

Memory and Archives: Documenting White Minorities in Post Colonial Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Archives and societal memory are contested territories, archives are selective memory and the voices of the elites overshadow those of minorities and the underrepresented. The archives of Zimbabwe are inherently colonial like most former colonies and attempts at addressing the colonial imbalance (Oral History Programmes) has resulted in the marginalisation of the white community as both a racial and numerical minority. The study sought to ascertain the strategies employed by the White Community in the archiving of their Historical Manuscripts (HM). Data were collected from the management committees of former white community institutions, and individuals with knowledge on white minority archives in Zimbabwe using interviews. The

findings of the study established that the records of the white community are stored and preserved in undetermined conditions, their format nature and quantity unknown and thus vulnerable to neglect and decay. The major recommendation arising out of the study is that intervention strategies are required to ensure that records originating from the White settler associations are collected and preserved so that they will ultimately contribute to an integrated societal memory in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: *Archives, Memory, Minority, Oral History Programme, White Community, And Integrated Societal Memory.*

Introduction

Discourse on the state of archives in Africa and in particular Zimbabwe, tends to focus on the challenges and the opportunities that exist, this discourse paints a bleak picture inherited from the former Colonial Administrations, and continued by the successor states, (Mnjama, 2010; Tough, 2009). Some of the challenges range from inadequate funding, lack of recognition by national governments of the role that archives play, poor storage facilities, poor arrangement and description standards, inadequate retrieval systems, lack of professional staff and understaffing, migrated archives, and “silences” and “absences” of minorities and the underrepresented in the Archive, to mention just but a few.

White Zimbabweans are people from the southern African country Zimbabwe, who are white in linguistic, cultural and historical terms. They are of European ethnic origin and comprise of the English-speaking descendants of British and Irish settlers, the Afrikaans speaking descendants of Afrikaners from South Africa and those descended from the Greek, Portuguese and Italian settlers. People of European ethnicity first came to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), during the late 19th century (Crush

and Tevera, 2010:52). At its peak in 1975 the white population was 296,000, representing 8% of the population of Rhodesia. In 1999 it fell to around 120,000 and to less than 50,000 in 2002 (Crush and Tevera, 2010:52). According to the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (2013) The white population of Zimbabwe was listed as 28,732 in the 2012 census. By the time of doing this study (2015-2018) whites were both politically, economically, and socially disenfranchised as an ethnic minority in Zimbabwe. The study posits that post-colonial efforts at filling the gaps in the Archive, resulted in the expansion of the Oral History (OH) programme to fill in the “silences” and “absences” of the voices of the black majority at the expense of the white minority. At the same time the Registry Model that defined the archival endeavour in Zimbabwe, reflected that public-sector records and archives predominated in the mainstream archives of Zimbabwe (Ngulube, 2012).

Objective of the Study

The overall purpose of the study was to explain the context and documentation strategies of archiving and preservation of Historical Manuscripts of the White community in post-colonial Zimbabwe. The specific objectives of this study was to: Ascertain the strategies employed by the White Community in the management of both pre-archival and archival HM of the White Community; and the specific research question was: What are the current documentation strategies employed by the White Community in post-colonial Zimbabwe? The sub questions focussed on:

- The challenges of archiving white community memory,
- What happened to HM of the white community in the post-independence era (1980-)? And
- Whether there was a vibrant civic engagement in white activities and interest in documenting white memory in post-colonial Zimbabwe?

