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The *Journal of Cultural Heritage and Development* focuses on the nexus between culture, heritage and development. Its primary purpose is to publish original articles that relate to the safeguarding, preservation, promotion, and awareness of all forms of cultural heritage within a broad framework. It provides a platform for academics and other professionals interested in the fields of culture, heritage, and development who wish to contribute to this and related disciplines.

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Editorial

The Journal of Cultural Heritage and Development – Volume 1, Issue 1 Culture, Heritage, and Development: Forging Pathways to a Shared Future

On behalf of the Editorial Team, it is with boundless joy and gusto that we present to you the maiden publication of *The Journal of Cultural Heritage and Development*. This periodical materializes timeously because it serves as a bold initiative, dedicated to expanding and hollowing out an understanding of the vibrant interaction between culture, heritage, and sustainable development. At a time when global engagement progressively acknowledges and embraces the significance of identity, memory, and cultural continuity and diversity, our unveiling of this issue marks a momentous contribution to discourses relating to the establishment of inclusive, resilient, and culturally grounded societies.

This inaugural issue reflects the journal's undertaking, which is to stimulate and give an impetus to multiscious scholarship and innovative research focused on the safeguarding, promotion, interpretation, and celebration of the diversity of cultural heritage in all its forms. These scholarly offerings span varied milieus and themes that range from digital remembrance practices in Zimbabwe to indigenous ecological knowledge and the revitalization of endangered languages, validating how cultural heritage contributes in aiding as a potent engine for social, educational, and environmental development.

Key Themes and Scholarly Insights

1. **Digital Remembrance and Narratives from the Subaltern**

   The first piece, *"Digital Memorials: The Internet as a New Space for Remembrance and Countermemory in Zimbabwe,"* explores how digital technologies are restructuring heritage practices and memory-making from below in postcolonial settings. By means of social media, online archives, and digital storytelling, Zimbabweans are reclaiming and retelling suppressed histories and fostering cross-border dialogues. The article high spots how digital spaces can capacitate silenced communities to contest dominant, state-sanctioned narratives and democratize the act of remembering and re-membering the dis-membered.

2. **Naming, Identity, and Cultural Expression**

   In *"Antonomasia and Personal Naming among the Ndebele of Lupane,"* the author explores the representative and figurative depth of naming in Ndebele culture. Through the use of Cognitive Metaphor Theory, the inquiry exposes how the substitution of personal names with eloquent descriptors replicates individual distinctiveness, social roles, and lived experiences. This work locates naming as a

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living heritage practice that strengthens communal bonds and transmits cultural values.

3. **Indigenous Knowledge and Environmental Stewardship**

   "Reviving Indigenous Wisdom: The BaTonga's Role in Environmental Conservation" scrutinizes the Indigenous ecological knowledge of the BaTonga, elucidating how ancestral practices offer treasured perceptions into sustainable environmental management. The article serves as an advocacy for the official acknowledgment and acceptance of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and their incorporation into current safeguarding policies and strategies, accentuating their relevance in addressing climate and ecological challenges.

4. **Reconciling Heritage Management Frameworks**

   The article *"Bridging the Divide: Western and Indigenous Systems of Heritage Management in the African Context"* critically examines the often-contentious connection between colonial preservation and management models and Indigenous heritage practices. It propositions an amalgam, a community-centered stratagem that tributes and embraces resident traditions but at the same time integrating Western scientific conservation methods, calling for collective stewardship as the pillar of effective heritage preservation.

5. **Media, Representation, and African Identity**

   The representation of African Identity in Western creative works of fiction and film has long been at the heart of Western imagination, where Africans are presented as the Other. *"The Representation of Africa's Intangible Heritage in Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa (2008)"* proffers a critical examination of how African cultures are largely and negatively portrayed in Western animated media. While detecting and isolating persistent stereotypes, the paper furthermore exposes occasions where the film affirms African values such as community, resilience, and oral tradition. It emphasizes the importance of genuine self-representation and the need for African voices in global storytelling.

6. **Language Revival and Educational Equity**

   Closing the issue is *"Enhancing Inclusivity and Cultural Diversity: De-minoritisation, Revitalisation and Digitalisation of formerly Marginalised Languages in Teacher Education Institutions".* This article addresses the exigent mission of re-energizing marginalized languages within Zimbabwe's teacher training colleges. The study gives emphasis to the transformative potential of digital tools in language safeguarding and promotion, while calling for curricular restructurings

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that uphold linguistic diversity and promote cultural equality and equity in education.

Forward Impetus

This inaugural issue lays a sturdy foundation for future scholarship at the intersection of culture, heritage, and development. As the journal further develops, we are dedicated to positioning voices from the Global South, advancing decolonial methodologies, pushing boundaries, and fostering partnerships among researchers, policymakers, cultural practitioners, and local communities. We invite sustained engagement from academics and advocates who share our vision of cultural heritage as a living, evolving force that transforms and shapes equitable and sustainable futures.

We extend our wholehearted indebtedness to the authors, peer reviewers, and readers whose commitment has made this publication possible. Together, we can reimagine heritage not as a relic of the past, but as a vital, dynamic force that inspires, connects, and transforms.

Jacob Mapara and Josiline Chigwada

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Digital Memorials: The Internet as a New Space for Remembrance and Counter memory in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

In Zimbabwe, where memory, identity, and heritage are deeply entwined with struggles for liberation, post-colonial nation-building, and personal loss, digital memorials are emerging as powerful tools for reimagining remembrance. This paper investigates how Zimbabweans are increasingly using the internet through social media, online archives, and digital storytelling platforms to commemorate individuals, events, and cultural legacies that are often marginalised or contested in official heritage narratives. From Facebook tributes for political activists and COVID-19 victims to YouTube documentaries about Gukurahundi and WhatsApp-based oral history sharing, digital memorials offer new avenues for meaning-making that are accessible, participatory, and transnational. Drawing on case studies and interviews, the paper explores how these digital practices contribute to intangible cultural heritage, challenge state-controlled memory, and foster intergenerational dialogue within the Zimbabwean diaspora and at home. The study highlights how digital memorialisation in Zimbabwe is reshaping heritage into a living, evolving process rooted in everyday experience and digital citizenship. It also considers the implications of digital memorials for intangible cultural heritage, intergenerational transmission, and collective identity in an increasingly global and digital society. Ultimately, the paper argues that digital memorials not only preserve memory but actively reshape how heritage is created, experienced, and sustained in the 21st century.

Keywords: cultural heritage, digital memorials, digital preservation, digital archiving, memory and commemoration, virtual heritage.

1. Background

The intersection of digital technologies with the preservation of memory, identity, and heritage in post-colonial contexts has provided new opportunities for commemoration and cultural documentation. In Zimbabwe, where historical memory is frequently contested, especially concerning politically sensitive events such as the Gukurahundi massacre of the 1980s, digital memorials have emerged as powerful tools for reimagining remembrance (Hatchard, 1998; Mpofu, 2021). Mapara (n.d.) observed the notable absence of Ndebele spirit mediums, traditional songs, and key Ndebele historical figures in national narratives and commemorative discourses. In contrast, there is a strong emphasis on the veneration of Shona spirit mediums such as Sekuru Kaguvi and Mbuya Nehanda, particularly regarding their symbolic roles in the liberation struggle. This selective remembrance highlights an imbalance in the representation of Zimbabwe's diverse ethnic heritage and raises critical questions about the inclusivity of national

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memory and identity construction. Scholars like Bhebhe and Ngoepe (2023) and Bhebhe (2023) emphasise the importance of digital archives and oral histories in preserving marginalised histories, particularly in a complex political landscape such as Zimbabwe's.

Zimbabwe's history, marked by political upheaval and contested memory, presents a unique challenge for heritage preservation. The works of Ndlovu (2019), Mpofu (2021), and Mpofu (2023) examine the silencing of events like Gukurahundi (1983 to 1987), victims of Operation Murambatsvina in 2006, and call attention to the need for alternative memory practices to challenge state-controlled narratives. Scholars such as Chigwada and Ngulube (2025) and Rukara and Chiripanhura (2025) emphasise the value of digital tools in preserving indigenous knowledge, particularly in rural communities where oral traditions are the primary means of transmitting cultural practices and histories.

Digital platforms enable these practices to be documented, shared, and made more accessible to both local communities and global audiences. Chigwada and Ngulube (2025) further discuss the application of FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable) principles in the digital preservation of indigenous knowledge, offering a framework for understanding how digital memorials not only preserve memory but also ensure its accessibility for future generations. This aligns with the study's central argument that digital memorialisation represents an evolving process of heritage creation, supported by both local communities and global networks.

The study also engages with community-driven heritage practices, a theme explored by Pikela, Thondhlana, and Madlome (2022), who highlight the role of local heritage initiatives and museums in preserving cultural memory. Digital memorials extend these grassroots practices by providing additional platforms for engagement and preservation. Scholars like Schmidt (2017) stress the significance of community-based heritage in Africa, illustrating how local initiatives often challenge official heritage policies.

In Zimbabwe, digital memorials created by communities through platforms like social media, YouTube, and WhatsApp offer individuals the opportunity to document and share personal versions of history, frequently in opposition to state narratives. These practices contribute to the creation of counter-archives that resist dominant memory-making forces, providing alternative perspectives on national identity and historical events.

Another key aspect of this study is the role of the Zimbabwean Diaspora in digital memorialisation. As Caswell (2014) and Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd (2009) argue, digital archives and community-based memory practices are especially important for marginalised groups separated by borders. In the case of Zimbabwe, the Diaspora plays a crucial role in shaping transnational memory and heritage practices. Digital memorials

enable Zimbabweans abroad to engage with their cultural heritage in ways that transcend geographical boundaries, fostering inclusive and participatory commemoration that connects the Diaspora with those in Zimbabwe. The preservation of indigenous knowledge and the documentation of oral traditions are essential to sustainable heritage practices. Bhebhe and Chirume (2014) and Bhebhe and Ngoepe (2021) stress the importance of oral history in African memory work, particularly within community archives.

This study examines how digital memorials, as forms of ethnic-community archiving (Bhebhe & Ngoepe, 2023), allow for the preservation of Zimbabwean cultural heritage in ways that reflect local needs and resist historical erasure. Through documenting cultural practices and histories, these community-based digital archives provide counter-narratives to the marginalisation of indigenous practices in mainstream historical discourse.

This study views digital memorialisation as an evolving and dynamic practice that not only preserves memory but also reshapes how heritage is created, experienced, and sustained in the 21st century. Through digital tools such as social media platforms, online archives, and digital storytelling, Zimbabweans are reimagining their engagement with the past. This transformation is particularly significant in a post-colonial context, where historical erasure and the marginalisation of certain communities and cultural practices have long been entrenched in official heritage frameworks.

The study draws on the theoretical foundations of community archives, counter-archives, and intangible cultural heritage to explore how digital platforms facilitate the documentation, sharing, and transmission of alternative memories. These practices not only challenge dominant historical narratives but also create participatory, transnational spaces of memory that bridge generational and geographical gaps, particularly within the Zimbabwean diaspora communities.

Digital memorials offer a platform where individuals can engage with, contest, and reconstruct historical records in ways that were previously impossible. A critical component of this process is digital citizenship, which allows individuals to take ownership of their personal and collective histories. This concept aligns with the work of Sibanda and Chiripanhura (2024), who discuss the power dynamics of state control over museum and archival collections in Zimbabwe, where marginalised cultural expressions are often excluded from official narratives.

Digital platforms, in contrast, offer a more inclusive and democratic approach to memory preservation, allowing marginalised groups such as survivors of political violence to share their stories and challenge official accounts. This approach is consistent with Bhebhe and

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Ngoepe's (2023) focus on oral history and community archiving, which emphasises creating counter-archives to preserve the voices of those silenced by history.

Foucault's concept of counter-memory (1972) is particularly relevant here, as digital memorials serve as spaces where these alternative histories can be articulated, contributing to historical justice and social reparation. In alignment with Chigwada and Ngulube's (2025) arguments about the importance of preserving indigenous knowledge in the digital age, this study underscores how digital memorialisation safeguards intangible cultural heritage.

Zimbabweans are increasingly using digital tools to document and share indigenous practices, oral traditions, and local histories that might otherwise be lost. These digital archives serve as repositories for traditional ceremonies, songs, and stories that are critical to understanding Zimbabwe's cultural heritage. This preservation fosters intergenerational dialogue, particularly among younger generations, including those in the diaspora. As Pikela, Thondhlana, and Madlome (2022) note, community-driven curatorship of cultural artefacts enables self-representation and cultural restoration, offering a more accurate and inclusive account of history than traditional institutions.

Digital memorials contribute to the decolonisation of memory, empowering Zimbabweans to reclaim their cultural identity through active participation in the digitisation of history. This study investigates how digital memorials, including Facebook tributes to political activists, YouTube documentaries on historical events, and WhatsApp-based oral histories, are providing inclusive and participatory spaces for memory-making, thereby helping to reclaim silenced histories and offer more equitable representations of Zimbabwe's past.

2. Problem statement

In Zimbabwe, the struggle for identity, justice, and national unity is complicated by contested historical narratives surrounding events like the Gukurahundi genocide, the liberation war, and the August 1, 2018, post-election violence (Mpofu, 2021; Ncube, 2021). According to Sibanda and Chiripanhura (2024), state-controlled institutions such as museums and archives marginalise or erase certain histories, privileging official narratives that serve political agendas. This leaves a gap in inclusive platforms for preserving Zimbabwe's diverse cultural histories, particularly those that challenge state-endorsed accounts. Bhebhe and Ngoepe (2023) argue that state-sanctioned memory silences counter-memories from marginalised communities, limiting the representation of these histories. The rise of digital memorials, such as social media tributes and online archives, provides a space for these marginalised histories. These platforms, as Caswell

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(2014) suggests, offer opportunities for community-driven curatorship, allowing individuals to reclaim suppressed histories. Despite the growing prevalence of digital memorials, the role they play in reshaping collective memory and national identity in Zimbabwe remains underexplored. There is a significant research gap regarding how Zimbabweans, both at home and in the diaspora, use digital technologies to commemorate cultural legacies excluded from official narratives, particularly given the political sensitivities in Zimbabwe's history (Schmidt, 2017). Bhebhe (2023) further emphasises that digital memorials foster transnational conversations, enabling Zimbabweans to engage in preserving intangible cultural heritage across borders. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how digital memorials contribute to memory-making, heritage preservation, and identity formation in both post-colonial and transnational contexts. The research provides insights into the evolving relationship between digital technologies, memory, and heritage, and contributes to broader discussions on the democratisation and decolonisation of memory and heritage in contemporary Zimbabwe.

3. Aim

This study aims to explore the role of digital memorials in Zimbabwe in preserving and transmitting intangible cultural heritage, with a focus on how these platforms challenge state-sanctioned memory and provide alternative historical narratives.

4. Research Questions

This research seeks to answer the following research questions

1. How do digital memorials in Zimbabwe challenge state-sanctioned narratives and contribute to alternative historical understandings?
2. In what ways do digital memorials preserve and transmit Zimbabwe's intangible cultural heritage, particularly regarding marginalised historical events and memories?

5. Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon the concept of counter-memory (Foucault, 1972) to explore how digital memorials contribute to memory-making, heritage preservation, and identity formation in Zimbabwe. The concept of counter-memory is particularly relevant in the context of digital heritage memorials, as these platforms provide a space for alternative narratives to emerge, especially in societies where official histories are incomplete, manipulated, or deliberately obscured. In Zimbabwe, where traumatic events such as the

Gukurahundi genocide and politically sensitive moments like the August 1, 2018, post-election violence are often marginalised or denied by the government, digital memorials become crucial for countering state-controlled narratives.

A study by Sibanda and Chiripanhura (2024) highlights the role of museums and archives in shaping historical memory, often privileging certain political agendas, which makes digital platforms vital spaces for reclaiming and contesting these dominant narratives. Digital memorials on platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and various online archives allow Zimbabweans to create and participate in the construction of counter-memories that resist the erasure of painful histories. These platforms provide individuals with the opportunity to share personal accounts of trauma, survival, and resistance, offering a counter-narrative to the official version of history upheld by state-controlled institutions (Bhebhe & Ngoepe, 2023).

Digital memorials also facilitate the active participation of the Zimbabwean Diaspora, enabling individuals to engage in the counter-memory process across borders. As Bhebhe (2023) observes, these platforms support transnational conversations about heritage and historical memory, ensuring that stories from marginalised communities are preserved and accessible globally. This diaspora engagement is vital for the continuity of Zimbabwe's intangible cultural heritage, including oral histories, rituals, and traditions, which might otherwise be forgotten or sidelined by mainstream narratives. Through these digital memorials, individuals can challenge the silencing of their collective memory, asserting their experiences within both Zimbabwe's historical landscape and in the global memory. Digital platforms not only preserve memory but also foster social justice by ensuring the experiences of marginalised groups remain visible and valued. In this way, counter-memory and digital heritage memorials are deeply interconnected in Zimbabwe, functioning as critical tools for contesting the hegemonic historical discourse and for promoting a more inclusive, accurate, and dynamic understanding of the nation's past. These digital spaces, therefore, are not only about remembering but are integral to reshaping national identity and advancing the cause of historical justice.

6. A brief literature review

This literature review explores the emerging role of digital memorials in Zimbabwe, focusing on how these platforms serve as spaces for counter-memory and collective memory. The review draws on several key themes that align with the research questions: the role of digital memorials in shaping historical narratives, their impact on cultural heritage preservation, and their capacity to facilitate intergenerational dialogue.

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6.1 The role of digital memorials in shaping historical narratives

Research on digital memorials emphasises their potential to challenge state-controlled historical narratives, especially in contexts where dominant historical accounts marginalise or erase critical events. For instance, Bhebhe and Ngoepe (2023) highlight the importance of oral history projects and digital archives in preserving memories that are often overlooked by mainstream history, such as those related to the Gukurahundi genocide. These digital spaces provide marginalised communities with an opportunity to present their histories, offering alternative perspectives that contest the official accounts presented by state-run institutions. Digital memorials challenge the dominant state-sanctioned memory, which often suppresses or distorts key historical events through documenting and sharing personal stories (Bhebhe & Ngoepe, 2023; Ndlovu, 2019). Sibanda and Chiripanhura (2024) further support this argument by emphasising how the politics of memory in Zimbabwe, shaped by state-controlled institutions, often leads to the marginalisation of specific cultural and historical experiences, particularly those related to national trauma.

In the Zimbabwean context, digital memorials have become powerful tools for reclaiming silenced histories. These platforms allow individuals to share personal accounts of trauma, survival, and resistance, directly challenging the government's attempts to suppress or distort historical events. Digital memorials also serve as critical sites of memory for the Zimbabwean Diaspora, enabling them to preserve and transmit histories of marginalisation, cultural loss, and political struggle. Schmidt (2017) also underscores the significance of community-based heritage and memory practices in Africa, where local communities use digital platforms to assert their narratives in opposition to national-level historical accounts. Furthermore, scholars like Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd (2009) suggest that digital memorials not only preserve individual memories but also enable collective memory-making, thus democratising heritage preservation and allowing for a more inclusive approach to history. Through these collective efforts, digital memorials offer a space for both Zimbabweans at home and in the Diaspora to engage in a process of counter-memory, reshaping national identity and contributing to a more inclusive historical discourse.

6.2 Digital memorials and the preservation of cultural heritage

Another significant theme in the literature is the role of digital memorials in preserving cultural heritage, particularly in the context of intangible cultural heritage. Chigwada and Ngulube (2025) underscore how digital archives and platforms have become essential tools in the preservation of indigenous knowledge and cultural practices, which are often endangered by modernisation, globalisation, and the legacies of colonial history. As they

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note, digital memorials allow Zimbabweans to safeguard cultural expressions, rituals, and historical events, ensuring that these cultural elements are not only preserved but also made accessible to both local and global audiences. This aligns with Pikela, Thondhlana, and Madlome's (2022) exploration of community-driven curatorship in Zimbabwe, where digital platforms allow communities to curate their cultural heritage, amplifying voices often silenced by institutional narratives. Again, the BaTonga people in Binga have organised cultural groups like the Basilizwi Trust and Tonga Language and Culture Committee (TOLACCO), which establish community archives to document their language, rituals, displacement history, and oral traditions (Bhebhe, 2023). The BaTonga have mobilised digital platforms to record testimonies and preserve these memories for future generations.

Through digital memorials, Zimbabweans can counteract the erasure of their cultural practices and ensure that these practices remain vibrant and accessible for future generations. Moreover, Kiwa et al. (2021) discussed the development of online panoramas, a digital tool for documenting and preserving vanishing cultural practices. This work emphasises the importance of digital heritage in enabling the survival of intangible cultural elements that might otherwise be lost. The study argues that online panoramas serve as innovative and interactive ways to document cultural heritage, especially in the face of rapid social changes. In line with Bhebhe & Ngoepe (2023) and Flinn, Stevens, and Shepherd (2009), this highlights how digital memorials not only serve as a means for remembering the past but also as dynamic platforms for preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge across generations. In this way, digital memorials contribute to the ongoing process of heritage-making, enabling communities to maintain ownership and control over their cultural narratives while also participating in the broader global dialogue on heritage preservation. This becomes particularly important for Zimbabweans, where issues of cultural identity and memory are often shaped by the complex dynamics of post-colonial heritage practices.

6.3 Intergenerational dialogue and community engagement

Digital memorials in Zimbabwe play a significant role in facilitating intergenerational dialogue by providing a platform where both older and younger generations can engage with and share historical knowledge, particularly in the context of contested or marginalised histories. According to Caswell et al. (2018), community archives and digital storytelling create participatory spaces where diverse generations can contribute their experiences and memories, enhancing a collective understanding of history. In Zimbabwe, these digital platforms have proven essential in connecting the older generation, who often hold first-hand accounts of historical events such as the Gukurahundi genocide or the Zimbabwean Liberation War, with younger generations who

may not have access to these oral histories through traditional, institutionalised channels. This digital bridge enables younger Zimbabweans, particularly those in the Diaspora, to engage with their heritage in a way that transcends both time and geographical boundaries, ensuring continuity in the transmission of intangible cultural heritage (Bhebhe, 2023).

Moreover, digital memorials serve as vital spaces for the Diaspora community to contribute to the preservation and transmission of Zimbabwean cultural heritage. Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and online archives allow Zimbabweans living abroad to actively participate in the construction and dissemination of counter-narratives, which challenge the state-sanctioned historical accounts that often overlook critical events. This enables the preservation of memories of marginalised histories, such as the Gukurahundi genocide, through a digital archive that is accessible across borders (Mpofu, 2023). As Sibanda and Chiripanhura (2024) suggest, communities play a crucial role in sustaining these alternative narratives, offering a means to both preserve cultural practices and redefine collective memory. Furthermore, by fostering the sharing of oral histories and personal stories, digital memorials also encourage younger generations to engage in the process of memory activism, ensuring that these important memories are not only preserved but actively reshaped for future generations (Bhebhe & Ngoepe, 2023). These digital spaces, therefore, not only preserve the memories of marginalised events but also offer a dynamic, transnational platform for intergenerational dialogue and cultural continuity.

7. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design, using a case study approach, to explore the role of digital memorials in shaping collective memory and counter-memory in Zimbabwe. Purposive sampling was done to come up with 30 participants. These participants were identified based on their active engagement with digital memorials such as online commemorative platforms, social media heritage pages, or virtual exhibitions, and their involvement in the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems. Recruitment was done through referrals from cultural institutions, online heritage networks, and snowball sampling within diaspora communities and local cultural organisations. The participants ranged in age from 21 to 68 years and included both male and female voices, with a near-gender balance: 16 were female (53%) and 14 male (47%). Of the total participants, 12 (40%) resided in the Zimbabwean Diaspora, primarily in the United Kingdom (10%), Australia (10%), South Africa (10%), and Canada (10%), while the remaining 18 (60%) were based within Zimbabwe. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with Zimbabweans who actively engage with digital memorials and cultural practitioners involved in the preservation of indigenous knowledge. Using semi-

structured interviews, the researcher was able to explore participants' experiences and perceptions of digital memorials in facilitating intergenerational dialogue and the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. Content analysis was also conducted on various digital memorials such as Facebook tributes, YouTube documentaries, and online archives to identify themes of memory, identity, and historical preservation, with a specific focus on how these digital spaces challenge state-controlled narratives and promote counter-memory. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns in the data. Data was organised and coded manually. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and emotional sensitivity, were prioritised throughout the study. The data was presented in narrative form.

8. Findings and discussion

The findings of this study were drawn from the analysis of interviews and content analysis of digital memorials, providing insights into how digital memorials function in Zimbabwe as sites for counter-memory, cultural heritage preservation, and intergenerational dialogue. The study explores how these digital spaces challenge state-controlled historical narratives, foster the transmission of intangible cultural heritage, and contribute to community-driven memory-making processes.

8.1 How do Zimbabweans' digital memorials challenge state-sanctioned narratives and contribute to alternative historical understandings?

Digital memorials in Zimbabwe have become pivotal in reshaping historical narratives and challenging state-sanctioned versions of the past, particularly concerning events that have been marginalised or erased from the official discourse. These platforms have provided critical spaces for the documentation and dissemination of alternative histories, ensuring that previously silenced voices are heard. Below is an exploration of how these digital memorials function as agents of historical change and resistance.

i) Counteracting state-sanctioned amnesia

In Zimbabwe, some of the most significant historical events, particularly the Gukurahundi genocide (1983-1987), have been largely overlooked or minimised in state-approved narratives. The official discourse often seeks to promote unity and national reconciliation by downplaying or omitting the painful and divisive events that continue to affect many communities, especially those impacted by the violence. In contrast, digital memorials provide a space where survivors and descendants of victims can tell their stories, demand justice, and challenge the official silence surrounding such atrocities. These platforms, whether through Facebook, YouTube, X, or WhatsApp, enable communities to collect and

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share oral histories, allowing for personal testimonies that directly confront the state's attempts at erasure. One Gukurahundi survivor shared their perspective:

> *Without these digital spaces, our stories would be lost forever. The government has worked hard to erase or distort our histories, particularly the painful and traumatic events like the Gukurahundi genocide. These moments of suffering and resistance, which remain suppressed in official history, would have been forgotten if not for the emergence of digital platforms. These spaces, whether it's Facebook, WhatsApp, X, YouTube, or online archives, have become the only places where we can tell our stories openly, without fear of censorship or political repression.*

As Bhebhe (2021) and Mpofu (2023) argue, the memorialisation of such events in digital spaces fosters collective memory work by facilitating education and awareness, where survivors are able to articulate their experiences without fear of state censorship. This also empowers individuals to confront the official historical narrative that has, for decades, minimised or ignored their suffering. The counter-memory created through these digital memorials is not just about recording events; it is also about challenging the state's dominant historical account, particularly regarding sensitive political issues. As Foucault's concept of counter-memory suggests, these platforms disrupt the official historical narratives that exclude or marginalise certain groups (Foucault, 1972). Participants discussed how digital memorials serve as sites of resistance, where alternative histories are preserved, and personal experiences of trauma are publicly acknowledged. This finding aligns with the literature on counter-memory (Bhebhe & Ngoepe, 2023), where digital platforms act as spaces to contest dominant historical versions and provide an alternative counter-history.

