

INTERROGATING THOMPSON'S COMMUNITY APPROACH TO ORAL HISTORY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SELECTED ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMMES IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Thompson (1998, 27) argued that “there have been telling criticisms of a relationship with informers in which a middle-class professional determines who is to be interviewed and what is to be discussed and then disappears with a tape of somebody’s life which they never hear about again—and if they did, might be indignant at the unintended meanings imposed on their words.” This is one of the criticisms that have been levelled at conventional oral history methodologies, especially those used by national institutions such as National Archives of Zimbabwe. It is Thompson’s argument that with the use of a “community approach” methodology, communities are empowered and then have confidence in writing their history which will be accessible to the public. This article will therefore interrogate Thompson’s concept using case studies of the Mafela Trust, the Tso-ro-tso San Development Trust and the National Archives of Zimbabwe to understand the positives and negatives of the community approach to oral history. The Mafela Trust is a private archival institution which deals with the memory of the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) whilst the Tso-ro-tso San Development Trust deals with the San Community of Zimbabwe. These institutions have used oral history as a tool to collect their oral testimonies; therefore this article will use oral history testimonies, some of which are archived, as its source of data. Document analysis will also be done.

Keywords: oral history; community archiving; National Archives of Zimbabwe; ZAPU; Mafela Trust; Tso-ro-tso San Development Trust

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INTRODUCTION

A trend is developing in Zimbabwe where oral history programmes are now being conducted by communities themselves. Long ago and to some extent even now, the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) tended to be the “sole” collector of oral testimonies. NAZ has been collecting oral testimonies since the establishment of the oral history unit in 1968. During its inception period, it mainly targeted the white community, especially the ones who were involved in the pioneer column. Manungo (2012, 65) mentions that the colonial regime then did not view Africans as having had a history worthy of being recorded. Similar sentiments were echoed by Murambiwa et al (2012, 8) who described the programme in the following manner:

Its main objective was to recollect the British colonial occupation and remembrance for those who served the then Rhodesia in various ways. In essence, the African stories were largely neglected unless it had incidental or circumstantial relevance to the colonial occupation of the country.

Later, in the 1970s, a few prominent black citizens were interviewed, notably the late Jairus Jiri, the well-known philanthropist who was interested in positively advancing the interests of disabled people in Zimbabwe. Other notable interviewees during this period were chiefs. The oral history approach then can simply be described as being exclusive rather than inclusive.

Immediately after independence, the oral history programme at NAZ then shifted from exclusive tendencies and tried to accommodate the majority of black people in Zimbabwe. Oral history programmes were now being extended to almost all the diverse ethnic communities of Zimbabwe but mainly to the large ethnic groups such as the Shona and the Ndebele. The so-called minority groups such as the Venda, the Xhosa, the San, the Kalanga, the Tonga, the Nyanja, the Suthu, the Shangane and the Nambya were being “ignored.” Concerning the war of liberation, oral history programmes collected more data for the “victors,” that is Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), whereas nothing much was being done for the “losers,” that is Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU).

However, later in 1980s, 1990s and 2000s the NAZ as an institution tried to be inclusive by covering such side-lined minority groups. Oral testimonies were now being collected from minority groups such as the Kalanga and Shangane. Oral testimonies of ZAPU cadres were also targeted. Unfortunately, a lot of challenges were met. These communities were not willing to cooperate as they viewed NAZ and its oral historians as outsiders who were not even conversant with their local languages, which forced interviewees to speak in interviewer’s language. For the ZAPU cadres, it was a question of not trusting government and its departments such as NAZ because of their immediate post-wartime experiences in which soon after independence they were labelled dissidents and some of their compatriots and civilians were killed during what

became known as the Gukurahundi “atrocities” hence their reluctance to participate in government sponsored oral history programmes.

These challenges which are still being faced by NAZ call for the institution to experiment with oral history methodologies that can be utilised in order to bring better results. One interesting oral history methodology that can be taken into consideration is the one expounded by Paul Thompson which suggests that it is better for the local communities to collect their own history than for them to have outside individuals and organisations playing “big brother” in often marginalised minority communities. In his own words, Thompson (1998, 26–27) argues that:

The co-operative nature of the oral history approach has led to a radical questioning of the fundamental relationship between history and the community. Historical information need not to be taken away from the community for interpretation and presentation by the professional historian. Through oral history the community can, and should, be given the confidence to write its own history.

