Heritage on the periphery: administration of archaeological heritage in Hwange district, northwestern Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT
The governance of archaeological heritage, mostly in the global south, is impeded by competition with complex socio-economic and political interests among different stakeholders namely policy-makers, politicians, local communities, academics and other interest groups. This paper examines the interactions and involvement of state and non-state actors in the management of archaeological heritage sites, ancestrally linked to a minority ethnic group, and situated in the marginal Hwange district in north-western Zimbabwe. Special reference is made to the stone-built archaeological structures that are historically associated with the descendants of the Nambya state, a precolonial socio-political formation that came into demise in the early 20th century. Today, the Nambya people remember, celebrate and revere some of the stone-built archaeological places such as Bumbusi, Mtoa and Shangano that are located in Hwange district. However, in spite of the local reverence, these archaeological sites are poorly conserved, unprotected from wildlife and other related threats. Following Laurajane Smith’s (2006) authorised heritage discourse theory, this paper discusses how the current state-driven and controlled heritage administration system, haunted by the legacy of colonialism, is struggling to meaningfully engage other key players such as resource ministries, non-governmental organisations, universities and local communities in promoting the good governance of archaeological heritage.

KEYWORDS: Archaeological Heritage, Good Governance, Hwange District, Local Communities, Nambya

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:
Introduction

The re-naming of the country to Zimbabwe from Rhodesia in 1980 appears to have given spotlight on the governance of archaeological heritage sites of the Zimbabwe Culture. The Zimbabwe Culture, named after the archaeological site of Great Zimbabwe, refers to an archaeological tradition that marks the development of complex state systems in southern Africa (Caton-Thompson 1931; Huffman 1972; 2007; Pikirayi 2001; Pwiti et al. 2013; Sinamai 2019). This culture has been mainly identified through settlements of varying sizes and types, which are made up of dry-stone walling architecture, and found mostly in Zimbabwe, with a few also dotted in Mozambique, South Africa, and Botswana (see Figure 1; Kim and Kusimba 2008; Pwiti et al. 2013). Against the backdrop of appropriation of the imagery and symbolism of the sites, the government has paid lip service to conservation and management of sites of Zimbabwe Culture (Matenga and Chikwanda 2000; Sinamai 2019).

Figure 1. Distribution of Zimbabwe Culture sites in southern Africa
In most parts of the country, these stone-built archaeological sites are threatened with destruction by both human and natural causes (Matenga and Chikwanda 2000; Mawere et al 2012). In Hwange district the best known sites of Bumbusi, Mtoa and Shangano (see Figure 2) are in poor state of conservation and are unprotected from wild life in this region that continue to be portrayed by the state as a ‘wilderness or elephant country’ for tourism purposes (Martin 1999; McGregor 2005). This situation exists regardless of the presence and action of government ministries and departments, politicians, traditional leaders and local communities interested in and / or responsible for the upkeep of these archaeological heritage sites. Personal observations, coupled with more than nine years of working experience within the state heritage management system, has led me to suggest that practically and theoretically, the management of heritage in Zimbabwe fall within what Smith (2006; 29) termed and criticised as: the ‘authorised heritage discourse’ (hereafter referred to as AHD).

The AHD is a concept that Smith (2006) uses to challenge the Western notion of heritage as a material fabric that emphasises monumentality, relying on the power/knowledge and authority of technical experts and institutionalised state heritage agencies to provide value to
archaeological sites. The AHD naturalises in a self-serving manner what ought to be preserved as heritage and what is to be erased or ignored. Thus, archaeologists and historians continue to be regarded as the sole legitimate mouthpieces of the past (Smith 2006; Pendlebury 2013) and they regulate what is valuable to protect based on their own self-interests. In this paper, the AHD is used as a lens to understand how, and why the management of archaeological heritage resources in Zimbabwe, is dominated by one state heritage agency and a few experts, while the concerns of other actors are ignored.

This paper relies mainly on ethnographic research carried in 2017 and 2018 among the communities in Hwange district, northwestern Zimbabwe. Here, I examine the administration of archaeological sites located in area regarded as geographically marginal. I examine the interaction of different institutions and power structures, establish who has the power, and makes decisions, and how the decision makers are held accountable on matters concerning conservation and management of archaeological sites.

**Approach and Methodology**

This paper relies on the information collected over more than 6 months of fieldwork in 2017 and 2018 in Hwange district. During this period, I was living, interacting, and interviewing villagers, traditional leaders, state heritage managers, representatives of cultural heritage associations, among other interest groups, towards the governance of archaeological heritage in the country. The aim was to understand their views, perceptions sentiments about the local heritage. Below is a table detailing the demographics and social strata of the informants.