Most participants also agreed that government censorship and political interference limit the diversity of collections (Sibanda & Chiripanhura, 2024). Participants agreed that information professionals face pressure to self-censor and prioritise collections that align with government interests. In Zimbabwe, documentary evidence and artefacts related to the Gukurahundi massacre in the 1980s are not easily found in galleries and bookshelves (Ndlovu, 2019). More so, records and artefacts related to the participation of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) during the liberation struggle were also said to be understated or under-documented and represented (Mpofu, 2023). ZAPU was one of the parties that fought for the independence of Zimbabwe but lost the 1980 independence elections. The collections in the public spaces of Zimbabwe today favour narratives from the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), which has been in power since 1980.

Mapara (n.d.) also argues that music performed during national events such as Independence Day, Heroes Day, and the Defence Forces Day events in Zimbabwe is not merely a tool for celebration or national pride, but often functions as a deliberate instrument for shaping collective memory. In these highly symbolic spaces, only songs that reinforce the narratives and ideological dominance of ZANU-PF are typically included. This selective musical representation systematically silences the legacy of ZAPU, effectively erasing its contributions to the liberation struggle from public consciousness. Such exclusion has profound implications, not only for historical accuracy but also for the emotional and cultural recognition of communities aligned with ZAPU. Their memories, struggles, and sacrifices are rendered invisible, fostering a sense of marginalisation and historical loss. Music, in this context, becomes a means of political control, shaping what is remembered and what is forgotten in the nation's story.

The sentiment above also applies to the information generated by institutions that represent the homosexual people in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is a conservative country that does not promote same-sex marriages or relationships. Collecting records and artefacts that promote homosexuality is a taboo that might face resistance from the community and the government. In addition, materials reflecting the experiences of marginalised communities, for example, women, LGBTQ+ and people with disabilities, are also scarce in information centres in Zimbabwe. These groups of people will resort to social media for their visibility. As Sibanda and Chiripanhura (2024) highlight, state-controlled institutions such as museums and archives often present a version of history that serves the government's political agenda, overlooking the complex realities of historical events. For instance, while the Liberation War is often framed through a victorious nationalistic narrative, Zimbabwean veterans, especially those from marginalised communities, have used online platforms to offer alternative perspectives that acknowledge the conflict's complexities, including the divisions within liberation forces, tribal tensions, and the suffering of civilians. The Mafela Trust is a significant example of how digital memorials can preserve and transmit Zimbabwe's intangible cultural heritage, particularly by recovering marginalised histories of the liberation struggle (Bhebhe, 2016). Founded by ZAPU and ZPRA veterans, the organisation works to document the experiences and contributions of those sidelined in official national narratives dominated by ZANU-PF (Bhebhe & Ngoepe, 2022). The Mafela Trust collects and digitises oral histories, photographs, and archival documents, creating an accessible counter-memory that honours forgotten fighters and civilians (Tshuma, 2022). In addition to preserving memory, the Mafela Trust engages the public through commemorative pilgrimages and youth-oriented education, ensuring that suppressed histories are not only remembered but actively transmitted across generations.

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ii) Digital platforms as sites of resistance and alternative narratives

Digital memorials in Zimbabwe function as decentralised spaces where individuals, cultural groups, and communities can present alternative versions of history that challenge the state-controlled narrative. For example, the stories of Zimbabwe's indigenous cultural events and festivals, such as the Ndau Festival of the Arts (NdaFA) or the Hurungwe Arts Festival (HAF), or the Great Limpopo Cultural Trade Fair (GLCTF) (now Budula Festival) among the Mhlanguleni (Tsonga/Shangani) community in Chiredzi, are often left out of national celebrations and government-sanctioned archives (Kusasa et al., 2022). These local cultural practices, however, find a home on digital platforms, where communities can document and share their rich cultural histories. By doing so, they challenge the state's emphasis on a centralised, uniform narrative of the nation's history, offering a more inclusive and diverse account of Zimbabwe's heritage. One local participant emphasised the importance of this counter-narrative:

> *The digital platforms allow us to reclaim the narratives that have been silenced by state-controlled institutions, and in doing so, we are not just preserving our personal and collective histories; we are making a stand for the truth. The government may control the official archives, museums, and history textbooks, but it cannot control the voices of the people who use digital spaces to document their lives, their pain, and their resilience.*

Chigwada and Ngulube (2025) emphasise the importance of digital archives in safeguarding indigenous knowledge, providing an alternative to the politically shaped national archives. These digital platforms allow for the preservation and recognition of cultural events and traditions that would otherwise be overlooked or erased by the state's version of history. Digital memorials, however, provide a space where counter-narratives can be constructed and shared openly, circumventing the state's control over official historical accounts. Platforms like Facebook, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter) and WhatsApp have allowed individuals, particularly survivors and their families, to publicly share testimonies, oral histories, and personal accounts that contradict the official versions of events. Political activists such as Blessed Geza have also resorted to social media to discuss their grievances against the government. Some Gukurahundi and political violence survivors have used digital memorials to share personal experiences and testimonies of government viciousness, which have long been excluded from the state's historical record (Bhebhe & Ngoepe, 2023).

iii) Community-driven curatorship as a form of cultural resistance

Traditional communities in Zimbabwe, including indigenous groups, have increasingly taken control of how their histories are represented through digital memorials. This contrasts sharply with institutionalised heritage management, where heritage institutions like museums and archives are often state-controlled and reflect the priorities of the government. By using digital platforms to curate their own histories, these communities assert their right to control how their cultural narratives are constructed and shared. This community-driven curatorship challenges the state's monopolisation of history and provides an opportunity for local histories to be told from the perspective of those who lived them, not from the lens of a politically motivated national archive. As one local participant noted:

> *This is a fight for the right to memory, a fight for historical justice. As we share these stories online, we are not just preserving our past; we are asserting our right to be heard, ensuring that our stories are not erased, and holding space for alternative histories that are often overlooked. Through these digital memorials, we are creating a new history, one that is grounded in truth, personal experience, and collective memory.*

Pikela, Thondhlana, and Madlome (2022) highlight how community-driven curatorship empowers traditional chiefs, elders, and cultural practitioners to curate and share their own histories, offering a powerful form of resistance. This grassroots approach to heritage preservation allows marginalised communities to present histories that may contradict or oppose the state's official narratives, offering a more nuanced and inclusive account of Zimbabwe's past.

There are very limited collections related to the cultural practices of minority groups such as the Nambya, Ndau, Tsonga/Shangani, Tonga and Venda, among others. The underdocumentation of these minority groups of people was also attributed by participants to a lack of power and authority in the politics of Zimbabwe. These marginalised groups will find themselves on social media to express themselves and also to capture and preserve their memories. This has led to community groups opening up WhatsApp and Facebook group platforms such as *Rekete Chindau: Leave a legacy*, *Wapwere wekwaHonde, Proudly Shangaan, Rhodesian Bush War Living History and Rhodesians World Wide* to champion their marginalised history. These digital spaces offer an alternative historical record, one that is shaped by survivors' experiences rather than government-sanctioned narratives, thus contributing to the broader struggle for historical justice (Bhebhe & Ngoepe, 2023).

iv) The role of digital memorials in healing and reconciliation

Digital memorials in Zimbabwe not only function as sites of resistance but also contribute to the process of healing and reconciliation. While state-sponsored efforts have often ignored or downplayed traumatic events like the Gukurahundi genocide, digital memorials provide a platform for survivors and affected communities to memorialise their experiences, acknowledge the wrongs done, and begin a process of collective healing. These digital spaces serve as a form of public reflection, allowing for the recognition of past injustices and the acknowledgement of the trauma that continues to affect communities today. As one local participant reflected:

> *The digital spaces have become our sanctuary. For so long, we were told to forget, to move on, but the pain still lingers. These memorials give us a voice, a chance to heal by sharing our stories, by confronting the government's attempts to erase our history.*

Scholars such as Bhebhe and Ngoepe (2023) argue that oral histories and digital archives are essential for healing post-conflict societies. By offering marginalised communities a space to process and memorialise painful histories, these digital platforms foster dialogue and contribute to broader national efforts of reconciliation, even in the face of official state silence.

v) Challenging historical erasure and promoting cultural sovereignty

One of the most important functions of digital memorials is their ability to challenge historical erasure. In Zimbabwe, many indigenous communities, as well as rural and minority groups, have had their histories intentionally overlooked or suppressed in state-run institutions. Digital memorials provide an accessible and inclusive platform for these communities to assert their cultural and historical narratives. By documenting and sharing their experiences online, these groups can ensure that their histories are not lost to the void of state-sponsored historical erasure. Schmidt (2017) argues that digital technologies have empowered local communities to reclaim their heritage and resist the state's attempts to erase or distort their histories. Through platforms such as WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages dedicated to specific communities or cultural events, Zimbabweans are creating digital spaces where their stories can be shared widely, contributing to a more inclusive understanding of the nation's history.

Collected data also shows that digital memorials in Zimbabwe act as a form of memory activism by reclaiming collective memory from the hands of state-controlled institutions. As Caswell et al. (2018) argue, community archives and digital storytelling practices

facilitate the democratisation of memory by enabling ordinary people to share their histories and perspectives. In Zimbabwe, this process is particularly important for marginalised groups who have been excluded from official historical discourses. By participating in digital memorialisation, these communities challenge the official, state-endorsed narratives and assert their right to memory. For instance, survivors of the August 1, 2018, post-election violence have used social media platforms to document and share videos and images that show state security forces' involvement in the violence, directly contradicting government claims about the events. In doing so, digital memorials become powerful counter-tools in contesting the erasure of inconvenient truths and foster a more inclusive memory culture (Ndlovu, 2019).

vi) The digital preservation of oral histories as a resistance to symbolic annihilation

Another significant aspect of digital memorials in Zimbabwe is their ability to preserve oral histories, which have often been neglected or misrepresented in official archives. Oral histories are crucial for preserving the cultural identities and historical experiences of marginalised or oppressed groups, especially those who have been excluded from formal, state-controlled historical narratives. By collecting, sharing, and preserving these oral traditions, digital memorials ensure that alternative historical accounts are available for future generations. As one Diaspora participant explained:

> *These stories are our truth, our legacy. Without digital memorials, our voices would have been erased. It's through these platforms that we can ensure that future generations understand our history, not the one the government wants to sell them.*

Caswell et al. (2018) emphasise the transformative power of community archives in resisting symbolic annihilation, where entire histories and cultures are erased from collective memory. This is particularly important in Zimbabwe, where many communities' histories have been either ignored or misrepresented by the state. Digital memorials enable these communities to assert their cultural agency, ensuring that their histories are not only preserved but also made accessible to a global audience.

vii) Digital memorials as a catalyst for cultural and political change

Digital memorials in Zimbabwe serve as powerful tools for challenging state-sanctioned narratives and promoting a more inclusive and diverse historical understanding. These platforms offer marginalised communities a space to document and share their histories, providing a form of resistance against historical erasure and state-imposed amnesia. Through community-driven curatorship, digital memorials allow for the preservation of

alternative histories that may otherwise remain hidden or suppressed. Furthermore, they contribute to healing and reconciliation by allowing communities to memorialise past injustices, fostering dialogue and understanding. The digital preservation of oral histories and the reclaiming of cultural sovereignty through these platforms are vital for ensuring that Zimbabwe's intangible cultural heritage is not only preserved but also understood from multiple perspectives. As these digital spaces continue to grow and evolve, they will remain central in the ongoing struggle to challenge historical silences, reclaim cultural identity, and resist political manipulation of the past. Digital memorials are not just platforms for remembering; they are catalysts for cultural and political change, contributing to the democratisation of history and the empowerment of communities whose stories have long been silenced.

viii) The transnational nature of digital memorials and their impact on global understanding

Another crucial finding of this study is the role of digital memorials in promoting transnational dialogue. Zimbabweans in the Diaspora have been particularly active in using digital memorials to ensure that Zimbabwe's contested histories are documented and discussed globally. As Bhebhe (2023) notes, digital platforms offer a way for the diaspora community to contribute to preserving their cultural heritage, ensuring that marginalised histories, such as the experiences of political refugees and victims of state violence, are acknowledged in global spaces. Through YouTube documentaries, Facebook memorial pages, and online forums, Zimbabweans living abroad can engage in transnational conversations that influence international understandings of Zimbabwe's historical struggles. This also opens up new avenues for diaspora-driven activism, where digital platforms serve as sites for lobbying for accountability and raising awareness on global platforms about the silences in Zimbabwe's history (Schmidt, 2017).

ix) Digital memorials as tools for intergenerational memory transmission

Digital memorials play an essential role in intergenerational memory transmission. As discussed by Caswell et al. (2018), digital archives and storytelling provide platforms for older generations to share their lived experiences with younger generations, many of whom may be disconnected from Zimbabwe's complex history due to political repression or geographic distance. Through digital memorials, both Zimbabweans at home and in the Diaspora can engage in a participatory process of collective memory-making, ensuring that the memories of past struggles are passed on to future generations. This process not only preserves historical knowledge but also fosters a sense of shared identity and cultural continuity across generations. Digital memorials thus serve as an essential bridge between the past and present, enabling the transmission of intangible

cultural heritage, particularly in the face of state-imposed silences and erasures (Pikela, Thondhlana, & Madlome, 2022).

8.2 The role of digital memorials in preserving and transmitting Zimbabwe's intangible cultural heritage, particularly regarding marginalised historical events and memories.

A central theme in the study was the role of digital memorials in the preservation of Zimbabwe's intangible cultural heritage. Below are the findings and discussion related to this research question.

i) Bridging the geographical gaps and ensuring the transmission of cultural heritage across time and space.

Most participants emphasised how digital platforms have become essential tools for preserving traditional cultural practices and knowledge that might otherwise be at risk of fading due to modernisation, globalisation, or historical erasure. Oral traditions, cultural practices, and indigenous knowledge, typically shared within specific communities, are now being archived in digital formats, allowing these practices to reach a broader, often global, audience. As one participant in the Diaspora said:

> *We use Facebook to share traditional ceremonies and rituals that the youth in the diaspora can watch and learn about, keeping our culture alive across generations.*

This highlights the potential of digital technologies to bridge geographical gaps and ensure the transmission of cultural heritage across time and space. A deeper content analysis of digital memorials revealed numerous instances of Zimbabweans utilising social media platforms to celebrate and commemorate key cultural events, such as the Ndau Festival for the Chipinge community or the Hurungwe Arts Festival for the Korekore people of Hurungwe, the Budula Festival (formerly the Great Limpopo Cultural Trade Fair) in Chiredzi South. These events, often excluded from mainstream national narratives, are actively documented and shared online, ensuring their continued visibility and relevance. This digital archiving supports the argument put forward by Chigwada, Ngulube, and Dewah (2024), who suggest that digital archives are vital in safeguarding indigenous knowledge and intangible cultural heritage. They argue that in the digital age, archives become critical resources that counter the risks of cultural loss, especially given the political and historical marginalisation faced by many indigenous communities in Zimbabwe. Additionally, Chigwada and Ngulube (2025) underscore how integrating CARE (Collective Access, Reuse, and Enrichment) and FAIR (Findable, Accessible,

Interoperable, Reusable) principles in digital preservation efforts not only enhances the accessibility of cultural resources but also contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by fostering cultural diversity and resilience.

ii) Offers participatory spaces for cultural exchange

Moreover, digital memorials are evolving into dynamic, participatory spaces where cultural practitioners, especially traditional leaders, engage younger generations in the preservation and perpetuation of cultural heritage. This participatory approach aligns with Blake's (2015) exploration of how museums and digital heritage initiatives can utilise participatory practices to involve local communities in the conservation process, ensuring that cultural heritage is actively transmitted and reinterpreted in the digital age. Rukara and Chiripanhura (2025) further highlight the role of digital platforms in fostering intergenerational dialogues, emphasising the intersection of artificial intelligence and information management in enabling more inclusive and participatory models of heritage preservation. By adopting AI tools, communities can digitally curate and share local knowledge, expanding the scope and reach of traditional practices while maintaining control over their cultural narratives. The emphasis on community-driven curatorship is also explored by Pikela, Thondhlana, and Madlome (2022), who highlight how traditional chiefs and cultural experts at the Avuxeni community museum in Chiredzi South district actively engage in curating local heritage for both preservation and education purposes. These community-driven efforts provide a counterpoint to top-down, institutionally dominated models of heritage management. In the digital realm, such models are reinforced, as community members take on the role of curators, ensuring that their culture is represented authentically and independently of external influences.

iii) Cultural reclamation and identity restoration

Digital memorials also play a role in fostering cultural reclamation and identity restoration, especially in the context of post-colonial Zimbabwe. Musendekwa (2025) discusses the challenges of urban heritage preservation, noting that digital platforms can help preserve urban cultural landscapes that have been erased or neglected due to rapid urbanisation or colonial histories. In the same vein, Nigar and Selim (2023) argue that informal heritage conservation practices such as those supported by digital memorials are increasingly essential for sustaining cultural identity, particularly in environments where formal heritage institutions may have limited resources or political backing. Furthermore, these digital initiatives resonate with the work of Schmidt (2017), who discusses community-based heritage practices in Africa and their capacity to reshape local knowledge production through collaborative and accessible technologies. The decentralisation of heritage stewardship, as Schmidt notes, empowers local communities to reclaim

narratives that have often been marginalised by institutionalised memory systems. In the Zimbabwean context, the digitalisation of cultural heritage can be seen as an act of resistance against historical erasure, enabling communities to assert their own identities and histories in the face of colonial and post-colonial silences.

iv) Provide a space for collective memory

This study also revealed that the integration of oral history within digital memorials plays a crucial role in providing a space for collective memory. As Bhebhe and Ngoepe (2023) assert, oral history is a significant form of ethno-community archiving that helps preserve the lived experiences and traditions of indigenous populations. Digital archives allow for the collection and dissemination of oral narratives that might otherwise be lost, ensuring that marginalised voices are heard and preserved for future generations. These practices are in line with the work of Caswell et al. (2018), who emphasise the transformative power of community archives in fighting symbolic annihilation and promoting cultural agency in marginalised groups. Digital memorials also provide a space for collective memory, which has been especially important in the context of post-conflict societies like Zimbabwe. The works of Bhebhe (2023) and Mpofu (2023) examine how memory work, including the memorialisation of historical events like the Gukurahundi genocide, is crucial for community healing. Digital memorials offer a platform for these difficult conversations, allowing for the public acknowledgement of past injustices while simultaneously serving as tools for education and reconciliation. The integration of digital platforms in cultural preservation aligns with a growing body of scholarship that emphasises the need for inclusive, decentralised, and participatory models of heritage conservation. Scholars such as Chigwada, Ngulube, and Dewah (2024), Rukara and Chiripanhura (2025), Pikela et al. (2022), Musendekwa (2025), and Bhebhe and Ngoepe (2023) collectively highlight the critical role of digital memorials in safeguarding indigenous knowledge and fostering cultural resilience in a rapidly changing world.

v) Intergenerational dialogue and community engagement

The study also found that digital memorials facilitate intergenerational dialogue, particularly between the Zimbabwean Diaspora and the home community. Through social media platforms, Zimbabweans living abroad can contribute to discussions on national memory, cultural practices, and historical events. Participants in the interviews noted that these digital platforms allow them to reconnect with their roots and share personal memories with younger generations in Zimbabwe. Interviews also revealed that digital memorials provide a space for the elderly generation to pass down knowledge and historical experiences, particularly those tied to liberation struggles and early post-colonial history. These interactions help ensure that significant aspects of Zimbabwe's collective

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memory, especially those related to independence and the liberation struggle, are communicated to younger generations. The use of oral history as a tool for transmitting these memories was evident, as participants discussed how stories were recorded and shared online to preserve them for posterity. The findings of the study align with Caswell et al.'s (2018) arguments on the role of community archives and digital storytelling in fostering participatory memory-making, where diverse generations can engage in the creation and transmission of collective memory. Zimbabweans are using these digital memorials not only to record history but also to create ongoing conversations about the country's past, ensuring that these memories remain alive and accessible for future generations.

9. Conclusions

This study has highlighted the pivotal role of digital memorials in shaping collective memory, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering intergenerational dialogue in Zimbabwe. Digital platforms, such as social media, online archives, and digital storytelling tools, have emerged as powerful spaces where Zimbabweans, both within the country and in the diaspora, can share personal narratives, challenge dominant state-controlled historical accounts, and engage in active memory-making processes. These platforms provide an accessible and participatory means of preserving memories that are often marginalised or contested, especially those related to politically sensitive events such as the Gukurahundi genocide, Operation Murambatsvina or political violence.

The research confirms that digital memorials serve as essential tools for counter-memory, offering alternative historical narratives that challenge official versions of Zimbabwe's past. Through providing a platform for survivors, activists, and cultural practitioners to share their stories, these digital spaces help to combat historical erasure and promote alternative histories that reflect a wider range of lived experiences. This aligns with Foucault's and Halbwachs' (1972) concepts of counter-memory, as digital memorials allow for the creation of spaces where marginalised memories can be shared and preserved outside state-controlled archives and narratives.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of digital memorials in preserving Zimbabwe's intangible cultural heritage. These platforms enable cultural practices, oral histories, and indigenous knowledge to be passed down across generations, particularly in a time when such traditions are under threat due to modernisation and historical erasure. Through facilitating intergenerational dialogue, digital memorials enable younger generations, especially those in the Diaspora, to connect with their cultural roots and history, promoting a sense of shared identity and belonging. This study confirms that digital memorials in Zimbabwe are not just passive sites of remembrance; they are active

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spaces of resistance, cultural preservation, and social justice. They play a crucial role in reconstructing national identity, challenging historical erasure, and ensuring that Zimbabwe's diverse cultural and historical narratives are preserved for future generations. As digital technology continues to evolve, the role of digital memorials in Zimbabwe's collective memory will likely expand, further transforming how history is shared, experienced, and understood.

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Antonomasia and Personal Naming among the Ndebele of Lupane

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Abstract

Antonomasia refers to the semantic mechanism of replacing a proper name with an allusion or ascription that denotes a perceived set of traits. This paper aims to examine how antonomasia as a phenomenon is used in personal naming, as driven by cognitive metonymic and metaphoric mechanisms. It seeks to explore how the Ndebele conceptualise different members of society and consequently name them. From a Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) perspective, the study employs autoethnography and focus group discussion to study a group of adults in a rural community, exploring how antonomasia has been used in their adult-acquired names. Convenience sampling techniques were used to identify twelve participants who were put into three groups based on their social and physical proximity. Sources of antonomasia in personal naming include perceived physical or behavioural qualities, one's life history and experiences, as well as one's speech habits. In other instances, antonomasia is based on metaphorisation that is founded on association and transfer of semantic conceptual structure. The study concludes that antonomasia is a primary naming strategy among the Ndebele, especially about names acquired at adulthood, where one dimension of a person's character becomes a typical representation of who they are.

Keywords: antonomasia, cognitive linguistics, conceptual metonymy, epithet, metaphoric metonymy

1. Introduction

The Ndebele are a Nguni group that came to present-day Zimbabwe from Zululand in the early 1800s (Hadebe, 2002; Ndlovu, 2017). They are a Bantu people found mainly in the western parts of Zimbabwe, and their language belongs to the Nguni sub-group of the Bantu language family (Hadebe, 2002). The Ndebele language and culture are closely related to those of other Nguni groups such as the Zulu of South Africa, the Xhosa, and the Ngoni of Central and East Africa. Outside Matabeleland and Midlands provinces of Zimbabwe, the Ndebele people are also found in Buhera in Manicaland, Mwenezi and Chivi districts in Masvingo, as well as Zvimba and Hurungwe districts in Mashonaland West (Hachipola, 1998). The Ndebele language is related to other Nguni languages like Zulu, Xhosa, Swati, and Ndebele of Transvaal. The Ndebele are the second-largest ethnic group in Zimbabwe.

According to Arnaud (2022), antonomasia is a literary term in which an expressive term substitutes an individual's name. It can range from light-hearted nicknames to epic

names. It is used to call attention to certain characteristics of the individual, whether visible, known, or discernible; hence, antonomasia is bestowing nicknames that reveal something about a person. While both antonomasia and nicknaming generally relate to the substitution of an already existing name, the former always calls attention to characteristic qualities, while the latter may be ingenious and obscure, often lacking a satisfactory explanation (Arnaud, 2022). With antonomasia, the link between the name and its referent is visible or has a known history, while it is commonplace for nicknames to be ironic, include some antiphrasis, and lack correspondence between the name and the referent. Starks and Taylor-Leech (2011, p. 87) posit that, "[T] he sociological studies of nicknaming practices have shown that naming practices are often associated with domains of language use." This is an important characteristic of nicknames that distinguishes them from antonomasia in that while the former appears to be domain-specific, the latter is more general, transcending various domains. Nicknaming practices are common in gangs (Rymes, 1996; Zaitozow, 1998), sports teams (Kennedy and Zamuner, 2006), and family, while antonomasia tends to be general and more accessible and used by people across the various spheres of life.

2. Statement of the problem

The distinction between antonomasia and nicknaming is very blurry; while the former is figurative and descriptive, the latter implies the act of bestowing on someone an informal name that is often social. However, both concepts are commonly used in personal naming, and sometimes with overlaps. Nicknames can be based on shorter names, characteristics, new names, specific names, resemblances, and professions (Dianitami, Widyastuti & Setiawan, 2023). On the other hand, antonomasia is the name applied to that form of expression when the title, office, dignity, profession, science, trade, or any other characteristic is put instead of the true name of the person (Popescu, 2019). Thus, with antonomasia, there is always a transfer of characteristics, something that is not requisite with nicknames. This article examines the concept of antonomasia in personal naming among the Ndebele of Zimbabwe. It seeks to establish how antonomasia, as driven by a cognitive metonymic and metaphoric mechanism, can reveal how different members of a society are conceptualised and consequently talked about. The type of antonomasia where there is emotional substitution of a person's name based on the transfer of characteristics (from other domains) is a common phenomenon among the Ndebele, yet it is often labelled as nicknaming.

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3. Literature Review

According to Achilova (2021), the concept of antonomasia is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that has been traditionally viewed as a metaphor for object identification with the real meaning of the name. Antonomasia is a Greek word that is traceable back to antiquity (Schwab et al., 2019). It means to name differently and refers to the phenomenon of substituting an official or real name with a nickname. As opposed to an epithet, which is an added tag, antonomasia is the total replacement of a proper noun by an appellative. Achilova (2021, p. 55) postulates that "antonomasia is a type of metonymy that refers to words or phrases that indicate the place of a real name or noun". It highlights an important feature of an object or its relatedness to something else. Thus, metaphorically, antonomasia is a comparison with paragons from other spheres (Holmqvist and Pluciennik, 2010).

