorporates multiple historical periods, precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial. It uses artefacts, photographs, and interpretive panels. However, the depth and organisation of these periods is uneven. Colonial history is more detailed, more visually prominent, and more coherently structured than any other period represented. Indigenous and African histories, by contrast, feel fragmented and underdeveloped, producing a significant imbalance in how historical periods are weighted. Key resistance figures such as Chief Rekayi Tangwena are included, but their stories are not fully integrated into the exhibition's main narrative. As a result, inherited colonial frameworks continue to shape the core historical narrative of the site.

Inclusion of Indigenous Histories and Community Perspectives

Despite efforts to incorporate indigenous histories and cultural practices, local community members expressed that their voices and lived experiences remain underrepresented within the exhibition. Participants argued that the museum tends to romanticise settler figures while softening the realities of local displacement, colonial violence, and resistance. The study also found that local communities have limited involvement in curatorial processes. This contributes to a disconnection between institutional narratives and community memory. The exhibition does not fully reflect the cultural realities or historical consciousness of the surrounding Nyanga community.

Visitor Perceptions and National Identity

Visitor responses revealed a noticeable divide between international and domestic tourists. International tourists generally found the exhibition accessible and informative, though several noted that indigenous histories were less developed than colonial content. Domestic tourists expressed a stronger sense of disconnection. They argued that the exhibition does not reflect community experiences or adequately represent contemporary Zimbabwean identity. These patterns suggest that while RNHE contributes to historical awareness, its capacity to promote an inclusive national identity is constrained by uneven narrative representation and limited emotional engagement.

Potential for Sustainable Cultural Tourism

The study found that RNHE possesses significant unrealised potential for cultural tourism. The exhibition offers valuable opportunities for heritage education, historical reflection, and cultural tourism development. However, several structural and operational constraints prevent this potential from being fully realised. These include limited community involvement in tourism development, heavy reliance on static text-based displays, the absence of digital and multimedia infrastructure, and entrance fees that are financially inaccessible to many local visitors. Field observations confirmed that domestic visitor numbers are substantially lower than international visitors. Some local community members were observed actively avoiding the site due to a perceived disconnect between the exhibition and their own histories.

5.3 Conclusions

Research Question 1: How does RNHE represent and interpret Zimbabwe's colonial heritage?

The research conducted shows that the RNHE still operates Mainly in the structure of AHD. Colonial narratives continue to be the main force interpreting the content of the exhibition. They are not only more organized and thorough, but also institutionally supported, than any other historical viewpoint. This predominance is not just a question of the preferences of the curators. On the contrary, it is the archival legacy, funding streams, and the very institutional history of a place established for commemorating a colonial figure that are reflected here. Even though African viewpoints have been incorporated through re-interpretation, they are still relegated to the status of the secondary within an interpretive scheme that never actually envisaged them as being the focus. The museum personnel themselves recognized this structural disparity during the interviews when they mentioned that colonial history is better supported by archival material. As a result, colonial narratives continue to be given precedence in the exhibition, even if this is not the intention. The cumulative outcome is an interpretive setting that non-verbally conveys the idea that certain histories are of greater importance than others.

Research Question 2: In what ways does the exhibition balance colonial narratives with indigenous histories and resistance stories?

The exhibition does not yet achieve a balanced representation of colonial and indigenous histories. Indigenous content exists within the exhibition but functions more as supplementary material than as a foundational interpretive layer. Resistance narratives are included but lack the contextual depth and emotional weight that would make them central rather than peripheral. Community participants were particularly clear on this point, describing a persistent gap between the institutional version of local history and the oral traditions, lived experiences, and ancestral memories they carry. This gap points to a deeper issue. While the exhibition incorporates indigenous perspectives, it has not fundamentally transformed the interpretive framework that marginalised them. The results suggest that the exhibition has largely incorporated indigenous perspectives without transforming the interpretive framework that marginalised them.

