

Conflicting Values and the Preservation of Heritage Sites: Case Studies from Masvingo, Zimbabwe.

Tendai Zihove

Makerere University, Uganda

Email: tendaizihove@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines how conflicting values surrounding heritage sites compromise heritage preservation efforts. Focusing on the Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre, Musimbira National Monument, Old Fort Victoria, and the Providential Pass in Masvingo, Zimbabwe, this paper explores how different actors are using the sites, the impact of the use on their preservation and the various ways in which actors can collaborate to preserve the sites. To gain a deeper understanding of the conflicting values associated with heritage sites, site visits, archival research, and semi-structured interviews were employed. The sites were visited in three different years. Archival research involved the use of journal articles and textbooks. A total of thirteen research participants were selected for the study using a purposive sampling method. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff from the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ), small-scale miners, and farmers with maize fields at Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre, as well as local communities surrounding Musimbira National Monument. The results of the research indicate that a heritage site can be utilised differently by many people, and this compromises the conservation of the site. The Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre, Musimbira National Monument, Old Fort Victoria, and the Providential Pass were affected in many ways due to the various activities happening around them. The study also found that little effort is being made to protect the sites from damage. The paper argues that the preservation of heritage sites is of importance, depending on how the sites are valued. The research is essential in that it reflects the various purposes a heritage site serves and the impact on its preservation.

Keywords: heritage sites; conflicting values; community participation; preservation; vandalism

Introduction

The paper explores how the conflicting values attached to Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre, Musimbira National Monument, The Providential Pass, and the Old Fort Victoria by various players contribute to the preservation of these sites. It notes that there is often a belief that heritage sites hold the same meaning for all people. Nevertheless, the paper posits that the sites can be viewed in different ways by various people. A single heritage site can have economic, historic, political, social, scientific, aesthetic, and educational values, and these multiple values bring confusion in the preservation of the site. The study investigates the ways the heritage sites in question are used and valued by different players. The several ways in which they are used determine how the sites are preserved. Given the multiple values and uses the sites have, the research explores how the usages

of the site compromise their preservation. The study also highlights the importance of raising awareness about the significance of the sites.

The National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) is a government department responsible for preserving the country's cultural heritage sites. The NMMZ categorises its heritage in different forms, namely archaeological sites, historic buildings, liberation heritage, and historic sites. Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre is categorised under liberation heritage. The Providential Pass and the Old Fort Victoria are classified as colonial heritage or historic sites. Musimbira National Monument is an archaeological site or a dry-stone-walled structure. The National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe categorises its monuments as follows: there are Class One (1) monuments, which are the most visited; Class Two (2) ones, which receive fewer tourists when compared to Class One and Class Three (3) memorial sites are the least visited. Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre and Musimbira National Monument are classified as Class Two (2) monuments. The Providential Pass and the Old Fort Victoria are Class Three (3) monuments.

Sites that are classified as class two or three are more vulnerable to vandalism. This is because the sites receive less attention in terms of their preservation because they do not attract many tourists. Such is the case with sites like the Old Fort Victoria, Providential Pass, and Musimbira National Monument. These sites, therefore, are considered less valuable and are prone to vandalism. The way the heritage sites are categorised also determines the way they are preserved. Old Fort Victoria and the Providential Pass, for example, are colonial heritage sites, and because of their association with colonialism, they receive less attention in terms of their preservation. The socio-economic situation in the country also triggers the vandalism of the sites, as various players see economic potential in the sites. The sites are often exploited for economic reasons through the search for resources such as firewood, minerals, and grass for thatching houses, and through utilising open spaces for farming purposes.

Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre, Musimbira National Monument, Old Fort Victoria, and the Providential Pass were 'vandalised' because of the different values that people attach to them. The Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre has been encroached upon by local communities who farm within the landscape. To the neighbouring communities of the Provincial Heroes Acre, the space within the monument is a farming area. At Musimbira Monument, the dry-stone structures were removed by some members of the local community, who used the stone blocks to build their houses. At Old Fort Victoria, some members of the Johanne Marange eChishanu church once turned a section of the monument into a place of worship, which they refer to as 'sowe' or 'masowe'. The perimeter fence of the site was also stolen. The Providential Pass was vandalised by people seeking gold at the site and also by those constructing the Masvingo-Beitbridge highway. These activities at these sites reflect the multiple values that the sites have.

There has been little research on the effects of heritage sites having multiple values. This study explores this gap by first examining how various players use the sites in different ways. It then explores how the sites' preservation is in a deplorable state as a result of many people using them in different ways. Having realised the challenges the sites face, the paper highlights the importance of actors working together for the betterment of heritage sites.