Although it is commonplace to have both phenomena used simultaneously, this study explores the use of epithets as a form of antonomasia in personal naming among the Ndebele. Antonomasia can provide someone with a strong epithet that celebrates and venerates their great deeds, or give negative names to weak or nasty people. Antonomasia provides people with exciting names and nicknames that reflect certain characteristics, feats they possess, or even their professions.

Bergien (2013) avers that, in antonomasia, a source serves as a paragon to elevate the target (sometimes by applying a modifier that provides a corresponding context). Thus, it relates to token or telling names as the person's name serves to describe their visible, known or discernible characteristics (Widdowson, 1992). Token or telling names give information to the hearer (reader) about the bearer of the name. In this way, antonomasia is based on the interface of logical and nominal meanings, and these meanings must be realised concurrently. This study seeks to demonstrate how antonomasia is applied in personal naming, with specific reference to nicknames acquired at adulthood.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Cognitive Linguistics Theory, which focuses on "the study of language in its cognitive function, where cognitive refers to the crucial role of intermediate informational structures in our encounters with the world" (Geeraerts & Cuyckens, 2012, p. 5). Language offers us a window into the cognitive functions of the human mind, providing insights into the nature, structure and organization of thoughts and ideas (Evans & Green, 2006). Geeraerts and Cuyckens (2012) and Nordquist (2021) observe that our interaction with the world is mediated through informational structures in the mind by

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focusing on natural language as a means for organising, processing, and conveying that information. Language, then, is seen as a repository of world knowledge, a structured collection of meaningful categories that help us deal with new experiences and store information about old ones. In this regard, antonomasia is a cognitive and linguistic process and phenomenon where the perceived characteristic attributes of an individual are then conveyed through an attributive appellative. This brings to the fore the primacy of semantics in linguistic analysis, the encyclopedic nature of linguistic meaning, and the perspectival nature of linguistic meaning regarding personal names.

Cognitive linguists are more concerned with determining how language reflects people's perceptions of the world around them by focusing on the process of interpreting meaning and the mental concepts the mind forms and expresses about the world through language. Dancygier and Sweetser (2014) observe that meaning does not exist independently from people who create and use it (Lakoff & Johnson, 1993, 1999, 2003; Grady, 1999). The study uses the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) propounded by Lakoff and Johnson (2003), which states that metaphors are a property of language, thought, and linguistic phenomena, and involve perceiving one experience in terms of another. Fundamentally, in human cognition, metaphors are at the centre of speech production, communication, and processing of meaning, which depends on the perceived resemblance between domains. Grady (2005) proposes the use of metaphors as a universal and basic principle of generating names and creating novel meanings. Thus, in this study, the Conceptual Metaphor Theory is used to explore and discuss the resemblance metaphor applied as antonomasia in the Ndebele language from a cognitive linguistic point of view.

5. Methodology

This study was carried out in Lupane, which is located in the south-western part of Zimbabwe. Lupane is situated in Matabeleland North province, which is 170 kilometres from Bulawayo, along Victoria Falls Road. Dandanda village is 70 kilometres north of Lupane town. It is a predominantly Ndebele-speaking community that shares borders with Gokwe to the east and Binga to the north. The study follows a qualitative approach to get an in-depth understanding of the respondents' perceptions of how antonomasia is deployed in personal naming among members of the Ndebele society. The data is in the form of views of the respondents, which helps the researcher make an exploration of the respondents' predispositions (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005). The study combines autoethnography with data collection and focus group discussions to understand the sources of antonomasia. Autoethnography is when a researcher uses personal

experience, acknowledging and valuing their relationships with others, to interrogate the social phenomena (Poulos, 2021).

Using the chain referral technique, a form of snow-ball sampling that begins with a convenience sample of initial subjects that could not be accessed through non-convenient methods (Heckathorn, 2012), the researcher identified two initial participants based on social proximity, who then referred him to others. The total sample size was twelve participants who resided in the Dandanda area. Of these, eight were males and four were females, aged between 48 and 78 years. Three sessions were held with three separate groups according to their physical and social proximity to each other.

In an informal setting, and beginning with the names of the participants, the nicknames were discussed, paying attention to their origins, the shifts and continuities in these names. Participants were initially asked how they acquired their names and hen the questions:

1. Who bestowed these names on them?
2. How do they feel about these names?
3. How have their attitudes changed towards these names?

Clarifications were sought on the link between the names and characteristics of the bearers.

Discussions were not limited to the names of the participants alone; names of other people who have passed on or have relocated to other places were also discussed. These focus group discussions were held between December 2021 and April 2022, when the researcher visited the village on weekends and vacations. A set of semi-structured interviews was used to guide the discussions, focusing on the origins of the names under discussion. Informal appointments were made with some informants and discussants, while some of the names and their origins were discussed during everyday activities in the homesteads. The study targeted older members of the community who have acquired names through antonomasia. These older members were targeted based on the premise that such names could be offensive to others, while the younger members of the population may not have acquired some of these names. The different types of antonomasia are discussed in terms of how these members of the community have acquired them.

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6. Findings

The following names were collected from the population. The source or origin of each name was discussed. These names are discussed under the categories of pejorative names, speech patterns and idiosyncrasies, names celebrating positive attributes, as well as those used for self-referencing. Although during the discussions some names were suggested by the participants, only the twelve names listed on Table 1 were discussed in detail.

Table 1 below presents the names that were discussed with participants. The table presents the name, its meaning or attribution, source, and the source domain. The source for the names presented in Table 1 ranges from mechanical, topography, animal and linguistic domains. Others are sourced from the human domains of speech, occupation, race and maturation.

Table 1. Personal names, their meanings and source domains.

Name (target)	Meaning/attribution	Source	[DOMAIN]
Bhawuza	Big bodied	common noun	[MECHANICAL]
Titsha	Assertive; knowledgeable	common noun	[HUMAN occupation]
Lele	Witty	common noun	[ANIMAL]
Magagasa	The stutterer	adverb	[HUMAN speech]
Zidulini	One who likes anthills	adjective	[TOPOGRAPHY]
Maravaza	The brutal one	adverb	[LINGUISTIC]
Sidzweyatstweya	Crookedness	adjective	[LINGUISTIC]
Mfanongakatsheni	Toothless baby	adjective	[HUMAN maturation]
Zakabatana	They are bundled up	adjective	[LINGUISTIC]
Maheleza	One with a hoarse voice	adverb	[HUMAN speech]
Makharathi	Mother of coloureds	adjective	[HUMAN racial]
Mawawama	The loud talker	adverb	[HUMAN speech]

In antonomasia, although in most cases both the source and target are persons, one or both could be almost anything as long as the target is a proper name (Schwab et al., 2013). The source domains of the names in Table 1 range from mechanical, human, topography, animal, and linguistic. What is outstanding is the attribution of certain properties to people.

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6.1 Pejorative names

These names were initially created and maintained by close friends and peers because they were considered offensive and disparaging. Over time, they would then migrate and become popular with other groups within the community. Names such as *Bhawuza* (the big woman/bowser) and *Magagasa* (the stutterer) were initially used by peers but eventually extended beyond the boundaries of peer groups. Although pejorative in their nature, the bearers indicated that they were left with very little choice but to embrace these names because they were most often used by those close to them, such that they understood it as an endearment rather than anything negative. One respondent, Magagasa, stated:

> *Mina angilandaba lakho ukuthi abantu bathi nginguMagagasa ngoba vele ngiyakwazi ukuthi kuliqiniso. Abanye phela abalandaba, bayakubiza ngebizo asebekuphe lona. Ngiyazwisisa ngoba thina phela besesibanengi oMaDube so besokumele basehlukanise.*
>
> (I don't mind that people call me a stutterer because I am indeed a stutterer. Some people don't really care; they begin addressing you using a name they would have bestowed on you. I do understand because there were so many of the Dube women, and so there had to be a way of distinguishing one from the others).

Maheleza is an old man in his mid-70s, he has a distinctive and hoarse voice that makes him stand out to those who know him. In the excerpt below, he recounts how he got his name:

> *Mina ngezwa sokuthiwa ngingu Maheleza. Kodwa akungikhubanga ngoba lakhathesi lami ngiyalizwa ilizwi lami ukuthi lembala liyaheleza.*
>
> (At some point, I just got to know that people call me Maheleza (one with a hoarse voice). I never took offence though because even right now I can tell that, indeed, I have a distinctive hoarse voice).

Regarding the etymology of the name *Mawawama*, the son of an elderly woman, in her early 80s, had this to say about his mother's name:

> *Umama kwakuthiwa ngumawawama ngenxa yokukhulumela phezulu. Thina sasikwazi ukuthi vele ukukhulumela phezulu kodwa ukuthi ngubani owametha lelobizo lathi ngeke sitsho.*

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> (My mother was referred to as *Mawawama* (the talkative or the loudmouth). We were conscious that she was a loud talker, but we cannot tell who in particular gave her that name).

The above excerpt demonstrates how salient character traits can become conduits for the acquisition of new names, even at adulthood, a classic example of how an official name can be replaced by an attributive one – antonomasia. In this regard, stuttering, a hoarse voice or being a loud talker served as a "unique attribute" through which the individuals are differentiated from other persons of the shared identity (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980).

Some of these names may appear abusive and derogatory, but that is what makes them common and sticky (Morgan et al., 1979). *Bhawuza* is a metaphorization as the woman in question is being likened to an inanimate object, the water bowser, based on her body stature. Further interrogation regarding the time at which the name could have been first mooted revealed that, during the early 1990s, when there were massive road works in the Dandanda area, one of the distinct and noticeable items of equipment was a water bowser. One of her very close friends had this to say:

> *UBhawuza samnika lelo bizo ngenxa yokuthi wayeqatha, elomzimba omkhulu. Sasuke samfanisa lebhawuza le eyayithwala amanzi. Saqala nje silibiza nxa sisodwa emaklabhu abomama kodwa sasesibona ukuthi laye uyalithakazelela, kwaba yikho ukukhula kwebizo lelo.*
>
> (We named her Bhawuza (bowser), having compared her with a water bowser because of her big body. Initially, we used the name among ourselves as women whenever we would meet at our gatherings, but realising that she loved the name, it was popularized).

Although some may take offence and view it as body shaming, *Bhawuza* was an emotionally strong character who cherished her gigantic stature. Puoane, Tsolekile and Styen (2010) argue that, among Africans, happiness and wealth are regarded as important factors related to a big body. In the same vein, within the Ndebele culture, a big body is a symbol of nourishment and attracts respect; thus, by naming her *Bhawuza*, her contemporaries were acknowledging that she is a distinct, well-nourished woman of ample proportions. In their interaction with the world, mediated through informational structures in the mind, the bowser became a reminder of the distinct woman, and to capture the experience of having encountered a water bowser, metaphorisation was the best strategy for organising, processing, and conveying that information. Metaphorisation

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is founded on association, and it constructs systems-based prototypical notions and meanings which are used to classify the world (Grkoviae-Mejdor, 2008, p. 54). It is based on the transfer of semantic and conceptual structure (size) from the source conceptual domain (MECHANICAL: bowser) to the target conceptual domain (PERSON: *Bhawuza*). In the class of the big things, the woman in question belonged to the same category as the water bowser, hence the rephonologised name *Bhawuza*.

As Morgan et al. (1979) note, a nickname often highlights characteristics or stigmas, physical or social, to which a recipient is reluctant to call attention. They are often based on characteristics they would prefer to forget. *Mfanongakatsheni* is a graphic attribute of an elderly man who has lost all his front teeth. Narrating how he got his name, his nephew narrated:

> *Umalume sasimbiza Mfanongakatsheni ngoba wayengasela mazinyo njengosane oluncinyane olungakabi lamazinyo. Yena umnikazi walithanda ibizo lakhe kazange kumkhathaze ukuthi simbiza ngalo.*
>
> (We would refer to my uncle as *Mfanongakatsheni* because he had lost the whole frontline of his teeth, such that he resembled a yet-to-teethe baby. He had no qualms with being referenced as such).

The art of naming among the Ndebele is sometimes based on similarities and mockery (Dlodlo & Moyo, 2022). Certain names are bestowed on people based on whom they are likened to. Regarding the name *Makharathi*, a group participant noted that:

> *UMakharathi yena kutshiwo ngoba bonke labantwabakhe bamhlophe yingakho-ke yikho sabafanisa lamakharathi.*
>
> (We called her *Makharathi*, “mother of coloureds” because her children are light in complexion, hence likening them to coloureds).

From the above excerpt, the name *Makharathi*, although bestowed upon the mother, becomes a banner that she carries on behalf of the family, and it typifies the average member of the family (Dlodlo & Moyo, 2022). It is important to note that although some of these names may have originated from a disablist context, and are pejorative in their etymologies as they reference distinct and often visible differences by those outside the difference, the bearers have accepted them as an endearment by those close to them. A key feature of nicknames is that they are mostly assigned to individuals against their will and usually maintained by their peers.

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6.2 Speech patterns and idiosyncrasies

In this instance, *Maravaza* earned himself this name through the repeated use of the phrase *ravaza* (to tear up). He would (and still does) use the phrase even in instances where it would not be proper.

> *Umdala kuze kuthiwe nguMaravaza wayethanda ukuthi ngizakuravaza nxa ekuthembisa ukukutshaya. Kodwa nje yena kuye yonke into eyenzakalayo yikuravaza kuphela ngoba lanxa elima uthi ezakhe ziyaravaza. Lelanga uthi liyaravaza, lezinja zakhe kazilumi ziyarazava. Kutsho ukuthi yena nguye uMaravaza.*
>
> (The old man here is called Maravaza because he would use that phrase when threatening to beat you. But to him, any act or anything done well is referred to as tearing up. He can use the word to refer to anything from the hot sun, vicious dogs, or even tilling the fields).

Just like *Maravaza*, *Sidzweyatsweya* earned his name by consistently using the term *isidzweyatsweya*, a word borrowed from the Shona language, *kutsveyama* meaning crookedness. He would refer to any kind of behaviour and conduct that he was not satisfied with as *isidzweyatsweya,* meaning dodgy and unscrupulous.

> *Umdala vele lakhathesi uyakuthanda ukuthi kafuni sidzweyatsweya. Yonke into angayizwisisiyo uthi yisidzweyatsweya. Ukuqila, ukungathembeki, ukungacaci konke yisidzweyatsweya.*
>
> (Even to date, the old man is fond of saying I don't want *isidzweyatsweya* - dodgy conduct. To him, anything that he cannot comprehend is referred to as such. It includes cheating, insincerity, or anything that does not make perfect sense to him, which is referred to as such).

Just like *Maravaza* and *Sidzweyatsweya*, *Zakabatana* earned his name by consistently using the phrase *"Zakabatana,"* another word borrowed from the Shona language, which means wholeness. Every time his clients asked for change, he would tell them that *Zakabatana* (*zvakabatana mari dzacho*), he does not have loose notes or coins, but big bills only.

> *Undoda lo wayehlala engothengisayo. Pho-ke wayethi nxa esebuzwa intshintshi athi zakabatana. Zibambene mama. Esitsho izimali. Yikho ukukhula kwebizo lelo.*

> (This man has always been buying and selling different commodities. So, whenever he would remain with your change, upon being asked, his common response was '*zakabatana'*, meaning that all the money is a single note).

In this regard, antonomasia is primarily created by attributive, idiosyncratic combinations or phrases that are characteristic of the bearer, highlighting the salience of names in ordinary self-concept relative to other personal traits and characteristics. Contrary to the views by Alford (1988), that recipients rarely generate their names, when a person gets a name such as *Maravaza*, *Sidzweyatsweya* or *Zakabatana* originating from their idiosyncratic tendencies, it is as good as if they have generated these names themselves. It does not take long before the recipient begins self-referencing by these new names. It is a common phenomenon among the Ndebele for one to acquire an additional name from their most distinct phrases.

Names such as *Zidulini* and *Maravaza* are examples of antonomasia as they have seemingly overridden the official names in social settings. This is attested to by the decision that *Zidulini* has made to inscribe the name on his bus stop signpost. It is the only one of his names inscribed there. Some (fairly new) members of the community may not know his official name and surname because he is always referred to as *Zidulini*. Within a cognitive linguistic perspective, such names as *Maravaza* and *Zidulini* speak to the characteristic attributes of those individuals, conveying meaning covertly or overtly. The appellatives draw attention to the primacy of semantics in linguistic analysis of these names, and the encyclopedic nature of their linguistic meaning as personal names become prominent.

6.3 Names celebrating positive attributes

In antonomasia, the language unit used as a new name is written with a capital letter, and as a proper noun, it stands for a quality which becomes inseparable from the naked character (Poghosyan & Ghumashyan, 2021). In this regard, antonomasia is a veneration of a person's exceptional deeds and carries with it an ameliorative meaning. It is relatively easier for a positive name to replace an official one, and it will stick. However, with time, while the names are popularised and adopted, the originators of these names fade away into opacity, as seen in the following excerpt:

> *UMpofu omdala kuthiwa nguLele ngenxa yokuhlakanipha kwakhe. Ukuthi singatsho ukuthi ngubani owamnika ibizo, ngeke sisakhubula kodwa esikwazi kamhlophe yikuthi kwathiwa nguMvundla kwacina sokuthiwa nguLele ngoba phela ukuthi lele lokuthi mvundla yintonye.*

> (The older of the Mpofu brothers is now referred to as Lele. It is difficult to say when that name came about, but one thing is certain, it is due to his witty character that he was first referred to as Mvundla, then later Lele, because the two are synonymous).

According to Brozoviæ-Ronèeviæ and Zic-Fuchs (2003), names carry meaning in their original form from their point of creation, and meaning lies behind the motivation for their usage as personal names. *Tistha* is a rephonologisation of the English word 'teacher' with a transfer of the semantic meaning to suggest that the bearer has the wits of a teacher. Commenting on the origins of the name Lele, one participant had this to say:

> *UMpofu omncane yena sambiza Titsha ngexa yokuthi wayetshengisa ukukhalipha njalo ehlala engumuntu ogqoke kuhle njengababalisi bakudala. Ungumuntu olomqondo okhaliphileyo lezeluleko ezinhle kwabanye. Ucabanga njengombalisi sibili.*
>
> (The younger of the Mpofu brothers is called *Titsha* because people admired his deportment and general wise counsel. He thinks like a teacher even though he is a layman).

The names *Titsha* and *Lele* are designations that celebrate or venerate their recipients. They celebrate the positive attributes of the recipient. *Lele* is synonymous with the common Ndebele word *umvundla* (the hare), a very witty character in Ndebele folktales. While the former venerates its recipient as a smart guy who is 'well-educated' (because his reasoning resembles that of a teacher), the latter celebrates the craftiness and shrewdness of the bearer. Once more, there is a transfer of semantic meaning from one domain (ANIMAL: hare) to another (HUMAN: *Lele*).

Metaphorisation is considered one of the most basic notions of language and human cognition, and linguistically, it is an important source of names. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999), this is a basic metaphor where an animal is perceived as a person with such qualities as the size of the animal and their perceived behaviours as understood from folktales (Onchoke, 2018). This is also noted by Alford (1988), who notes that antonomasia provides a strong epithet that further celebrates or venerates their great deeds or character traits.

6.4 Self-referencing

As the popularity of the names grows beyond certain boundaries, the recipient then begins self-referring, ushering in a new phase as the name overrides their official one in

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some settings. In self-referring, the bearer attempts an amelioration of the name, further distinguishing themselves as a unique and special being. An informant had this to say:

> *Mina ubaba nguye owayethi nginguZidulini ngoba umuzi wami wakuqala ngangiwakhele phezu kwesiduli eceleni kwensimu yakhe. Omasalu yibo abalikhulisayo lelibizo ngoba vele lanamuhla kabakaze bangibize ngebizo lami lokuzalwa. Ngabona ukuthi kungcono-ke ukuthi ngilithathe lelibizo ngoba angikaze ngilizwe komunye umuntu loba ngaphi. Manje sengibonile ukuthi okulibizo lokhu kushapu.*
>
> (My father is the one who would call me *Zidulini* because I built my first home on the anthill next to his field. The older women are the ones who popularised this name because, since then, they have not used my official name. I then realised that I had never heard of this name anywhere. I decided to embrace the name, and now I have realised that it is a beautiful name).

Snyder and Howard-Fromkin (1980) emphasise that names, along with commodities as well as attitudes and beliefs, are unique attributes through which individuals may differentiate themselves from other persons. Thus, in self-referencing, attributive names serve as a distinctive identity marker championed by the bearer.

7. Discussion

From the findings of this study, there is a noticeable pattern in the migration of the names from nicknames to pure antonomasia. There is a thin line between an epithet and an antonomasia; however, the major difference is that an epithet is often used in conjunction with an official name, as an extension to it, while antonomasia entails the replacement of an official name with an acquired and unofficial name. In the case of antonomasia, it does not matter whether people know or remember one's official name; they use the acquired name on its own, as seen in this study. The bearer of this name also uses this name as if it were their official one.

As it is seen in this study, antonomasia among the Ndebele provides society with a strong epithet for celebrating and venerating people's good deeds and distinct characters. Although sometimes these names seem derogatory, abusive, and pejorative, antonomasia represents the complementarity of elements in the African worldview, which allows people to live with contradictions in their lives (Ntuli, 1999). When one's peers and close family bestow them with a seemingly abusive name, this represents the complementarity of the contradictions that people experience daily. The phenomenon

serves to remind us that acquired names remain a common phenomenon in many African societies, and an individual accumulates such names as they progress from birth to death (Lienhardt, 1988).

At a personal or family level, names are part of a communicative repertoire that decorate the personal stories and histories of the bearer, as is seen with the names *Zidulini* and *Mfanongakatsheni*. Hence, the role of the name in existential, identity, and opaque contexts makes every name a description of the bearer or their existential conditions. Lienhardt (1988) reminds us that, in many African cultures, names tell a story, and there is a host of personal names that are formed by compounding ideas, idiomatic or proverbial expressions or even sermons. Hence, for every proper name, there is a collection of descriptions associated with that name that constitute the meaning of the name (Gottlob and Russell, cited in Hlengwa, 2019).

A name such as *Zidulini* (one who builds his home on an anthill) and *Bhawuza* (a giant woman of ample proportion) personifies the bearer. Upon hearing such names, the hearer is likely to enquire as to what could have led to a person earning such a name, hence soliciting that the full story be told. Ubahakwe (1981) posits that an indigenous African name, on the whole, personifies the individual and tells some story. Hence, in the study of names acquired at adulthood, from a Cognitive Linguistic Theoretical perspective, antonomasia is a central concept as it relates to studying societies' mental and emotional processes and behavioural patterns (Neethling, 1998, p. 59). Because a people's language is the main conduit that transports cultural expression and marks one's identity, their lived experiences become the best source of names as their existential conditions directly determine their naming practices.

This study explored the phenomenon of antonomasia in the Ndebele language and concluded that it is mainly stylistic as it is represented by the use of a general term (an epithet) to stand for a referent having a proper name. In this regard, a new metaphoric name is used as a proper noun, replacing the individual's official name. Antonomasia in the Ndebele language is an attributive stylistic device often used as a token or telling name. The major distinction between nicknames and antonomasia is in their usage, where the former is often used widely across domains while the latter is common in groups such as sports teams, circles of friends, and family. The sources of antonomasia in the Ndebele language range from perceived physical or behavioural qualities to one's life history and experiences, as well as their speech patterns. Sometimes antonomasia is based on metaphorisation and is founded on association and transfer of semantic conceptual structure. Sources of antonomasia in the Ndebele language include metaphorisation and behavioural names. In the former, names of objects become

personal names, while in the latter, one's habits, such as speech, can become a source of their name. In addition, loan words and rephonologization are popular among the Ndebele, as seen in names like *Sidzweyatsweya*, *Bhawuza,* and *Maravaza*, which all have a non-Ndebele origin. We can also discern that the metaphoric nature of some Ndebele names appeals directly to the senses of listeners, soliciting their imagination to understand what is being communicated; therefore, the cultural nuances in antonomasia should be appreciated. Thus, antonomasia can be regarded as a sub-branch of socio-onomastics, the study of names, naming systems, and naming patterns as they pertain to particular societies (Neethling, 1998:59), where there is always a transfer of characteristics between entities or domains.

8. Conclusion

This study concludes that antonomasia is an active strategy for personal naming among the Ndebele of Lupane, especially with names acquired at adulthood. While, just like in ordinary nicknaming, people acquire new names, with antonomasia, these names are not mere pet names but analogical as they highlight the similarity of features between two entities (Sharagih & Marpaung, 2021). Antonomasia is a conscious cognitive process rather than the simple throwing of names at people. There is a metaphoric transfer and emphasis of shared characteristics between entities, making it a popular naming strategy for names acquired even in adulthood. While antonomasia involves replacing a common noun with a proper noun and vice versa (Grgić & Nikolić, 2011), this study focused on the type of antonomasia that involves the use of a regular/common noun to replace a proper noun (Athanasiadou, 2023). This is demonstrated by the use of names such as *Magagasa* (the stutterer) instead of one's official name. In this regard, antonomasia becomes metonymic (Holmqvist & Pluciennik, 2013) as a personal naming strategy, as one dimension of a person's character becomes a typical representation of who they are. The study recommends future research to explore other types of antonomasia within Ndebele onomastics and other fields.

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Bridging the Divide: Western and Indigenous Systems of Heritage Management in the African Context

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Abstract

Western heritage management systems were introduced as part of a colonial package throughout Africa to preserve monuments and sites that bore witness to the development of indigenous peoples. Before colonialism, indigenous management systems were in place to maintain respect and the survival of cultural heritage sites. These included taboos, restrictions, legends, myths, and ritual ceremonies, and these measures were effective in ensuring the survival of heritage places. This was mainly because traditional communities shared common values and respect for these places, which represented points of communication with the ancestral world. The new Western system of heritage management, however, sought to protect only tangible heritage and considered Western-centric techniques as the only relevant ways of conservation. This scenario prevailed throughout the colonial period, and heritage institutions even inherited the rigid policies towards conservation after independence. Coupled with aspects like the introduction of Christianity, science and technology, and legislation about land ownership, the environment led to the 'suffocation' of indigenous management systems in many parts of Africa. The two systems have different aspects that they cater for and present a conflict, though in a few cases, there have been integrations. This paper adopts a qualitative research approach, which includes interviews with archaeologists, cultural heritage practitioners, and community members in an attempt to get more insights on the possibilities of integrating Western and Indigenous management systems for heritage in the African context. Engaging communities enables the discovery of significant narratives that can provide deeper and more valuable information.

Keywords: heritage management, Western systems, Indigenous systems, bridging the divide, African context, cultural integration.