Literature Review

The literature reviewed in this study focused on conceptualising minorities, and the strategies currently utilised to address the “silences” and “absences” in the archive. Literature indicates that

archivists have to be transparent and accountable to society in their activities in particular when documenting societal memory. Literature also indicates that mainstream archival activities are the main cause of the “silences” and “absences” from the archive of minorities and the underrepresented (Jimerson 2003). (Kaplan, 2000; Jimerson 2003) observed that archives are not sites of objective historical truth: The archival record doesn’t just happen; it is created by individuals and organisations, and used, in turn, to support their values and missions, all of which comprises a process that is certainly not politically and culturally neutral. Archives thus become “major players in the business of identity construction and identity politics”. In summary the global initiatives especially those exhibited in America and Europe fall into these broad categories, archival social justice of Daniel (2010), the concept of total archives, whose main proponents are (Millar, 1999; Momryk, 2001; Bastian, 2004). The other strategies being utilised in the developed world are provenance (social and ethnicity) as argued for by Daniel (2010) and Nesmith (2006), custody versus stewardship as posited by Wurl (2005), documentation strategy of Samuels (1986) and Cook (1992), social movements and social justice forms of, Stevens, Flinn and Shepherd (2009), archival activism McDonald (2008), and Millar (2010) community archives CADG (2007), and Bastian (1999) digital archives and web technologies Daniel (2010) and Flinn (2010). One can also add the efforts by White (2009) focusing on archival education in Mexico, particularly in as far as training imparts archiving skills that are eventually applied in the process of archiving and archivalisation. An Afrocentric initiative is by Rodrigues, Van der Walt and Ngulube (2014) who propose an archival collecting plan to document minorities.

The context of study is that literature reviewed shows that there is a dearth of literature on the subject. Most of the literature is Eurocentric and Africa is represented by only three seminal studies, that of Garaba (2010), which focused on the documentation of liberation movements in southern Africa, and that of Rodrigues (2013), who studied the documentation of the Lusophone community in Gauteng Province of South Africa, and Chabikwa (2019) that focused on archiving white community historical manuscripts in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

Methodology

The method for the study was qualitative, relying on face-face interviews and case studies for data collection. A multiple case study research was used to address the exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory research questions. The justification was that a case study is holistic, it exists in real-life context. The population of the study was members of the white community in Zimbabwe, the White Community was a difficult population to study and extract data from, given the political climate that prevailed at the time of conducting the study. The white community had been displaced from the land as a result of the acrimonious land redistribution programme. The study relied on snowball sampling for the white community and yielded three male managers from the White Associations and four male members of the White Community in Zimbabwe. The above constituted the actual sampled population for this specific objective of the study. This did not yield any female participants, hence their absence from the study. The study also excluded other racial, ethnic, gender (women included), and religious minorities from the study because of the limited resources.

Non-probability sampling techniques were employed (purposive sampling). The study snowball sampled the leadership or management committees of the various White Associations and members of the White Community locally. The respondents were selected because it was expected that they were representative of the population of interest (white minorities in Zimbabwe) Hofstee (2006). Data analysis utilised open coding as well as the identification of developing themes as they emerged from the qualitative data. This was done without predetermining what categories would emerge (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:101). Analysis was generally descriptive, theory generation, analytic and thematic. Ethically, the study observed the following: participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained; and privacy and confidentiality were observed to protect the identity of the participants using pseudo-names and ultimately it was bias free in writing about the underrepresented and minorities (Rubin and Babbie, 1997:76-77).

Findings

In light of the apathy that characterised white community participation in the study, the article reports on the findings from seven members of the White Community who responded to issues that addressed how whites were preserving their memory. The findings revealed the following:

Hindrances to Archiving HM of the White Community in Zimbabwe

In a preliminary interview that was held with Respondent D, the interview revealed the challenges listed below as being the major hindrances to archiving HM of the White Community Associations' in Zimbabwe.