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<th>DESIGNATION</th>
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<td>Nambya Cultural Association</td>
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<td>Heritage Professionals/ Managers</td>
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**Table 1:** Demographic and status profile of interviewees and discussants

Archaeologists and heritage professionals in Zimbabwe pose as the experts and evoke ‘objectivity and scientific knowledge’ to legitimise their versions of the past and in this
posture tend to marginalise many voices of the ‘uneducated’ rural communities regarding the management of heritage resources. On the other end of the spectrum there are the Chiefs, Headmen, village heads, and elders, whom Fontein (2004; 2006) referred to as the ‘traditional connoisseurs.’ Often, this stratum of experts espouses ‘tradition’ in validating and legitimising versions about the representation and management of the past materialities. However, regardless my efforts of being gender sensitive, as shown in the above table men dominate key decision making positions in rural communities, constitute the larger strata of interviewees and discussants on governance issues. Politicians and professionals from the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ), and the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZPWMA) were also interviewed. Interviewing the ZPWMA’s technocrats was imperative since most of the archaeological study sites in this paper are concealed within Zimbabwe’s flagship National Park - Hwange. More so, over the years the two state institutions (NMMZ and ZPWMA) have been involved in contestations and blaming one another over the poor state of protection and management of archaeological sites located within national parks (see Mahachi and Kamuhangire 2008; Makuvaza 2012). Thus, the interviews and discussions were intended to gain an insight into the perceptions, experiences and attitudes of different stakeholders and interest groups towards the governance of archaeological sites in Hwange district and Zimbabwe as a nation.

I also visited, more than thirty stone-built archaeological sites located within Hwange and other districts in Zimbabwe and observed and recorded their state of conservation and protection. In that regard, the research questions and the identification of research participants was informed by the material and immaterial knowledge that I had gained over archaeological sites located within Hwange district and beyond. To supplement the data gathered during field research, published and unpublished works on cultural heritage management were consulted. The management of heritage resources in Zimbabwe has been well-researched (Pwiti and Ndoro 1999; Fontein 2006; Matenga 2011; Sinamai 2019). However, from this ever-expanding literature on heritage management, there is limited scholarly examination on the administration and conservation of archaeological heritage associated with minority ethnic groups and situated in nature-based protected areas such as the Hwange National Park.

Management of heritage in Zimbabwe: Historical background

Some scholars such as Ndoro (2001; 2005) and Sinamai (2019) have highlighted that the management of cultural heritage places was not solely introduced by the colonial administration in Zimbabwe or the rest of the continent. In fact, pre-colonial societies had their own ways of looking after their materialities of the past. Ndoro (2001) has argued that in the absence of any form of cultural heritage management, the colonisers would not have found many such places still intact. It is this form of management, anchored on the sacredness bestowed by African societies on heritage sites that has been termed ‘traditional or customary’ practices. Sinamai (2006) noted that many cultural heritage sites had traditional custodians such as spirit mediums and traditional leaders regulating access and
use. However, with the occupation and colonisation of the Zimbabwean plateau in 1890, the customary governance of heritage was relegated. It is since then that archaeological heritage sites are managed through ‘western’ heritage management philosophies mainly centred on experts such as archaeologists, historians, or architects arrogating the legitimate authority to judge what past is valuable to protect. This development as cited by Mahachi and Kamuhangire (2008) was one of the tragedies to befall African heritage. The indigenous heritage management frameworks were gradually dismantled, and new systems were put in place without considering their relevance and effectiveness.

In Zimbabwe the first modern heritage law was enacted after the looting of Zimbabwe type-sites by pioneer European settlers. The ‘discovery’, exploration, and vandalism of Great Zimbabwe and other similar sites dotted around the country in the 1890s, by amateur researchers and ‘ancient ruin miners’ (Ndoro 2001), resulted in the passing of laws meant to govern archaeological heritage resources. Major damage to heritage sites occurred from 1895 when Frank Johnson and W. G Neal of the Rhodesia Ancient Ruins Ltd. obtained a license to mine stone ruins in the country serve for Great Zimbabwe. As noted by Matenga (2011:76) the company’s target seem to have been gold, but without details of their operations, it is likely that they collected other items that they came across which have not been recorded. During the five years that the Ancient Ruins Lt operated, it is alleged to have mined 2000 (62.2kg) ounces in gold artefacts from the architectural archaeological sites (Hall and Neal 1902: 91). Although, among other conditions, the ancient ruins miners were not supposed to destroy ruins during their mining activities, this was inevitable. Thus, their activities were destructive to archaeological sites (see Ndoro 2001; Matenga 2011; Kaarsholm 1992). Some sections on stone-walled archaeological sites were destroyed completely. Excavated pits at archaeological sites such as Naletale and Dhlodhlo (see Fig 1), in central Zimbabwe are still observable and today’s reminders of the destructive operations of the Ancient Ruins Company.