1. Introduction

Conservation of heritage is often inseparable from local communities, as it fosters identity for a certain society/nation, and the state turns to legitimise it (Maradze, 2003). Hence, communities should be central in the management of heritage. Heritage represents people's beliefs, opinions, and ideologies; thus, cultural resources belong to the people, and there is a need to include them in the conservation, rather than adopting laws and conservation practices that alienate them. Community involvement in the management of heritage seems to be taking centre stage worldwide over though some African countries tend to reflect the alienation of local communities in heritage resource management. This

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is because some heritage legislation in Africa remains a legacy from the former “colonial masters” (Chirikure et al., 2008).

A new philosophy for cultural heritage management in the African context has shifted towards integrating indigenous systems of heritage management (Report of the Director General of UNESCO to the Secretary General of the United Nations, 2013, p. 3). This has seen a lot of research and publications over the years on issues related to community engagement in its management. In a bid to investigate and solve the alienation of local communities and bridge the gap with regard to Western and indigenous management systems of heritage in Africa, new philosophies of the same have been adopted.

Over the last decades, indigenous populations worldwide have been engaged in theoretical aspects as well as practices of heritage and archaeology, increasingly becoming vocal about issues of cultural heritage (Pikirayi, 2011). Conclusions have been that the parameters of community engagement should be redefined, as local communities have been alienated from cultural heritage resources because of colonial legislation (Pikirayi, 2011). Chirikure (2008) states that community engagement in heritage management has progressively gained importance as archaeologists strive to increase the discipline’s social relevance by actively engaging local communities in the running of heritage places.

In Zimbabwe, the democratisation of the political process from white minority rule did not witness the immediate engagement of local communities in issues related to the management of heritage resources. This has culminated in ownership and management wrangles as the alienated local communities have become activists, demanding a stake in the conservation of their heritage (Chirikure, 2008). According to UNESCO (2003), the Convention on Intangible Heritage (Article 11b), a partnership approach amongst communities and other stakeholders in the management of heritage proves to be a more viable approach to this challenge.

According to Ndoro (2003), in recent times, the theory and practice of heritage management have been changing in significant ways. One of the most significant changes that can be noted is that local communities have increasingly engaged with issues related to the management of cultural heritage sites through the development of varied models of heritage resource management, such as co-management and participatory management. In Africa, archaeological research has traditionally been carried out by foreign scholars, often using Western scientific methods that hold little relevance for local communities. Rooted in colonial practices, archaeology has historically marginalised indigenous perspectives. However, recent approaches to heritage

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management increasingly emphasise the importance of engaging local communities in the conservation of archaeological sites (Pikirayi, 2011). Jopela (2011) states that most heritage agencies have operated based on Western heritage management approaches. Both local communities and various academics have criticised these management approaches as inadequate (Mawere et al., 2012). Scholars and heritage practitioners argue that the Western heritage management systems are unable to ensure holistic management of heritage and are of no cultural significance. Motivated by these developments, this study, through a qualitative approach, sought to investigate if the integration of indigenous and Western systems of community-based heritage management is a realistic and effective option for the African context.

2. Literature review

2.1 Legislation for Heritage management in the context of Africa

The purpose of legislation is to foster the good management of the national estate as well as to encourage the local communities to conserve their legacy, unlike in other countries. The world over, most African countries' legal instruments are like 'new wine put into old skins' as they date back to colonial times, except South Africa (Munjeri, 2005). Legal protection of heritage without community involvement can negate the purpose of listing a place or heritage resource on national or international heritage registers (Deacon et al., 2003). Most sub-Saharan countries are victims of European colonisation, and as a result, several of their post-colonial legislations are a cast of colonial frameworks. One of the most distressing legacies of colonial and minority rule was the alienation of local communities from their heritage resources (Mitchel, 2003). This has perpetuated a system of alienation and exclusion of local communities in the conservation of their heritage legally in some of the post-colonial legislations in Africa, with exclusion of a few countries that have addressed these anomalies.

According to Deacon et al. (2003), in 2001, UNESCO emphasised that the core principle of the proposed Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage is that such heritage should be preserved primarily through the creativity and active participation of the communities that create and sustain it. This underscores the importance of a bottom-up approach to conservation, ensuring that communities remain central to the process. International frameworks, such as Australia's Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act, have demonstrated effective models by establishing mechanisms that allow communities to retain control over the management of their intangible heritage and benefit directly from it (Beazley, 2002; Blake, 2001), which is what most sub-Saharan African countries should adopt. According to Deacon et al. (2003), a few national

legislations in Africa, namely Botswana's (2001), South Africa's NHRA (1999) and others, refer directly to intangible heritage. The NHRA includes in the national heritage register all places and objects associated with oral traditions and living heritage (1999, section 3(2)). In section 5(7), it makes specific provision for protecting the living heritage components associated with objects and places.

Against the background of earlier exclusion of local communities in apartheid South Africa from participation in the conservation of cultural heritage, the South African National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999 was born. This act empowers previously marginalised local communities to take a central role in the conservation of their heritage resources (Delmont, 2004). The act has seen the introduction of an integrated and interactive system for the management of national heritage resources. Chapter 1, section 8 of the National Heritage Resources Act (NAHRA) 25 of 1999 provides for the establishment "three-tier system" to ensure effective management of heritage resources. These are the national level under the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), provincial level heritage resources agency responsible for provincial heritage resources, and the local level, which is constituted with members of the local community who are responsible for class three heritage resources. This can be viewed as a great achievement in Africa, as some legislations have seen the need for inclusion of local communities, as local societies have taken centre stage in the conservation of heritage through legal appointments as custodians of class three heritage resources in South Africa.

More so, the new Monuments Relics Act 2002 of Botswana has addressed issues on community involvement in the management of monuments to enhance protection and conservation of heritage (AFRICA2009, 2002). Communities have taken centre stage in conservatory activities at heritage sites to enhance heritage conservation for posterity. Tsodilo Hills is one example where local communities are undertaking most conservation activities.

Additionally, a classic case of local community success in playing an important role in the conservation of tangible heritage in South Africa can be evidenced at a site called Thulamela in Kruger National Park. In the 1990s, after a consensus was reached to rebuild the walls at the Zimbabwe-culture site, locals were taken on board from the genesis of the project and had important decision-making powers in the conservation project (Chirikure et al., 2008). To date, Thulamela has been celebrated in the local and international media as a success story of local community involvement in the conservation of heritage resources before the amendment of the South African post-colonial legislation. Henceforth, the notion that locals are central to the conservation of tangible heritage in sub-Saharan Africa can be reinforced by this case study.

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However, in Zimbabwe, the transition of the political process from White minority rule did not immediately see the involvement of local communities in conserving their heritage. The National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe Act 25:11 (NMMZ) was adopted from the colonial heritage legislation, which did not provide for community involvement in the conservation of either tangible or intangible heritage, as it is silent on this aspect (Pwiti & Mvenge, 1996). This saw the local communities getting agitated and hostile by committing several acts of vandalism in defiance of their alienation. For example, they defaced the Domboshava Rock art site with oil paint as an act of sabotage. These occasions triggered policy change within NMMZ, and it then adopted a community involvement policy (Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008). This has seen NNMZ recruiting members of the local communities to work within the organisation, partaking in conservation activities. At the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage site, the bulk of the stone masons who carry out conservation activities of the dry stone walls are from the local community, namely the Mugabe clan who are descendants of the coterie that occupied the site in the nineteenth century, who use their traditional knowledge of stonemasonry to restore collapsed walls (Fontein, 2006).

Though in this instance the locals have taken centre stage in conservation activities, it is not enshrined in the NMMZ Act 25:11 that locals are central in the conservation of heritage resources, hence it is not legally binding. NMMZ is the board set up and mandated by the law to be the custodian of Zimbabwe's tangible heritage, thereby carrying out conservation activities of heritage resources, and is silent on local communities being central in conservation. Ironically, the NMMZ Act 25:11 is in clear contrast to the UNESCO 1972 Convention concerning the protection of the World cultural and natural heritage, which Zimbabwe ratified in August 1982. The Convention advocates for the participation of local communities and other stakeholders in the protection of World Heritage (UNESCO 1972 Convention, Article 5). The act provides for a partnership approach to the management of heritage, a significant contribution to the protection of World Heritage properties. UNESCO is, without a doubt, making a bold move by advocating legally for the central participation of local communities worldwide in the conservation of heritage resources. Thus, it is pertinent for Zimbabwe to include local communities in the national legislation and not just make it a policy but legally binding, as local community involvement in the conservation of heritage is gaining prominence not only regionally but worldwide.

Based on the above section, heritage agencies worldwide have realised that adopting a solo approach that excludes local communities as well as traditional conservation and management strategies in heritage conservation and management is counterproductive, as it leads to unsustainable use of heritage sites. Involving informal management systems

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has been thought to be the best solution to manage and conserve heritage sites in Africa; yet, the problem has been how the community can be involved (Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008). Community participation has recently become popular in the global heritage management discourse. Formal heritage management systems have failed to protect archaeological sites in many parts of Africa. Since historical times, local communities living near heritage places have often played a large role in ensuring the survival of places of cultural significance through their traditional custodianship systems. Yet often these systems are ignored or not fully recognised by the state heritage management organisations.

However, in ensuring the conservation and management of archaeological sites, most governments have fallen short in ensuring the participation of other management systems, because heritage management falls within two different frameworks: the 'modern', Western or state-based management system designated as formal and the traditional custodianship system or traditional management systems (Ndoro & Pwiti 1999; Mumma 2002; Jopela, 2006). The management of heritage sites imbued with sacred values has led to a conflict between local communities and heritage management institutions across the region (Pwiti & Mvenge 1996; Taruvinga & Ndoro 2003). The dilemma associated with managing such archaeological sites is that often formal heritage managers criticise the damage done to sites as a result of the traditional use of such spaces (Pwiti et al., 2007). On the other hand, the limited resources and capacities of state-based heritage organizations and the way they currently operate (based on formal heritage management approaches), has led scholars and heritage practitioners to recognise that formal heritage management systems on their own, are incapable of ensuring the effective and sustainable management of immovable heritage, or any other place of cultural significance (Mumma 2005). There is a need for heritage authorities to bridge the gap, that is, to involve both formal and informal systems at all stages of planning and management of heritage places. All conservation procedures implemented by heritage managers should be sensitive to the needs of the local community.

The weakness in legislation was largely addressed by making recourse to international legislation, such as the Venice Charter, Burra Charter, and the World Heritage Convention. Emphasis is on Western values in these charters and legislations in most of Africa; local values were not taken on board (Ndoro, 1997). This has led to the growth of approaches mooted to engage and co-opt local values and informal systems into the mainstream. Community participation is now viewed as an integral component of the practice of heritage management systems sensitive to local needs, though its success has been lukewarm (Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008). Indigenous systems of heritage management remain largely unnoticed. Perhaps this is caused by the difficulty in reconciling opposed systems. The Western system is based on restricted access; striking

a balance between the two is a goal yet to be pursued and has not become standard practice (Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008). Formal community-based systems are seen as a tool of oppression and not protection (Munjeri, 2005).

2.2 State of Heritage Management in Africa

The establishment of programmes like AFRICA2009 can be seen as another step towards putting local communities at the centre stage in the management of heritage in Africa. The AFRICA2009 programme is a partnership of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, ICCROM, CRATerre-EAG, and African Cultural Heritage Organisations (Joffroy, 2005). This programme was launched in 1998 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, to improve the conservation conditions of immovable cultural heritage in sub-Saharan Africa through sustainable conservation of heritage places. Through courses, seminars, and research, professionals come together to devise ideas and develop collective frameworks that can be adapted to suit local needs regionally. According to Joffroy (2005), the AFRICA2009 research project is devoted to 'Traditional Conservation of Immovable Cultural Heritage in Africa'.

The research done under this programme emphasised the role of the traditional owners and local communities in the conservation of these immovable heritage sites after a pilot project at the Royal Palaces of Abomey in Benin and Timbuktu in Mali. It made it clear that conservation of heritage places without local communities' inclusion was 'fruitless' or retrogressive, because it would create social or political problems (Joffroy, 2005). On the other hand, the involvement of traditional owners and local communities has yielded numerous benefits in the conservation of heritage resources, including enhanced sustainability, strengthened cultural identity, and increased community ownership of heritage management processes. These rewards include an in-depth understanding of a site about its social context and use, as well as how it is valued by the locals. In situations where physical intervention is necessary, the heritage agencies have traditional experience and knowledge to warrant correct conservation practices, thus fostering the preservation of the authenticity of the site (Joffroy, 2005). Hence, this project brought about the adoption of what is termed a traditional approach to conservation which puts local communities central to the conservation of tangible and intangible heritage, as reinforced by Munjeri (2004) who suggests that societies or local communities are part of the three pillars of an equilateral triangle relationship (the Magna Triangle) that form a 'smart partnership' that sustains cultural heritage. This is illustrated below from various cases in this discussion, taken from sub-Saharan Africa, some pioneered by the AFRICA2009 initiative.

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In Kenya, the Mijikenda Kaya Forests are a model case that illustrates the local community being central to the conservation of tangible heritage. Kayas are the sacred forests of the Mijikenda people who live close to the Kenyan coastal plains (Githitho, 2000; Mutoro, 1994), characterised by residual patches which are on average 10-400 hectares. These Kayas were conserved as patches of forests of varying sizes that were used as burial grounds and meeting places (Chauke, 2003). Through a series of traditional conservation practices, the Kayas are managed by the local community. Various regulations were put in place to prevent the desecration of the site. In case of infringement, fines were imposed and cleansing ceremonies were performed. To conserve the Kayas, for instance, cutting down trees is prohibited because it is said the Kayas house the Fingo or protective magic to the community (Githitho, 2000). More so, sorcery or witchcraft was seen as destructive as well as antisocial and harmful to the community, and was strictly forbidden in the Kaya. The shedding of blood was prohibited in the Kayas, and women are prohibited from coming to the Kayas when experiencing their menstrual cycle. If any shedding of blood were to happen, whether by accident or intentionally, a cleansing ceremony would be done (Joffroy, 2005).

The Kenyan government has seen to it that the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) has declared most Kayas as national monuments as a technique of safeguarding them from human settlement as a result of the growing population (Githitho, 2000). These Kayas are managed jointly by the NMK and the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), as well as the Mijikenda community. The community is the one that carries out all conservatory work, and the NMK only comes in on a consultative basis and provides support through monitoring and legal prosecution where required, and WWF provides the technical expertise and financial support (Chauke, 2003). The communities are involved in all aspects of management and conservation of heritage in most parts of Kenya, as alluded to by NMK's former Director-General, Dr George Abungu, in Mombasa in 2001 in a speech to delegates at an AFRICA2009 workshop that NMK has since adopted local community involvement in the management of cultural heritage (Chauke, 2003). Hence, local communities are central to the conservation of heritage in most sub-Saharan countries.

The concept of involving informal management systems has dominated current heritage management (Munjeri, 2002). This has seen places like the Kasubi tombs in Uganda adopting community-based management systems. The majestic Kasubi tombs are housed in Kampala, the capital of Uganda. According to Munjeri (2002), the site covers almost 30 hectares, situated on a hilltop, and is evidence of the history of the 6 million Baganda. The tombs were inscribed on the prestigious World Heritage list in 2001, and worth noting is the fact that the management system of the tombs is deep-rooted in this

'age-old tradition' where custodians are stationed at the site and tasked at different levels technically, spiritually, and even administratively (Munjeri, 2002).

The conservation of the site is the sole responsibility of the locals, as various conservatory activities are placed under a certain clan amongst the local community. Management of the site is steeped in traditions; overall authority is vested in the Kabaka (king), who has a clearly defined hierarchy below him with clearly stipulated roles for each individual engaged in site management, decision-making, or technical activities (Munjeri, 2004). At the helm of the throne is the Nalinga, who is more of the 'Spiritual Father' of the site, while the Lubunga is the land-use coordinator. Thatching is done by the Ngeye clan, while the Ngo clan is tasked with the production and maintenance of the bark cloth. According to Munjeri (2002), the Kasubi tombs is a classic case of local community involvement or local communities playing a critical role in the conservation of heritage, as the safeguarding of the site is firmly backed by the country's Historical Monuments act which is the overall instrument for the protection of the site at national level, thereby rallying behind the wisdom and ability of the local communities to undertake conservatory activities of the sites. The title deeds on which the tombs are situated are in trust of the Kabaka on behalf of the kingdom, and the protection of the tombs is further supported by varying tourism policies. Based on these varying cases, it can therefore be established that most African countries have adopted the local community centrality approach to conservation of heritage.

Elsewhere in Africa, Botswana to be precise, Tsodilo Hills provides yet another case of community participation in the management of cultural heritage (Tsheboeng, 2001). Tsodilo World Heritage Site (WHS) is situated in the Ngamiland district in the northwestern part of Botswana. The site is about 400 kilometres west of the town of Maun and 50 kilometres south of the Okavango Delta. The Tsodilo hills are impressive natural quartzite landmarks that rise high within ancient dunes to the east and a dry fossil lake bed to the west (Wendorff & Lasarwe, 2005). The local Hambukushu and Basarwa communities have strong traditional beliefs that involve respect for Tsodilo as a place of worship and ancestral spirits.

The local communities living at Tsodilo WHS have been involved in the management of Tsodilo as the core stakeholders. Locals have been employed permanently at the Tsodilo site museum for certain positions, and some are engaged as local tour guides who play the role of community representatives in the active conservation and management of Tsodilo; thus, they also benefit economically from the site. These local community representatives and other members at large are also allowed to sell their locally produced curios at the site to the visitors for economic benefits. Some locals have significantly

benefited from the site, so they guard against site intrusion. Consequently, it can be safely said that Africa has seen local community centrality in the conservation of heritage, as pertinently witnessed by these varying cases.

In Burkina Faso, there is a living heritage site named Na-yiri Kokolog that is inhabited by the chief of eight villages. The chief, in cooperation with international organisations, started a project in an attempt to strengthen and promote the traditional practices for the conservation of Na-yiri Kokolog cultural and architectural significance (Ndoro, 2008). However, the growing need for water to facilitate the project required a borehole to be drilled, and a solar lighting system had to be connected to enhance the implementation of the project. The project brought together villagers in decision-making about the heritage place in terms of traditional conservation techniques. The locals also benefited in terms of the development of their area, which became an opportunity; the borehole and lighting became useful not only for the conservation of the cultural and historical environment but for the benefit of the whole community (Ndoro, 2008). Therefore, the locals began to make decisions themselves in terms of conservatory activities of the cultural landscape. Hence, in most communities in Africa, customary rights and traditional management systems have played an important role in the way people perceive, utilise, and respect their heritage (Ndoro, 2008).

The centrality of the local community in the conservation of heritage in Africa can be further strengthened by the case of Kasama rock art in Zambia. Declared a National Monument in 1964, the protection of this site has been under the Forest Act partly because it was classified as a Forest Reserve (National Heritage Conservation Commission, Zambia, 2008). In Africa, Kasama is notably one of the sites with the heaviest concentrations of rock art sites. All the paintings are iron oxide red; an estimated number exceeding 500 panels was registered during the 1990s. These paintings are characterised by mainly paintings or drawings on a rock surface of either animals or geometric figures. These masterpieces are considered the work of the Twa people, who can be traced as far back as 2000 BC (National Heritage Conservation Commission, Zambia, 2008). The site has various values associated with it, including spiritual, historical, educational, research/scientific, artistic/aesthetic, and economic values. These are preserved by a few villagers located in close vicinity to the site, who are the traditional users and custodians of the place. The Heritage Agency, the National Heritage Conservation Commission of Zambia, has agreed with the traditional leadership, comprising headmen and their close allies, to ensure that the local community plays an active role in conservation at the site. These locals have attached various traditional beliefs, for instance, the belief that the ancestral spirits that provide rain and heal, live in the caves (National Heritage Conservation Commission, Zambia, 2008). Hence, the

locals have assumed an active role in facilitating the conservation of this site with the support of the National Heritage Conservation Commission of Zambia.

According to Mawere et al. (2012), in Zimbabwe, just like in other African countries, the advent of post-colonial Zimbabwe has ushered in a scientific approach to the conservation and management of heritage inherited from the colonial heritage management agency. Nonetheless, the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) has since observed that the solo-approach to managing heritage that eliminates the use of traditional conservation and excludes local communities is counter-productive as it is a recipe for disaster (Mawere et al., 2012), hence, the adoption of community-based approaches to heritage management of some sites, like Chibvumani National Monument, though with some limitations. Chibvumani is a dry stone-walled national monument in the NMMZ's Southern Region in Bikita district of Masvingo Province. In a bid to embrace the concept of community participation in heritage management that is gaining prominence, the site was placed under the Adopt-a-Site programme (Mawere et al., 2012). This notion reinforces the fact that the concept of community participation is central to heritage conservation in Zimbabwe, as in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

However, it can be argued that though the programme appears to be noble theoretically, it requires reworking for it to be effective. The NMMZ pushed away the local community as it placed the site under Mamutse Primary School. The school was to carry out general conservation activities at the site and report any matters of extensive vandalism or deterioration to the NMMZ directly, thereby excluding local communities. In exchange, the NMMZ let the school use the site for educational tours and also ferry pupils to Great Zimbabwe for trips at least once a month (Mawere et al., 2012). The NMMZ failed to fulfil their end of the deal, which has brought the programme to a standstill. More so, this did not go down well with the local community, as witnessed by various acts of vandalism at the sites. The most recent act of vandalism was in 2009 by Donald Chirochangu, an allegedly mentally challenged male who reconstructed some walls at the site (Mawere et al., 2012). In addition, as a strong sign of anger in 1998, the then NMMZ Regional Director was chased away from the site as he was passing by on his way to Mutare. He was blamed and accused of economically empowering little children, whilst the real owners of the monument were and still get nothing (Mawere et al., 2012). The programme, noble as it is theoretically, can be regarded as a typical case of the failure of the idea of the centrality of the local community in the conservation of tangible and intangible heritage in Zimbabwe, as witnessed by this scenario.

The above-discussed scenario is echoed by Ndoro (2008), who notes that since independence, scientific heritage management methods in Africa have unconsciously

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been the cause for the continued exclusion of local communities from their heritage. Heritage management takes into account the whole landscape in which cultural property, tangible and intangible, exists and involves a commitment to uphold every value ascribed to the heritage by all parties involved (Grundberg, 2000). The challenge in preserving and presenting Africa's monuments lies in learning how to take off academic filters to view the social matrix and cultural perceptions of the past in full and finding ways to integrate traditional indigenous knowledge with scientific methods of proceeding (Ndoro, 2001). The formal management system does not engage the local community. The local community is absent and alienated from its cultural heritage. An integrated preservation and presentation strategy should ensure that the significance of the archaeological remains is presented effectively (Ndoro, 1994). Archaeological heritage management was introduced in southern Africa during the colonial period and has continued to be linked with European ideas even after independence. Western ideas and demands, rather than local values, have driven the course of heritage management (Ndoro, 2001). Indigenous views and feelings about the past held by the wider community are still disregarded. This has made formal and informal management systems equal and has led to conflicts at heritage sites.

The most potent challenge facing heritage management in Africa is the need to transform it from a rarefied discipline into a practice that broadly appeals to the local cultural ethos. In most African countries, colonial instruments are still being put into practice, but some countries like South Africa have created new heritage management systems which consider previously marginalised values (Ndoro & Pwiti 2005). Thus, in South Africa, formal and informal systems are integrated in the management of heritage, and the bottom-up approach is used for effective management.

At the international level, there are also calls to incorporate a traditional heritage protection system. UNESCO, through the World Heritage Convention definition of heritage, provided an innovative opportunity for the conservation of sites with both tangible and intangible heritage and for cultural landscapes as combined works of nature and man. The convention not only embodies tangible and intangible values of cultural heritage but also acknowledges in its implementation the recognition of traditional management systems, customary law, and long-established customary techniques to protect it (Rossler, 2003). It must also be emphasised that not all heritage typologies can be protected using both the Western and indigenous systems. Certain sites can be managed purely on a Western basis, others on the traditional (Chauke, 2003). The inherent traditional values found in a certain type of cultural heritage make it very possible to recognise the traditional heritage protection systems in formal legislation. The Western heritage systems are not fixed, hence the need to capture the equality among the three

principles of value, society, and the legislation that govern the management of cultural heritage (Munjeri, 2005).

3. Methodology

The research used a qualitative approach in examining the intersection of formal and informal systems of heritage management in the African situation. The qualitative approach was used due to its capacity to provide a deep understanding of the perceptions, beliefs, and values of communities on heritage preservation. Data collection involved interviews with archaeologists, cultural heritage practitioners, and local communities, as well as archival studies and policy document analyses. Qualitative methodology enabled narrative reporting of findings, consolidating the lived experience and perceptions of individuals presently engaged in heritage management (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Macmillan & Schumacher, 1993).

Field research was conducted in villages surrounding Great Zimbabwe, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to solicit firsthand data on customary conservation practice and conflict with formal systems. In addition, desktop research was carried out, analysing case studies of various African countries, including Kenya (Mijikenda Kaya Forests), Uganda (Kasubi Tombs), Botswana (Tsodilo Hills), and Zambia (Kasama Rock Art). This comparative analysis enabled the determination of successful models of community-based heritage management and the challenges faced in integrating Western and indigenous systems (Joffroy, 2005; Ndoro, 2008). The research employed focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews to understand stakeholders' perceptions of heritage management, traditional custodianship, and the feasibility of merging these two models of management. The responses were analysed using thematic analysis, bringing to the fore overarching themes that included disconnection from heritage resources, economic gains, and the place of traditional leadership (Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008; Katsamudanga, 2003). By prioritising the stories of the people, the research aimed to create a model that respects indigenous knowledge while meeting international conservation standards (UNESCO, 2003).

Ethical issues were dealt with by obtaining informed consent from the participants and by assuring anonymity when desired. The findings were validated with current literature to support the proposed management initiatives. Limitations identified in the study involve possible biases in self-reported community opinions and generalizability challenges of results in heterogeneous African settings. Notwithstanding, the study adds to the body of literature on the decolonisation of heritage management and informs policy reforms that acknowledge both formal and informal systems (Munjeri, 2005; Wijesuriya et al., 2013).

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4. Results

According to Pikirayi (2011), the public is starting to show interest in the past, its presentation as well as its interpretation. It is these issues that communities have begun to show concern about, emanating from the survey on the question of the management needs of local communities and other associated stakeholders. Four responses were yielded. Out of these, three respondents stated that one of the primary needs of the communities is to manage heritage sites through traditional systems without interference from the heritage agency. Katsamudanga (2003) echoes the same, as he notes that it is best to leave monuments and sites to traditional leadership and the communities because they are the ones that know what is important to them from the vast cultural past bequeathed to them by their ancestors. The professional heritage manager should only come in as a consultant. Communities also indicated that they need a stake in the revenue collected through tourism, challenging the idea of placing revenue generated in government coffers as inappropriate, arguing instead that it should be channelled towards community development projects (Charumbira, pers. com 2015). In addition, local communities stated the need to be directly involved in the management of the landscape, as well as to have access to the site for rituals.

