

Musukwe Bridge: A landscape of changing socio-political and symbolic meanings

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Abstract

Bridges are ordinary constructions that are join two opposite banks of the river. The banks represent two landscapes which are separated by the body of water flowing in between them. The bridge, as a human-made physical feature, is perceived as connecting the landscapes separated by the water body thereby also representing it as a point of passage. This paper uses the landscape and everyday concepts to examine and analyse the symbolic significance of bridges in people's socio-political history and social relations. It argues that bridges just like landscapes tell varied narratives about the people that associate with it. Thus, such narratives are collective and shared experiences, but at the same divided because people perceive and remember events connected with the bridge differently. Crossing the bridge has mostly been read along the argument of connection and social relations, but this paper goes further to argue that crossing at other times also means escaping. It argues that bridges and river landscapes happen to be manipulated and as such it analyses the changing socio-political and symbolic meanings of bridges and their perception by both their constructors and long-time users. These arguments are developed using information that was gathered between 2011 and 2013 in Rengwe Communal Land, Zimbabwe about Musukwe bridge. It explains how the bridge worked in restoring disrupted social relations due to forced movement as well as building new relations with another group that was resettled in Rengwe. This paper argues that places are connected by the bridge, but more importantly the bridge's has been manipulated at times and it also symbolised escaping. It argues that Musukwe bridge carries a lot of memories that are both shared and divided.