Research Question 3: How does RNHE influence visitors' perceptions of Zimbabwean national identity?

The exhibition plays a partial and uneven role in shaping understandings of Zimbabwean national identity. For international tourists, the exhibition provides a structured introduction to Zimbabwean colonial and resistance history. Many participants associated the site with themes of resilience and anti-colonial struggle. For domestic visitors, the experience was frequently described as emotionally distant and insufficiently connected to community experience. National identity cannot be meaningfully represented through institutional narratives alone. It must also engage with the memories, values, and experiences of the communities whose identity is being represented. The findings suggest that when heritage interpretation remains controlled by top-down institutional authority and excludes community participation, it risks producing a version of national identity that resonates with outsiders more than it does with the people it claims to represent.

Research Question 4: What is the potential of RNHE to promote sustainable cultural tourism in Zimbabwe?

The potential of RNHE as a sustainable cultural tourism destination is real and considerable, but it is not currently being realised. The site's historical significance, its location within Nyanga National Park, and the depth of the stories it could tell all position it as a valuable heritage tourism resource. Several factors limit the exhibition’s potential including static displays that offer limited emotional engagement, entrance fees that exclude local visitors, the absence of digital and multimedia platforms, and insufficient community involvement in shaping what the exhibition communicates. Sustainable cultural tourism, as frameworks such as UNWTO (2018) emphasise, depends on inclusivity, community participation, and authentic representation. On each of these dimensions, the exhibition falls short of what it could achieve. Addressing these constraints would not only improve the visitor experience, it would expand the exhibition's audience, strengthen its relevance to local communities, and increase its contribution to regional tourism development.

5.4 Recommendations

To the RNHE:

1. Rebalance Colonial and Indigenous Narratives

The primary interpretive structure of the exhibition should be restructured to integrate indigenous history as a foundational narrative rather than a supplementary element. Resistance stories, oral traditions, and precolonial histories should be developed with the same depth and institutional weight currently given to colonial content. This involves rethinking the exhibition's chronological framework and investing in the development of interpretive materials for indigenous and resistance histories that currently lack the archival depth of colonial documentation.

2. Strengthen Community Participation in Curatorial Processes

Local communities should be formally and meaningfully involved in the curatorial process. This could include structured oral history recording projects, co-curated gallery spaces, and rotating community-led exhibitions that allow community members to present their own historical narratives. Community involvement should not be token or consultative. It should give local participants genuine authority over how their histories are represented and interpreted.

3. Develop Digital Heritage and Interpretation Platforms

The exhibition needs to invest in digital infrastructure. This includes developing an active online presence featuring virtual museum tours and digital archives, as well as installing interactive touchscreen displays, audio-visual guides, and multimedia storytelling interfaces within the exhibition. Digital platforms would also provide an opportunity to incorporate oral histories and community perspectives that are currently underrepresented within the museum.

4. Revise the Admission Fee Structure

Current entrance fees represent a significant financial barrier for local visitors. This is contributing directly to the low levels of domestic visitation documented in this study. The RNHE should introduce substantially reduced admission rates for local residents, school groups, and domestic educational tours. A two-tier pricing structure, one for international visitors and one for domestic visitors is a practical and widely used model that would make the exhibition more accessible without compromising revenue from international tourism.

5. Transform the Storytelling Approach

The exhibition's reliance on text-heavy panels and conventional artefact displays should be progressively replaced with more immersive and participatory interpretation methods. These could include live guided storytelling sessions, historical re-enactments, community-led cultural workshops, and first-person narrative accounts from community members. The goal is to move from a presentation of facts toward an experience of history, one that connects visitors emotionally as well as intellectually.

5.5 Policy and Institutional Recommendations

Establishing a Decolonial Heritage Policy Framework

National heritage bodies should develop and mandate a postcolonial, community-centred conservation framework across all national monuments. This will ensure that pluralistic historical representation becomes a formal institutional requirement rather than a discretionary choice. Such a policy would provide RNHE and similar institutions with the legislative backing and resource allocation needed to implement substantive reinterpretation.