1. No records management systems were in place for most of the White Community Associations except for a few organisations;
2. Funding was the major problem facing these associations and organisations;
3. Economic challenges and dwindling membership resulted in most associations collapsing especially after the land reform of 2000;
4. Members were too few and too old and on pensions as a result they could not afford to fund the operations of their associations through membership fees;
5. The respondent belonged to three associations that had folded up due to 2,3 and 4 above;
6. There was suspicion by the Rhodesian element and access to assess and utilise their records or HM was difficult to obtain even for white researchers;
7. Most whites kept a low profile and this applied to their activities and the documentation of their memory;
8. All former military, police and air force associations did not cooperate with researchers internally unless one was a member or ex-serviceman;
9. Most records/HM were kept by individuals, families and organisations in undetermined conditions of storage and preservation;

10. When associations collapsed or ceased to exist, records were burnt or just given away to those interested in them;
11. Most surviving heirs migrated part of the records they needed or managed to carry outside of the country, what is of no interest to them was then destroyed mainly through burning;
12. Respondent D was a beneficiary of records bequests and donations mainly from heirs within the White Community and these are the ones the respondent utilised to write the history of Bulawayo and its society; and
13. The Pioneer Society of which he was a member was probably the only organisation with a professional archivist in its employ managing its HM from the 1890's mainly genealogical records of the pioneers. The archives were only accessible to members and descendants of the pioneers. The collection was managed using library methodologies, a database exists but not networked. It was a computerised system without a website or online tools for access or management. Digitised content was available of the collection, there was no evidence of backup copies anywhere. The reasons why the archives of the organisation fared better than those of other associations, was because the members who are descendants of the White Pioneers inherited land and other properties and businesses. The proceeds were used to fund the documentation and preservation of their memories, unlike the generality of white Zimbabweans who struggled with the day to day challenges of a dysfunctional economy.

Personal observations revealed that the issue of a lack of funding was a common problem affecting the archiving of HM of the White Community in Zimbabwe. This problem affected both cultural heritage institutions, and the White Community itself.

On the issue of what happened to records of the former White Community Associations in the post-independence era, (1980-), Respondent A, stated that:

as committees change and as management changes, they have probably destroyed those records or dumped in some storeroom and being destroyed by some white ants, I think. I was researching about Greendale club and the other information is available on boards at the club, (true of a number of sporting clubs in the country boards or roll of honours are still available in some places whilst others have been removed or defaced, the case of the Sailing Club is a sad one given that new owners took them down and workers said they were used to braai some meat) but specific detail about membership, activities, policy and management could not be found, it had disappeared or destroyed over the years mainly due to neglect and lack of proper records management strategies.

He went on to aver that:

we can say that memories of the White Community in post Rhodesia are in danger of being lost for posterity. There has been reluctance to write these things down, although a lot was written about infrastructure, facilities and life in Rhodesia, this can be found in the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), unfortunately the old generation of whites are no longer documenting life after Rhodesia, and this a sad scenario given that young whites are not interested or are busy with day-to-day challenges and survival or they have migrated to other countries. The culture of documenting memory was alive during Rhodesia but I don't know if it was carried on after 1980.

In discussing the lack of interest in documenting the memory of White Community Associations, Respondent A strongly argued that:

I think probably not, I suspect and think probably it has not been recorded, to be honest even in the white days 99% of the members cared less about the history and memory of their clubs, because they went

to enjoy the game of tennis or socialise and enjoy a few beers and that was all they were interested in, even management committees then were not that interested in preserving the memory of clubs and associations, I don't think they were that historically minded at all. Throughout the White Community people were not interested in art or history, even me as a child had uncles who served in World War I and talking about East Africa and South West Africa but it was of no interest to me, it is the same all the time, I think. Not documenting memory is typically a Zimbabwean problem than ethnic issue. I got interested in the history of the family in my later years but the elders had passed on and they had vast wealth of information about the military and mining in Rhodesia and that's memory already lost to me and ultimately to society.

Interestingly, Respondent A did mention the fact that the Salisbury Poultry Club donated (dumped in his own words) their records to him which he transferred to the NAZ after a number of years. In fact, most associations if they still exist give their records to Historians and those interested, if there are no takers, they throw them away in the rubbish bins or just burn them.

Respondent B corroborated the observation by Respondent A, but attributed this to the fact that, in essence most of the cultural, social and political institutions that existed before independence have died a natural death, largely because whites have no political power, but on the social side of things there is no cohesion because the numbers are just not there. With 50,000 whites in the country for example to maintain Scottish or Irish traditions is just impossible, the Rhodesian element is gone.

