

Towards Public Domain Management of Liberation Movement Heritage Records in Eastern and Southern Africa

Francis Garaba

Lutheran Theological Institute Library,
Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa
fgaraba@yahoo.com

Abstract

This article reports on research into the management of liberation movement archives in Eastern and Southern Africa. It is based on a systematic review of literature on the subject, content analysis of national archival legislations in relation to the management of liberation movement archives, inspection visits to such archives in the region, and qualitative content analysis of the responses to an open-ended survey questionnaire administered on the heads of national archival institutions of the countries in the region. The study found out that the archival legislation dealing with the management of private archives is outdated, lacks clarity and are punctuated by latent passivity, and that the available regulatory instruments are inadequate to ensure appropriate acquisition for long term public domain management of the liberation movement archives that are currently managed ineffectively by various private archives in the region. The study recommends that such archives, because of their national heritage importance, should be decommissioned from private custody and managed by the various national archival institutions for the benefit of posterity.

Keywords

Liberation movements, National heritage records, Archival legislation, Private archives, East Africa, Southern Africa.

Introduction

The struggle to liberate the continent of Africa from colonialism was a profound and all-time consuming one for Africans during the second half of the twentieth century (Dominy, 2004), and as such this history needs to be documented accurately in whatever appropriate form for the benefit of posterity. Cabral (1972) and Nzongola-Ntalaja (1987) argued that the people's struggle for national liberation and independence from imperialist rule constituted a fundamental component of contemporary history. The struggle for liberation that led to the attainment of national independence and the birth of new nations were results of a protracted struggle by different movements that had one common objective of dismantling settler colonialism. Southall (2003) could not have put it better when he remarked that these struggles took numerous forms, yet they were all characterised by the rejection of racism and imperialism and the demands of previously nationally oppressed peoples for sovereign equity with the colonial powers.

Dominy (2004) observed that "Liberation Struggle" archives are of different types and status, reflecting the diverse nature of the struggle itself. As a result, records were created from within and outside Africa to document this historic epoch from 1950s to 1990s, and these records have to be managed as treasured national assets and made available to the public for research and general interest. Moodley (1993) had earlier opined that the papers and archival documents of the liberation movements in South Africa were among the most valuable original source materials for historical research in the 20th century.

Literature Review

This focus of this study connects two main concepts, about which there does not appear to be consensus

in the literature: national liberation movements (or struggles) and records. The definition of national liberation movement has been contentious among scholars. It remains subject to debate, doubt and disagreement, and even elementary questions of definition, terminology and delimitation of the field are still not settled (Valentine, 1987). The conceptualisation of the term is a matter of interpretation, and Wilson (1988) rightly pointed out that defining national liberation movement is a challenging task and argued that the label, as popularly used, is imprecise. For the purpose of the present work, a national liberation movement is defined as a non-governmental organisation which, through violent or non-violent means, strives to win effective national independence in its crusade for emancipation.

There have also been many debates on the definition of a record, and on how records differ from information and knowledge. The word “record” has been a site of contestation as Harris (2000) remarked. This view is shared by Cox (2001) who posited that even records professionals, archivists and records managers engage in protracted debates about what constitutes a record. Definitions with a focus on information, data, structure, origination or end user potential are all offered. Thus, Yusof and Chell (1998) observed that there is no universally accepted definition of the term record, and the varied definitions of the term have led to confusion which affects the formulation of theory to underpin the discipline of archival science. For instance, according to Shepherd and Yeo (2003), a record is any recorded evidence of an activity and is *not defined by its physical format or storage medium*, its age, or the fact that it has been set aside for preservation. Millar (2010), however, defined a record as a piece of information that has been captured *on some fixed medium* – and that has been created and is used to remember events or information or to provide accountability for decisions or actions (emphases inserted to highlight the subtle difference).

Archives are a subset of records, hence the dictum that archives are records but not all records are archives. Millar (2010) observed that archives are those records, created or received by a person, family, an organisation, a business or a government in the course of their life and work, which merit preservation because they provide enduring

informational value about the functions, responsibilities, actions or transactions of the creator or about the life and times in which the creator conducted his or her affairs and the society in which he or she lived and worked.