Owing to the increased public pressure, the company was dissolved in 1900 resulting in the promulgation of the Ancient Monuments Protection Ordinance in 1902 and the Bushmen Relics Ordinance in 1912. These two pieces of legislations were repealed and replaced by the Monuments and Relics Act of 1936. This new act brought into existence the Commission for the Preservation of Natural and Cultural Monuments and Relics (Historic Monuments Commission) that ushered in the concept monument ranking and inspections (Ndoro 2001; Chipunza 2005). Thus, after the passing of this act, the Monuments Commission, which was under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, recommended to the ministry several archaeological sites to be proclaimed as national monuments. This is the period when Mtoa and Bumbusi stone-built archaeological sites located within Hwange district were proclaimed as national monuments in 1942 and 1947, respectively. By 1954, the Commission had designated 79 sites across Rhodesia as national monuments (Ndoro 2005). In addition, the commission produced several publications and even implemented school programmes that were meant to popularise archaeological and other heritage sites.
However, a major policy change in the administration of heritage in Zimbabwe occurred in 1972 when the National Museums and Monuments Act Chapter 313 17/1972 was passed. In addition to many other progressive outputs of the new act, it established a board of trustees whose main mandate was to administer museums and monuments. The act also brought about the amalgamation of the Monument Commission and the country’s national museums and this has been singled out by writers like Ndoro (2005: 12) as the main contribution of this legislation. The 1972 act also led to the creation of five administrative regions, controlled from a museum centre or heritage site. The regions were, and remain as follows: Northern region, covered the northern parts of Rhodesia and was administered from the Queen Victoria Museum, Salisbury. The Eastern region and Central regions were administered from the Umtali and Gwelo museums respectively. Only the Southern region was administered from a national monument - Great Zimbabwe. The Western region, covering the whole of Matabeleland regions focuses mainly on natural history heritage and has continued to be administered from the Natural History Museum in Bulawayo. This is the region that is responsible for governing archaeological heritage sites located in Hwange district, 330 km away from the regional administration offices.

In postcolonial Zimbabwe, the 1972 act continued to have profound implications on the administration of heritage. As observed by Chiwaura (2005: 19), the 1972 National Museums and Monuments of Rhodesia Act Chapter 313 17/1972 was adopted almost verbatim in independent Zimbabwe as the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe Act Chapter 313 and later 25:11. Almost four decades after attaining independence, there is still continuation of colonial character and philosophies in the way Zimbabwe manages its heritage resources. However, there seems to be increased effort by the NMMZ to decolonise the heritage management practices in the country as shown by the ongoing efforts to come up with a new heritage act that speaks to understanding of heritage and its management from a Zimbabwean perspective.

In the recent past (2003), Robert Mugabe, the former president of Zimbabwe (1980 – 2017) addressed delegates to the 14th General Assembly and Scientific Symposium of the International Council on Monuments and Sites at Victoria Falls saying:

> Zimbabwe was committed to preserving its heritage... Zimbabwe valued heritage so much that even the graves of the country’s colonialists as Cecil John Rhodes were being preserved. We accept history as reality (Ranger 2004: 228)

However, the purported national commitment to protect and manage heritage mentioned above, has remained a political rhetoric that has not translated into practice. For instance, rarely do parliamentarians raise motions and debates in the House of Assembly on the poor state of archaeological heritage sites mainly found in remote rural areas. Instead, they seem to be immersed in the ‘bread and butter’ issues in which heritage matters are on the margins of state priorities. The situation is even worse when it comes to narratives of the stone-built archaeological sites in Hwange district that have taken a ‘minority’ ethnic bias (Ncube 2004;
McGregor 2005; 2009; Hubbard and Haynes 2012). This is because the Zimbabwean government continue to lack accountability to politically insignificant ‘minorities’, producing long-standing processes of marginalisation even that of cultural heritage resources (McGregor 2009).

The current heritage administrative systems and approaches in Zimbabwe make governance of archaeological heritage a preserve of only a few heritage professionals based at either regional or national offices (see Fontein 2006; Long 2000; Pwiti 1996). Here, what is vital to highlight is the fact that in the context of Zimbabwean heritage administration, decisions that affect local communities and other multiple webs of stakeholders are made by state-employed officials, mainly based in cities distant from the local realities of heritage management and interests. As a result, the principles of good governance in the administration of heritage in Zimbabwe cannot be ascertained. In the absence of a research-based assessment, it remains speculative to measure the effectiveness, transparency, or the degree to which the public participates in governing their heritages. Realising that gap in knowledge, this paper uses Hwange district as a case to explore the governance of archaeological heritage in Zimbabwe.