The World Heritage Convention of 1972 (Article 5) highlights the need to actively engage locals in heritage management. In light of this, Pikirayi (2011) notes that one of the themes of the 2008 World Archaeological Congress was advocating for community participation in managing heritage. According to Katsamudanga (2003), it appears the best method in preservation of heritage would be to allow local communities to carry on with their activities at these sites. This, however, should be done within a legal framework that allows ethical practices and observation of human rights issues, with heritage agencies playing a consultative and advisory role. Recognition of traditional leadership will ensure the revival and preservation of intangible values at monuments and sites under formal and traditional systems.

This study sought to explore the interplay between Western and Indigenous systems of heritage management in the African context, with a specific focus on how local communities, traditional leaders, and heritage professionals perceive and engage with sites. Through interviews and focus group discussions, the research uncovered a series of recurring themes: exclusion from decision-making, contrasting definitions of ‘management’, contested access rights, benefit-sharing concerns, and the marginalisation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKSs). The results presented here reflect the lived realities and perspectives of the research participants, highlighting both the tensions and opportunities that lie in bridging these two paradigms of heritage

governance. A female community member from Masvingo District stated, “We have been here for generations. We know what the sacred places mean. But no one asks us when they make decisions”.

This statement captures a dominant sentiment among local community members: a feeling of historical and ongoing marginalisation in heritage management decisions. Despite their proximity to and historical relationship with heritage sites, communities often find themselves excluded from consultative processes initiated by authorities. This exclusion fosters resentment and perpetuates the belief that their cultural expertise and custodianship are undervalued or ignored. It also underscores the lack of mechanisms that facilitate meaningful participation at the grassroots level. A traditional leader from southern Zimbabwe re-echoed this:

> *Government officials only come during ceremonies or for inspections. But we are the ones who stay with these sites every day. They should consult us more.*

This response highlights the symbolic nature of government involvement, which is often limited to ceremonial functions rather than ongoing collaboration. Many felt that their role as stewards of the land and its ancestral significance is disregarded by state institutions. This perception reflects a broader critique of top-down heritage policies that tend to institutionalise Western approaches while overlooking the lived experiences and relational knowledge embedded in traditional leadership. According to an archaeologist with the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe:

> *Management means controlling visitor access, ensuring preservation, and monitoring environmental degradation.*

This interpretation, shared by many professional archaeologists, illustrates a prevailing definition of heritage management rooted in Western conservation ethics. From this perspective, management is about applying technical, legal, and regulatory frameworks to preserve the material fabric of heritage sites. It reflects a managerial and procedural understanding that is concerned with compliance, documentation, and environmental protection, often framed through the lens of international heritage standards.

In contrast, the community's understanding of management is embedded in ritual practice, spirituality, and oral tradition, as was highlighted by a Bikita District community elder. This illustrates how local custodians see heritage sites, not just as physical spaces to be protected but as living entities tied to ancestral presence and communal identity. Management, in this sense, is an act of care, intergenerational knowledge transmission,

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and sacred duty dimensions that are often invisible within Western conservation discourse. It is a case of paying homage to ancestral spirits as was stated by one traditional healer.

The issue of access to sacred sites emerged as a major source of conflict. Many community members, particularly those engaged in ritual and healing practices, reported facing restrictions that they found culturally inappropriate and spiritually offensive. The bureaucratisation of heritage access, such as requiring permits or regulating entry times, was seen as a form of cultural violence that alienates people from their heritage and interrupts sacred practices that require spontaneity and ancestral guidance. However, a heritage officer from the Midlands Province opined:

> *We are not trying to disrespect culture, but there are conservation standards we must follow. If too many people perform rituals involving fire or animal sacrifice, it could harm the site.*

This response shows that while acknowledging the cultural importance of rituals, some professionals advocated for a regulated framework that balances respect for tradition with conservation imperatives. This highlights a central tension: the desire to preserve material integrity versus the need to sustain living traditions that may, at times, pose risks to the physical site.

According to a village head:

> *Visitors come, pay money, and leave. That money goes to the capital, but our roads, schools, and clinics are still in poor condition.*

These words echo community members' concerns about the inequitable distribution of economic benefits derived from heritage tourism. They expressed frustration over the fact that while heritage sites generate revenue for the state, very little of that wealth is reinvested in the local areas that host them. This was seen as not only an economic injustice but also a failure to recognise the community's role as custodians and cultural interpreters.

In light of this, a local you leader stated that even if they were given 30%, they could build a clinic or drill a borehole, and this would help people to appreciate the value of preserving their culture. This insight reflects a practical solution proposed by many community members: revenue-sharing models that link heritage conservation with local development. Participants believed that if tangible benefits such as health facilities, water projects, or schools were visibly linked to the presence of heritage sites, it would

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strengthen community support for conservation efforts and deepen their sense of ownership and responsibility.

From a culture and identity perspective, one female community elder lamented, "Our children go to school and learn foreign histories, but they don't know our clan stories or sacred songs. We need heritage to be taught at home and in schools." This reflects a strong concern about the erosion of cultural knowledge among the younger generation. Participants lamented that formal education often prioritises Eurocentric curricula, leaving little space for local histories, oral traditions, or spiritual teachings. Many respondents advocated for the inclusion of Indigenous heritage content in school programmes and community-led cultural education initiatives to ensure the continuity of cultural identity and values.

According to another traditional leader from Masvingo Province, the need for laws that respect local knowledge, arguing that the spirits of the land recognise them as community members, not government offices. Such calls for the legal recognition of IKS were a common theme across interviews with traditional leaders. Participants advocated for a pluralistic legal framework that acknowledges customary laws, spiritual protocols, and local authority structures in heritage governance. Such frameworks, they argued, would not only legitimise traditional roles but also foster more sustainable and context-sensitive conservation practices.

Gender dynamics within heritage management also surfaced in the data, as was reflected in the insights of an elderly woman from Mwenezi District, Masvingo Province. Female participants, though often central to ritual and custodial duties, reported being systematically excluded from formal consultation processes. Their voices and roles are typically rendered invisible in official dialogues, despite their deep involvement in the day-to-day management and transmission of cultural knowledge.

All is, however, not gloom and doom as an archaeologist in Harare confirmed:

> *We are beginning to realise that top-down models don't work. Conservation must start with the community. We can offer technical expertise, but they must lead the way.*

This is encouraging as it is an acknowledgment of the limitations of exclusionary management models and an expression of a willingness to move toward community-led conservation. These emerging perspectives suggest a growing recognition of the value of participatory approaches, where heritage professionals serve as facilitators rather than

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directors of conservation practice. However, challenges still remain as a heritage officer in Masvingo noted that there had been cases where traditional leaders sold off land near heritage sites or allowed construction that damaged them, developments that required that there be checks and balances. These observations underscore the need for robust accountability mechanisms and shared governance models that blend community agency with oversight.

A youth heritage activist expressed the need for training in conservation methods, highlighting that they needed the skills so that they can work together with the professionals. Rather than rejecting formal heritage systems, many sought collaboration based on mutual learning and respect. This creates an opportunity for joint training programmes and inclusive knowledge-sharing platforms. There was also the fact that people felt that the heritage laws were written without their input. He further pointed out that this was the reason the laws did not work. They called for laws that speak their language and respect their ways, something that was also buttressed by one local councilor in southern Zimbabwe. They noted that heritage laws were overly technical and often derived from colonial frameworks that exclude traditional authority and practice. There was a call for legal reform that incorporates community consultation, customary norms, and language accessibility. This was re-echoed by a local farmer who stays near a sacred hill

> *They tell us not to build here or farm there because it's a monument. But our families have lived here for generations. Shouldn't we have a say?*

Tensions around land rights and heritage boundaries were also reported. Communities expressed frustration with restrictions on land use imposed by heritage agencies, which they perceived as undermining their livelihood and ancestral claims. These tensions highlight the need for integrated land-heritage policies that respect both conservation priorities and customary tenure systems. According to a community development officer:

> *We tried to work with the authorities, but it felt like we were only there to rubber-stamp decisions they had already made.*

This quote illustrates the performative nature of many participatory processes. Respondents reported instances where community meetings were convened merely to validate pre-made decisions, with little room for genuine input. This reinforces the importance of designing consultation processes that are transparent, inclusive, and empowering. There is a need to build trust as one heritage professional stated.

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Despite these challenges, several respondents shared success stories of co-management initiatives where communities and professionals collaborated effectively. These projects were characterised by mutual respect, regular communication, and a shared commitment to heritage stewardship. Such models offer valuable lessons for scaling participatory heritage management frameworks. This approach is best captured in the words of a spiritual custodian in the Great Zimbabwe area who said that they do not separate the stone wall from the spirit of the ancestors, emphasizing that both must be respected together. These sentiments encapsulate the holistic worldview underpinning Indigenous heritage management. For communities, tangible and intangible heritage are inseparable. Any effort to protect the physical structure must also honour the spiritual and social dimensions embedded within it. Bridging the divide between Western and Indigenous systems, therefore, requires more than technical integration; it demands a philosophical reorientation that places community worldviews at the centre of heritage discourse.

5. Discussion

Management approaches to heritage must accommodate the shift that has surfaced in recent times in various parts of the world. Approaches need to be wider and more inclusive to heritage management (Wijesuriya et al., 2013). According to Katsamudanga (2003), various academics have been calling for co-management or community participation. However, the degree to which communities should be involved was not specified. The safeguarding of intangible values in monuments and sites in Zimbabwe, and maybe anywhere else, requires the preservation of the social processes that created them.

This study has therefore been an investigation towards the development of an ideal management mechanism for African heritage that effectively captures the concept of community engagement in the management of cultural heritage in the African context. There has also been a growing need to actively engage local communities in contemporary heritage management and challenging of the heritage agency by communities as well as owners of the patrimony and not stakeholders (Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008). Consistent with Katsamudanga (2003), several chiefs have been appearing on national television yearning for the return to traditional values, like rain petitioning ceremonies at heritage sites. Granting more powers to traditional leaders to manage sites appears to be the ideal for the revival of intangible values. However, the study argues that the complex picture of local communities that claim a stake in the management of heritage sites makes it intricate to come up with a solid management system that captures both the formal and informal aspects because they are based on divergent principles.

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It might seem feasible to implement a fusion of traditional and scientific management systems theoretically; however, it is not an ideal management mechanism. Munjeri (2008) argued that cultural heritage is challenging to manage with communities constantly questioning management and conservation approaches used by heritage agencies.

For Katsamudanga (2003), the protection of sacred sites can be facilitated through spirit mediums, which might also keep out the heritage managers through a system of taboos and other social controls. The success of indigenous management systems is demonstrated by the presence of sacred shrines and activities in many rural areas that are being managed without direct involvement of heritage agencies. In Masvingo at Nerumedzo, for example, a sacred forest located in Bikita District in the NMMZ's Southern Region, the management of the forest continues to thrive through a system of taboos and other social controls put in place by the local community with very little interference from the NMMZ. In this light, the NMMZ becomes a liability to the nation, as it would have been excluded from the management system. However, there might be other values to protect at the same monuments and sites, such as archaeological, historical, aesthetic and Western (scientific), whose management cannot be effected traditionally (Katsamudanga, 2003); therefore, a combination of the traditional and scientific management system proves a more viable option.

The management of heritage should encourage the active participation of the communities and stakeholders concerned with the property as a condition to attain its sustainable protection, conservation, management and presentation (Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention 2013, Para 119). According to Chiwaura (2007), heritage management has transformed in the past decades as its emphasis is now on the involvement of ordinary people, particularly local communities, in the management. This has been seen in some countries worldwide, particularly New Zealand (Maori), the USA (Native Americans) and Australia (Aborigines) and in non-Western countries, the change has underscored the fact that heritage belongs to local people (Chiwaura, 2007). Hence, the management policies and legislation in place must reflect the people's customary and traditional practices.

The management of the royal tombs at Kasubi is placed under the Buganda Kingdom, with the *Kabaka* as the overall overseer, hence granting local communities power to effect management activities at the site. An example is the *Ngeye* clan, which does the thatching of the tombs, and conservation as well as management skills are passed down from the elders to younger members of the clan during apprenticeship (Kasubi Tombs Management Plan 2009-2015). However, the government of Uganda through the Department of Museums and Monuments with the help of other stakeholders like

Makerere University, UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS and other NGOs act in supervisory and advisory capacities to ensure protection of the tombs through the legal framework (Kasubi Tombs Management Plan 2009-2015). Adopting an inclusive approach in the management planning process is central to the management process as it fosters unity and facilitates coordination between agencies, local governments and community groups, thereby contributing to problem-solving.

An ideal cultural heritage management mechanism in Africa would involve the active participation of communities through a collaborative model that integrates both Indigenous and Western (scientific) management systems. The centrality of such an approach fosters meaningful coordination among heritage agencies, local governments, and community groups, thereby ensuring inclusive and sustainable heritage governance (Wijesuriya et al., 2013). Great Zimbabwe is a cultural landscape just like Kasubi and a World Heritage Site as well. Certain aspects of it can be managed traditionally, for instance, the spirituality of the site can be managed traditionally, and the physical fabric scientifically. This scenario would involve placing certain parts that are considered sacred by the communities under the management of the traditional system and other parts under the scientific system. An example of such an arrangement would be when guests to the landscape and the NMMZ observe set traditional rules and regulations, such as removing shoes before one climbs the hill complex, as it is considered sacred. However, the NMMZ will continue to be in charge as the legal custodian to manage the site, to control and mediate conflicts between the communities that might surface, as they possess the administrative and political power to do so.

Removing shoes is a traditional practice in the Shona culture that shows respect for the guardian ancestral spirits of a given area. According to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre (2013), the same scenario is practised at the Taj Mahal World Heritage Site in India. Visitors to the historic sites take off their shoes when entering the Taj Mahal mosque or temple. I therefore recommend that the same arrangement be adopted for the Great Zimbabwe cultural landscape in conjunction with a scientific system as a possible management mechanism.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore that cultural heritage management in the African context cannot be effectively carried out in isolation from the social, cultural, and environmental realities of the communities that surround and sustain it. The perception that heritage sites can be managed purely through Western scientific methods, devoid of local involvement, is not only impractical but counterproductive. As highlighted by local

leaders and community members during the study, heritage is lived and practised; it is not a static relic. Therefore, the relevance of Indigenous management practices rooted in cultural values, rituals, and traditional leadership structures must be recognised as not only valid but vital. It is therefore important to recognise that while Western systems provide essential tools such as documentation, scientific conservation techniques, and legal frameworks, they often fall short in capturing the intangible, spiritual, and communal significance of heritage. There is therefore a need to buttress and sustain the bottom-up approaches to conservation, where heritage value is defined by those who live with and relate to the site. The study also noted that there is a need to establish revenue-sharing models and legal mechanisms that directly support local development, ensuring that heritage becomes a tool for empowerment rather than marginalisation. Finally, and worth emphasizing, is the fact that the integration of Indigenous and Western systems of heritage management is not only feasible, but it is essential.

7. Recommendation

The central recommendation emerging from this study is the development of a hybrid model of cultural heritage management that values the scientific rigour of formal heritage institutions while drawing upon the lived knowledge and custodianship of local communities. Such an approach would require legal reforms, policy innovation, and institutional restructuring to accommodate diverse voices and values. Most importantly, heritage management must shift from being a technocratic exercise to a socially embedded practice that respects and revitalises both tangible and intangible dimensions of heritage.

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Reviving Indigenous Wisdom: The BaTonga's Role in Environmental Conservation

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Abstract

The thrust of this paper is on Indigenous Knowledge and Belief Systems (IKBS) of the BaTonga, which they used to preserve and conserve the natural environment. It is based on the cultural, religious, and ecological study of the BaTonga. The main objective of the study is to establish the extent of use and efficacy examines the environmental IKBS of the BaTonga people in their efforts to preserve the environment. The study is motivated by the unprecedented environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources in the Binga communal area in Matabeleland North Province. Regardless of the existence of IKBS and modern environmental management strategies, the environment is under siege, with local people complaining that modern ways should be complemented with IKBS, hence triggering this study. In this qualitative study, in-depth interviews and storytelling were conducted with traditional leaders and community elders of the BaTonga to collect data. Document analysis was also used to collect IKBS-related data from this indigenous community. In this study, thematic analysis is anchored on interpretive and ontological paradigms utilised within the Decoloniality theory. IKBSs found in this study were thematically presented as water bodies, vegetation, animals, birds, insects, and cosmology. The study concluded that the use of IKBSs is undermined by minoritisation and paucity of information on IKBSs documentation of the BaTonga. It was noted that the IKBS has potential for preserving the environment for sustainable development.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge Systems, wildlife, environmental conservation, environmental degradation, Indigenous people.

1. Introduction

Under colonialism, developing countries have increasingly neglected their indigenous knowledge and belief systems in preference to Western models in natural resource management discourse (Georgia, 2016). As such, natural resource management (national and international) policies, programmes, and strategies have marginalised and neglected the involvement of traditional institutions and indigenous knowledge systems, even though they remain relevant to the culture and are regularly practised and learned within communities and between generations (UNESCO, 2020). It is more imperative for Natural Resources Management (NRM) to integrate the indigenous knowledge and belief systems of various cultures to prevent drastic loss of bio-systems and facilitate natural regeneration of the environment (UNESCO, 2020). Despite calls for this integration, several environmental challenges have arisen in developing countries, where culturally relevant mechanisms have been neglected. These challenges include environmental

degradation, ozone layer depletion, water body acidification, deforestation, species extinction, and a dramatic decline in biodiversity (Mapira & Mazambara, 2013). While these issues are physically evident, there has been an over-reliance on Western methods of environmental preservation and conservation, often ignoring the valuable contributions of indigenous knowledge and belief systems in addressing these challenges (Rusinga & Maposa, 2020). UNESCO has recognised numerous African cultural beliefs and practices in the preservation of natural resources (UNESCO, 2003).

It is against this background that this study discusses the place of IKBS in environmental preservation and conservation of the BaTonga in Binga in a religio-cultural context, looking at their beliefs and practices. This is because environmental preservation and conservation strategies in many African countries are increasingly carbon-copying Western epistemologies, while ignoring the role of indigenous knowledge and belief systems as well as traditional institutions (Mapira and Mazambara, 2013). The use of Western strategies in conserving and preserving the natural environment has alienated indigenous people from environmental preservation strategies related to their cultural milieu. This is because indigenous knowledge and belief systems are often considered archaic, traditional, and uncivilised (Zivave, 2021). Be that as it may, the over-reliance on Western environmental strategies over indigenous ones, in preserving the natural environment, has resulted in more harm than safety. In this context, one may argue that indigenous knowledge and belief systems should be pursued to avoid further harm to the natural environment because continued environmental abuse and overuse will affect the natural habitat of humanity and every creature in the universe.

The Biodiversity Convention (1992) is a global treaty with the main goals of conserving biodiversity, sustainably using its components, and ensuring fair and equitable sharing of benefits from genetic resources (Ekardt et al., 2023). The treaty was initiated by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992, and made several resolutions to protect the environment from further harm (Aniah et al., 2014). Since then, different international fora, including, for example, the Beijing Conference for Women in 1995 echoed the problems of continuing environmental degradation (Kamla-Raj, 2006). The conference is critical in dealing with environmental challenges such as degradation, siltation, and climate change that ultimately affect women who are repositories of indigenous knowledge and belief systems in many African societies. This is because the African approach to natural resources preservation is deeply rooted in its respect for indigenous knowledge and belief systems.

From an African perspective, the use of Western methods undermines the role of the indigenous knowledge and belief systems of Africans. This is even though the IKBSs in many African societies have been recognised for its potential in reducing environmental challenges because Africans are "notoriously religious" (Mbiti, 1969). It has been further observed that indigenous knowledge and belief systems are saturated with environmentally friendly principles, such as taboos, unlike the Western epistemologies, which are capitalistic and materialistic, and do not put future generations at heart (Aniah et al., 2014). It can thus be argued that Western knowledge and belief systems are at the centre of the current environmental challenges because they are not closely linked with the Africans' belief systems.

Land degradation, air pollution, eutrophication and deforestation all rose because of the advent of Western civilisation and culture, which replaced indigenous knowledge and belief systems, which by and large were centred on the sustainable use of the natural environment (Appiah-Opoku, 2007). Traditional ecological knowledge is closely linked with good environmental practices (UNESCO, 2003). However, deforestation and land use have become a major environmental challenge affecting the north-western part of Zimbabwe, and in particular Binga (Siambombe, Mutale & Muzingili, 2018). This is a result of rural land use, which is centred on farming, and this has resulted in the demand for more land. It is further observed that the indiscriminate cutting down of trees, poaching and water pollution are major environmental challenges affecting the BaTonga. There is a threat to wildlife populations in all reserves from illegal hunting, grazing and activities of local smallholder farmers (Siambombe, Mutale & Muzingili, 2018). Changes in land use and land tenure system influenced by the colonialists are equally blamed for the current environmental challenges (Rusinga & Maposa, 2020). The role of the chief in environmental use and regulation has been undermined, although they possess authority derived from their ancestors to be stewards of the natural environment. The flora and fauna was believed to belong to the spirit world, and the chiefs were considered the custodians of cultural knowledge and belief systems under their jurisdiction. Ancestral spirits had the authority of caring, protecting and managing forests, land, water sources, wildlife and other such resources located within such lands in the region and the country at large (Appiah-Opoku, 2007). Mapira and Mazambara (2013) assert that knowledge and practices accumulated through time have been used to make sustainable use of natural resources and minimise the impact of climate change. This means that IKBSs are critical in addressing contemporary environmental challenges. However, the coming of colonialism, modernity and industrialisation has affected how they interact with the environment as IKBSs are neglected in the natural resources management discourse. It

is because of this that the study focuses on the use of IKBSs by the BaTonga as representative of other indigenous communities.

This study focuses on the role of IKBSs in environmental preservation and conservation among the BaTonga in Binga, and it is framed within a religious context that emphasises the beliefs and practices shaping their relationship with the natural environment. The choice of Binga is significant due to its growing population, which rose from approximately 118,234 in 2012 and rose to around 159,982 in 2022. This has intensified pressure on local resources. While the lives of the BaTonga are deeply interconnected with their natural environment, colonialism, modernity, and industrialisation have markedly altered their interactions with these resources, complicating their ability to manage their environment effectively.

1.1 Who are the BaTonga?

The BaTonga are believed to have originated from the equatorial forests of the Congo Basin, migrating to the Zambezi Valley between the 15th and 16th centuries (Saidi & Matanzima, 2021). The term BaTonga derives from the prefix “Ba-” meaning owner, and the verb “Tonga,” meaning to rule or judge, signifying self-rule. This title reflects their chiefless society, where decisions were made collectively, unlike the hierarchical systems of the Shona or Ndebele (Ncube, 2004; Saidi, 2019).

Geographically, the BaTonga inhabit southern Zambia and northern Zimbabwe, particularly in Binga along the Zambezi Valley. Also known as the Basilwizi, or "people of the Great River," their identity is closely tied to the Zambezi River, which was historically referred to as Kasambabezi (McGregor, 2009, p. 2). Their long-standing adaptation to the harsh conditions of the valley suggests a deep historical presence (Colson, 1960; Sitambuli, 2016). Today, and in Zimbabwe, they are primarily found in and around Kariba and Binga District. Religiously, the BaTonga revere Nyami Nyami, a river god depicted as a snake spirit that governs their way of life. Nyami Nyami is seen as the protector of the BaTonga and is often represented with a snake body and fish head (Colson, 1960). This belief forms a cornerstone of their indigenous knowledge system, emphasising the sacredness of the Zambezi River basin and regulating their environmental practices in honour of the river god and their ancestors.

1.2 Problem statement

The Binga community faces numerous environmental challenges, including pollution, degradation, and poaching. However, they have largely relied on Western approaches to address these issues. In contrast, the neglected indigenous methods that incorporate local knowledge and belief systems are often more effective and culturally relevant. This

paper aims to explore the role of the indigenous knowledge and belief systems of the BaTonga in Binga district, Matabeleland North Province, in developing effective preservation and conservation management strategies which are culturally oriented.

1.3 Major research question

The major question is:

1. How do the BaTonga utilise indigenous knowledge and belief systems in environmental preservation and conservation management strategies?

1.4 Research objectives

In view of this main research question posed, the study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the roles of indigenous knowledge and belief systems in natural environment preservation and conservation in the Binga District in Matabeleland North Province.

2. To suggest how the BaTonga IKBSs can assist in conserving the natural environment can complement modern ways.

1.5 Justification of the study

In light of the above research question, the subject of the interrelatedness between indigenous knowledge and belief systems (IKBSs) and preservation of the natural environment has emerged as a crucial topic within the broader fields of Religious Studies, eco-feminism, and environmentalism. This study contributes to the ongoing debate surrounding environmental discourse, focusing specifically on the BaTonga, an ethnic group in northwestern Zimbabwe. The choice of the BaTonga is particularly significant due to the limited ethnographic research conducted on this minority group compared to other Indigenous communities, such as the Ndebele, Karanga, Zezuru, and Korekore. The BaTonga's rich heritage and unique perspectives on environmental preservation have often been overlooked, resulting in their indigenous knowledge and belief systems being marginalised and neglected in environmental discussions. This study thus explores the importance of IKBSs among the BaTonga people, emphasising their potential contributions to environmental preservation. By exploring these connections, the research seeks to highlight the value of indigenous practices and knowledge in contemporary environmental discourse, ultimately contributing to the broader understanding of sustainable environmental strategies.

1.6 Understanding IKBS

In 2003, the UNESCO General Conference in Paris recognized intangible cultural heritage as encompassing the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, and the associated instruments, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces that communities identify as part of their heritage (UNESCO, 2003, p. 4). This heritage is transmitted through generations and is continuously recreated by communities in response to their environment and history, fostering identity and continuity while promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. From this definition, indigenous knowledge and belief systems (IKBSs) emerge as vital components of intangible cultural heritage. Specifically, the BaTonga of northern Zimbabwe, living along the Zambezi River basin, embody an IKBS characterised by local traditions, beliefs, customs, and religious views (Neil, 2005). This contrasts with Western epistemologies, emphasizing a culturally embedded understanding of knowledge. Maila and Loubser (2003) describe IKBSs as facts that are deeply rooted in the cultural and historical context of a people, forming the backbone of their social, economic, and technological identity.

In Africa, strategies for environmental preservation are intertwined with indigenous knowledge and belief systems. The BaTonga view themselves as environmentally conscious, with their connection to nature reflecting their belief system (Fontein, 2006). As Ranger (1999) notes, many African societies regard the natural environment as sacred because of their beliefs. Rusinga and Maposa (2020) emphasize that indigenous communities like the BaTonga systematically utilise natural resources, guided by traditions rooted in their cultural context. This knowledge is crucial for conserving biodiversity (UNESCO, 2020), shaping the BaTonga's perceptions and values regarding the environment.