On the other hand, Respondent C averred that two years ago they realised that white documentation was being lost to this country for various reasons "some whites did not want to donate their material to the National Archives not out of political or racial reasons, but because they had become aware that the National Archives was taking years and years to process material and therefore putting it in the

archives was like putting it in a cold storage refrigerator where no one will see it for thirty years which rather defeats the objective of donating to the NAZ".

According to Respondent C, the biggest challenge, in documenting memory of the White Community and that of all Africans in general is finance even self-publishing which is the most viable option is not cheap. Respondent C argued that "The person who is self-publishing has to put upfront at least US\$3000 they may recoup some of that through book sales but the book market is in decline in this country because of the economic hardships. On the one hand, the community is generally poor because the average age is probably 60 years, and most whites are retired and living on pensions which have been decimated by hyper-inflation over the years".

The second biggest challenge according to Respondent C, is that "all these people who want to write reminiscences are not trained historians, and most of them have not written anything in life except answering letters that's all and putting up a book is quite a challenge and they need quite a lot of help in editing and selecting and so on".

Asked if the above efforts stemmed from the realisation that memory was being lost to the White Community and ultimately to society in general, the respondent asserted that:

Yes it is being lost, increasingly the whites are in danger of reverting to what they were 50 years ago, and thinking only about Cecil Rhodes, Dr Jameson, the Pioneers and things that are well documented and the most important is to forget what the whites did or did not do in the 100 years after the famous people who have been well documented and written about, but much more interesting things are being lost and the other thing I did recently at the archives, I met a retired Native Commissioner, who wanted to write his reminiscences and I urged him to publish it, they were fascinating because he was brought up in the most extreme poverty, poverty the sort that whites have totally forgotten existed in this country and probably to the depth that no African ever believed whites had to endure.

Opportunities

Based on the above findings, the opportunities that arise from the difficulties of archiving HM of the White Community in Zimbabwe, seem to focus on self-publishing as a solution. Little if any solutions are considered to utilise web tools, to complement the encouragement to the white community to continue donating HM to cultural institutions. The NAZ needs to play a pivotal role in the archiving of societal memory and must instil confidence in the White Community that materials donated or bequeathed are processed to enhance access and bring them into wider scholarly circulation.

Discussion

The objective of the study sought to ascertain the strategies employed by the White Community in the management of both pre-archival and archival HM of the White Community. The findings revealed that there were no proper records management practices and lack of good houseman ship endangered the preservation of the HM in the custody of the White Community Associations. There is lack of proper systems in relation to standard records life cycle procedures from creation/receipt, use and maintenance, and ultimate disposal, ideally to an archival facility as dictated by statute and policy.

The consequences of an aged population and a large number in the diaspora means limited funding and budgets to finance operations let alone manage records properly. These financial challenges are related to the literature reviewed in that, as of 1935 when the Archives was set up in Rhodesia, funding came from taxing the White Community as observed by Murambiwa, Ngulube, Masuku, and Sigauke (2012). Ironically, at the time of conducting the study the White Community could not afford to fund the preservation of their memory within the community initiatives that exist. The White Community Associations are willing to take on board a technical partner to provide technical archival support for the preservation of their memory. This finding corroborates the clarion call for NAZ to begin to render that archival support as argued by Ngulube (2012).

The White Community Associations acknowledged that they lack the technical expertise and are willing to collaborate or partner with individuals or organisations that would help them

preserve their HM for posterity. On the other hand, they ascribe both historical and cultural value to their collections (documents) or HM. Implicitly the findings reveal that White Community Associations believe that cultural heritage institutions must be responsible for documenting memory. This tallies with the literature reviewed. In fact, the findings point to a greater role for the NAZ, as one respondent lamented the processing backlogs at the NAZ, which have prompted others to consider setting up their own archives as (Kaplan, 2000; Jimerson, 2003; and Haskins 2002) averred in the literature reviewed on community initiatives. The challenge as mentioned earlier is to do with the practical difficulty (technical expertise, financial costs) which prevents such an initiative for the White Community.