Literature Review

Colonial Heritage Controversy

Soon after acquiring majority rule, many Southern African countries, including South Africa, Zambia, Namibia, and Zimbabwe, began advocating for the removal of colonial monuments (Magadzike, 2024). This was seen as a way of erasing the painful experiences that people went through during the colonial era. In South Africa, there was a call to remove Mahatma Gandhi's statue because of his association with the segregation of Black people (Qwatekana et al., 2021). A "Rhodes Must Fall" movement also called for the removal of Cecil John Rhodes' statue at the University of Cape Town (Qwatekana et al., 2021). The call for the removal of Cecil Rhodes' and Mahatma Gandhi's statues is a reflection of controversies surrounding colonial heritage. The once colonised society does not find colonial heritage as valuable. In Zimbabwe, the focus was on removing colonial statues and renaming towns and cities. For instance, the Cecil John Rhodes statue was removed from the City of Bulawayo and dumped in the backyard of the Natural History Museum (Magadzike, 2024). Names of towns and cities were changed, for example, Fort Victoria to Masvingo, Salisbury to Harare, Gwelo to Gweru, and Marandellas to Marondera. At a later stage in 2023, the focus shifted to the renaming of streets in most cities across the country. Destroying colonial monuments, therefore, was a deliberate move. It is something that was triggered by the memories of colonialism. There is a possibility that almost everyone in the country agreed with their removal. This is a situation that differs today, where monuments are given various meanings.

While other colonial monuments were destroyed, some were left intact. The ones that were left include forts and graves, such as Rhodes' grave and the Allan Wilson Memorial at Matobo World Heritage site. The monuments continue to be protected under the National Museums and Monuments (NMMZ) Act, Chapter 25:11, and their removal is considered an offence. Colonial heritage is not readily accepted in society, as alluded to by Nyambiya and Mutyandaedza (2019). Therefore, some people feel that it has to be demolished to erase the memory of colonisation. Rhodes' grave generates revenue; therefore, it is well-maintained and well-protected. The issue is not about valuing the grave, but rather what it brings to the country. Colonial heritage is received with mixed feelings in Zimbabwe. Some believe that the heritage needs to be preserved like other

heritage sites in the country, while others argue that the heritage is endowed with painful memories and that heritage practitioners should remove it (Nyambiya & Mutyandaedza, 2019). Nevertheless, colonisation of the country is part and parcel of the country's history, and the heritage left during the colonial period needs to be preserved. Preserving colonial heritage may not necessarily mean praising the colonisers, but it will serve as evidence of the country's colonisation.

Vandalism Drivers

Vandalism of monuments is not peculiar to Zimbabwe. Vandalism of heritage sites comes in various forms, namely graffiti, defacement, deliberate removal of monuments and objects, and negligence by authorities (Raič & Jelinčič, 2025; Dominic, 2024). In Western countries, the vandalism of monuments is often caused by tourist activities, but in cases where graffiti or defacement is observed, the act is attributed to a psychological disorder on the part of the offender (Dominic, 2024). Qwatekana et al. (2021) note that vandalism of heritage sites in South Africa is intentional. Cases of vandalism on monuments occur mainly in towns (Qwatekana et al., 2021). In Tanzania, the rock art sites in the Iringa region were vandalised by people who set fire close to the paintings (Itambu & Bushozi, 2021).

Vandalism of monuments is rampant in Zimbabwe, but it is mostly carried out by local communities surrounding the heritage sites. This normally happens when the community feels that it has been excluded from the management of the heritage site. Such cases happened at Domboshava and at KwaVaMuzenda National Monuments. At Domboshava, the rock paintings were sprayed with paint (Mukuya et al., 2025). At KwaVaMuzenda National Monument, the exhibition was vandalised and the gate to the monument was removed by the local communities around Mucheke suburb in the City of Masvingo. The Mucheke community was angered by the fact that the monument was erected without their engagement or consultation. They were also not pleased with the fact that the road, which they usually use, had been closed.

Vandalism of monuments in Zimbabwe is not taken seriously by the NMMZ, but the extent to which sites such as Great Zimbabwe are vandalised remains to be evaluated. Sites like Domboshava Rock Art at KwaVaMuzenda National Monument, as earlier mentioned, were vandalised by local communities, but NMMZ took no action to penalise the wrongdoers. As a way of avoiding confrontations, NMMZ engaged the local communities in the management of the sites. This has been regarded as the most effective way to address vandalism of monuments. While dialogue with local communities has proven to be an ideal solution in heritage management, there are certain situations where communities may not be cooperative. For instance, communities may view heritage in diverse ways and may not advocate for its preservation. In such cases where

controversies arise over the preservation of heritage, heritage practitioners can find innovative ways of engagement and awareness raising.