Investing in Critical Museology Training

Museum personnel at RNHE and across Zimbabwe's heritage sector require access to professional development in participatory museology, critical heritage studies, and community engagement practice. Capacity building in these areas would equip staff to move beyond inherited colonial administrative habits and toward the collaborative, inclusive approaches that the decolonisation of heritage requires.

5.6 Areas for Further Research

This article explored heritage reinterpretation by concentrating on one site and a specific time period only. From the results, a number of significant directions for future research became clear. Comparative studies carried out at various Zimbabwean heritage sites and museums would reveal whether the difficulties with interpretation at RNHE are common throughout the sector or just limited to this one institution. Long term research looking at the effects of participatory curation initiatives on community ownership, visitor satisfaction, and local economic outcomes will provide the kind of supporting data that Zimbabwean heritage literature needs. Besides that, studies that are centered around the use of digital technologies and virtual heritage platforms in Zimbabwean museums would also help in gaining a deeper awareness into how digital progress can cause decolonised heritage interpretation even in under-resourced institutional settings. Lastly, inquiry into the economic aspects of heritage tourism at community level such as the sharing of tourism revenue, obstacles to local participation, and community entrepreneurial opportunities would help to build the evidence setup for sustainable heritage tourism policy in Zimbabwe.

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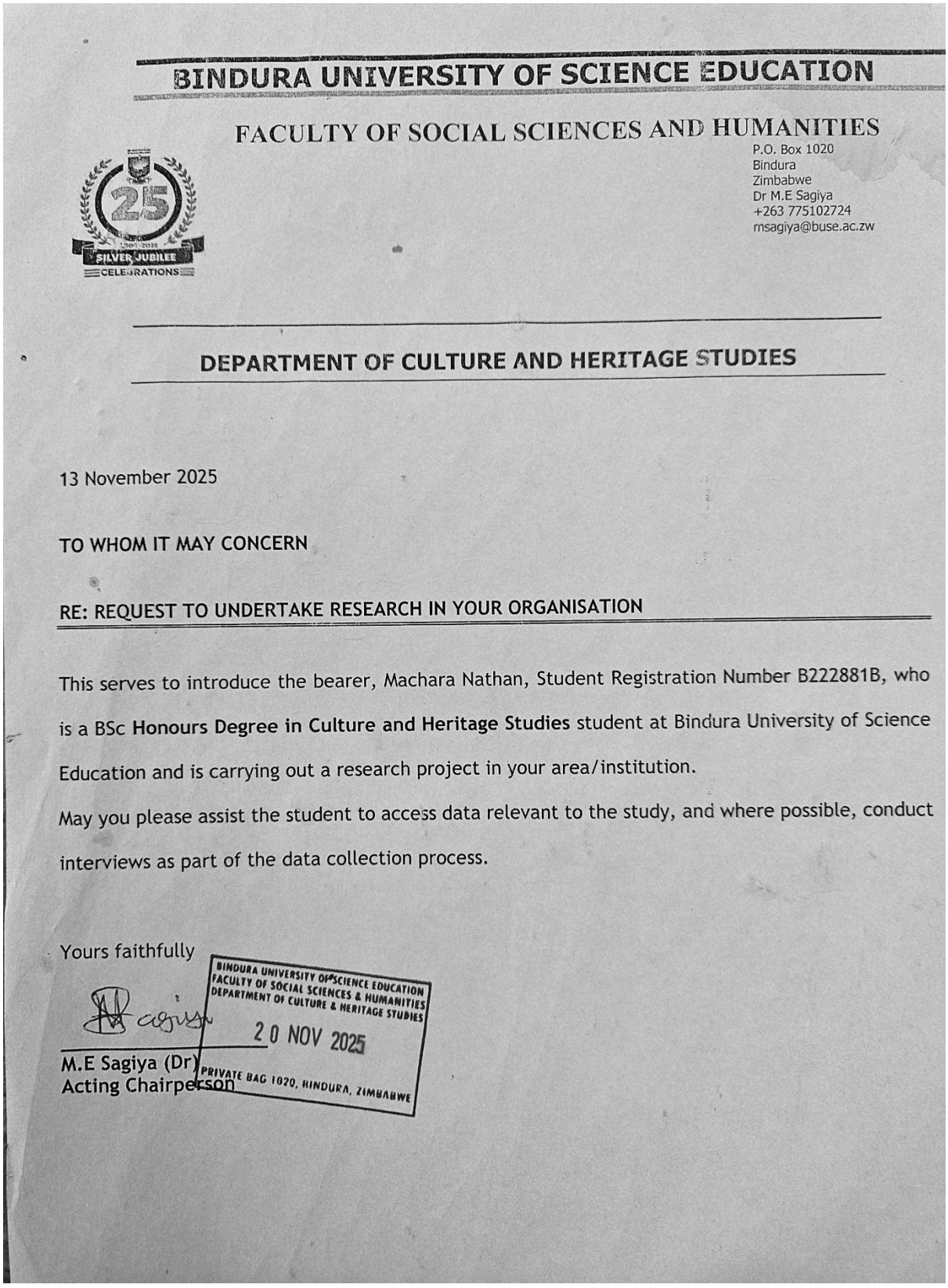
APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does the Rhodes Nyanga Historical Exhibition represent and interpret Zimbabwe's colonial heritage?
2. In what ways does the exhibition balance colonial narratives with indigenous histories and resistance stories?
3. How does the Rhodes Nyanga Historical Exhibition influence visitors' perceptions of Zimbabwean national identity?
4. What is the potential of the exhibition to promote sustainable cultural tourism in Zimbabwe?