Another important distinction is the one between public records (and archives) and non-public records (and archives). Public records are those created or received in the course of official business by governmental bodies at central, provincial and local levels. Non-public records comprise all other categories of records – private papers, business records, church records and so on (Harris, 2000). This is similar to the view of International Records Management Trust (IRMT, 1999) that non-governmental or private records are those records created, received and maintained by non-governmental organisations, families or individuals relating to their private and public affairs. By these definitions, the records of the former national liberation movements are non-public because the movements were essentially private initiatives, although ultimately having fundamental impact on the socio-political development of the countries where they operated. Such records contain evidence of the activities of the former liberation movements and, by the above definitions of records, include papers, maps, photographs, machine readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by the movements.

The liberation movement heritage is a nation’s cultural capital (Deacon et al., 2003), and so also records associated with it. The essential question then is whether these records are being adequately managed and protected to ensure that this important element of national cultural capital is not lost. To answer this question, it is necessary to look at the regulatory framework in place to ensure that liberation struggle archives are managed professionally. Lacovino (1998) observed that all aspects of record keeping have legal implications. Legislation gives legality to archival operations, and it follows then that policies are offshoots of legislation as they are designed to outline the purpose, objectives and conditions which define the scope of archival activities, the authority under which they operate and the services offered to clients (Schwirllich 1993:26). Thus, policies establish a framework for the

management of records within an archival institution. This view was also echoed by Millar (2010) who argued that considering that archivists, realistically, often have little control over the development of legislation; they should however be fully responsible and active in the development of core policies that define the scope, mandate and duties of their institutions. It is therefore mandatory that all archival institutions establish and maintain a strong policy framework.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the regulatory landscape in which both public and private archival enterprises are operating has its challenges, responsibility as to the management of liberation struggle archives should be a national responsibility and not be left to political parties that spearheaded the struggle considering that the documentary heritage of a country is at stake. Millar (2003) stated that a nation's *Public Records Act or Public Archives Act* must define the record-keeping process and confirm that this process must be supervised by a body separate from those responsible for executing the duties of government. The National Archives is the key agency responsible for the care of records held within a country, it serves as an information auditor, responsible for protecting documentary evidence.

The foregoing view by Millar (2003) is a body statutorily appointed to oversee records keeping. This is not to suggest that private archives be part of the state archival collection as is the trend in socialist countries. Rather, Millar's (2003) view is that there should in every nation be a body that is entrusted by laws to manage some of such records as part of the country's heritage assets. Such an arrangement will not only give legal protection to private archives but will also go a long way in preventing their dispersal and destruction.

Problem Statement

Scholars have been arguing for comprehensive and coordinated information policies to cater for information generated by both public and private institutions in various countries. Mnjama (2005) noted that the private sector is yet to fully participate in the collection and preservation of records and archives of national importance. National archival legislations and institutions in Africa often neglect

private archives. Thus, very little is known about the status and management of those private archival records that may be of transient value to their private creators but could be of immense long term value to the countries where and about which they are created. The national liberation movements' records and archives fall into this category, and there is need to investigate how they are being managed in order to initiate policies, legislation or frameworks for their long term management. This need instigated this research.

Objectives

The study focused on collecting, analysing and interpreting information about and from public and private archival institutions and archival legislations in the Eastern and Southern Africa region, which is also the region covered by the activities of the East and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA). The main objective of the study was to assess the role of the national archives of the different countries in the region in managing or supporting the management of the records and archives of the former liberation movements, in terms of the existing relationships between national archival institutions and liberation movement archives and the available legislative frameworks for the relationships. The following two research questions were investigated in connection with this objective: How harmonious is the relationship between national archives, political parties and former liberation movements in the management of records of the former liberation movements in the Eastern and Southern Africa region? What needs to be done to improve the management of such records?

Methodology

A questionnaire, an interview schedule and an observation checklist were employed as data collection instruments. The questionnaire was directed to the first population, comprising the heads of the twelve national archives repositories in Angola, Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The second population comprised the archival repositories housing the records of former national liberation movements within Eastern and

Southern Africa. The focus here was on the seven archival institutions holding ANC (African National Congress) struggle records and archives, as well as the archives of FRELIMO (The Liberation Front of Mozambique), MPLA (The Peoples Movement for the Liberation of Angola), SWAPO (South West African People's Organization), ZANU PF (Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front) ZIPRA (Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army) and PAC (Pan Africanist Congress). The seven institutions housing the ANC archives are: African National Congress Archives; Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg); Digital Innovation South Africa (DISA); Gandhi-Luthuli Documentation Centre (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Westville); Liberation Archives, University of Fort Hare; Nelson Mandela Foundation; UWC-Robben Island Mayibuye Archives. However, only nine of the twenty-three provided the requested documents and responses to the questionnaire for the analyses. The third sources of information were the archival legislations of the countries within the region.