Stone-built archaeological sites in Hwange district

Hwange district is in Matabeleland North province, northwestern Zimbabwe. In the north, the district is bounded with the country of Zambia by the Zambezi River, while its western border is shared with the Republic of Botswana (see Fig.2). On the eastern side, Hwange district is demarcated by the Gwaai River, with Lupane district. To its north – east and south, Hwange shares boundaries with Binga and Tsholotsho districts respectively. Within the Hwange district, there are numerous game reserves, forests areas, coal concessions, and the Hwange National Park, which is largest and oldest in the country. In the far northwest of the district is the famous Victoria Falls World Heritage site, a transboundary property shared between Zambia and Zimbabwe. Hwange is one of the national parks constituting the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA) (see Fig. 3 below). The KAZA TFCA is currently the largest conservation zone in Africa and the world’s largest terrestrial transfrontier conservation zone (Somerville 2012; Andersson et al., 2013; Giller et al., 2013).

The KAZA TFCA was established following the signing of a treaty on the 18th of August 2011 between Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Giller et al., 2013:77). Among its conservation objectives, KAZA TFCA facilitates the development of a complementary and linked network of protected areas to protect wildlife and to restore dispersals corridors and migratory routes (Nkala 2018). As a transboundary protected area, it is dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity and associated cultural heritage resources (IUCN 1994; Somerville 2012; Giller et al., 2013).
However, within the Hwange National Park, the focus has only been on protecting and conserving the wildlife and nature (see McGregor 2005; Hwange National Park Management Plan 2016 - 2026). The rich archaeological heritage resources in particular monumental stone buildings of the Zimbabwe culture within and beyond the Hwange National Park are neglected by the responsible authorities and are not part of the tourism products of this region.

Today the Nambya people who are numerically the dominant ethnic group in Hwange district claim a direct ancestral link with the builders and occupants of dry stone-walled places scattered within Hwange National Park, its surroundings, and the whole district (see Fig. 1; Ncube 2004; McGregor 2005; 2009). In fact, Herbert Nassau Hemans, who was the Hwange District Administrator in the pre-independence era, carried out a study in the 1970s of the history of the ‘ruins’ (Hayes 1977). In his findings, Hemans noted that in comparison with other ethnic communities in the district, the Nambya people were more knowledgeable about who had built and occupied them — their forefathers — and could recount historical events that occurred at different sites (Henson 1973; Hayes 1977). Out of possibly 50 stone-walled sites in Hwange National Park, only two, Bumbusi and Mtoa, have featured noticeably in the discourse on national heritage and archaeological significance. This remains the case, even though some of the stone-built archaeological sites are revered and used for rain
making rituals by local communities in Hwange district (see McGregor 2005; Hubbard and Haynes 2012).

Mtoa is one such stone-walled archaeological site that is remembered and revered by the Nambya people. It is located in the north-east corner of the Hwange National Park, about 30 km northwest of Main Camp. Mtoa was built on a bedrock high point and it is made up of two enclosures, a main one and a smaller one, surrounded on the lower ground by clay house floors. The larger enclosure is about 14 m in diameter and the smaller enclosure forms a southeast extension to the larger one. Mtoa is one of the recorded archaeological sites in Hwange district to have fallen victim to treasure hunting. Peter Garos, a Greek farmer who lived at Sinamatella, dug inside Mtoa’s main enclosure, searching for gold ornaments (Davison 1977; Haynes 2014). This act resulted in the disturbance of some parts of the site, such as a hole dug in the main enclosure, as witnessed during visits to the site as part of my field research.

Hughes (1988) observed that the façade walls at Mtoa were built using trimmed granite blocks forming very wavy, irregular courses, like the P-style walling described by Whitty (1961) at Great Zimbabwe. In some areas the coursing is quite difficult to identify at all. Thus, Nyabezi (et al. 2017) and Hubbard and Haynes (2012) have described Mtoa as an architectural riddle of the Zimbabwe culture sites. It is a site with unique architectural features that do not neatly agree with previous assumptions (see Whitty 1961; Garlake 1973) about the Zimbabwe culture.

In comparison with Bumbusi, Mtoa was built with special detail, as argued by Davison (1977) with a chevron pattern in the wall and monoliths on top of the wall suggesting connection to Great Zimbabwe. In terms of its conservation state, the northern side walls of the main enclosure have collapsed, either through slumping due to gravity or disturbance by elephants (Hubbard and Haynes 2012). A heavy cable fence was built around the walling at one time, but elephants apparently broke the cable, and animals continue to walk through the walling. Some parts of walls have collapsed from settling and animal disturbance. In spite of these conservation problems, walls at Mtoa are still fairly intact as compared to those of Bumbusi.