Vandalism may not always be executed deliberately, but can be triggered by socio-economic circumstances. Dominic (2024) notes that the economic situation in a country plays a role in having sites being vandalised. Giving an example of Khami, Makuvaza and Makuvaza (2013) highlight that the site is affected by people who fetch firewood and poach wildlife within the monument. People fetch firewood at Khami because there are electrical power shortages in the country. They also poach wildlife because they will be looking for meat to eat or sell. Similarly, at the heritage monuments in Kerala, India, vandalism occurs due to poverty and unemployment (Dominic, 2024). In such socio-economic circumstances, heritage sites are often at risk of destruction. It is likely that in such situations, no value is given to the heritage; rather, people view it as an unutilised space.

Community Participation

Many communities might not have links with the heritage site (Thodhlana et al., 2023), hence they pay less attention to the conservation of the sites. Communities that lack direct connections to heritage often fail to appreciate its original value. That is the reason why some of them end up vandalising heritage. The issue of community participation in heritage management is emphasised in existing literature, such as Mensah (2021) and Thodhlana et al. (2023). Mensah (2021) emphasises that communities need to be incorporated in the management of heritage sites. The challenge that is realised with the involvement of the local community is that they feel entitled to the heritage sites and think that they can override the heritage laws. There are situations where communities may not have an interest in managing the site, but they will still have an interest in using the site in ways they consider suitable. This can be realised at the Providential Pass, Musimbira, Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre, and the Old Fort Victoria, where communities use these sites for various reasons.

Lack of interest in heritage management in Zimbabwe has been attributed to the influence of colonial history (Sinamai, 2021), where people were alienated from their heritage through the Land Apportionment Act of 1930. Through the Land Apportionment Act, many people were displaced from their heritage, and their communities were replaced by new individuals with no connection to the heritage (Thondlana et al., 2023). Makuvaza and Makuvaza (2013) argue that displaced people developed a negative attitude towards their heritage as they became separated from it. Nevertheless, people need to develop a positive attitude towards their heritage despite the way they were divorced from it during the colonial period. Lessons can be learnt from what Zimbabwean nationalists did with the Great Zimbabwe Monuments. With Great Zimbabwe, nationalists had to counter the

colonialists' narratives about the site by replacing them with their own, thereby making the site a symbol of the nation (Thondlana et al., 2021). The site is well-preserved due to its value in the country.

Heritage sites evolve in meaning over time. They can end up being used for purposes other than the initial ones. Sinamai (2021) highlights that site like Great Zimbabwe underwent a change in meaning, initially used for strictly private ritual purposes, but later became publicly accessible to common people. Changes in values for heritage sites can impact their conservation, as the sites often end up being exploited. This paper further explores this concept by examining how changes in heritage values impact sites. It discusses how the Providential Pass, Old Fort Victoria, Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre, and the Musimbira National Monument have been influenced by many people who have altered their meanings, making them vulnerable to exploitation.

Methods

The research design for this study is a case study where the researcher investigated the conflicting values found at heritage sites and their impact on heritage. A purposive sampling method was employed where key actors such as NMMZ staff, neighbouring communities, small-scale miners, neighbouring communities of Musimbira Monument, and farmers at the Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre were chosen. Narrative analysis was used in analysing data. The researcher chose key stories, which were then categorised into themes. Relevant information related to the research questions was chosen. Research participants were briefed about the purpose of the research. Informed consent was sought from the participants before the commencement of the research. The privacy of the participants was observed in the research.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with NMMZ staff, including curators, site custodians, and heritage education officers. The staff who were interviewed are from the Southern Region of NMMZ. They were interviewed because they are responsible for the management and conservation of the heritage sites. Interviews were also held with the neighbouring communities of Musimbira National Monument. Four members from the community were interviewed. The researcher chose two members who stay close to the site and two elderly members from the community who have been living in the area for a long period. These neighbouring communities are the people who interact with the monument almost daily; hence, they have a wealth of information about what takes place at the site. Three small-scale miners from Masvingo were also interviewed to understand how they value heritage sites, especially in cases where gold or other minerals have been discovered. The small-scale miners are from Zoma, Bondolfi, and Manyama. Their interviews were held separately as they stay far away from each other. Three farmers

with maize fields at the Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre were interviewed to understand the values they attach to the site.

Site visits to all monuments were made in order to understand how the sites are being preserved and conserved over the years. Archival research was also utilised to gain more knowledge about the history of the heritage sites. The archival research involved consulting textbooks and journal articles.

Results

The results of this research are categorised into four sections, with each segment having its own outcomes. The final part of the results provides an overall overview of the monuments by the NMMZ.

Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre

The Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre is a place where liberation heroes from Masvingo Province are interred (See Figure 1). The people included are those who were liberation fighters, as well as males and females (*vanamujibha nanachimwido*) who participated in the liberation struggle as collaborators serving at times as logistical corps. The Provincial Heroes Acre was declared a national monument in 2017 and is protected by the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe. It is situated on a hillside and is approximately four (4) km away from the city of Masvingo. The Provincial Heroes Acre covers an area of nine (9) hectares.



Figure 1: Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre. Picture by Tendai Zihove (2023)

Due to its significance in the history of Zimbabwe's liberation, the Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre is viewed as a revered shrine by the liberation war fighters, *zvimbwidos*, *mujibhas*, the Government of Zimbabwe, the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe, and other stakeholders. The fact that it is significant to the nation does not mean it holds the same significance for all people in the country. People from nearby suburbs have carved out farming plots within the national monument, as shown in Figure 2 below. The farmers claim that the land belongs to them. They argue that they have been using the space for a long time, and the land where they cultivate their crops is now theirs. The challenge faced at the site is that it lacks a perimeter fence. Therefore, people access it anyhow, and this exposes the monument to illegal activities being executed around it.

In some instances, people come to the site for picnics. Those who visit the site for picnic purposes might probably think that the place is a resort area where they can do such things. However, in Shona culture, grave sites are revered places where respect is required. As such, the Provincial Heroes Acre is probably not the ideal place for picnics. Certain sections of the shrine are littered with used condoms, and this might be considered the desecration of the place.

Some people use the site for dumping purposes. Rubbish is thrown at the entrance of the Provincial Heroes Acre (See Figure 2 below). This indicates that some people do not consider the site to be of any significance. Visitors to the site might not realise it as a national monument, but rather as a neglected burial area.



Figure 2: The section showing maize fields and litter at the entrance of the shrine. Picture by Tendai Zihove (2023)

Some members of the Ropafadzo church/ *mapostori* set up a shrine within the monument in January 2025 and were asked to vacate the site by NMMZ in March 2025. The shrine is not the first one that was established at the site. There was another one that was situated on the hill slope in 2016, closer to where the graves are located. This suggests that the Provincial Heroes Acre has something that draws the *mapostori* to it. The research findings revealed that members of the *mapostori* are drawn to the Heroes' Acre because they seek to connect with the spirits of the people buried there. It is believed that the spirits of the dead assist them in their prophetic works.

When the NMMZ staff were asked about what they think about the illegal activities happening at the sacred shrine, they argued that arrangements are being made to place a precast wall or boundary partition at the site. They believe this will be the most effective way to prevent people from encroaching on the monument. The NMMZ staff also noted that the Provincial Heroes Acre is looked after by a site custodian and a security guard, and these assist in preventing some of the illegal activities happening at the shrine.

The Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre is a site where NMMZ is expected to intervene, but so far, no action has been taken. With the illegal activities occurring at the Provincial Heroes Acre, NMMZ is expected to evict all farmers and other individuals who engage in such activities there. It is also expected that the government sponsors the boundary wall to protect the site from any encroachment. Nonetheless, little effort is being made to protect the site. It is also a reflection that the people who are buried there are not considered to have played a significant role in the liberation struggle, as compared to those at the National Heroes Acre. This is probably due to the creation of a hierarchy of heroes. The heroes are currently categorised into two levels: national and provincial, with the higher level being national hero. The national hero status entitles one to be buried at the National Heroes Acre. This is where the issue of assigning values to heritage is evident. If it were the National Heroes' Acre, there would be no illegal activities happening there. Since it is a Provincial Heroes Acre, the values associated with it may not align with those of the National Heroes Acre. As such, its preservation is not prioritised, and unauthorised activities within the monument largely continue unabated.

The values attached to the site are historic, economic, and social values. These values are realised in the way the site is used as a burial place of heroes and heroines; as a farming land; as a place for picnics and for church gatherings. Religious groups, such as the *mapostori*, reinterpret the site's spiritual significance, which illustrates the multiplicity of contested meanings and values. Farmers see an economic potential in the shrine by utilising the space that NMMZ is not currently using. The various activities at the site reveal the competing interests based on collective memory, political, and economic interests.

Musimbira

Musimbira is a small dry-stone structure located on the northern edge of Bikita District in Zimbabwe. The site is situated along the Masvingo-Nyika main road and is close to Bikita Minerals, a company that mines lithium in the area. Musimbira was designated a national monument in 1972. The dry-stone walls occupy about 1800 square metres. There are five main enclosures at the site, but these walls have since collapsed. A few walls on the site are still standing, and the outer perimeter wall is in rubble, as highlighted in Figures 3 and 4 below.