Appendix 2: Research letter from the department



BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

P.O. Box 1020
Bindura
Zimbabwe
Dr M.E Sagiya
+263 775102724
msagiya@buse.ac.zw

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE AND HERITAGE STUDIES

13 November 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: REQUEST TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH IN YOUR ORGANISATION

This serves to introduce the bearer, Machara Nathan, Student Registration Number B222881B, who is a BSc **Honours Degree in Culture and Heritage Studies** student at Bindura University of Science Education and is carrying out a research project in your area/institution.

May you please assist the student to access data relevant to the study, and where possible, conduct interviews as part of the data collection process.

Yours faithfully

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE & HERITAGE STUDIES
20 NOV 2025
PRIVATE BAG 1020, BINDURA, ZIMBABWE

M.E Sagiya (Dr)
Acting Chairperson

Appendix 3: Research letter from the National Trust of Zimbabwe

NATIONAL TRUST OF ZIMBABWE

Heritage is precious: treasure it

National Trust of Zimbabwe

6 Warwick Road, Greystone Park, Harare, Zimbabwe

+263 775960221 ntzimbabwe@gmail.com www.ntoz.org

INTERNATIONAL NATIONAL TRUSTS ORGANISATION

www.facebook.com/pages/National-Trust-of-Zimbabwe www.linkedin.com/company/74070716/

13 February 2026

Dear Mr Nathan Machara

RE:PERMISSION TO UNDERTAKE A RESEARCH AT THE RHODES NYANGA HISTORICAL EXHIBITION.

We are pleased to accept Mr Nathan Machara to undertake a research at Rhodes Nyanga Museum on ***REINTERPRETATION OF COLONIAL HERITAGE :THE RHODES NYANGA HISTORICAL EXHIBITION AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN ZIMBABWE.***

The Museum will provide access to relevant archival material and exhibition records ,subject to Museum policy and supervision by the Curator.

Please confirm acceptance of these terms. We look forward to hosting you.

Yours faithfully,

Marshall Nyanhanda [Museum Curator],

Rhodes Nyanga Historical Exhibition.