Bumbusi is situated about 30 km south-west of Hwange town as the crow flies. Unlike the few such sites found in Hwange (Mtoa and Negasha) that are built of granite, Bumbusi was constructed using sandstone blocks most probably quarried from the nearby sandstone kopjes. The main features at Bumbusi are enclosures with free standing walls and platforms made of retaining walls. There are also remains of daga floors of houses. Bumbusi can be categorised into eight parts; the hill complex, south eastern enclosures, central enclosure, lower enclosure, furnace enclosure, northern enclosure, eastern platform and the smelting furnace (Makuvaza 2001; 2008a).
Kearney (1907), one of the early European farmers to settle in Hwange concluded that Bumbusi seems to have been a poor imitation of the ‘ruins’ in Mashonaland where the Nambya claim to have migrated from before setting up their own state. It is at Bumbusi where the Nambya state was destroyed by the Ndebele as explained consistently by the local informants. Later, the site of Bumbusi was venue for sacred functions and the last big rainmaking ceremony is said to have been held in 1946 (Haynes 2014; McGregor 2005; Ncube 2004). In terms of rituals, the district ceremonies were done at Bumbusi mainly and at Shangano, another Zimbabwe culture sites within the district. For the ritual ceremonies at Bumbusi, the local communities are supposed to seek permission from the Parks Authority. During instances when they were allowed, a team of game ranchers would escort them either to protect them against dangerous game or prevent them undertaking ‘illegal’ activities such as hunting. Today, local people seek permission to access Bumbusi for rituals and to have an appreciation of their ‘great’ past that is now concealed within a state protected area.

As explained above, both Bumbusi and Mtoa are located within the Hwange National Park, giving them double state custodianship of the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZPWMA) and the NMMZ. More so, Bumbusi and Mtoa were proclaimed national monuments during the colonial era, the highest national status a place can attain in the country. In principle, with that status and location, these archaeological sites are supposed to
be well protected, with a site custodian carrying out the day to day maintenance work, a site museum, among other state-aided support.

Figure 5: Bumbusi ruins

However, this is not the case as I observed during my several visits to these archaeological sites. That is, besides their national monument status there is nothing else to celebrate. During the field research, I noted progressive collapse at both sites caused mainly by animals, and in some cases by people. Interestingly, Shangano a similar site located within the communal area looked well preserved than the ones located within the state conservation protected area.

Shangano, also referred in some texts and oral histories as Chilobamago, is a stonewalled site located near the confluence of Lukosi and Chibungo rivers, about 16 km southeast of Hwange town. The site is located on a flat plain ground, about 80 m south from the Ndomolupanga mountain range. Shangano consists of two stone-walled enclosures separated by a stone wall about 15 m long. The enclosures lie in a north-south relationship. The northern enclosure is more complex than the southern, consisting of 6 radial walls. These radiate to a central large house platform. The central mound has two extra house platforms, one to the north-west and the other to the south.
As is the case with the prominent Njelele sacred shrine in Matobo cultural landscape in south western Zimbabwe (Makuvaza 2008b), local beliefs and practices honour Shangano as a place that should not be approached without the presence of a traditional custodian and the performance of traditional entry rituals. The access to Shangano remains part of the existing communal traditional control and governance system of heritage sites. The site’s customary custodian is traditionally from the Chilanga clan of the Nambya people and he acts as the intermediary between the people visiting Shangano and the shrine.

The field research that I conducted in the region as well as textual analysis, revealed that there is existence of other numerous ancient stone-built settlements located within and beyond the Hwange National Park. The park itself has been described as a veritable storehouse of archaeological information with at least one hundred sites of stone age and farming community eras having been identified (Hwange National Park Management Plan 2016 – 2026: 8). The same management plan document for the Park cites that the documentation of such archaeological pasts has been sparse, and it is therefore likely that many sites have already been lost. Through archaeological surveys and information gathered from local communities, I managed to visit some of the stone-walled archaeological sites such as Bhale, Dobashuro, Pandari, Negasha, Madumbisa, Holobele, Halfway House, and Ndomolupanga (see Figure 6 below).
Of all these archaeological sites, rarely have been mentioned by other scholars who have worked in this area. For me, these sites represent the un-inherited archaeological past, that has been forgotten, which is at the periphery and which is absent from both local and national heritage narratives. Sinamai (2019) argued that narratives define what can be preserved or discarded. In the same line of thinking, the reason why some archaeological heritage places have been more important than others reflects power politics and community and institutional conflicts among government departments such as the NMMZ, and ZPWMA. Although there are several archaeological sites within Hwange National Park and the whole district, the state heritage managing agency has rarely engaged other interested groups in shaping and reshaping sound heritage governance approaches.