The questionnaire contained mostly open-ended items, and the responses to the items, as well as the legislative and other documents were content analysed and interpreted qualitatively. According to Colorado State University (2007) and Ngulube (2003), content analysis involves the collection and organisation of information systematically in a standard format that enables analysts to draw conclusions about the characteristics and meaning of recorded material. The content analysis focuses around certain words or concepts within texts or set of texts. Researchers quantify and analyse the presence, meanings and relationships of such words and concepts and then make inferences about the messages within the texts. The source of the text could be anything written, visual or spoken that serves as a medium for communication and includes interviews, discussions, historical documents, speeches, conversations, films or videotapes (Neuman, 2000).

Traditionally, content analysis is usually divided into two categories, namely: conceptual analysis and relational analysis (Babbie and Mouton 2001:492). Conceptual (thematic) analysis involves establishing the existence and frequency of concepts usually represented by words or phrases in a text. In

contrast, relational (semantic) analysis examines the relationships among concepts in a text (Colorado State University 2007). Thus both recurring and related concepts represented by words and phrases in the regulatory instruments of the surveyed institutions were examined in search of meaning.

Findings

The nearest the National Archives Act (1986) of Zimbabwe gets to assisting in the collection of private archives is in Section 2(b) which refers to any record or other material acquired by the Director of National Archives in terms of paragraph (c) of Section 5 of that Act. Therefore the *Director*:

... may acquire by purchase, donation, bequest or otherwise any record or other material which in his/her opinion is or is likely to be of enduring or historical value.

A similar situation is witnessed in the Public Archives and Documentation Service Act of Kenya (1991), which provides that, with the powers vested in the Director, s/he may

... approve any institution, whether private or otherwise, as a place wherein may be deposited, housed or preserved either permanently or temporarily any public archives, records or records which have been declared historical records, under Section 9.

The National Archives of Namibia Act (1992), the National Archives of South Africa Act (1996) and the National Archives of Tanzania Act (2002) are explicit with regard to the management of private archives in their respective countries. The vision of the National Archives of Namibia as enshrined in its archival legislation is to:

... acquire, conserve and provide access to private and public records in all formats and media of national significance ... and co-operate closely ... with the National Library as well as other information centres.

A site visit to the National Archives of Namibia confirmed this co-operation as the institution is leading the digitization project of liberation struggle archives by providing storage services and expert advice to the records of the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) under the auspices of SWAPO Party Archives (SPARC).

The National Archives of South Africa Act (1996) provides in its preamble a catalogue of terms in which the definition of a non-public record is spelt out for the sake of clarity. The Act goes further to define the objects and functions of National Archives with regard to non-public records as being to:

- (a) preserve non-public records with enduring value for use by the public and the State;
- (b) make such records accessible and promote their use by the public;
- (c) collect non-public records with enduring value of national significance which cannot be more appropriately preserved by another institution ...; and
- (d) maintain national registers of non-public records with enduring value and promote co-operation and co-ordination between institutions having custody of such records.

In addition, South Africa has the Promotion of Access to Information Act, No. 2 of 2000, which requires private institutions to present a manual containing the narration of records, which is a laudable move to promote access to information.

The National Archives of Tanzania Act (2002) similarly defines private archives in its interpretation section for clarity's sake, and Section 13 (2e) states that the Director may do all such things as appear to him necessary or expedient for maintaining the utility of the National Archives and any other archival repository under his control, and may in particular ... *accept private records for safekeeping and acquire private records by gift, bequest or deposit.*

The Minister is also empowered by Section 26 (1) to acquire private records. Thus, provided:

... [they] are of national importance, and that it is in the public interest that they be acquired, he may, after consultation with

the owner of the private records and subject to the following provisions of this section, acquire them, or any part of them, and declare them to be public.

