

Abstract

This study looks at the implications of a decolonial approach in heritage management, questioning how a decolonial thinking can shift the way the Great Zimbabwe World Heritage Site is managed. Through a predominantly qualitative research paradigm in the form of a case study design, both primary and secondary data sources were examined to enable an analysis focusing on the decolonial discourse and management of Great Zimbabwe. The study was motivated by an existing body of theory widely criticising colonially informed systems of management that alienate the intangible concerns of indigenous populations, and for side-lining local communities and their indigenous knowledge on the periphery and thereafter prioritising Western management approaches. Indigenous populations value the stories that give meaning to cultural sites and not necessarily only their physical fabric. I argue that management of heritage should be all encompassing to cater for both tangible and intangible values, and how to conserve them through institutional and local communities' collaborations.

There are some possibilities, through the deployment of decolonial thinking to involve the community in the management of heritage. While efforts to include local communities have been made at Great Zimbabwe by the site's management, these were largely superficial, and the local communities are still largely side-lined in major decisions that affect the site. While it is possible to integrate Western and decolonial approaches in heritage management, it is a case of easier said than done as there are challenges to effectively involve the community. Therefore, the management of Great Zimbabwe will necessarily need to negotiate and mediate a number of conflicts at different levels: between the different local communities, national interest and local ownership, tourists and hosts, international and local priorities, different legislation and guidelines, tangible and intangible heritage, 'traditional', Western, colonial and decolonial approaches.