**Does geographical context matter in the governance of heritage resources?**

The Hwange district’s rather austere environmental characteristics have long held back interest among researchers of the past in exploring how pre-colonial societies interacted with their environment. Much of the district is an edaphic desert, which has led to some observers such as Davison (1977: 129) to conclude that there is ‘no or little history and archaeology’ to talk about. The region is touted in tourist brochures as ‘elephant country and wilderness’ (McGregor 2005: 7), implying no human presence before modern times. However, the few archaeological and historical research done so far has revealed a very different context (e.g., Klimowicz and Haynes 1996; Haynes and Klimowicz 2005, 2007, 2009; Haynes 2014; Haynes et al. 2011; Hubbard and Haynes 2012; Makuvaza 2008a; Ncube 2004; Nyabezi et al 2017). Hwange district is relatively rich in archaeological remains from the Stone Age to the Late Farming Community eras. Sites from late pre-colonial times are especially notable; for example, numerous Zimbabwe Culture stone-built archaeological sites are in the district,
historically associated with the Nambya people (see Ncube 2004; McGregor 2005; Hubbard and Haynes 2012).

Basing on the observations made during fieldwork, the Zimbabwe Culture archaeological sites are in a deplorable conservation condition, and have been mismanaged despite their economic, educational, social, and political significance to the local communities and the nation at large (Hwange National Park Management Plan 2016 – 2016; McGregor 2005). This condition continues to exist regardless of Zimbabwe’s national heritage protection laws, state heritage managing organisations, and the local communities that are attached to this heritage (Haynes 2014; McGregor 2005, 2009; Hubbard and Haynes 2012; Makuvaza 2008a). Within the Hwange National Park, archaeological heritage sites have, in theory, double custodial protection from the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) and the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Authority (ZPWMA), but these heritage resources are threatened by natural decay and depredations from wild animals (Hwange National Park Management Plan 2016 - 2016). The NMMZ is the state heritage institution under the Ministry of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage with the legal mandate, as provided for in the NMMZ Act Chapter 25:11, to manage heritage resources in the country. On the other side, ZPWMA is the state agency under the Ministry Environment, Tourism and Hospitality Industry that oversees the management of national parks in Zimbabwe. These two government agencies have a long history of conflict especially on the mandate of protecting, providing access, use, and presentation of cultural heritages that are in National Parks (Makuvaza 2012; Makuyana 2009). Despite these complexities, northwestern Zimbabwe is one of the regions with the nation’s highest tourist traffic, mainly due to the Victoria Falls and the Hwange National Park, which attract the largest numbers of visitors in the country. One would expect that the archaeological heritage resources of the district would be effectively managed, protected, and presented to the public as an asset for sustainable cultural tourism; however, this does not seem to be the case.

The situation in Hwange district raises interesting issues about how geographical context, the designation of land as a national park during the colonial era (1890 -1980), continues to affect the governance of archaeological heritage, and how the people dispossessed of their lands with the establishment of the park imagine their ancestral landscapes. On one hand, archaeological heritage is being mismanaged and neglected partly because the authorities governing Hwange National Park are targeting international tourists who have a specific idea of Africa as a ‘wilderness’ – a place of animals, nature, and safaris. Before independence, the Hwange district was marginalised by the state due to its unfavourable agro-ecological conditions and the prevalence of tsetse flies and diseases such as malaria. Even now in post-colonial Zimbabwe, when the district is free from tsetse fly, the local people that I interviewed expressed mixed feelings about the national government’s limited concern for socio-economic issues and archaeological heritage resources in the district.

My examination of memorandums and reports kept by the Monuments Department at the Natural History Museum in Bulawayo revealed some of the reasons why preserving the archaeological sites located in the geographical margins is regarded as problematic. I came
across two interesting such reports. The first one is when Cranmer Cooke who was the director for the Historic Monuments Commission based in Bulawayo, wrote to the Regional Warden, at the then Wankie National Park in April 1967 ‘confessing’ that administering the ‘remote ruins’ has been one of their major problems (Natural History Museum Bulawayo File Ref HIS.4/1/69). Second, in September 1990, the director for NMMZ’s western region wrote to a curator highlighting the problems experienced in the management of sites in the north-western of the country:

the problem of distance from Bulawayo has over the years adversely affected those of our monuments in the Hwange and other far-off places. The constrains have been mainly transport and personnel (Natural History Museum Bulawayo File Ref HIS.4/1/69)

The above quotes show that the further a heritage site is from the administering offices, the less attention and intervention it receives from the state heritage agency. This seem to have been the case in both colonial and postcolonial eras. Mostly, financial and human constraints have been mentioned by heritage managers resulting in NMMZ to focus on selected sites and monuments. But the selection of one heritage is the rejection of another, as noted by Callaghan (2015). Being a geographically peripheral region, occupied by several ‘minority’ ethnic communities (that is, the Leya, Nambya, Dombe and Tonga) the ‘neglect’ of archaeological heritage sites is viewed by many local communities in Hwange as part of the state’s marginalisation of the district. According to most of the local people whom I interviewed, governance of archaeological heritage in Zimbabwe is ethnically and regionally biased. Such concerns were being raised against the backdrop of state power, dominated by the Shona (the majority ethnic group in the country), a situation that impact on policies focusing on sites in Shona dominated regions. For example, Great Zimbabwe, is not only a major archaeological site but it is paramount for the dominant Shona discourses.