However, a visit to the National Archives of Tanzania seemed to confirm otherwise as archives pertaining to the Liberation Committee under the now defunct Organization of African Unity (OAU) were said to be under the custody of Tanzania Defence Forces (TDF). Verification efforts to establish the whereabouts of these records hit a brick wall due to non-co-operation by the National Archives of Tanzania that is purported to have supervisory powers over these records. Not surprisingly, Chachage and Ngulube (2006) were highly critical in their appraisal of the Records and Archives Management Act (United Republic of Tanzania 2002), an Act which pays little attention to business records at a time when the majority of government enterprises were being privatised. In section 26 (1), for instance, the Act indicates an interest in only acquiring private records of national importance and public interest. The pertinent burning question is: How would the National Archives identify private records of national interest if there was no law regarding their management and a clear mandate for National Archives to identify and manage them?

In summary, the analysis of archival legislation reveals in some cases the inherent semantic ambiguity which also suggests that a revisiting of these issues is needed. In other cases however, there appears to be good cooperation between the National Archives and private archival collections, such as those of the liberation movements.

Other important instruments for the location of private archives are guides and directories, including those published by institutions holding the papers. Two of the nine institutions that participated in the survey had published guides and directories to private archives in their countries compared to seven without. Site visits to the institutions confirmed the existence of these guides and directories, as this researcher was shown printed and electronic copies. Hinfelaar and Macola (2004:8) stated that the decision to compile their *First Guide to non-governmental archives in Zambia* originated from a deep concern for the state of the materials in that country. These private archives are under-utilised, inaccessible and

often in danger of decay or destruction owing to lack of resources and expert care.

A survey conducted by Seton (1984) observed that in recent years in the developed world there has been an increasing tendency to regard private archives as part of the national archival heritage, and to legislate accordingly. This contrasts markedly with what is happening in the developing countries. According to Chachage and Ngulube (2006), the passing of "FOI laws" (Freedom of Information) in some African countries underscores the need for some private records connected with public sector to be managed so that they will be available when citizens request to have access to them under the terms of the law.

The present research also sought to find out whether there was any competition between different institutions over the acquisition of private archives. Three of the archival institutions (33.3% of those who participated in the survey) noted that relations between private and public archives were not harmonious in as far as the acquisition of private archives was concerned. The three also attested that the general situation in their respective countries with regard to private archives was not satisfactory. In contrast, one other institution reported that it enjoyed a harmonious relationship with other repositories in as far as the acquisition of private archives was concerned.

Areas of concern noted by the archival institutions were on the physical state of private archives, their storage and custody, arrangement and finding aids and access. One of them reported that personal papers and archives of liberation movements were in a state of neglect, while for another institution the neglect was affecting various categories including papers of families and estates, and literary manuscripts.

On whether private archive administration was included in the curriculum for archival training, two of the institutions reported that it was not, compared to one institution which included this component in training courses for archivists.

Finally, in response to the question of how best to improve private archives administration, the respondents mentioned policy reviews, legislation revisiting, co-operation and the overhauling of curricula in the training of archivists.

Discussion

In the surveyed institutions, the content analysis of the existing legislation in the respective countries revealed that in some cases there was lack of precision in provisions for the management of private archives, whereas in others this was clearly spelt out. Millar (2003) submitted that the first critical step in managing records effectively is to ensure the development and maintenance of a strong legislative and regulatory framework for record keeping. Records and archives legislation establishes the infrastructure within which appropriate records and archives systems can be created and implemented. The conclusions that can be drawn are that the legislative apparatus dealing with the management of private archives lacks clarity and a defined programme of action. Merely acknowledging the existence of private archives in the form of registers, without adequately catering for them in terms of their administration, compounds the problem of this lack of clarity and definition.

Another major problem in the management of the former liberation movement records is that portions of the records are held by competing national political parties that emerged from the separate movements in the same country. The competition and sometimes animosity between the major ruling and minor political parties makes it difficult to ensure adequate identification and management of some of the records. The minority parties that emerged from former liberation movements often feel their voices have been sidelined by the major political parties in favour of major political movements, and accuse them of undermining their archival records in the presentation of history in general and their roles in the emancipation crusade of their countries. Two examples of this, in Zimbabwe and South Africa, may suffice here. In Zimbabwe, there is fundamental difference in the emphasis of the ruling ZANU (Patriotic Front) concerning its own liberation movement records and roles, and that of the Mafela Trust Archives in Zimbabwe which is concerned with the recording and preserving ZIPRA (Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army) history. Thus, the

