

Title of the Thesis: Rethinking Knowledge Production in Materiality at the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences

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Abstract:

This thesis critically examines the Zimbabwe Museum of Human Sciences (ZMHS), highlighting its historical role in reinforcing colonial narratives and the marginalization of indigenous communities, particularly the *Ndau* people. As a former settler colonial institution, ZMHS has perpetuated exclusionary practices in the collection, classification, and representation of ethnographic materials. Grounded in decoloniality and critical museology, the study advocates for collaborative provenance research that centers indigenous voices and repositions them as experts in interpreting their cultural objects. Emphasizing the 2022 redefinition of museums by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the research calls for the integration of *hunhu/ubuntu* (humility) into curatorial practice, promoting curatorial humility as a means to disrupt colonial museology. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach including interviews, participant observation, exhibition analysis, and archival research, the study engages with *Ndau* communities, who view ethnographic objects not as static artefacts, but as living entities imbued with meaning through song, dance, and ancestral connection. The findings underscore the importance of shifting from top-down, Western-centric knowledge production to inclusive, community-based practices that prioritize indigenous perspectives and authority. By challenging the scientific dominance of museum curators and advocating for a bottom-up approach to storytelling and interpretation, the thesis contributes to broader decolonial debates and proposes an indigenized museum model that redefines knowledge creation in postcolonial contexts like Zimbabwe.