2. Brief literature review

This sub-section deals with theoretical and empirical review with regard to the use of indigenous knowledge systems in environmental conservation. Notably, a Decolonial theoretical review is used in the context of environmental challenges.

2.1 Theoretical review

This paper is grounded in the Decoloniality theory, which critiques the dominance of Anglo-American thought in scientific discourse and seeks to establish a native cultural paradigm (Huerfano, Caballero, & Rojas, 2016). This reformulation is crucial for integrating African knowledge and belief systems into natural environmental preservation. Decoloniality aims to "remake the world" so that marginalised groups can reclaim their identity, land, history, knowledge, and power (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014). It challenges the

biased global structures that dictate environmental management strategies, particularly in developing countries facing several environmental problems. The theory promotes the democratisation of epistemological spaces by recognising the significance of indigenous knowledge and belief systems in Africa in dealing with environmental challenges.

The worsening of the environmental crisis manifests in biased epistemologies that dismiss African knowledge in favour of Western conservation strategies (Shizha, 2006). Through Decoloniality, Africans and, in particular, the BaTonga, can address environmental challenges in ways that align with their cultural beliefs and practices. Coloniality appears when Western solutions are imposed on African communities, evident in the organisation of power, identity, and knowledge (Zondi, 2015). This perspective highlights how indigenous methods of environmental preservation are often dismissed as lacking scientific validity. Thus, Decoloniality seeks to uncover and confront coloniality in environmental preservation, exposing double standards in Western responses to Africa's environmental issues. The theory empowers African scholars to advocate for the democratisation of environmental strategies to combat global warming, climate change, land degradation, and other ecological crises. This approach aims to decentre hegemonic global epistemologies in the context of Zimbabwe's environmental challenges in the Binga community.

It is essential to recognise that the colonial and ethnic assumptions labelling the BaTonga people as environmentally ignorant are misguided. These stereotypes perpetuate cultural hegemony and imperialism, undermining the Indigenous knowledge system of minority groups. Such assumptions persist today, where the environmental conservation practices of minority ethnicities are undervalued. The persistence of colonial mindsets and cultural dominance alienates groups like the BaTonga from their Indigenous practices that support environmental preservation. The continued reliance on Western solutions reflects a long-standing neglect of Indigenous knowledge by governments and international organisations (Warren, 1992). Rusinga and Maposa (2020) argue that post-colonial Zimbabwe has perpetuated colonial legislation that harms local communities, while Wolmer (2007) notes that Western conservation initiatives often conflict with local livelihoods. The degradation of natural environments results from these Western strategies, which distort Indigenous perspectives on conservation (Aniah et al., 2014; Siambombe, Mutale, & Muzingili, 2018).

2.2 Empirical review

A study by Emery (1996) concluded that scientists now recognise that indigenous people have managed the environments in which they have lived for generations, often without significantly damaging local ecologies. The study noted that indigenous knowledge can

thus provide a powerful basis from which alternative ways of managing resources can be developed. In a related study, Tanyanyiwa and Chikwanha (2011) observed that indigenous knowledge technologies and know-how have an advantage over Western science in that they rely on locally available skills and materials and are thus often more cost-effective than introducing exotic technologies from outside. The indigenous knowledge is connected to the religiosity of the community in which it operates. This means that indigenous knowledge and belief systems are linked to the worldview or the way the local group perceives their relationship to the natural world (Emery, 1996). Tanyanyiwa and Chikwanha (2011) further note that indigenous knowledge is embedded in a dynamic system in which spirituality, kinship, local politics and other factors are tied together and influence one another. This means that a belief system about nature may influence how resources are managed and how willing people are to adopt new resource management strategies (Emery, 1996).

Studies have shown that serious effects of environmental challenges continue to threaten human existence and livelihoods (Tanyanyiwa & Chikwanha, 2011; Mukurazhizha et al., 2023). These challenges continue to affect developing nations such as Zimbabwe, resulting in environmental degradation, pollution and climate change, thereby leading to ecosystem imbalances (Mukurazhizha et al., 2023). While research has been done, including studies on mechanisms for addressing environmental problems and their effects on indigenous communities in Zimbabwe (Duri & Mapara, 2008; Muchenje & Goronga, 2015; Mukurazhizha et al., 2023), gaps are evident in the use of indigenous knowledge and belief systems of perceived minority ethnic groups such as the BaTonga in addressing environmental challenges. UNESCO (n.d.) acknowledges that leaving out indigenous knowledge and belief systems in addressing environmental issues has adverse effects on fighting the effects of environmental degradation, climate change, pollution and deforestation in the contemporary world.

Research in northwestern Zimbabwe shows that communities in Binga attribute environmental degradation to poor agricultural practices, urbanisation, and lack of access to clean energy, leading to climate change, aquatic species loss, deforestation, and soil erosion (Siambombe, Mutale, & Muzingili, 2018). In response to these challenges, there is a growing interest in revitalising the indigenous knowledge and belief systems (IKBSs) in post-colonial Africa to address environmental issues. Colonialism and Christianity have historically marginalised IKBSs, which could be instrumental in sustainable environmental strategies. The double minoritization of BaTonga IKBS, deemed inferior to Western practices, overlooks their rich historical context grounded in observation and experimentation (Ward, 1989). For instance, the Nyami Nyami tradition embodies the BaTonga's cultural heritage, shaping their belief system in the preservation of the natural

resources. This means that the IKBS of the BaTonga is part of their intangible cultural heritage. Smith (2016) points out that the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage is not just about protecting the past but also about fostering resilience and adaptability for future generations. Furthermore, Duri and Mapara (2008) examined how pre-colonial Zimbabweans, specifically the Shona, conserved their natural resources using IKBSs.

Studies indicate that indigenous peoples' relationship with their environment is deeply shaped by their values, identity, and traditional wisdom, equipping them to effectively understand and tackle environmental challenges (WHO, 2025). For instance, Indigenous communities in Zimbabwe employ traditional ecological practices, such as what the Shona call "kuradzira munda," which involves resting the land to prevent degradation, reflecting a belief system that honours local flora and fauna (Zivave, 2021). However, Indigenous knowledge systems and institutions face significant threats due to land loss, forced displacement, and rapid environmental changes (Ford et al., 2020). These communities encounter numerous obstacles, including challenges in defining their development in line with traditional values, limited political participation, and difficulties accessing essential social services (UN, 2025). Moreover, Indigenous knowledge and belief systems are often overlooked in decision-making regarding land use and natural resource management (WHO, 2024). This neglect is compounded by the forced eviction of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands due to resource exploitation and large-scale development projects (UN, 2025). A notable example is Binga, where activities by Chinese miners are leading to significant environmental issues and potential displacement (Magidi and Hlungwani, 2022). This has affected the connection between indigenous identity and knowledge, which is premised on their land and other natural resources. Challenges such as displacement, climate change, pollution, and exclusion have affected the indigenous people in natural resource management (UN, 2025).

Despite the existing literature addressing the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge, there remains a notable gap in research specifically focused on the BaTonga people and their unique IKBS concerning contemporary environmental challenges. Most studies tend to concentrate on broader indigenous practices or focus on dominant cultural groups, failing to highlight the specific environmental strategies employed by the BaTonga. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive examination of the BaTonga's IKBS and its potential contributions to sustainable environmental management in the context of current ecological crises.

This study focuses on the BaTonga people, whose beliefs have been historically undervalued due to colonial influences and modernity. By contributing to the discourse on environmental preservation through culturally relevant practices, this research aims to

align with the Sustainable Development Goals, integrating indigenous methods with modern approaches to ensure a sustainable future.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Design

This study employed a qualitative approach, utilising a phenomenological research design to explore the indigenous knowledge and belief systems of the BaTonga in relation to the natural environment. The phenomenological design was particularly relevant as it allowed for the examination of religious behaviours from the BaTonga's perspective, avoiding the imposition of preconceived value judgments. This approach facilitates an investigation into how individuals perceive and understand reality (Cox, 1992). By applying the principle of epoch, we gathered data after "bracketing" any external value judgments that may influence the interpretation. Consequently, the BaTonga's cultural beliefs and practices regarding environmental preservation were studied as unique and self-contained phenomena. The strength of this phenomenological approach lies in its ability to distinguish between the researchers' perceptions and the actual practices of the BaTonga people. This method ensured the collection of first-hand information from indigenous BaTonga individuals, especially when combined with participant observation. Moreover, this methodological design aligns with ethnography, focusing on the belief system, customs, taboos, and cultural practices of the BaTonga community.

3.2 Data collection procedure

Using a participant observation approach, we engaged in face-to-face interactions with BaTonga elders within their natural settings. This involved conducting in-depth interviews and closely observing how the BaTonga express their culture and religion in relation to environmental preservation strategies. The participant observation technique significantly enhanced our field investigation by allowing us to consider the unique circumstances and cultural context of the indigenous community. Our direct interactions with the BaTonga provided us with first-hand data, deepening our understanding of their socio-cultural environment. This insight was crucial for drawing conclusions on indigenous knowledge and belief systems concerning natural environment preservation and conservation strategies. By employing both participant observation and intensive interviewing methods, we were able to gain an “insider’s point of view,” which allowed us to interpret the significance of indigenous knowledge, cultural beliefs, customs, taboos, and traditions that shape how the BaTonga preserve their natural environment.

3.3 Population and Sampling

The research study was conducted among the BaTonga people in Binga district, who are found in the northwestern part of Zimbabwe. Thus, purposive sampling was used to select four (4) elders, two (2) headmen, and four (4) native residents from Binga district who were interviewed, as they are the custodians of the traditions. This means that ten participants were sampled for the study. In Binga, observations were made as to how the BaTonga deal with environmental challenges.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

The study used an interview schedule and participant observation to collect data from the field. In Binga, interviews were conducted in several selected areas in Sikalenge, Manjolo, Siachilaba, and Kariyangwe chieftaincies. Those interviews were targeted at 10 elderly people who we considered credible custodians of BaTonga history, culture, and traditions. The elders are better informed about the indigenous knowledge and belief system of the BaTonga people. The interview delved into how IKBSs are being used to preserve natural resources. The interview further established difficulties and possibilities that come with modern ways of addressing environmental challenges. In addition, observational data were gathered through visits to cultural gatherings and the environmental spaces that are preserved through IKBSs. This involved watching how the BaTonga interacted with their environment. The data was analysed through the thematic frame approach.

4. Trustworthiness of Data.

The researchers ensured that the content of the data collection tools was relevant and culturally appropriate, accurately reflecting the participants' experiences and perspectives. Reliability was enhanced through data triangulation, as multiple methods were employed to gather information from the field. This approach strengthened the validity of the findings by providing a comprehensive understanding of the participants' insights.

5. Ethical Considerations

The researchers obtained informed consent from participants by clearly explaining the study's objectives, along with any potential risks and benefits of participation. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time during the data collection process without facing any consequences.

6. Research findings

The study aimed to explore various Indigenous Knowledge and Belief Systems among the BaTonga people and their application in environmental preservation and conservation management strategies. Participants were coded as follows: E1, E2, E3, and E4 for elders; H1 and H2 for headmen; and N1, N2, N3, and N4 for native BaTonga individuals outside these groups. From the research participants, several sub-themes emerged.

6.1 Cosmology

The study revealed that the BaTonga cosmology is used to control how human beings interact with the natural environment.

E1 had to say:

> *We believe that the natural environment belongs to the river god and the ancestors. Nyami-Nyami is our supreme ancestor, and we revere nature, particularly the water bodies like rivers and pools.*

The above verbatim is also underscored by the H1, who underscored:

> *We believe in one Supreme Being called Leza, whom they consider the creator (Mulengi) of the universe and everything in it.*

N3 also underscored:

> *We are people of the river, and we believe in the river god, Nyami-Nyami. He is the owner of all aquatic species. Tradition has it that in the times of drought and hunger, Nyami-Nyami would help the BaTonga people with food.*

From the above verbatim submissions, it is clear that the BaTonga belief system attributes supernatural powers to various elements of the natural environment, particularly the Zambezi River, which is considered the home of the Nyami-Nyami and is highly revered. Preserving water bodies such as rivers, hot springs, and pools in their natural state aligns with the BaTonga's religious mandate. This reflects the tripartite cosmology described by Siambombe, Mutale, and Muzingili (2018), which includes underground spirits, ancestors, humans, and Leza. Violating religious taboos associated with water bodies can lead to punishment from ancestral spirits and it comes in the form of natural disasters, as the BaTonga believe that their ancestors may use locusts, quails, and elephants to punish those who mistreat the environment.

6.2 Wildlife

It also emerged from the study that the BaTonga use totems to preserve the fauna. Totems refer to the animals, objects, and aquatic species that are considered sacred by a cultural group of people (Zivave, 2021). Many of the BaTonga totems are derived from animals, and participants highlighted some of the following totems.

Totem	English Name	Clan Name
Chiwena	Crocodile	Munkuli
Mpongo	Goat	Muleya
Ngombe	Cow	Mungombe
Suntwe/Mbelele	Hyena/sheep	Muzamba
Nzovu	Elephant	Munsaka
Sokwe	Baboons	Mudimba
Mbizi	Zebra	Mudenda
Munyati	Buffalo	Munkombwe
Mulavu/Inkuku	Lion/Chicken	Mumpande

N1 had to say:

> *In our culture, it is taboo to hunt or eat one's totem.*

In the same light, E2 said:

> *Totemic animals are revered in many ways. They are not supposed to be killed or used as relish.*

These verbatim responses indicate that totems help in the preservation of some animal species, for example, totemic animals like baboons, lions, zebras, crocodiles and rhinoceroses are considered sacred among the Muchimba, Mumpande, Mudenda and Munkuli clans, respectively. Besides being totemic animals, some animals are associated with ancestors. For example, the lion (*Mulavu)* is used by ancestors when they manifest themselves. The study revealed that the lion is used to predict weather patterns among the BaTonga who live along the Zambezi. According to H2:

> *Ancestors manifest themselves at shrines such as Chibbwatata hot spring through a lion. During the rainmaking (sic) ritual ceremony called Malende, a lion is used by ancestors to inform people about the weather.*

The verbatim response could suggest that the lion holds a valuable place in the lives of the BaTonga people. An empirical study by Siambombe, Mutale and Muzingili (2018)

notes that the lion is a sacred animal which is preserved because of its association with BaTonga spirituality. What makes animals sacred in BaTonga ontology is the ancestral spirits related to these animals. As such, sacred animals are respected because they represent ancestors. As a result, this promotes respect for sacred animals because they embody a sacred power that protects them from human greed and destruction.

6.3 Birds, Reptiles and Insects

Totem	**English Name**	**Clan Name**
Magande	Frog	Mugande
Basi chombolwa	Brown ants	Munenge
Intale	Crocodile	Mutale
Ntanga	Pumpkin seed	Muntanga
Buyuni	Quails	Mweembe
Nkwilimba	Pigeon	Mwinde
Nzuki	Bees	Muunga
Buyuni	Quails	Muvwandu

E3 underscored that:

> *Totems among the BaTonga preserve animals, birds, insects and plants.*

This was further corroborated by H1, who underscored that:

> *Totems in our culture are not limited to animals but to every component of the flora and fauna.*

The above excerpt suggests that reptiles, birds and insects also occupy an important role in the lives of the BaTonga people. All species are critical components of biodiversity preserved through totemism and sacredness (Mapira & Mazambara, 2013). The value of all forms of biodiversity reduces the killing of some edible animals, birds, reptiles and insects. These components of biodiversity are venerated, and the BaTonga are encouraged to use them sustainably and preserve them from possible extinction.

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6.4 Water bodies

Participants in this study cited several examples of water bodies that are centres of environmental preservation. Table 1 below indicates the list of water bodies that act as centres of environmental protection. Most sacred places in Binga are regarded as the residence of ancestral spirits**.**

Name of sacred place	**Location**
Chibbwatata hot spring	Kani ward near Zambezi River
Zambezi river	Binga
Saba hot spring	Saba

H1 underscored that:

> *Rivers, hot springs and other water bodies as sacred. We strongly revere the Zambezi River and its tributaries because of their association with Nyami-Nyami.*

N4 further asserted that:

> *Hot springs are home to water spirits like mermaids, and there are taboos associated with rivers and hot springs. There are so many consequences that can be experienced as a result of polluting water bodies.*

Similar sentiments were echoed by E2, who said:

> *Our belief that water bodies belong to BaTonga ancestors helps in the preservation of aquatic species and the prevention of water pollution.*

N1 underscored that:

> *We conduct most of our rituals on river banks, pools and hot springs. In these places, fishing is prohibited, and if one fishes at that place, one would be blown away by a strange wind into the water and drown or catch fish with human hair.*

The findings above suggest that water bodies are treated with great caution and respect. The veneration of tributaries and the pools along the Zambezi River is overt among the BaTonga. For example, Namoongamoonga in Dobola ward along Nakapande River, Chibbwatata hot spring and Saba hot spring are sacred. Thus, water bodies are the abode of ancestors. Siambombe, Mutale and Muzingili (2018) indicate that the BaTonga are constantly referred to as people of the river because of their close association with

water bodies. It is this belief system that has preserved water bodies from pollution and misuse among the BaTonga people.

6.5 Mountains and Plants

The BaTonga also value mountains, forests, and plants in their natural resource management. E3 underscored that:

> *Nachuulwe Mountain in Siabuwa is sacred, and harvesting of firewood is taboo.*

N2 also underscored that:

> *Trees such as baobab trees (Mubuuyu), tamarind (Musiikka) and mwiiyi/munyi are considered sacred because the rainmaking ritual ceremony (Malende) is done under such trees.*

This was further corroborated by H2, who said:

> *In our culture, Mululwe is considered sacred and is not used as firewood because it brings misfortune to the family.*

From the above, mountains and trees are highly valued and preserved for their sacredness and as sources of food among the BaTonga. This aligns with Duri and Mapara (2007), who found that indigenous fruit trees like *muzhanje* (*Uapaca kirkiana*), *mutamba* (*Strychnos*), *mutohwe* (*Azanza garkeana*), and *munhengeni* (*Ximenia*) are protected from being used as firewood to ensure a steady supply of fruits. Similarly, the BaTonga utilise taboos related to certain trees like baobab trees (*Mubuuyu*), tamarind (*Musiikka),* and *mwiiyi/munyi* to aid in environmental preservation and reduce deforestation risks. Their belief in the sacredness of trees, rooted in indigenous knowledge and belief systems (IKBS), not only serves religious purposes but also safeguards trees from destruction.

6.6 Land

With regards to land as a critical part of the environment, E4 underscored that:

> *We do land clearance (kukukuula) in September (Ivwivwi). The chief gives a go-ahead to clear the land by doing Kugwisya Chibala. All crop residues are piled together and burned.*

On the other hand, H2 stated that:

> *Land clearance is done to prevent the spread of pests that can have adverse effects on plants. This is important in maintaining soil fertility and reducing environmental degradation.*

N4 further elaborated that:

> *Our land use system is divided into farming areas (Kumyuunda) and areas for animal pastures (Machezezyo). To reduce overgrazing, we have many grazing pastures (Machezezyo) which have water sources like pools and rivers where animals can drink water from.*

The word for word rendering given above reflects that the BaTonga demonstrate a deep care for the land, viewing the chief as the custodian representing the ancestors who are perceived as the real owners and custodians. This highlights the absence of individual land ownership, as communal stewardship prevails. Without this communal framework, land abuse can lead to degradation. The BaTonga's environmentally friendly land use system is influenced by the fear of ancestral reprisals and community accountability. Their division of land into *Kumyuunda* (arable land) and *Machezezeyo* (grazing land) fosters conservation and reflects a commitment to protecting both land and biodiversity. This aligns with Duri and Mapara (2007), who noted that indigenous land use prioritises the welfare of both humans and animals. Thus, BaTonga wisdom in land use significantly contributes to the preservation of the natural environment.

7. Discussion of findings

The management of natural resources is integral to the BaTonga's knowledge and belief systems, deeply rooted in their religious worldview. This worldview emphasises the interconnectedness of the Supreme Being Leza, spirits, and humans within the cosmos. For the BaTonga, human habitation and nature are inseparable. As Zivave (2021) notes, the environment is saturated with spiritual significance, leading to practices that respect ancestors through good environmental stewardship. Rivers, forests, and mountains embody ancestral spirits (*Mizimu*) and water spirits (*Nyami-Nyami*), underscoring the sacredness of these natural elements. Rusinga and Maposa (2013) highlight that the BaTonga believe the natural environment belongs to their revered ancestors. Thus, misuse of the environment incites ancestral anger, reinforcing a belief system that curtails deforestation, pollution, and environmental degradation.

Wildlife conservation is another critical aspect of BaTonga environmental practices, with many animals regarded as totems. Mukurazhizha et al. (2023) explain that totems play a vital role in preserving specific species and habitats. Strict taboos against harming totemic animals ensure community adherence, as violations are believed to bring misfortune,

including illness or death. This spiritual significance fosters a strong connection between humans and nature, promoting conservation. The BaTonga also maintain that sacred animals, such as lions, are protectors of ancestral spirits. Committing acts against these animals is believed to invite severe repercussions from both ancestors and traditional leaders, serving as an effective conservation strategy. Metuh (1981) notes the ferocity of these beliefs, instilling a deep respect for wildlife that acts as a deterrent against poaching and unnecessary destruction.

Water bodies hold profound religious and cultural significance for the BaTonga. Practices surrounding water conservation include prohibitions against littering or using contaminated objects to fetch water, reflecting a commitment to preserving these vital resources (Matanzima & Saidi, 2020). Although indigenous knowledge and belief systems (IKBS) may lack scientific validation, they have historically proven effective in environmental conservation (Duri & Mapara, 2007). The BaTonga also view forests, trees, and mountains as essential components of their ecosystem. Sacred sites, like Nachuulwe, are protected through cultural taboos that forbid activities such as firewood harvesting, which is believed to bring dire consequences for offenders. This reverence aids in preserving both plant and animal life.

We advocate for the decolonisation of environmental epistemology (Mawere and Kadenge, 2010). Reviving BaTonga environmental wisdom is essential for achieving sustainable development and preserving intangible cultural heritage. Integrating IKBS with some Western scientific conservation strategies has the potential to enhance environmental management, counteracting the detrimental effects of colonial and religious influences that marginalise indigenous practices. The BaTonga worldview offers valuable insights for addressing contemporary environmental challenges.

8. Conclusion

This paper has explored the role of Indigenous knowledge and belief systems (IKBSs) in natural resources preservation among the BaTonga and their implications for Zimbabwe. Key issues discussed include land management, conservation practices through taboos and rituals, and the significance of totems in protecting biodiversity. Zimbabwe's cultural policy recognises the value of IKBSs in environmental preservation, yet there is an under appreciation of integrative approaches that combine modern and traditional methods. A refocused strategy is needed to incorporate IKBS into environmental legislation, ensuring it reflects local culture and realities. The involvement of indigenous people in conservation must extend beyond mere acknowledgement, emphasising the importance of local solutions. Integrating IKBS into environmental policy is essential for addressing contemporary challenges effectively.

9. Recommendations

In light of the findings, the study recommends the following:

9.1 Revisiting Indigenous Knowledge and Belief Systems: It is crucial to re-evaluate and integrate the Indigenous knowledge and belief systems of Zimbabwean ethnic groups. These systems offer valuable insights for the management, preservation, and conservation of the natural environment. Such integration is essential not only for the sustainable development of northwestern Zimbabwe but also for the broader national context.

9.2 Empowerment through Education: Chiefs and community leaders must take an active role in educating their subordinates about the importance of using the indigenous knowledge system for environmental preservation. By promoting awareness and understanding, they can foster a culture that values conservation over exploitation, ensuring that natural resources are protected for future generations.

9.3 Collaboration with the Environmental Management Agency (EMA): The EMA should prioritise the encouragement and application of Indigenous knowledge and belief systems in their environmental strategies. By doing so, they can empower indigenous communities to see themselves as custodians of the environment, fostering a sense of responsibility and active participation in conservation efforts.

9.4 Government Incentives for Conservation: The government should implement incentives that promote the use of Indigenous knowledge and belief systems aimed at environmental conservation. By aligning these practices with community development initiatives, residents will be motivated to engage in sustainable practices that benefit both their communities and the environment.

9.5 Documentation of Indigenous Knowledge: There is an urgent need to document the Indigenous knowledge and belief systems of local communities. This knowledge plays a vital role in natural resource management and serves as a foundational element for sustainable practices. Comprehensive documentation will facilitate the preservation of these invaluable systems and ensure their transmission to future generations.

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The Representation of Africa's Intangible Heritage in *Madagascar Escape 2 Africa (2008)*

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Abstract

This study explores how the Western animated film Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa (2008) portrays African cultural themes and how intangible aspects are represented. The study employs a qualitative research approach grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The research purposively sampled key scenes that depict African cultural narratives; these scenes were transcribed, taking note of verbal utterances, and visual cues were annotated and thematically coded to identify patterns relating to stereotypes and counter-narratives by focusing on the examination of power dynamics. The key findings reveal a troubling trend of misrepresentation, where African spirituality is often depicted through superstition and inferiority, and oral traditions are wrongly associated with illiteracy. However, the film also offers glimpses of African community values, suggesting that despite prevalent stereotypes, a counter-narrative exists that deserves attention. These findings encourage us to adopt a more nuanced perspective on African representation in media, advocating for self-representation that genuinely reflects the richness and diversity of African cultures.

Keywords: intangible cultural heritage, animation, Africa, media representation, stereotypes

1. Introduction

The representation of Africa in Western media, particularly in animated films, remains a complex and often contentious issue. This study specifically examines *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* (2008). The animated film remains relevant due to its enduring popularity and cultural impact. The study comes from a background that commercially successful animated films usually inspire trends in media and entertainment after them (Suntai & Tordue, 2020). Lee (2015) further reiterates that the ideas of friendship and self-identity portrayed in animated movies resonate with all generations, contributing to their ongoing appeal. The great recognition and influence of the film have also been supported by recent studies that state that nostalgic animations play a large role in shaping childhood entertainment preferences (Brown & Davis, 2018). Thus, the immense popularity and thematic nature of the film places it squarely in the foreground of contemporary media discourse. This study explores how the film both engages with and misrepresents aspects of African intangible cultures. While there is an extensive academic analysis of cultural representations in animation, specifically on Japanese, Chinese, and Korean contexts (Izang Azi, 2012; Qingshan et al., 2025; Roy & Sahharil, 2020), inquiries into African

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cultural depictions remain scarce, especially when it comes to intangible cultural heritage (Eichler, 2021; Gwerevende & Mthombeni, 2023; Innovation in Cultural Heritage, n.d.; Waelde et al., 2018). The now broader definitions of cultural heritage include living traditions such as oral traditions, performing arts, and social practices that media images seem to neglect.