national chairman of the ruling ZANU (PF), John Nkomo had cause to voice out an urgent need to record the true history of the ZIPRA to reflect its role in the liberation struggle (Nkomo, 2006). In South Africa, the conflict is between the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). Sapire (2009) observed that because it was the ANC rather than the PAC that emerged as the premier liberation movement, the role of the latter has been sidelined. In turn, there has been a tendency by historians of liberation movements in South Africa to write from the perspectives of the victors, and this is because the archival record of the ANC is more extensive and coherent. This unilateral and partisan approach to the documentation of the liberation struggle history has led critics to point out that it is important to shift emphasis from a narrow formulation of victors' narratives to more nuanced and inclusive histories of struggle (Isaacman, Lalu and Nygren, 2005). More broadly, in order to be relevant to all citizens, the various archives in a country need to reflect all aspects of that country's past, without excluding one group in favour of another.

In a nutshell, the majority of national archival institutions were not active as far as the management of private records was concerned. The situation obtaining on the ground is that political parties of former national liberation movements have the sole mandate over these records, and they have established their own archives that stand out independently of the national archives. This state of affairs is not satisfactory as it is the thesis of this study that archives need to serve people and not political systems as it is presently the case. Not surprisingly, areas cited as cause for concern in the management of private archives pertained to acquisition, arrangement, storage and custody, finding aids and access. In addition, respondents mentioned the need for policy reviews, legislation revisiting, co-operation and overhauling of curricula in the training of archivists, in as far as the administration of private archives was concerned.

It can thus be concluded that liberation struggle archives are under threat due to varying levels of inadequate care in the different countries. Mazarire (2009) summed up the crisis situation in the management of the records of former liberation movements by pointing to two of Zimbabwe's main

liberation movements, Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and ZIPRA:

Very little primary material has come from their private collections and it is public knowledge that both movements still do not possess proper archives. Their age-old animosity continues to make any effort to reveal their individual collections a security concern and this way much of this crucial data has lacked systematic and proper care or been simply left to decay ... there is so much more crucial material in the hands of participants in the war who lack confidence in existing modes of documenting and archiving this liberation heritage. Material such as manuscripts, letters, rare photographs, etc. has been encountered in people's private libraries, locked up in trunks in their basements or worse still, left in the custody of people who have no idea of its value.

This assessment mirrors the general situation with regard to private archives holding the former national liberation movements' records. There is a clear need for urgent action to save such records and archives, which calls for appropriate advocacy and legislation, public domain funding, and appropriate professional training of archivists in the various countries in the proper maintenance of such records and archives.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The main conclusion of this study is that the laws that govern the national archives of the countries within ESARBICA are wholly inadequate when it comes to the management of private records of national importance. In particular, the regulatory instruments dealing with the management of private archives are outdated, lack clarity and are punctuated by latent passivity. Archives sustain us, provide meaning, give us a place in posterity (Cox, 2009), and provide insights into the human condition (Dearstyne, 1993). Jonker (2009) rightly pointed out that modern archival legislation, which still focuses on public records, cannot ignore the growing importance of private records in the fabric of society's archival memory.

Liberation struggle archives are like other historical records, but their deeply emotional value and connection with significant epochs in the heritage of the countries is what makes them unique, irreplaceable and a particularly prized asset. The liberation struggle heritage is a nation's cultural capital (Deacon et al., 2003); hence, the it is necessary to protect them jealously at national, and not organisational level. It follows then that stewardship efforts concerning liberation movement archives should be oriented towards achieving the ultimate goal of ensuring that this treasured national asset is adequately safeguarded in these countries before it is consumed by the tides of time.

The findings and conclusions of the study lead to the following two recommendations: (1) that legislation pertaining to the administration of private archives in these countries should be reviewed or modernized in order for national archival institutions to be empowered to identify, support and manage effectively the various liberation movement records and archives of different origins currently being maintained by different private archives and political parties in the countries; and (2) that national archival institutions need to spearhead this drive for the required new legislation that will empower them to manage valuable private records for their countries.

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Francis Garaba is Manuscript Librarian at the Lutheran Theological Institute Library, Scottsville, South Africa. He holds a Bachelor of Arts Honours degree in history from the University of Zimbabwe, an MIS degree and a doctorate from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. He has worked for the National Archives of Zimbabwe as an archivist and at the Midlands State University in Zimbabwe as a lecturer in records and archives management. His research interests include records and archives management in national liberation movements, churches and sports associations.