Figure 3: Standing walls at the site. Picture by Tendai Zihove (2021)



Figure 4: Outer perimeter wall at Musimbira. Picture by Tendai Zihove (2021)

The NMMZ staff members noted that the stone structures were looted from their original positions by some members of the local community, who used the stones to build their own houses. It is believed that those who loot the stones feel that the structures are just heaps of stones that have been abandoned in the bush. Some members of the local community argue that people who take the stones are recent arrivals in the village who are unaware of the site's significance. They noted that the stones were taken during the night. Local community members said that they could have prevented people from taking the stones if they had been taken during the day. Other community members have also pointed out that the site is prone to vandalism due to a lack of proper care of the monument by responsible authorities.

NMMZ, on the other hand, is neglecting the site, as evidenced by the extensive vegetation cover at the site (See Figure 3). The structures at the site are overgrown with vegetation. The challenge of having lots of vegetation around stone walls is that it affects the walls in several ways. The roots of trees can disturb the foundation of walls, potentially causing them to collapse. Walls can split in cases where trees grow between the stone blocks. In other instances, trees can displace upper blocks, thereby disturbing the walls. These structural challenges have been affecting Musimbira National Monument for an extended period, to the point where many stone structures at the site are collapsing. Despite all these challenges, the NMMZ has made little effort to restore the stone structures at the site. NMMZ highlighted that they do not have funds to conserve the site, hence they focus more on those that bring revenue. This explains why other dry stone wall structures in the country that generate revenue, such as Great Zimbabwe, Khami, and Naletale, receive a fair share of conservation measures. So, this is a matter of priorities in terms of which stone structures should be preserved. With the state of Musimbira, it is expected that people think the location has little or no significance to society; hence, why they take stones from the place.

Musimbira is seen as a provider of stone blocks that can be used to build houses by neighbouring communities to the site. This is the value that some members of the local community attribute to the site. Other members of the local community who do not act after realising that the stones have been stolen could be viewing the site as of no importance. If it were that important to them, they could have taken measures to protect the site from further damage. On another note, reporting about the theft of stone blocks might make them suspects, so they prefer to keep quiet. The NMMZ still regards the site as a national monument, but little effort is being made to preserve it. Some of the dry-stone wall monuments, as discussed previously, are being conserved, while Musimbira receives less care, indicating that Musimbira is not considered equally important. The way the monuments are classified could be the reason why Musimbira receives less attention.

The blame for the status of the site is on both sides, the local community and NMMZ. NMMZ deliberately neglected the site by not restoring the walls and clearing vegetation. The neighbouring communities further caused a lot of damage to the site by removing the stones from the site. While the communities have vandalised the monument, it is important to consider the reasons that drove them to loot the stones. The cost of living in the country could have driven them to use the readily available resources at Musimbira. There is also a possibility that they chose stones over bricks because of their long-term durability and strength. As the site was also not receiving proper care, the community could have assumed that the place was an abandoned area where they could get free resources to build their houses. This is the dilemma that neglected heritage sites face. Musimbira has lost its architectural, cultural, and historic values due to vandalism by omission (by NMMZ) and intentional vandalism (by neighbouring communities).

Old Fort Victoria

Old Fort Victoria is the first town of Masvingo (Sayce, 1978). The town was established in the 1890s. The area was deserted due to water shortages, and the Pioneer Column relocated to the current town, where the City of Masvingo is now situated (Sayce, 1978). The features found at the site include remains of house foundations. There is also a plaque which shows that the place is the first town to be settled in the country (See Figure 5 below).



Figure 5: *The Old Fort Victoria. Picture by Tendai Zihove (2023)*

A member of the Johanne Marange eChishanu Apostolic Church/ *mapostori* once erected a shrine at the site. The results of the study reveal that when NMMZ visited the site for inspection in September 2017, they were told to leave the area as it was a sacred place. One of the leaders of the church told the NMMZ staff, "*Matsika sowe redu! Munoziva henyu kuti kutsika sowe remunhu kunorevei?*" (You have stepped on our shrine. Do you know what it means to step on someone's shrine? You are going to face the consequences). These utterances indicate that the shrine had been established for quite some time. As a result, they felt entitled to the place. NMMZ also felt that their heritage site had been invaded. The members of the apostolic church viewed the site as a "sowe" (holy place/shrine), while NMMZ saw it as a monument. These mixed values about the site brought tensions between the two parties. Quarrels over the control of the place emerged as each party felt confident that Old Fort Victoria belonged to them. Nevertheless, the apostolic sect left the area in November 2017 after NMMZ staff told them about the NMMZ Act that forbids people from using the site without the authorisation of the Executive Director. It is most likely that the *mapostori* (as they are affectionately known) left the place, probably due to fear of being arrested for violating the NMMZ Act.