Of concern to the study is the issue of accessibility to HM by the general populace. The study highlights the strategy of encouraging the White Community to donate material to the NAZ, although there are concerns by the White Community that the failure to arrange and describe the material hinders access, and ultimately renders the archival endeavour redundant. The issue of backlogs feature, prominently in the findings, it creates a scenario that corroborates the argument that mainstream archival activities are the causes of the imbalances in the archive as White (2009) observed. The study argues that this compounds a situation where emigration denies access the heirs to provenance and this lack of capacity has been described by a respondent in this study as equal to putting archives in the freezer and forgetting about them.

The claim that HM donated to NAZ in the 1960's is yet to be processed raises alarm and concern about the state of archiving of HM in Zimbabwe. The registry model as described by (Ngulube, 2012; Murambiwa, et. al., 2012) affirms the observation and finding that mainstream archival activities marginalise racial and numerical minorities like whites in the archive, in postcolonial Zimbabwe. The findings on the issue of archival backlogs is also one of the discontents in the literature reviewed made by Foucault (1969) and Derrida (1996) as they postulated theoretical questions about processing, applications, selection and description of archival collections. It can be inferred that NAZ needs to clear the processing backlogs to enhance access to this shared cultural heritage. This was corroborated

by Mnjama (2006) when describing the three consequences of archival backlogs that “the existence of backlog accumulations leads to the denial of access for researchers to materials some of which have reached mandatory statutory periods for their opening...It can therefore be argued that any archival institution holding backlog accumulations containing records that are more than 20-30 years old is denying its citizens their inalienable right of access to part of their archival heritage”.

The issue of custody of white community archives is a contentious one given the politics of the day. Setting up a community archive for the white community would be deemed politically incorrect and inappropriate. This is also corroborated by the findings themselves in that the solution lies in the NAZ playing a leading role in the archiving and preservation of HM from the White Community. The findings point out the waning influence of whites, and ultimately the loss of their memory for posterity if custody or other interventions invested in the NAZ are not implemented. The findings reiterate this argument by Ngulube (2012), and also expect that the initiative should come from the NAZ.

A web presence though critical for the White Community Associations, it has not been widely adopted and utilised. The findings reveal that prohibitive costs have not encouraged the utilisation of web tools in Zimbabwe, by the White Community Associations. The initiative is limited to the Hellenic community which is still vibrant and actively documents its activities online, unfortunately for the rest of the White Community in their varied ethnicities little or no effort has utilised web tools for documenting memory.

A further gap in knowledge about archiving white memory that the study addresses is the issue of what happens to records when associations fold up. The findings revealed that records (HM) have been destroyed or simply dumped in some storerooms and exposing them to neglect or decay. The neglect of records that document White Community Associations, has resulted in the loss of memory, and invaluable information about membership, activities, policy and management, and this compounds the gaps that have been created by the OH programme and the registry approach in Zimbabwe. The lack of proper records management strategies and neglect have not helped either. The

implication is that white memory in post Rhodesia is in danger of being lost for posterity. Although the Zimbabwean archive is largely colonial, the study revealed that gaps in White memory emerge in the post Rhodesian era, there is little documentation of whites after Rhodesia. Equally, the younger white generation is not interested or have migrated to other countries. It can be inferred that the culture of documenting memory that existed during Rhodesia has declined with the demise of Rhodesia.

