

The Representation of Minority Languages and Indigenous Cultures in Zimbabwean Museums

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Most African countries, Zimbabwe included, have diverse languages through which people disseminate and express their unique identities and cultures. These languages, regardless of status, carries culture and transmit skills, ideas, values and symbols that are peculiar to each indigenous community. In Zimbabwe, two indigenous languages namely Shona and Ndebele, stand as national languages whilst English is the official language. Other languages such as Kalanga, Venda, Nambya and Tonga are classified as ‘small’ or minority languages. It is the argument of this paper that the interconnectedness of culture to language entails that attention is accorded to minority languages especially by museums which are repositories of Zimbabwe’s traditional and contemporary culture. Minority languages, if at all included, exist in museum exhibitions mainly to name the object and not to elaborate on the cultural context which led to creation of such symbols. Therefore, what does this mean regarding the representation of minority languages and indigenous cultures in Zimbabwe? This paper argues that the language and culture of minority groups constitute national identity and need to be accommodated in the integral vision of National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ).

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