The members of the Johanne Marange eChishanu did little damage to the site. One of the reasons their presence at the site should be applauded is that they assisted NMMZ in maintaining the site, as they consistently cleared vegetation. As the place had become their shrine, or "sowe," it was sacred and had to be maintained at all costs. Although they maintained the site, they were unfamiliar with some of the features surrounding it, which include remains of house foundations and ancient mounds. These features, according to some NMMZ staff, were damaged when the *mapostori* cleared vegetation at the site.

The perimeter fence at the site was stolen in 2014, which is a clear indication of vandalism. Some of the houses near the monument are built within the monument's grounds. The encroachment of people into the monument could have been triggered by the fact that the area looks deserted. Moreso, it is most likely that the political leadership in search of support and votes has ignored the legal. The NMMZ stated that it will liaise with the Masvingo City Council to ensure that the buffer zone of the monument is not invaded by people occupying the land around the site.

At Old Fort Victoria, the *mapostori* were able to have their 'sowe' because NMMZ visits the place once a year. The *mapostori* could have concluded that the area was abandoned, hence they felt that they could occupy the place and have their shrine there. Once an area is not visited regularly, it is prone to being used in various ways. The Old Fort Victoria is likely to be vandalised as the area around it is now being developed to become a residential suburb. Residential stands are being allocated around the Clipsham area where the Old Fort Victoria is situated. Due to these developments, there is a chance

that there will be no evidence to show that the area was the earliest town in Zimbabwe. These are some of the ways heritage is lost.

The case of Old Fort Victoria is evidence of how heritage sites' narratives change. The area is known to be of spiritual significance. The Pioneer Column is believed to have targeted such spiritual places. This is where they set up their first town, and it became a historic place, thus assuming a historic value. The NMMZ seems to prioritise the historic value over the spiritual one since it attaches historical meanings to the site more than the spiritual aspects. The site is considered a historical site based on the history of the colonisation of the country. By virtue of this, the members of the Johanne Marange eChishanu could have been right in finding spiritual healing at the site. As such, the sites have two major values that need to be respected. Nevertheless, the spiritual value is subdued, and any person who attaches that value to the site is considered an 'intruder'. These types of contested values are some of the aspects that bring confusion to the preservation of heritage sites.

Providential Pass

The Providential Pass lies 10 km South of the city of Masvingo on the Masvingo-Beitbridge road, and is one of the first colonial monuments established in the country. The Pioneer Column found the Providential Pass on their route northwards. On their way northwards, they passed through the southern areas such as the Runde River, where there was a lot of heat (Sayce, 1978). The Pioneer Column then reached a cool plateau (Sayce, 1978). The plateau was named Providential Pass because they had discovered the right path, which led them to a cooler environment (Sayce, 1978). The discovery of the pass was a fortunate one, hence the name Providential. The Providential Pass was built of concrete (See Figure 6) and had eight pillars that were supported by a chain.



Figure 6: *The Providential Pass. Picture by Tendai Zihove (2023)*



Figure 7: *Providential Pass after being destroyed. Picture by Tendai Zihove (2024)*

The area is now a monument, but it is viewed from different angles by people in society. The NMMZ views the site as having historical value, and the organisation aims to preserve it. The society, especially small-scale miners (*makorokoza*), views it as a place where Whites hid treasures and feels that the monument should be excavated in search of minerals that could have been hidden underneath. The monument has since been dug, and it is now damaged (See Figure 7 above). For the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructural Development, the site is a lay-by. Further damage to the monument occurred during the construction of the Harare-Beitbridge highway. The lay-by was extended to where the monument lies, as shown in Figure 7 above. The pillars at the site were removed from their original positions. One of the pillars has been written in a way that anyone passing by would think it is someone's grave. The pillar is inscribed with the name 'Mambo Zago 1969-1982'. This act distorts the history associated with the site. The people who wrote the pillar are not known, but it was likely written by those who destroyed the site. The NMMZ highlighted that an Archaeological Impact Assessment was done before the road was constructed, and the Providential Pass was considered as one of the monuments that needed to be preserved. The NMMZ also made efforts to stop the site from being vandalised during the construction of the Harare-Beitbridge highway. Nevertheless, this did not materialise.

Small-scale miners have different sentiments for the site. They do not see the value of the monument, particularly the structures that are there. The value that they attach to the site is what they assume is hidden underneath the structures. Some of the interviewed

small-scale miners said that “*Zvinhu izvi zvakasiwa nevarungu saka hazvichina nebasarese*” (These things were left by Whites, so they are now useless). As such, they feel they can vandalise the property since it is no longer serving the purpose for which it was built. Some small-scale miners indicated that mining is more important than heritage sites. They mentioned that mining boosts the country’s economy more than tourism, hence it should be prioritised in the economic sector. Heritage sites, therefore, are seen as of less significance amongst the small-scale miners.