Regionalised and ethnicised heritage: ‘A struggle within a struggle’

In Zimbabwe, as with other African countries or elsewhere, local populations have been displaced and impoverished in order to create national parks, forests, conservancies, safaris and other related protected areas meant to serve conservation agendas - what Nelson (2003:65) has termed a form of ‘environmental colonialism’. On one hand, Hwange district has been branded a ‘wilderness’ as cited before, meaning that the perceptions that have been developing over the years about this region are devoid of the past human traces and relationship with their environment. On the other hand, logistically, the district presents a difficult archaeological heritage research environment as well, with the presence of dangers of working in an area with wild animals and very poor road network. Against this background, Hwange district has witnessed the emergence of individuals and community associations (groups) fighting against this ‘environmental colonialism’ and marginalisation of the cultural heritage in the national discourse. These pressure groups are lobbying the government and NGOs to pay attention to their heritage rights.
Hwange district experienced violent forced displacement of the local communities such as the San and Nambya, who previously had been interacting with their ancestral landscape, making use of some archaeological spaces as venues to conduct traditional rituals and other cultural practices. However, as pointed out by Ndlovu (2011), nature conservation and indigenous communities were not seen to complement each other by the colonial administrators. Yet, cultural heritage places to which the people were being alienated from, play a crucial role in the quality of life of the communities who use them or live near them (see Ndoro et al. 2018). For instance, Smith (2006), argues that archaeological sites will not be ‘heritage’ unless there are people who value and give them a meaning through performance of rituals and ceremonies, among other cultural practices or social processes. Otherwise, without such connections and reconstructions by the people, archaeological sites, such as stone-built settlements, are lifeless ruins or heap of stones.

In the absence of thorough archaeological research in the region, oral history has privileged the Nambya as people ancestrally connected to the stone-built archaeological sites located in Hwange district. However, there are other ethnic groups in the district, such as the Dombe and the Leya who contest the traditional claims and association of the Nambya with the ruins. But as mentioned before, the challenge of these other ethnic groups is that unlike the Nambya, they lack historical information about these heritage places, such as when the settlements were established, by who and different activities taking place in the past as well as in the present. As such, the discussion here focuses on the efforts among the Nambya individuals and groups towards the promotion and recognition of archaeological heritage located in Hwange district.

The history of the Nambya is contested, generating numerous conflicting and in some cases similar versions. What many writers (Hemans 1913; Henson 1973; Hayes 1977; Ncube 2004; Nyathi 2005) seem to agree is the fact that the Nambya people who are now in Hwange migrated from somewhere else. The often written and orally referred area of origins for the Nambya people is generalised as Masvingo, although in some sources it is specified as Great Zimbabwe. Further evidence supporting origins from Great Zimbabwe state is alleged to be shown by the abundance of stone-built archaeological sites in the Hwange district that are similar although smaller than the Great Zimbabwe site itself (see Ncube 2004; McGregor 2005). The proof of such claims requires further archaeological and historical studies to determine the actual builders of the Zimbabwe-type stone-walling sites. In the absence of such comprehensive scientific investigations, the narratives associated with Hwange’s Zimbabwe Culture stone-built archaeological sites are mainly derived from the Nambya people, who besides using some of the sites for traditional ritual ceremonies, have keen interest in governing archaeological sites located in Hwange National Park and other protected areas within the district.

The activism and lobbying efforts of the Nambya stem primarily from two-fold marginalisation predicament (see Sinamai 2019). Thus, nationally, the Nambya people constitute one of the small minority ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, a country dominated by the
Shona and Ndebele ethno-linguistic groups. Regionally, in Matabeleland North where Hwange district is located, the Nambya are also considered a minority due to the dominance of the Ndebele people. For instance, until recently, the Ndebele was the only official local language in Hwange district that was taught in schools before the approval of the Nambya language by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Besides the socio-political and economic dominance by other ethnic groups, the other main reason that promoted local activism in Hwange district was the realisation among the Nambya that as people who are living on the periphery of the state, had remained marginal not only in terms of the state developmental programmes but also with regards to the promotion and preservation of their heritage. Vika Marumani and Ndoswi Sansole who were a sergeant police officer and senior court interpreter in Hwange respectively, are the first activists who initiated the promotion of heritage associated with the Nambya in the district. One of their greatest achievement was in 1946 when they persuaded the then Native Commissioner (now District Administrator) to use the term ‘Nambya’ on individual’s identity cards and pass documents, which had been previously used the derogatory Nanzwa, a name that they had been given by the Ndebele during the pre-colonial past (McGregor 2009). Marumani and Sansole also managed to collect oral histories from community elders focusing more on the Nambya’s dynastic history. Part of the collected histories included details of the successive Nambya rulers who ruled from a succession of stone-built capitals.