The existing literature provides a foundation for understanding the unintended consequences of cultural misrepresentation in media; notably, Baah-Acheamfour (2024), Madrid-Morales and Wasserman (2025), Obia et al. (2022) and Thomas (2024) cite stereotypes that have perpetuated Africa as a land of savagery as opposed to one of varied or complex cultures. This investigation examines the stereotypes presented in *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* and analyzes any counter-narratives purportedly offered by the film. The study found that the film often portrays African spiritual practices as superstition and oral traditions as a sign of illiteracy, thereby belittling and marginalising Africa's rich cultural heritage and cultures with their richness and wisdom.

2. The Plot

In this animated film, the producers, Mark Swift, Mireille, and Soria, and the directors, Tom McGrath, Eric, and Darnell, embed several African cultures that are worthy of consideration to determine if it is indeed a true reflection of the continent. The animation is a story of four young outlaw animals: Marty the zebra, Alex the lion, Melman the giraffe, and Gloria the hippopotamus from the Central Park Zoo in New York who embark on a vacation, and upon return to New York on a plane, crash land in Africa, to meet several of their kind. The events that follow here in Africa, most of which are not only negative but also unfortunate at first, greatly contribute to projecting the rich thematic endowment of the film. At the end of the dark tunnel, one is shown how the quartet overcomes their numerous challenges in unity, and most importantly, how the characters use dancing (which is a cultural setting) to restore the lost glory and pride of their family. This theme has informed this interesting academic inquiry.

3. Literature Review

3.1 The Visual Representation of Africa

Africa, as represented in early Western films and literature, was often depicted through colonialist lenses, painting the continent as a "dark continent" that is filled with bizarre wildlife and primaeval societies that needed European civilisation to bring them up to standard. This is, for instance, captured in so-called classic adventure novels like H. Rider

Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885/2002) and *She: A History of Adventure)* (1887/2001), as well as in films such as the *Tarzan* series. These works have created enduring but problematic visual tropes of Africa as a wild, feral frontier waiting to be explored and conquered. Some of these stereotypes are discussed below.

3.2 Stereotypes in Visual Language

Global studies highlight prevalent misrepresentations of Africa in films. Notable films include *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1981) and *Out of Africa* (1985). Many studies, such as Dokotum's (2020) and Nwobodo's (2025), critique the portrayals of Africa as a dark continent inhabited by illiterates. Recent productions often depict Africa as barbaric and a place of violence (Mboti, 2016). Such misrepresentations influence perceptions of Africa's setting and the underlying themes within these stories. Such fallacies make it hard for the audiences to sustain genuine perceptions regarding African-centred films and their intangible cultural heritage (Njambi & O'Brien, 2019). African heritage has been represented through stereotypes, mostly as poor and underdeveloped, of regression and backwardness. These narratives and framed realities, coupled with the subtle rhetoric of poverty, suffering, and helplessness, have also remained static in Western media platforms, even in this contemporary time. Taoua (2018) submits that the Western media, from its infancy to date, has inherited a tradition that stereotypes, gives biased accounts, and portrays Africans as subjects. Afolabi (2017) postulates that images of good infrastructure, such as skyscrapers, good roads, and luxurious cars, are often absent from the mindset of Western audiences when it comes to Africa.

3.3 Violence and Poverty Tropes

Recent scholarship, for instance, Frankema (2025) has criticised the one-dimensional image of Africa as a war-torn, suffering, and underdeveloped continent common to media and film. Such representations reinforce stigmatising projections of weakness and primitivism that, in their turn, affect understandings of African social and cultural environments. There have been attempts to push back against these narratives in African advertising industries, seeking to portray the continent's societal development, modernity, and technological progress (Bhanye & Shayamunda, 2021; Goodluck, 2021). They aim to dismantle stereotypes and bring a more complex vision of the continent to the forefront.

3.4 Animation and Cultural Identity

Anime is at the centre of significant innovations and cultural debates in Japan. Japan has one of the richest cultures in the world. Abu Backer (2023) and Alsubaie and Alabbad

(2020) posit that Japanese anime only reflects the present but also heavily relies on the past. Anime is the abbreviated term for animation, but in Western countries, it has become closely associated with Japan and Japanese culture. Anime has made Japanese culture available to the world. This research aims to delve deeper into the creation of animation related to the representation of culture in animation and the reasons behind its deep roots. Sharin (2021) contends that anime is used to safeguard martial arts styles in Japan. They are portrayed as being informed by animals and birds. This view is supported by Yamamura (2019), who notes that Japanese anime enforces the ideals of nationalism and patriotism on issues of protecting the country's martial arts heritage and sometimes educates the audience on historical stories.

The most notable scholar who has given an account of African animation, Callus (2012, 2018), argued that African animation is largely influenced by anthropology. The scholar discusses how anthropological models can be drawn upon when reading animation, and she utilises supporting examples of sub-Saharan animations to promote the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach to reading animation. The production of animations in this study is influenced by local practices of animation. In another view, Coetzee (2016) argued that African animation has since transitioned from depicting realities rooted in traditional culture to the development of superheroes analogous to those of the Western world. Fendler (2022) is of the view that creating superheroes in African animation is a counter-hegemonic move that has, in past productions, presented Africans as weak and volatile. Whilst Afrofuturism is important in the global animation market, it is also important that the stories presented not only give a positive image about the continent, but should as well be coined with true representations of intangible cultures, so that communities learn and safeguard them. The animation genre has become popular in recent years. Countries such as Kenya and Zimbabwe have also used animation methods to create music videos, educational and health campaigns (Allela, 2013).

4. Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research paradigm to explore how *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* constructs representations of African cultural elements. Qualitative research is a form of social action concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena (Tilman et al., 2025). The primary research question is:

1. How does *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* portray African culture, and what counter discourses are evident in these representations?

To address this, the research employs a qualitative approach rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the analytical method to examine the representation of African cultural

heritage in the selected animated film. CDA was chosen as a primary methodology because it allows for a nuanced understanding of how both linguistic and visual elements within selected scenes perpetuate cultural hegemony, power dynamics, and post-colonial narratives (Sveinson et al., 2021). The film was chosen because it is a well-known animated comedy that presents a stylised African reality, making it very relevant for the discussion of cultural stereotypes and ideological messages in contemporary media. Considering the apparent reference to the date, the event holds significant temporal relevance, as the film was released in 2008 to ideally reflect contemporary postcolonial representations and global perceptions of Africa. This process analysed purposively sampled key scenes, highlighting African cultural themes (Stratton, 2024). The data were subsequently transcribed in their entirety, and annotation of verbal utterances and visual cues was conducted, and the information was thematically coded to identify patterns and themes concerning stereotypes, exoticization, and counter-narratives. Creswell (2009, 2014) states that thematic coding helps develop patterns among qualitative data. The coding process was iterative, allowing the definition of themes to be adjusted as new patterns emerged. In the interpretive phase, the intent was to analyse how these themes are related to wider racial, cultural, and power discourses (Fairclough, 1995, 1999). Some of the limitations of the study regard focusing on a single film, which may not account for all of how media representation of Africa is presented, as well as the possibility of the researcher's bias at the time of interpretation. Yet, triangulation of verbal and visual data contributed to the enhanced reliability of our findings and resulted in an in-depth understanding of the cultural narrative of the film. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

5. Results

5.1 African Knowledge Systems, Leadership and Spirituality

This section presents how the selected scenes portray African spirituality as influenced by abject poverty. The film *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* (2008) offers a critical examination of African spirituality and cultural heritage, often portraying it through a lens of poverty and superstition. For example, King Julien's dependence on ritualistic practices during crises highlights a stereotype that links African spirituality to backwardness and irrationality. This portrayal can be further examined through Ngugi wa Thiong'o's perspective on the colonisation of the mind, where he points out that African cultures are frequently oversimplified and misrepresented in Western narratives (Demissie, 2024; Kaur, 2024).

Portraying King Julien and other African animals as naive can hurt perceptions of African leadership and intelligence. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argues that these media portrayals reflect colonial stereotypes that suggest Africans are incapable of self-governance, a narrative that persists in both historical and modern discussions. Consequently, the film misses a chance to highlight the complexity and richness of African cultures, which are traditionally based on governance systems that prioritise community involvement and consensus, described as Ubuntu.

Figure 1: *King Julian arrives at the middle of a crisis with escort: Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* (2008)

Figure 1 portrays Africans as overly credulous and vulnerable to manipulation, portraying their participation in spiritual gatherings as uncritically accepting of ritualistic practices. This framing raises questions about the portrayal of cultural adherence as potentially irrational, especially when contrasted with available pragmatic alternatives. The governing system of African kings is ridiculed. For example, King Julien, a raccoon, is a depiction of a pompous African leader who, amidst crisis, chooses a grand entrance. The depiction of African meetings emphasises disorganisation and chaos, which can be interpreted as a visual reinforcement of stereotypes concerning the inefficiency of traditional governance structures. Such portrayals may serve to justify colonial narratives that depict African political systems as inherently unstable, thereby undermining the

diversity and resilience of indigenous administrative practices. This view is corroborated by Kumari, who noted that Africa's governance systems are characterised by bad governance, centralised power, and corruption, impacting public administration (Kumari, 2021)

The film's portrayal of African spiritual rituals tends to emphasise their exotic and primitive aspects, framing them as irrational or threatening. Such representations contribute to stereotypes that characterise indigenous practices as savage, thus marginalising authentic spiritual expressions and reinforcing biased perceptions. To counteract the problem faced by Melman, the Giraffe, he is forced to be burned in the huge furnace as a sacrifice to appease *the gods* without considering other, more logical, civil, or less brutal alternatives to global warming and climate change. The film suggests the idea that Africans themselves are stupid and will believe anything they are told when faced with dire situations.

On the contrary, African rituals are derived from African spirituality to address problems (see Ndemanu 2018; Singh & Bhagwan, 2020). There are different rituals designed for different plights in society, for instance, the rain-requesting rituals misrepresented in the animated film. The representation of rain-requesting rituals is dramatic and entails exaggerated dancing, gestures, and spectacular visual effects meant to elicit divine intervention. The film takes matters further by implying blood sacrifice as a necessary ingredient, an element that is certainly alien to the real practices, further fueling the stereotypical notion of African rituals as violent or barbaric. King Julien's leadership style exhibits authoritarian qualities, a stark contrast to many African models wherein leadership is exercised with a high degree of communal consultation or participation from those to be governed. This contrast gives the impression of a dichotomy that might dim the intricate reality of native leadership traditions. Ncube and Tomaselli (2019) note that African societies have historically adopted a *dare-dariro* approach, which encourages democratic participation.

5.2 The Misrepresentation of African Oral Heritage and Culture in Media

This section provides a closer examination of how the studied animated film simplifies and misrepresents the rich oral heritage of Africa, subtly suggesting that oral traditions are somehow less valuable than Western literacy. The film appears to portray these practices as primitive, which aligns with certain stereotypical representations of African oral traditions in popular media (see Asiimwe, 2023). The film tends to overlook the central role that oral stories play in African communities, where they serve as vital mechanisms for transmitting history, cultural values, and ecological knowledge. The character of

Gloria, who hails from the New York Zoo, serves as a prime example of the problematic *white saviour* narrative. This narrative implies that African characters cannot take charge of their cultural practices. Such portrayals reinforce the damaging idea that African societies are incapable of self-governance and need outside help to tackle their challenges. This notion is intertwined with how the West has pillaged African cultural heritage, filled its museums with stolen African Art under the guise of preservation (Batt, 2021). The film suggests that African leaders are unaware of their communities' needs, perpetuating a harmful stereotype that separates African cultures from stories of self-determination and resilience.

The film, unfortunately, keeps alive some harmful gender stereotypes, especially in how it portrays African men and women, which only serves to reinforce old biases in popular culture. African men are often portrayed as physically strong but not very intelligent, a stereotype that is evident in Gloria's unkind comments about Moto Moto, a character intended to represent this idea. For example, Gloria often calls Moto Moto "dumb" and makes fun of him for being gullible, implying that just because he is strong, he cannot be intelligent. These portrayals echo a troubling narrative that paints African males as strong but stupid, which oversimplifies their humanity and contributions to society (Chiumbu, 2015). This narrow view promotes a simplistic understanding of masculinity that fails to capture the rich diversity and intelligence found in African cultures.

On the other hand, the film tends to portray African women as less attractive than their Western counterparts, a point that is underscored by how easily Gloria wins over Moto Moto. Take, for example, the way the film portrays Gloria, a character from New York, as the gold standard for beauty and desirability, which ultimately overshadows the appeal of the African female characters. When Gloria shows up in Madagascar, her confidence and Western beauty are front and centre, and it does not take long for her to catch Moto Moto's eye. This creates a stark contrast between her allure and that of the other female characters, who appear less sophisticated and appealing. This dynamic not only undermines the representation of African women but also reinforces a damaging narrative that ties beauty to Western ideals, which can foster a sense of inferiority among African women (Patterson, 2018).

These portrayals contribute to the idea that African societies are marked by unequal gender dynamics, where women are not shown as leaders or complex individuals with their intellect and agency. Instead, they often end up as comedic side characters or love interests, primarily serving the storylines of the male characters. The lack of strong, intelligent African female figures in the film perpetuates the stereotype that African women

are subordinate or dependent on their male counterparts for validation and success. This kind of representation not only misrepresents the rich diversity and strength of gender roles within African cultures but also reinforces a colonial mindset that views African societies through a narrow, Westernised perspective (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

5.3 Positives in the Film's Representation of Africa

It is essential to highlight the moments in the film that showcase positive representations of Africa. Take, for instance, the animals in Madagascar; each has its unique personality, hinting at a rich narrative that can truly resonate with viewers. Figure 2 below shows that the way animal characters celebrate community and friendship mirrors the importance of communal ties in many African cultures, reflecting the concept of Ubuntu, as discussed by African thinkers such as Mogobe Ramose. This concept emphasises how individuals are interconnected within a society (Ramose, 1999).

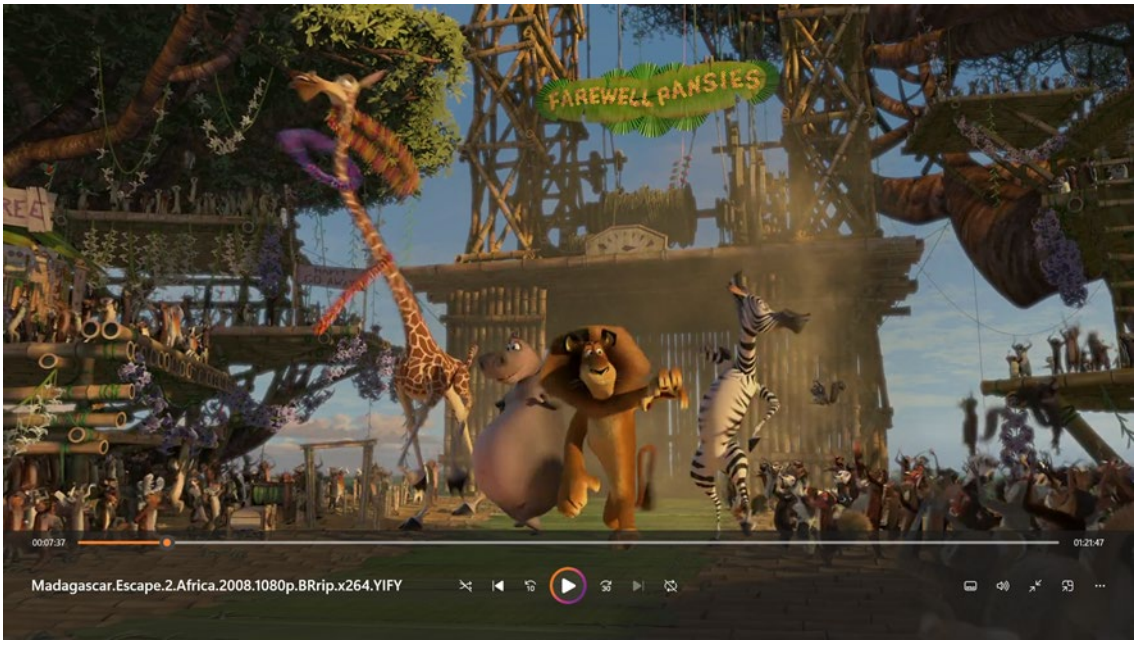

Figure 2: The animals in Madagascar celebrating together, *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* (2008)

While the portrayal of Africa's vibrant landscapes may be a bit romanticised, it does capture the continent's incredible diversity and beauty. The colourful animations create environments that can spark awareness and appreciation for Africa's ecological wealth, potentially encouraging viewers to explore its culture further. This celebration of nature aligns with the views of scholars like Wangari Maathai, who emphasise the importance of

environmental conservation and the crucial role of African communities in preserving their natural heritage (Maathai, 2004). Some humorous moments stemming from cultural misunderstandings provide valuable insights into the universal aspects of human experiences. The shared laughter among the characters illustrates how different cultural backgrounds can come together, showing that even in the face of misrepresentation, there is a shared humanity that fosters laughter and understanding.

6. Discussion

In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), the way Africans *were portrayed as wonderous on a prehistoric earth* reveals a colonial perspective that views them as primitive (Min, 2022). This portrayal implicitly justifies Western intervention as a so-called civilising mission. The ongoing misrepresentation and the imposition of Western ideals on Africa highlight the need for what Mignolo and Walsh call *epistemic disobedience*, which is essentially a deliberate rejection of dominant Western ways of knowing (Laakso & Adu, 2023). Building on this idea of epistemic disobedience, it is crucial to take a closer look at how Africa and its people are portrayed in popular media, especially in animation. As Gonese (2019) points out, African societies have a deep-rooted tradition of storytelling that has been passed down through generations, reflecting cultural values, ideological beliefs, and artistic principles. This emphasises the importance of self-representation, free from the distortions of colonial history. The decolonisation of animated imagery related to Africa should be seen as a vital ideological goal. Some creators are eager to use animation as a platform to showcase African mythologies, philosophies, rich traditions, cultural expressions, and languages.

Take, for instance, the opening scene of the animated film *Madagascar Escape 2 Africa* (2008), where a reporter breaks the news about *troublesome animals* escaping from the New York Zoo to Africa:

> … On the loose, several animals, including the world's famous Alex the lion, escaped from the Central Park Zoo tonight. The escapes were cornered in Grand Central Station. Animal rights activists who convinced zoo officials to have the animals sent to Africa …

This narrative subtly portrays Africa as a haven for outlaws, portraying it as a dangerous and underdeveloped place where unwanted elements are sent. This view conveniently overlooks the historical truth of colonial expansion, during which Western powers unleashed violence and control in their quest for resources and cultural dominance. Scholars have documented that these actions were marked by annihilation, plunder,

enslavement, racialisation, and dehumanisation (Laakso & Adu, 2023). This scene exemplifies how Western animation studios frequently produce content that reflects and reinforces Western perspectives, often marginalising authentic African voices and cultural representations

Driven by a decolonial perspective, this analysis aims to challenge and push back against the images and ideas that strip Africa of its humanity. It rejects the colonial power dynamics woven into the film's narrative, embracing decoloniality as a fresh perspective and way of understanding. Grosfoguel (2007) emphasises that adopting a decolonial mindset means making visible, opening up, and promoting radically different viewpoints that challenge the notion of Western rationality as the only lens through which to view existence and thought.

The animation industry acts as a potent cultural entity, sculpting societal values and perceptions through the stories it tells. Large studios like DreamWorks often lean toward a Western paradigm; thus, African cultures especially come under its gaze. According to Adorno and Horkheimer (2007), Hesmondhalgh (2024), Mato (2009), and Murdoch et al. (2024), the cultural industries produce standardised content meant to uphold dominant ideologies and thereby maintain cultural hegemony. This view theorises that Western animators likely encode stereotypes or exoticise non-Western cultures, contributing to Western cultural hegemony instead of genuine representation. From that standpoint, the critical look into the industry uncovers how these productions are ingrained in a wider ideological hegemony that shapes the global worldview regarding Africa and other disenfranchised cultures.

While Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) points out that African decolonisation has mostly been a political process, the portrayals in the film suggest that mental, cultural, and social representations are still hindered by Western influence. Applying a decolonial lens reveals the persistent dominance of Western narratives in animation, underscoring the urgent need for more authentic, self-represented African stories that challenge these colonial legacies and foster genuine cultural sovereignty. Ultimately, a decolonial perspective highlights the need for animation to serve as a platform for African voices, challenging colonial stereotypes, promoting cultural sovereignty, and reshaping global perceptions of Africa.

7. Conclusion

This study underscores the pervasive issue of vague and stereotypical representations of African cultures in Western animated films, exemplified by *Madagascar: Escape 2*

Africa (2008). The very broad terms, such as real stories or true representations, cover all manner of inaccuracies and perpetuate colonial stereotypes that shape audience perception and reinforce power disparities. Such talk threatens to ignore the richly nuanced and evolving realities of African intangible cultural heritage in the form of oral traditions, spiritualities, and communal values. Linking these findings to current debates in heritage conservation and media regulation drives home the pressing concern for more conscious and responsible representations. The contemporary discourse now favours media literacy efforts and regulatory measures that will encourage authentic self-representation and counter imprints of colonialism. Practically, filmmakers and media regulators must foster collaborations with African communities to create folklore based on indigenous narratives. As a result, the representation will be accurate, respectful, and empowering. Studies should move beyond 2008 to see how recent trends in animation and digital media either promote or fight stereotypes. Investigating how Africans represent themselves and how globalised media might affect cultural sovereignty remains owing to such efforts fostering decolonisation of media narratives, meaningful cultural agency, and representations of Africa that are born out of reality rather than stereotypes. Thus, from these considerations, a responsible approach can hopefully lead to building a more mature and equal cultural dialogue that underlines the promotion and celebration of Africa's intangible heritage in its immense diversity.

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Promoting Inclusive Educational Practices: The Reclamation, Revitalisation, and Digital Integration of Historically Marginalised Linguistic Communities in Teacher Training Programs

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Abstract

The revitalisation and digitalisation of endangered minority languages are essential for fostering an inclusive society, a concern increasingly acknowledged by linguists, human rights advocates, and sociologists. This study examines the status of formerly marginalised languages and the challenges associated with their de-marginalisation, revitalisation, and digitalisation within teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe. It argues that insufficient training for native-speaking teachers, lack of curriculum integration, and limited digital resources and language learning applications hinder efforts to revitalise and digitalise formerly marginalised languages, which are vital for enhancing inclusivity and cultural diversity. Using Fishman's (1991) analytic framework and sociolinguistic theory, the study contends that socio-economic conditions significantly impede efforts for the revitalisation of formerly marginalised languages in Zimbabwean teacher education. It posits that de-minoritisation, revitalisation, and digitalisation are critical in reversing language decline and potential extinction by providing accessible learning resources. The study outlines strategies for de-minoritisation, revitalisation, and digitalisation of formerly marginalised languages in teachers' colleges to promote inclusivity and cultural diversity. Employing qualitative methods, including document analysis and interviews, the research examines the integration of formerly marginalised languages in college curricula in ten teachers' colleges. Findings reveal that formerly marginalised languages remain marginalised and underrepresented, underscoring an urgent need for revitalisation and digitalisation initiatives. The study concludes that incorporating formerly marginalised languages into teacher training programs promotes inclusivity and enhances cultural diversity. It recommends that teacher training institutions integrate formerly marginalised languages into their curricula and establish online platforms to support the de-minoritisation, revitalisation, and digitalisation of these languages.

Keywords: cultural diversity, de-minoritisation, formerly marginalised languages, inclusivity, language revitalisation

1. Introduction

The Zimbabwean Constitution of 2013 (Amendment No. 20) officially recognises sixteen languages that are Chewa, ChiBarwe, English, Kalanga, Koisan, Nambya, Ndau, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, Sign Language, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda, and Xhosa.

This means the national constitution promotes linguistic diversity and multilingualism in Zimbabwe. Before the enactment of the National Constitution, there was language hierarchisation that had English on the pinnacle, dominating as the de facto official language, Shona and Ndebele occupied the second stratum as national languages. All the other indigenous languages suffered from domination, exclusion, and marginalisation, and assumed the pejorative label, 'minority' languages.

The post-2013 era saw higher education institutions, including the previously marginalised languages, introduced into the curricula in line with the constitutional provisions (Section 6, 3a, 4) that mandate all state institutions and agencies of government to treat all officially recognised languages equitably, promote and advance their use, and create conditions for their use. However, it is critical to mention that the term 'equitable' loosely means being reasonable, fair, and just. Unlike the explicit term ‘equal’, this constitutional provision was crafted in euphemistic and implicit ways to promote vagueness and ambiguity. It is not clear what aspects should be considered for the languages to be regarded as having been treated equitably. This, arguably, was deliberately done to create room for non-implementation of a language policy. This fits well into the defining characteristics of most national language policies in Africa. Bamgbose (1991, p. 117) aptly describes this as an instance of a declaration without implementation, where a language policy may be declared with escape clauses, let-outs, opt-outs, modifications, alternatives, and stringent conditions.

This study applauds the National Constitution as one legal framework that spells out a near-national language policy for Zimbabwe. Apart from it, Zimbabwe does not have a policy document on language that spells out the national language policy. Before the enactment of the 2013 National Constitution, the language policy could be inferred from policy-related documents (Ndlovu, 2013; 2015). Despite the above technical challenges in the crafting and morphology of the National Constitution highlighted in Section 6, as discussed above, this study examines the treatment of previously marginalised language in teacher training colleges as part of the efforts to mainstream linguistic pluralism and democratise the operational space for the languages.

The motivation for examining the extent of including indigenous languages into the curriculum in teacher training institutions also stems from the 2018 Language in Education Policy that promotes mother-tongue education during the learners' formative years (Grade 0-4). This was done to promote the learners’ understanding of realities at home and school, since they are critical socialisation spaces. The Government of Zimbabwe recommended that educators should be proficient in at least three indigenous

languages for this objective to be achieved. Given this position, this study explores how teacher training colleges have conformed to this policy.

This study contributes to debates on language revitalisation, reversing language shift and death in the contemporary world. It is critical to mention that most indigenous languages in Zimbabwe were at different stages of extinction because there was little or no intergenerational transmission of the language. After all, they had suffered systematic marginalisation, exclusion, and subordination from Shona, Ndebele, and English for an extended period. Extant literature has explored the mainstreaming and inclusion of formerly marginalised languages in the basic education sector (in schools). These studies evaluated how the national education system has implemented the mother-tongue education policy espoused in different policy documents (Hungwe, 2007; Marupi, Tshotsho & Nhongo, 2021; Ndlovu, 2013; 2015). The implementation of the language provisions of the 2013 National Constitution in state media has also been a subject of study (Mabika & Salawu, 2014; Mamvura, Masowa & Ndlovu, 2022). This study provides another front, the inclusion of formerly marginalised languages, in the curricula of teacher training colleges, to the discussion of language revival, promotion, and development. No study has looked at how teacher training institutions have worked towards implementing the language provisions of the 2013 National Constitution and the 2018 language in education policy.