The value of the road being constructed was seen as more important than a colonial structure. To the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructural Development, the structure was just a mere lay-by, while the NMMZ valued it as a monument. The small-scale miners who vandalised the monument viewed it as a ‘gold mine’, hence it had to be dug. These multiple values attached to the Providential Pass compromised its conservation.

National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe’s position on the conservation of the monuments in question

Some employees from the NMMZ highlighted that they lack adequate staff, making it difficult for them to conduct regular monument inspections at other sites within the Southern Region of the NMMZ. They also said that a shortage of labour does not allow them to regularly conserve the sites that are far away from their offices.

Discussion

The study has shown that the sites in question are being vandalised without any action being taken by NMMZ to rescue them from further damage. The main challenge is that they are categorised as of lesser significance, especially Providential Pass, Old Fort Victoria, and Musimbira. As such, their preservation is not taken seriously. Conservation of sites is a preserve of Class One (1) monuments such as Matopos, Great Zimbabwe, and National Heroes Acre in Harare. The NMMZ is also doing less in terms of raising awareness about the importance of heritage sites. Sites classified as Class Three (3) receive less attention in terms of conservation and advertisement. If the sites are advertised sufficiently, they will attract tourists and be able to sustain themselves. A site like Old Fort Victoria is likely to attract many tourists to the country due to its significance as the country’s first permanent Western-style urban settlement. Nevertheless, because there is less effort to sell the site to the people, it remains less known.

Across all sites, there are similarities in the way communities value heritage (See Table 1 below). The common values found among the communities are the economic and spiritual values. For the NMMZ, the values that the Providential Pass, Old Fort Victoria, Musimbira, and Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre have are historic and scientific. One

thing that can be noted is that actors use the sites differently. Communities use the sites to improve their livelihoods by farming, digging for gold and removing stones for building purposes. The NMMZ, as the custodian of the sites, might consider the values attached to the sites by other players as a threat to heritage. While this is true, the vandalism of the sites could not have happened if the NMMZ were strict about the conservation of these heritage spots. The NMMZ is expected to intervene when heritage sites are being encroached upon, but nothing has happened. In a way, the NMMZ is also vandalising the heritage sites by neglecting them. Countries such as Italy, Australia and Germany have strict laws for vandalism of heritage sites and objects (Raić & Jelinčić, 2025). One can be jailed or asked to pay a fine for vandalising monuments. If the NMMZ is to employ similar laws used by Italy, Australia and Germany, the heritage sites will survive for a long period. Once the heritage is lost, it is lost forever and cannot be replaced. As such, if preservation of heritage sites is not prioritised, the heritage is likely to continue facing serious conservation challenges.

The trend of vandalising colonial heritage is becoming prevalent in Zimbabwe, particularly in Masvingo Province. The grave of Willie (Felix) Posselt, an antiquarian who looted cultural artefacts at Great Zimbabwe, was also vandalised. The grave is in Gutu, within the Zoma Communal Land area. Just like at the Providential Pass, small-scale miners vandalised the grave in search of treasure. This suggests that all sites associated with colonialism are believed to have hidden treasure around them. This is also a meaning attached to colonial heritage nowadays, especially among small-scale miners. Vandalism of colonialists' graves is also a reflection that the graves are of no use to Blacks especially considering that the same Whites desecrated their ancestors' graves at places such as Mwalindidzimu and Great Zimbabwe.

Below is a thematic table summarising how multiple values pose a threat to heritage sites:

Site	Community Value	NMMZ value and views	Outcome/ Threat
Musimbira	Architectural value (for use in building homes).	Scientific and cultural values Lack of funding	Loss of the site; Bad image of the local community
Masvingo Provincial Heroes Acre	Economic value (proceeds from the fields); Social Value (picnic); Historic value	Historic value (liberation heritage). Lack of funding	Negative perceptions of the site.

	(liberation heritage); Spiritual value (place of worship).		
Old Fort Victoria	Spiritual value (place of worship)	Historic value (Zimbabwe's first town) Lack of funding	Loss of the site's identity
Providential Pass	Economic value (search for minerals); Social value (lay-by)	Historic value (colonial heritage) Lack of funding	Irreversible damage; defacement