I argue here that Marumani and Sansole are the ones who sowed the seeds that led to the formation of the Nambya Cultural Association in 1960. The association was made up of young, Christian and educated men who had benefitted from missionary education, in particular the Roman Catholic Church. The Nambya Cultural Association came up with the version of their history and associated archaeological heritage places. It is against this background that certain archaeological sites mainly Bumbusi and Shangano were given a new life and meaning. As noted by McGregor (2005; 2009), the dynastic history, which made the past greatness tangible, was brought to life by trips to the largest and latest archaeological site of Bumbusi. The lobby group provided this archaeological site with a new role of being a symbol of ethnic heritage.

The works and operations of the Nambya Cultural Association suffered a major blow during the peak of nationalism and subsequent liberation struggle for independence. Some of the key members of the association were now spending more time dealing with national and broader issues, confronting not only the district but the nation at large. The other challenge that also affected this association and continue to do so when it was revived after independence was the fact that not all rural residents in Hwange defined themselves as Nambya. The intermarriages traceable from the pre-colonial times amongst the ethnic groups in Hwange resulted to a complex mix among many families inclusive of those from chieftainship clans. Due to such ethnic volatility, Dombe rose as a counter activist group pushing for recognition in the district. McGregor (2009) noted that the Dombe intellectuals wrote their own histories that focused on them as the Zambezi river people who pre-dated the Nambya. I also learnt that there are few Dombe who even claim ancestral connection to
pre-colonial sites like Bumbusi. Nonetheless, the formation of the Dombe Cultural Association in the 1990 did not deter the Nambya heritage lobbyist who managed to push for the establishment of the Nambya Community Museum in Hwange town. Although the launch for this museum was done a decade ago, it is yet to be completed, partly due to the ethnic contestations and conflicts. The main issue being the name of the museum and to which ethnic group it serves in such a heterogenous district. Based on the past and present works of the Nambya heritage activists and lobbyists, one can infer that their focus has been on cultivating pride amongst their kith and kin in the pre-colonial past tied to stone-built archaeological sites as physical evidence of past greatness. However, in this regard, it is not all the archaeological past that has been selected for such endeavours, some material pasts have been forgotten and therefore un-inherited as embodied in their silence from both the local and national narratives, and absence in their social or cultural life.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that, although the effective governance of archaeological heritage sites may appear to be a straightforward task, the process is resisted and convoluted with complexities and political interests at the local and national levels. This is because archaeological heritage sites have wide variety of interest stakeholders with at times conflicting views, experiences and attitudes towards their administration (Clark 2001; Sinamai 2014). Increasingly, archaeological heritage is made labyrinthine by pressure from religious, ethnic, national, political, and other groups that seek to appropriate, use, misuse, exclude, or erase it as a means of asserting, defending, or denying claims to power, land, or legitimacy (Matenga and Chikwanda 2000; Ndoro et al. 2018; Silverman 2011). Here I have focused on the problems of dealing with and managing archaeological sites that are located within a physically, culturally and politically marginal northwestern part of Zimbabwe.

Overall, there is little academic discourse in Zimbabwe on the governance and management of heritage resources that lie on the margins, geographically. Heritage management public debates and political will has been limited to Great Zimbabwe, and the alienation of local communities in heritage management (see Chirikure and Pwiti 2008; Fontein 2006; Ndoro 2001; 2005; Ndoro et al. 2018). It is a fact that the colonial heritage practices in southern Africa and elsewhere had relegated local people to the periphery of their heritage resources through various heritage policies and legislation, practices, and administrative approaches. However, the current emphasis on community engagement and participation in heritage management in post-colonial Zimbabwe by many scholars has obscured research on other equally vital issues such as the management of heritage on the margins. It is against this background that the paper recommends the devolution of heritage administration in Zimbabwe. Within the current system, authority is centralised at regional and head offices, concerns and views of other key stakeholders in villages, wards and districts are not known, or ignored.
The Zimbabwe’s current state-driven and controlled heritage administration system, haunted by the legacy of colonialism, is struggling to meaningfully engage other key players such as resource ministries, non-governmental organisations, universities and local communities in archaeological heritage governance. There is therefore need for bottom-up interactions among structures, processes and traditions that determine how power is exercised, how decisions are taken and how citizens or other stakeholders can contribute. Winter (2007) speaks of ways in which certain languages of heritage can give new meaning to places and thus re-claim them from the cultural margins of the state. Perhaps there is need for such an approach to the numerous archaeological sites in Hwange district that remain poorly researched, neglected and forgotten from heritage management discourse in the country.

References


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