It is from this background that this article will try to interrogate Thompson's approach by intensively looking into the case studies of two institutions, namely the Mafela Trust and Tso-ro-tso San Development Trust. The Mafela Trust deals, among other things, with the documentation of the former ZAPU's war of liberation history. The Tso-ro-tso San Development Trust is concerned with advancing the concerns of the San people who are viewed as a marginalised ethnic group in Zimbabwe and who still do not have a comprehensive orthography for their language.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The uncooperative attitude of some minority groups and some former liberation war parties such as ZAPU is a cause for concern. This therefore has led this researcher to interrogate the oral history methodologies used by NAZ, especially in understanding their limitations and how this has affected different groups of people in Zimbabwe. The ignoring of the community approach oral history methodology and the promotion of NAZ being the “sole” oral history collector is also viewed as a problem in this article. This is not a problem peculiar to Zimbabwe, as Mhlanga (2014, 82) in South Africa has this to say:

[D]espite the efforts made by National Archives and Records Services of South Africa (NARS) to achieve equality, whereby the institution strives to include in their archives those social groups previously under-represented by the apartheid record-keeping regime, they encounter resistance from the groups they would have otherwise targeted as marginalised elements that merit inclusion in the documentary heritage of the country.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To determine the oral history methodologies used by the Mafela Trust, Tso-ro-tso San Development Trust (TSDT) and National Archives of Zimbabwe in collecting their oral testimonies.
2. To establish how efficient and effective the Mafela Trust and TSDT have been in utilising the “power” of oral history in addressing other social, economic and political challenges they are facing.
3. To examine how successful the concept of the “communities approach” to oral history as applied by the Mafela Trust, TSDT and NAZ has been.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the oral history methodologies used by the Mafela Trust, TSDT and National Archives of Zimbabwe in collecting oral history testimonies?
2. How efficient and effective have the Mafela Trust and TSDT been in utilising the “power” of oral history in addressing other social, economic and political challenges they are facing?
3. What have been the strengths and limitations of the community approach to oral history as applied by the Mafela Trust, TSDT, and NAZ?

RESEARCH PURPOSE

The study sought to understand the implications of the oral history methodologies used by NAZ in collecting oral testimonies and to the documentation of local communities' history. The strengths and shortfalls of these oral history methodologies were considered. Also, the selected oral history programmes which are spearheaded by local communities such as the Mafela Trust and TSDT were studied and their cause of success or failure noted.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher was guided by the philosophy and ontology of interpretivism in order to understand the phenomena of the study at hand. The research took the form of being qualitative. The study was a multiple case study. In this scenario, the researcher was trying to understand the general phenomenon of the “community approach” to oral history. The cases were the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), the Mafela Trust of Zimbabwe, which deals with ZAPU, and the Tso-ro-tso San Development Trust (TSDT), which deals mainly with the San community. The data was presented in narrative form. The study was influenced by Thompson's concept of advocating for local communities to collect and document their stories instead of having outsiders collecting

oral testimonies for the locals. Data was collected mainly through document analysis. Oral history interviews collected by NAZ, TSDT and Mafela Trust were also treated as documents to be analysed. Official reports regarding the oral history programmes conducted by these organisations were also analysed. Observations in all the cases were also a source of data collection.

THE MAFELA TRUST

The archival landscape in Zimbabwe is the site of a fierce battle between the elites, the victors, the losers, women, men, the poor, the majority, minorities, and the marginalised. Those in power have tended to prioritise their historical narratives at the expense of other groups. Murambiwa (2009, 25) describes the Zimbabwe Archive as a memory of racial and ethnic conflicts which tended to be violent. In addition to this, Murambiwa (2009, 25) states that:

It is [an] archive of divergent versions shaped by colluding interests of archivists and historians. As part of the creation of the "Zimbabwean archive" certain social sections actively seek to protect their desired memories through collecting documents, objects and stories that buttress their viewpoints. In a parallel process, the same social sections seek to erase unwanted memories of losers, atrocities and repression. This they do through destruction of evidence, access control and distortion of history.

Similar sentiments are echoed by Pickover (n. d., 2) who observes that:

In this globalised world, knowledge and information, and archives, are seen as strategic resources and tools. The manner in which information is used and who controls it is therefore pivotal. And as a result the Soul of the Archive, because it mirrors historical constructs of the past, (albeit only fragments) is often a sought-after commodity. As such, archives are also about propaganda, rights, desires, lies, ownership, trust, nationalism, freedoms, concealments, acquisitiveness and surveillance.

It is from this theoretical background that one can understand the battle over collective social memory between ZANU and ZAPU. It is a battle that ZAPU may seem to be losing because of their exclusion from institutions of social memory, some of which are National Heroes Acre and National Archives. The ZAPU archives, important historical materials and other papers of Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZPRA) were seized by the government and have not since come to light (Kaarsholm 1992, 166). SAHA (2012, 5) has this to say about the exclusion of ZAPU's historical narrative from the national memory:

The Zimbabwean government has since 1980, been dominated by ZANU, a political party formed as a break-away from ZAPU in 1963. Within this context, the story of ZAPU's role in the liberation struggle has been eclipsed, deliberately underestimated by official Zimbabwean sources, and largely not understood by many sympathisers.