Table 1: Values and threats to heritage sites

Recommendations

The NMMZ needs to increase its awareness campaigns for the heritage sites in the country. This will help raise awareness about the significance of the sites. There is also a need to give communities the responsibility to look after the sites and ensure that they are not vandalised. Regular monument inspections of all sites should be conducted. When inspections are done regularly, the sites are likely to be conserved. Considering the illegal activities being conducted at monuments, the NMMZ needs to adopt a site programme to alleviate the burden that may be placed on conserving heritage sites within their jurisdiction. The adopt-a-site programme can be extended to communities and the *mapostori*. Currently, this programme applies to three sites in Masvingo: Kubiku, Majiri, and Chibvumani. The nearby schools that have adopted the monuments are Kubiku Primary School for the Kubiku National Monument, Mamutse Primary School for the Chibvumani National Monument, and Chandipwisa Primary School for the Majiri National Monument. Introducing an adopt-a-site programme might help in reducing the illegal activities happening around monuments. Further to this, there is a need to train communities and *mapostori* on how to preserve heritage sites, for instance, the restoration of walls and vegetation clearance at sites, without damaging the features. This training can also be introduced as a module in Heritage Studies at primary and secondary levels so that the younger generation becomes aware of the importance of preserving heritage.

With the rate at which heritage sites are being vandalised, there is a need for NMMZ to tighten heritage laws so that anyone who violates them faces the full force of the law. NMMZ also need to take the preservation of heritage sites seriously. There is a need for

NMMZ to set aside funds for the preservation of heritage sites, otherwise, the country will end up having fewer of these.

Conclusion

The study explored the different values attached to heritage sites, and how they impact on heritage preservation. The findings reveal that the major issues affecting heritage sites are their negligence and lack of awareness raising by the custodian, NMMZ. The negligence of the sites gives room to different actors exploiting them. The study has shown how the sites were vandalised in various ways, including theft of perimeter fence and stones. The effects associated with vandalised sites are that they end up having low visitorship, and tourists having negative perceptions about them. Given the negatives associated with sites being exploited, there is a need to improve their preservation and to increase public awareness campaigns about the sites.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank all the participants in this research for their valuable support.

References

- Dominic, A. C. (2024). Heritage Vandalism: Psychological and Sociological Reasons. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 9(11), 430-434.
- Dominic, A. C. (2024). Vandalism on Built Heritage in Kerala: A Threat to Cultural Identity. *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology*, 11(2), 917-941.
- Itambu, M. K., & Bushozi, P. M. (2021). Rock Art Conservation and Tourism in Iringa Region, Tanzania. *Tanzania Journal of Sociology*, 7(2), 68-92.
- Magadzike, B. (2024). On Colonial Monuments in the Post-colony: An Outline of the Problems of Populist Approaches in Managing Heritage in Southern Africa. *Journal of Heritage Management*, 9 (1), 87-102.
- Makuvaza, S., & Makuvaza, V. (2013). The challenges of managing an archaeological heritage site in a declining economy: The case of Khami World Heritage Site in

- Zimbabwe. *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites*, 15(3-4), 281-297.
- Mensah, J. (2022). Community Perception of heritage values regarding a global monument in Ghana: implications for sustainable heritage management. *Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Sciences*, 4(4), 357-375.
- Mukuya, T., Nyambiya, H., & Mutyandaedza, B. (2025). Local Communities and Protected Areas: The Case of Great Zimbabwe and Khami Ruins World Heritage Properties. In L. Shabalala (Ed.), *Community Development Insights on Cultural Heritage Tourism* (pp. 59-96). IGI Global Scientific Publishing.
- Nyambiya, H., & Mutyandaedza, B. (2019). Challenges of Managing Colonial Heritage in a Post-colonial Era: A Case Study of Colonial Heritage in Harare, Zimbabwe. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 21(4), 1-15.
- Qwatekana, Z., Ndlovu, T. P., Zondi, N. E., & Luthuli, S. (2021). Vandalism of Monuments and Neglect: A Concern for Heritage Tourism. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, 30(1), 187-206.
- Raić, M., & Jelinčić, D. A. (2025). Types and Effectiveness of Public Policy Measures Combatting Graffiti Vandalism at Heritage Sites. *Heritage*, 8(1), 18. <https://doi.org/10.3390/heritage8010018>.
- Sayce, K. (1978). *A Town Called Victoria or The Rise and Fall of the Thatched House Hotel*. Book of Rhodesia.
- Sinamai, A. (2021). Ivhu rinotsamwa: Landscape Memory and Cultural Landscape in Zimbabwe and Tropical Africa. *eTropic: electronic journal of studies in the Tropics*, 21(1), 51-69.
- Thondlana, T. P., Chitima, S. S., & Chirikure, S. (2021). Nation branding in Zimbabwe: Archaeological Heritage, nation cohesion, and corporate identities. *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 21(3), 283-305.
- Thondlana, T. P., Mukwende, T., Machiridza, L. H., Musindo, T. T., Tevera, G., & Maduro, N. (2023). When theory meets praxis: enhancing heritage management through practice-led research at Great Zimbabwe World Heritage property. *Journal of Cultural Heritage Management and Sustainable Development*, 13(3), 428-446. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCHMSD-08-2022-0149>.