Murambiwa et. al. (2012) and Manungo (2012) acknowledge that the archive is largely colonial in Zimbabwe, the findings suggest that few whites were historically minded and this continues today. As such it can be inferred that the colonial archive did marginalise or created gaps in its documentation of white memory. The voice of the black citizens in the case of Zimbabwe, continues to be absent from the archive and this is corroborated by Jimerson (2003) and Haskins (2007:402) who argue that “what was selected for preservation by mainstream archives were typically from the intellectuals and elites rather than from the illiterate”. It can be inferred and argued that the colonial archive did promulgate official ideologies at the expense of the underrepresented black population and the same continues today in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

Although literature highlighted the role of the NAZ in documenting memory in Zimbabwe, the findings however, revealed that there are other forums and initiatives that are actively documenting white memory though in a limited way in the country. *Heritage Zimbabwe*, the successor to *Rhodesiana* continues to publish manuscripts from predominately the White Community, and it ensures that the history of whites continues to be recorded in a way, even though mainstream activities tend to marginalise white documentation.

The desire to avoid unnecessary attention on the part of the whites’ entails that people meet and they don’t keep minutes, as the findings reveal this affects how memory is documented. This reliance on human memory ultimately means that with time memory will be lost due to forgetfulness. Related to this, is the issue of how anything that conflicts with the national ideology espoused by the ruling party (ZANU PF) renders memory work difficult, and minorities in Zimbabwe, whites included are increasingly being left out of the archive as argued

by postmodern dictums (Cook, 2000; Jimerson, 2003; and Harris, 2000).

Another key finding is the fact that there is little or no interest from both a regional, national or institutional level to collect and preserve HM. This has been left to individuals and this questions the sustainability of such efforts, at the same time transmission for posterity is not guaranteed. As such, there is need for intervention strategies to ensure that these HM, if they do survive neglect and decay can be migrated to new formats for accessibility in the future. The efforts by individuals to document themselves is limited, informal and covert. There is no central plan or organisation besides the Pioneer Society in Bulawayo.

The current efforts at documenting whites emerged largely from the observation that whites are not keen at donating their material to cultural heritage institutions, NAZ included. Firstly, this is because of poor collection development, on the part of cultural heritage institutions. Secondly, that the white population is aged and at death most of the HM are thrown away or burnt because nobody is interested in them, at times it gets migrated out of the country. The consequence of this is that memory is deliberately being lost through lack of archival intervention. The haphazard and covert documentation of white memory has tended to be in the form of publishing memoirs and reminiscences. Interestingly, it avoids the big men in history but focusses on the ordinary citizen as noted by (Haskins, 2007).

Conclusion and Recommendations

It has emerged in this study that the White Community Associations are predominately white. The reduction in numbers of the white population means race specific organisations don't exist anymore. This partly explains why most associations that were race specific folded up. Such associations would not survive the political climate that is Zimbabwe. The study therefore differs from other studies reviewed which can identify race specific institutions like archives or museums as argued for by Haskins (2007), Kaplan (2000) and Rodrigues

(2013). This has a bearing on the proposed management framework to archive HM of the White Community.

The study makes the following recommendations to the White Community and their Associations that they should:

1. Devise new or alternative funding models to fund operations of these associations;
2. Set up proper records/archival management systems to address the challenges of a lack of records/archival systems that relate to creation/receipt, use, maintenance, and disposal;
3. Document their activities and not conduct business without proper documentation, as such they should employ and retain administrative staff to assist with the management of and documentation of activities;
4. Be encouraged to donate and bequeath their HM with the NAZ and other selected cultural heritage institutions than to burn or destroy these when no longer needed;
5. Collaborate with selected cultural heritage institutions in particular the NAZ as part of the stewardship management framework, to acquire or access curatorial/archival technical expertise and services for the management of their collections;
6. Be discouraged from migrating their HM and records to other countries outside of Zimbabwe;
7. Adopt and utilise web-based tools for documenting their memories and enhancing remote access to their collections by society;
8. Assist the NAZ and selected cultural heritage institutions to identify and quantify the extent and nature of HM migrated and displaced after independence and post the land reform era of 2000; and
9. Members of the White Community should be encouraged to self-publish their memoirs and reminiscences as a complement to mainstream archival documentation strategies.

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