2. Literature review

In recent years, the conversation surrounding the de-minoritisation and revitalisation of formerly marginalised languages within higher education has ignited a vibrant debate (Ferrerós, 2024). This discourse is particularly compelling as it reflects a significant shift in the language hierarchy and educational practices (Jourbet, 2022). However, the integration of formerly marginalised languages into the digital environments of teacher training colleges is fraught with challenges. Despite the potential for these institutions to serve as vital platforms for language empowerment in our increasingly digital world, there remains a glaring gap in the training of educators to elevate the status of minoritised and marginalised languages (Ferrerós, 2024).

Numerous studies have highlighted the hurdles faced in implementing indigenous minority language programs within educational settings. Key among these challenges is the scarcity of qualified teaching staff, insufficient opportunities for teacher training, and a lack of adequate resources for language instruction. The strategies and methodologies required to effectively incorporate indigenous languages into the curriculum are often underdeveloped (Dołowy-Rybińska & Hornsby, 2021). Moreover, a critical language

dichotomy has emerged, exacerbated by the predominance of certain languages on digital platforms. The dominance of Shona and Ndebele on digital platforms is caused by the lack of full implementation of the language policy and policymakers who favour the dominant languages. This has resulted in the marginalisation, segmentation, and underutilisation of formerly marginalised languages, further complicating efforts toward their revitalisation. The intersection of digital technology and education thus presents both an opportunity and a challenge, calling for innovative approaches to ensure that formerly marginalised languages not only survive but also thrive in this modern landscape.

Zivave (2023) expresses a pressing concern regarding the need for de-minoritisation of languages that are marginalised, oppressed, and suppressed. This concept encompasses the processes aimed at dismantling the marginalisation of formerly marginalised languages, a shift often dictated by socio-political dynamics and the overwhelming presence of dominant languages such as English, Shona, and Ndebele. Researchers like Marungudzi, Chiwewe, and Mhute (2014) have underscored the historical favouritism embedded in Zimbabwe's language policy, which has consistently prioritised dominant languages at the expense of linguistic diversity. Zivave (2024) further argues that these policies inhibit the de-minoritisation and revitalisation processes, as government institutions tend to favour dominant languages in their operations. Consequently, formerly marginalised languages such as Nambya, Tonga, Venda, Shangani, Chewa, and Sotho face significant marginalisation, adversely impacting the identity and cultural heritage of their speakers. This is particularly evident in educational contexts, where a reverse language shift is crucial. Language revitalisation efforts seek to counteract the detrimental effects of de-minoritisation by advocating for the use and teaching of formerly marginalised languages within teacher development programs. By prioritising these languages in educational settings, it is possible to foster a renewed sense of identity and cultural pride, ensuring that these linguistic heritages not only survive but thrive in an increasingly globalised world.

Scholars such as Van Dongera, Van Der Meer, and Sterk (2024) underscore the critical role that teacher training institutions play in strategies for language maintenance. In Zimbabwe, initiatives aimed at incorporating formerly marginalised languages into teacher education programs have been proposed to enhance cultural diversity and inclusivity among trainee teachers (Chitando, 2014). Despite this, efforts to revitalise formerly marginalised languages, especially within the context of a digitalised educational landscape, have faced significant challenges due to the slow implementation of language policies in higher education institutions, including teacher colleges. Many of these colleges have made minimal progress in promoting 'minority' language revitalisation in

the current digital era. Critics argue that such efforts are often perceived as a 'waste of time and resources' with their success deemed unlikely or even impossible (Fishman, 1991p. 38). However, Fishman, a leading advocate for language revitalisation, asserts the necessity of believing in the value of these efforts, stating that one must believe that finding a cure is worthwhile" (Fishman, 1991, p. 39) before any meaningful progress can be achieved. The processes of language de-minoritisation and revitalisation are vital for fostering cultural value and strengthening community identity. Fishman elaborates on the intrinsic link between language and culture, noting that language serves as the primary vessel for cultural expression (Cantoni, 1996). This interdependence underscores the importance of revitalising formerly marginalised languages, as doing so not only preserves linguistic diversity but also enriches cultural heritage, ultimately benefiting communities and society at large.

In many teacher training programs, the use of formerly marginalised languages as a medium of instruction remains exceedingly rare (Van Dongera, Van Der Meer, & Sterk, 2024). This trend is particularly evident in post-colonial Zimbabwe, where English and dominant indigenous languages such as Shona and Ndebele continue to prevail at tertiary levels, reflecting deep-seated structural inequalities in language use. Some languages are, as Cantoni (1996) poignantly notes, 'wished to be dead' because of institutional barriers which promote exclusivism and impede cultural diversity. Consequently, language revitalisation becomes essential in dismantling these hierarchies and reinstating formerly marginalised languages within teacher education, thereby fostering a more inclusive pedagogy. Achieving this objective requires the de-minoritisation and revitalisation of these languages within teacher education curricula and digital spaces.

Digitalisation plays a transformative role in the revitalisation process of formerly marginalised languages. According to Marungudzi, Chiwewe, and Mhute (2014), the integration of digital tools and resources in teacher education can significantly enhance language learning and promote cultural diversity. Moyo (2017) further illustrates how online platforms and mobile applications can facilitate the creation of accessible learning materials in formerly marginalised languages. This digital shift not only aids in language acquisition but also connects speakers globally, fostering a sense of community among users of formerly marginalised languages (Kucherbayeva & Smagulova, 2023). Recognising the importance of this language shift is crucial (Kucherbayeva & Smagulova, 2023). Language revitalisation thus serves as a vital safeguard against linguistic death and potential extinction, ensuring that formerly marginalised languages thrive and contribute to the rich tapestry of human culture. By embracing these digital advances,

teacher colleges can play a pivotal role in promoting linguistic and cultural diversity, thereby enriching the educational experience for all.

Grenoble and Whaley (2006, p. 10) aptly describe education as “a critical domain” for formerly marginalised languages, emphasising that language education is often central to revitalisation efforts. One effective strategy to combat language shift is to ensure that teacher training colleges equip future educators with proficiency in formerly marginalised languages. This initiative has the potential to create a ‘language nest’ within these institutions, as Daigneault (2019) proposed. However, establishing such language nests in teacher colleges is not without its challenges. Many institutions face significant resource limitations, particularly in human capital, as there are often few fluent speakers available to provide instruction (Kucherbayeva & Smagulova, 2023). These obstacles can hinder the processes of de-minoritisation and revitalisation, impeding efforts to promote linguistic diversity.

Much of the existing literature on language revival and revitalisation tends to focus on primary school settings, which are viewed as crucial sites for cultivating new speakers (Chevalier, 2017; Todal, 2018). Yet, there is a growing recognition of the need for a more comprehensive approach that integrates de-minoritisation awareness, revitalisation strategies, and digital innovation in the teacher education sector. Such an approach is essential for fostering inclusivity and cultural diversity within higher education institutions, ultimately equipping future educators with the necessary skills and knowledge to support a linguistically and culturally diverse society. Despite this recognition, research on the integration of formerly marginalised languages into teacher education curricula and digital spaces remains limited. As we move forward, it is imperative to expand this research to better understand how to effectively incorporate minority languages into teacher training, thereby enhancing the inclusive educational landscape and contributing to the preservation of linguistic heritage.

3. Theoretical framework

Fishman’s (1991) analytic framework, particularly his theory on language shift and maintenance, provides a foundational lens for understanding the dynamics of formerly marginalised languages in the digital landscape in teacher education in Zimbabwe. His model emphasises the social and contextual factors that influence language vitality, proposing that language use is intricately tied to identity, community, and power relations. In Fishman's perspective, "deminoritisation" refers to the process by which languages that were once marginalised become even less visible and important. This typically happens when formerly marginalised languages lose their value because of societal

factors that promote the use of more dominant languages. Resultantly, the societal pressures increase as they adopt dominant languages, causing formerly marginalised languages to be pushed out of everyday contexts, leading to their decline. This shift can be exacerbated by digital platforms that prioritise widely spoken languages, thereby marginalising minority voices. The digital landscape can inadvertently contribute to language endangerment by providing limited resources and visibility for formerly marginalised languages in teachers' colleges. Conversely, revitalisation efforts can leverage digital technologies to counteract the minoritisation of indigenous languages belonging to minority groups. Social media, online communities, and digital content creation empower speakers of formerly marginalised languages to reclaim and promote their linguistic heritage in teacher education. Furthermore, digital tools can facilitate language learning and transmission, offering innovative approaches to teaching formerly marginalised languages by teachers trained in teachers' colleges. For instance, mobile applications and online courses can make language learning more accessible, thus revitalising interest and usage among college students in teacher development institutions. Ultimately, Fishman's framework underscores the need for a multifaceted approach to language policy that integrates digital initiatives with community-led efforts. By recognising the interplay between digital environments and sociolinguistic factors, stakeholders can better support the maintenance and revitalisation of formerly marginalised languages in an increasingly globalised world in institutions of teacher training. This holistic approach is crucial for ensuring that linguistic diversity thrives in the face of ongoing challenges posed by dominant indigenous languages such as Shona and Ndebele in teachers' colleges**.**

4. Research Methodology

This research employed a qualitative approach to explore the digitalisation of formerly marginalised languages in teachers' colleges, drawing on methods defined by Marshall and Rossman (2006) that include naturalistic, interpretive, and ethnographic techniques. The flexibility of qualitative research allowed for in-depth examinations through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and web analysis, facilitating open-ended discussions that encouraged participants to share relevant insights. Before data collection, participants provided verbal and written consent, with names and personal information anonymised to protect their privacy. Participants for the study were selected through purposeful sampling to ensure a diverse representation of perspectives. Five formerly marginalised language speakers were chosen based on their enrolment in teachers' colleges, allowing insights from individuals actively engaged in language education. Additionally, five lecturers specialising in indigenous languages were selected

for their expertise and experience in the field. To further enrich the data, two committee members involved in the promotion of languages such as Nambya, Shangani, and Tonga were included, providing a broader context on language advocacy and preservation efforts. This combination of participants aimed to capture a comprehensive view of the challenges and opportunities facing formerly marginalised languages in education. Discussions focused on the progress of digital initiatives and participants' perceptions of these efforts as tools for de-minoritising and revitalisation of indigenous languages. Focus groups further enriched the data by capturing diverse perceptions and experiences from various speakers and academics. Additionally, web analysis assessed the online availability of formerly marginalised languages, particularly on platforms like Google, to evaluate the impact of digitalisation efforts in Zimbabwe. Overall, the study aimed to highlight the feasibility and effectiveness of digitalisation in preserving and promoting formerly marginalised languages within the educational context, contributing to their revitalisation and documentation in a rapidly changing digital landscape in teachers' colleges.

5. Research questions

The following research questions guided the study:

3. What is the status of formerly marginalised languages in teacher training programs?
4. What key factors influence the effectiveness of minority language revitalisation programs in teacher education institutions within the context of the current digital landscape?
5. What are the potential benefits of de-minoritising, revitalising, and digitalising strategies for formerly marginalised languages in teacher education institutions?

6. Research findings and discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings from data collected from interviews with key informants. It discusses the different views from the participants on what they perceived to be salient issues in the de-minoritisation and revitalisation of formerly marginalised languages in light of the evolving digital landscape in teacher education. The participants are coded as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9 and P10 respectively. Data is thematically presented and discussed below.

6.1 Formerly marginalised languages are offered in teachers' colleges

When the participants were asked about the formerly marginalised languages offered in teachers' colleges, the participants lamented the deplorable status of formerly marginalised languages among many colleges in Zimbabwe. P1 said:

> *The teaching of formerly marginalised languages such as TjiKalanga, ChiNambya, ChiTonga and Shangani in teacher education institutions is pathetic. Our college does not have any minority language that is offered as a main subject, and even in the Professional Syllabus, B*.

P1 characterised the situation as 'pathetic,' indicating a profound lack of support for formerly marginalised languages such as Kalanga, Nambya, Tonga, and Shangani. The absence of these languages as main subjects or within the professional syllabus suggests institutional neglect, which could hinder the preservation and revitalisation of these languages in teachers' colleges.

On the other hand, P6 said:

> *At our institution, Chishona and IsiNdebele are the only indigenous languages offered, with other formerly marginalised languages not visible*.

It emerged from the study that Shona and Ndebele are offered at their institution, with other formerly marginalised languages lacking representation. This reflects a trend where dominant languages overshadow minority ones, limiting students' exposure to linguistic diversity.

P9 also underscored:

> *Our college offers Nambya and ChiTonga because of its location. Other formerly marginalised languages like Venda and Shangani are not offered*.

The participant provided a more nuanced view, stating that Nambya and ChiTonga are available due to the college's geographical context. However, the exclusion of languages like Venda and Shangani highlights the selective nature of language offerings based on regional demographics, which may reinforce existing inequalities of languages in teachers' colleges.

With a similar view, P2 said:

> *Our college is offering only one minority language because of its proximity to the ethnic group, but IsiNdebele is a dominant language at the college*.

This could suggest that some colleges are offering very few formerly marginalised languages, primarily due to their proximity to the ethnic group associated with that language. The dominance of IsiNdebele at one college further emphasises the marginalisation of other indigenous languages, demonstrating how institutional policies can prioritise certain languages over others.

On the contrary, P3 stated:

> *Our college is in the capital city with so many people from diverse backgrounds coming from all the corners of Zimbabwe, but ChiShona and IsiNdebele are offered as the only indigenous language. The visibility of the minority language here is not even there.*

This could suggest that formerly marginalised languages are less visible in teachers' colleges found in the capital city, where a diverse population resides. There is a missed opportunity for linguistic inclusivity and promotion of formerly marginalised languages, with Shona and Ndebele being the only indigenous languages offered. This raises concerns about the representation of formerly marginalised languages in settings that could otherwise support a rich tapestry of linguistic heritage in Zimbabwe.

Interviewees provided valuable insights regarding the status of formerly marginalised languages in teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe. Their responses highlighted significant disparities in the status and visibility of formerly marginalised languages in teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe. The collective insights of participants underscore a troubling trend in the treatment of formerly marginalised languages within teacher education institutions. The dominance of a few languages, often dictated by geographic and political factors, limits the visibility and viability of formerly marginalised languages. This situation calls for a re-evaluation of language policies in educational contexts to foster a more inclusive approach that values and supports inclusivity and linguistic diversity in teachers' colleges in Zimbabwe.

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6.2 Key factors affecting the effectiveness of de-minoritisation and revitalisation programs for marginalised languages in teachers' colleges in the digital era.

When the participants were asked about their views on factors that influence the effectiveness of the formerly marginalised languages revitalisation programs in teachers' colleges, P1 underscored a:

> *... lack of institutional support from colleges impedes language revitalisation. Our college does not have policies that prioritise formerly marginalised languages, and I feel the government is to blame for the lack of support for formerly marginalised languages in teachers' colleges*.

This insinuates that teachers' colleges do not have policies prioritising formerly marginalised languages, and this hinders revitalisation efforts across government institutions. Teachers' colleges can revitalise indigenous and formerly marginalised languages by integrating them into the curriculum and offering specialised training for educators. Additionally, fostering community engagement, supporting research, providing incentives for language courses, organising cultural events, advocating for supportive policies, and establishing mentorship programs will further enhance language revitalisation efforts. The finding further suggests that the government is neglecting its responsibility because of its attitudes towards formerly marginalised languages. This has influenced teachers' colleges to ignore and undermine the value of formerly marginalised languages. Without strong advocacy and support from the government and teachers' colleges, revitalisation initiatives of formerly marginalised languages will continue to struggle to gain traction.

P7 said:

> *There is adequate funding and resources dedicated to minority language programs in teachers' colleges. Many colleges are understaffed or do not have staff catering for formerly marginalised languages.*

This probably suggests that there are a lot of inconsistencies in resource allocation. While some colleges may be adequately funded, the overall staffing issues, such as being understaffed or lacking specialised staff for formerly marginalised languages, suggests that even when resources are available, they are not effectively utilised towards the revitalisation of formerly marginalised languages. This lack of personnel dedicated to formerly marginalised languages in teacher education institutions limits the ability to

implement successful de-minoritisation and revitalisation programs in a digitalised landscape.

P5 asserted:

> *The curriculum design in teachers' colleges favours the dominant indigenous languages. I feel that indigenous language curricula should be relevant and promote inclusivity by integrating formerly marginalised languages alongside dominant languages in all teachers' colleges. This would ensure that there will be more student engagement and linguistic diversity*.

This could suggest that the curriculum in teacher education is heavily biased towards dominant languages, which stifles the integration of formerly marginalised tongues. The teacher education curriculum on indigenous languages fails to promote inclusivity and cultural diversity, resulting in the disengagement of students from formerly marginalised languages in teacher development programs.

P1 also underscored:

> *There is a lack of integration of digital tools and platforms for teaching and learning formerly marginalised languages in teachers' colleges*.

Technological access and literacy further complicate the revitalisation efforts, as revealed by the study. The absence of digital tools in teacher education institutions specifically designed for formerly marginalised languages limits the effectiveness of language programs. In the current digital landscape, leveraging technology is essential for engaging college students and providing innovative methods for minority language learning. The lack of such technological tools and access can severely hinder revitalisation initiatives in teacher colleges.

P3 believed that:

> *… lack of training and professional development in teachers' colleges reflects the lack of valuing of formerly marginalised languages*.

This could imply that teacher education institutions' lack of training and professional development reveals a significant gap in the de-minoritisation and revitalisation efforts. Teachers who are trained in teacher colleges are not trained to value or teach formerly marginalised languages effectively. This hinders the revitalisation programs. Thus,

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teachers' colleges should foster an environment where formerly marginalised languages can thrive by embracing them in their curriculum.

P10 asserted:

> *There is a lack of partnerships with local minority language speakers and communities to enrich the learning experience in teachers' colleges. This has limited the use and appreciation of formerly marginalised languages in teachers' colleges*.

From this study, it may be deduced that the lack of partnerships with local minority language speakers is critical in the de-minoritisation and revitalisation of marginalised languages in the digital landscape. Teachers' colleges should form partnerships with local indigenous speakers, academic institutions, NGOs, technology companies, cultural institutions, government agencies, and other educational programs to enhance curriculum relevance, resource development, community involvement, and policy support. This means that community involvement is essential for enriching the educational experience and fostering a genuine appreciation of formerly marginalised languages. Without collaboration with local communities, colleges miss the opportunity to create culturally relevant and engaging learning environments that support language use. However, the informant's qualification to assess whether their college conducted stakeholder consultations is questionable, given the noted lack of partnerships with local, formerly marginalised language speakers and communities. This suggests that the informant may not have sufficient insight into the college's decision-making processes or stakeholder engagement practices, which are crucial for the effective revitalisation of marginalised languages.

P8 believed that:

> *Technological access and literacy are limiting the revitalisation process in teachers' colleges. There are no digital tools that promote effective digital language programs best suited for formerly marginalised languages*.

The insufficient integration of digital tools such as language learning apps, online course platforms, virtual reality technologies, interactive e-books, social media platforms, podcasting, online forums, language translation software, digital storytelling tools, and collaborative writing platforms presents a missed opportunity to enhance educational practices for formerly marginalised languages. Digital platforms like Duolingo, Coursera, EdX, YouTube, Facebook Groups, Reddit, Podbean, Storybird, Google Docs, and

Kahoot!, can significantly facilitate access to resources and learning materials that support these languages. In particular, Shona and Ndebele are benefiting from platforms like Duolingo, YouTube, Facebook Groups, WhatsApp, and Google Classroom in higher and tertiary education. However, the limited presence of formerly marginalised languages on these platforms indicates a substantial gap in modern educational practices within teachers' colleges, which could otherwise strengthen efforts toward de-minoritization and revitalisation**.**

6.3 The potential benefits of de-minoritising, revitalising, and digitalising strategies for formerly marginalised languages in teacher education institutions.

Research participants were asked about the benefits of revitalising formerly marginalised languages in higher education in a digital learning environment. P1 indicated:

> *If colleges are going to embrace formerly marginalised languages by revitalising them in this digital era, I am sure the cultures of minority groups will be preserved. Digitalisation can assist in preserving unique cultural identities and traditions associated with formerly marginalised languages*.

The digitalisation of formerly marginalised languages helps safeguard the unique cultural identities and traditions associated with these languages. In line with this finding, Mumpande (2006:11) believes that revitalisation is critical in "imparting new vigour to formerly marginalised languages through the expansion of domains to reverse language shift and empower the language". Language revitalisation in the teacher education context has to be anchored on cementing people's identity. This suggests that integrating technology can not only enhance the learning experience but also play a crucial role in maintaining the cultural heritage of marginalised people. Language is essential for maintaining the cultural heritage of these peoples, as it preserves traditions, fosters community identity, and supports the continuation of cultural practices. Additionally, it serves as a medium for transmitting knowledge, resisting assimilation, facilitating emotional expression, and promoting cultural revitalisation, thereby encouraging younger generations to engage with their heritage.

P7 indicated:

> *Revitalising formerly marginalised languages through digitalisation is essential in academic enrichment because college students will be introduced to varied worldviews and epistemologies of all indigenous people*.

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Revitalising formerly marginalised languages enriches academic experiences by exposing students to diverse worldviews and epistemologies. This indicates that formerly marginalised languages are not just tools for communication but gateways to understanding different cultural narratives and knowledge systems, enhancing overall educational experiences and richness.

P10 also underscored that the revitalisation of formerly marginalised languages in teacher colleges had the potential to promote research. The participant said:

> *Digitalisation enriches interdisciplinary research that incorporates linguistic, cultural, and social dimensions of all people. If all colleges do embrace formerly marginalised languages, cultural diversity and inclusivity will be promoted*.

The potential benefits of revitalisation are seen in boosting interdisciplinary research that encompasses linguistic, cultural, and social dimensions. This underscores the idea that formerly marginalised languages can contribute significantly to scholarly work, promoting inclusivity and diversity in research agenda.

P2 asserted:

> *Revitalisation has the potential of benefiting students in teachers' colleges by improving their engagement. Student from minority cultural groups whose languages are marginalised would feel more connected and motivated when learning in or about their native languages*.

Revitalisation plays a crucial role in enhancing student engagement, especially for those from marginalised cultural backgrounds. Maseko and Moyo (2013) argue that political and economic marginalisation, along with discrimination and dehumanisation, contribute to the undermining of these students' languages and cultures. When students in teachers' colleges learn in or about their native, marginalised languages, they are likely to develop a stronger connection to their education.

P9 stated:

> *Revitalisation of minority makes citizens multi-lingual competent because the proficiency in multiple languages is promoted*.

Revitalising formerly marginalised languages fosters multilingual competence among citizens, especially college students. Maseko and Moyo (2013) argue that revitalisation

should leverage digital media. This can be achieved by creating cultural content through methods like scanning, modelling, and archiving. Powerful search engines and database management tools can help manage this content, while the World Wide Web enables dissemination to audiences who might otherwise lack access. This reflects a broader educational goal of preparing students for a globalised world where multilingualism is increasingly valuable, enhancing communication and cultural understanding.

P3 was of the view that the*:*

> *Revitalisation of formerly marginalised languages promotes justice and equality among students in teachers' colleges. Furthermore, this process can assist in coming up with inclusive policies that recognise and validate linguistic diversity in educational institutions*.

The revitalisation of formerly marginalised languages is a means of promoting justice and equality, particularly in developing inclusive educational policies. This augurs well with Adegbija's (1997, p. 6) observation that:

> Before confronting and tackling all other problems that bedevil the development of small-group languages is the need for a strong, unshakeable policy and commitment of the will to the philosophy that all languages, no matter the number of speakers, qualify for, and should be given, a chance to survive, develop, and grow to their maximum without being stifled by government policy actions.

This perspective aligns with social equity goals, indicating that recognising linguistic diversity is essential for ensuring that all students feel validated and supported in teachers' colleges.

P6 believed that:

> *In line with heritage-based curriculum in teacher education, revitalisation of formerly marginalised languages has the potential of improving community engagement between teachers' colleges and local communities*.

Language revitalisation with community engagement suggests that a heritage-based curriculum can strengthen ties between educational institutions and local communities. This collaboration can benefit both students and the communities they represent, fostering a mutual exchange of knowledge and support.

P4 underscored:

> *The revitalisation of formerly marginalised languages in this digital era benefits educational institutions by availing research opportunities on languages. This is because digitalisation results in language documentation calling for research on these formerly marginalised languages.*

The importance of digitalisation in language documentation opens up new research avenues. Ndlovu (2009) believes that formerly marginalised languages could benefit from government support in the form of funding for research activities and documentation (Ndhlovu, 2009). This not only aids in preserving formerly marginalised languages but also encourages academic inquiry into these languages, potentially leading to greater awareness and appreciation of linguistic diversity.

7. Conclusion

This paper has highlighted that enhancing inclusivity and cultural diversity through the de-minoritisation, revitalisation, and digitalisation of formerly marginalised languages in teacher education institutions in Zimbabwe is essential for fostering an equitable educational landscape. By prioritising formerly marginalised languages, these institutions can empower diverse linguistic communities, ensuring that all students feel valued and represented. This approach not only preserves cultural heritage but also enriches the learning environment by incorporating varied perspectives and knowledge systems. Digitalisation plays a critical role in this process, providing innovative platforms for language learning and resource accessibility. It enables the creation of interactive educational materials and connects educators and students to a broader linguistic community. Moreover, revitalising formerly marginalised languages in teacher education cultivates culturally responsive teaching practices, equipping future educators with the skills necessary to navigate and celebrate linguistic diversity in their classrooms. Ultimately, these strategies contribute to a more inclusive society where all voices are heard and respected. By embracing the linguistic richness of Zimbabwe, teacher education institutions can lead the way in promoting social cohesion and understanding, ensuring that every learner has the opportunity to thrive in a culturally diverse educational setting. This commitment to inclusivity will strengthen both the educational system and the nation as a whole.

8. Recommendations

The study submits the following recommendations for enhancing inclusivity and cultural diversity through the de-minoritisation, revitalisation, and digitalisation of formerly marginalised languages in teacher education institutions:

1. **Curriculum integration**: Teachers' colleges should incorporate formerly marginalised languages into their curriculum to promote bilingual and multilingual education models.
2. **Training of minority language teachers**: Provide training for teachers from formerly marginalised languages to cultivate cultural diversity in educational institutions.
3. **Resource development**: Teachers' colleges should create and disseminate teaching materials in formerly marginalised languages, including textbooks, online resources, and digital applications. Furthermore, they should collaborate with local communities to develop culturally relevant content that reflects the linguistic diversity of students.
4. **Community engagement:** Teachers' colleges should foster partnerships with local minority language communities to promote language use and cultural exchange.
5. **Digital platforms**: Teachers' colleges should utilise digital platforms to create accessible language-learning resources and online courses in formerly marginalised languages.
6. **Policy implementation:** Teacher education institutions should implement policies that support the recognition and use of formerly marginalised languages.

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