In addressing this problem of being excluded from social institutions of memory, in 1989 former ex-combatants of ZAPU cadres decided to form the Mafela Trust (SAHA, 2012, 7), the main objective of which is to document the ZAPU/ZIPRA' liberation history. Now the Mafela Trust, as Garaba (2010, 63) has noted, is researching and documenting the political and military activities of ZPRA. Garaba continues to state that the Trust originated in a programme of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) to identify and commemorate its war dead. According to Brickhill (1995, 163), the conflict between ZANU and ZAPU in the 1980s left its own bitter legacy. It was this conflict and the attempted suppression of ZAPU which prevented that organisation from commemorating its own dead immediately after independence. Nkomo, one of the directors of the Mafela Trust as quoted by Garaba (2010, 63), argues that after independence some ZIPRA archives went missing, and we are still looking for them, and this is why we should strengthen Mafela Trust to play the role of documenting ZAPU/ZIPRA history. Nkomo cited by Garaba (2010:63) further argues that when some of the history textbooks were written, the authors had access to information about Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and they did not have access to ZIPRA archives. The Mafela Trust is thus an organization set up to research and document the political and military activities of ZIPRA during the liberation war and its archives are in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

Brickhill (1995, 164) states that Lookout Masuku, after whom the Mafela Trust is named, was concerned with the preservation of the ZAPU legacy to the extent that in his hospital bed he dictated a letter to the National Archives Director of Zimbabwe, Angeline Kamba, requesting that the ZPRA war records be donated to the National Archives. His argument was that these would provide the most useful source of historical record. However, the situation prevailing on the ground is that there is nothing much concerning ZPRA in the National Archives of Zimbabwe.

The liberation collection there, as observation has revealed, is "biased" in favour of ZANU and ZANLA. Some of the archival collection collected by the Mafela Trust is now housed at the South African History Archive (SAHA) for safe keeping (Zinyengere 2011, 67). It is very sad that ZPRA, which fought for the liberation of this Zimbabwe, has no confidence in the archival institutions of this country to the extent of having its archives housed in South Africa not in Zimbabwe.

However the National Archives of Zimbabwe, noting this archival gap in the liberation history, tried to fill it by conducting the oral history programme which came to be known as "Capturing the fading memory of Zimbabwe." This programme was not well received in the Matabeleland regions where most but not all ZIPRA cadres live. The reason for this failure is summarised by Murambiwa (2009, 31), who states that in Matabeleland the programme was viewed with suspicion. The ZIPRA cadres and the community at large in Gwanda were not willing to speak with the interviewers and in Tsholotsho the interviewees decided to "deliberately" confuse the Second Chimurenga

with Gukurahundi. Other cadres said they could not speak to the interviewers without first getting permission from their former war commanders.

These challenges which faced the 'Capturing the fading memory' programme, which comprised NAZ, National Museum and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) and the History department at University of Zimbabwe, call for a change of approach in oral history methodologies in Zimbabwe. Maybe it is time to take into consideration some of the advocated approaches, such as the community approach to oral history. The communities affected should play a major role in the collection of their history. This approach seems to be working for the Mafela Trust because the institution has managed to document much of ZAPU's history although most of them are kept at the South African History Archive (SAHA).

The Mafela Trust Collection at SAHA, indexed as SAHA collection AL3289, includes paper-based and digital materials, photographs, oral history interviews and video material. These materials were identified as endangered in the course of a research, digitisation and oral history project conducted by SAHA in 2010 and 2011 and the materials were relocated to Johannesburg in 2011 for comprehensive archival processing and digitisation (SAHA 2012a, 7). Even though there are challenges, the Mafela Trust has managed to partially document their liberation struggle testimonies. In 2013 the Mafela Trust in collaboration with SAHA managed to publish a book titled *ZAPU: Through Zenzo Nkobi's Lens* (SAHA 2012b), which chronicled ZAPU history in picture form. These success stories may be attributed to the communities associating with those they are interested in working with rather than "forced" associations.

It can be argued therefore that the community approach, in this case the Mafela Trust being an organisation formed by the ZAPU/ZIPRA community, has managed some achievements here and there because of the approach they are using. This can be contrasted with the fact that nothing much has come from the projects done by NAZ regarding the documentation of ZAPU history. Therefore when the community tells its story there are no issues of trust to contend with. Thompson (1998, 28) argued that the community approach helps the old and the less privileged to gain dignity and self-confidence.

The interesting idea about the community approach towards oral history is that it tends to embrace the whole societal system of the people; it does not end with the collection of oral testimonies but far exceeds that. For example; the Mafela Trust not only documents the oral history of ZAPU but also addresses other important issues affecting the community. For example, SAHA (2012, 7) outlined some of the projects of the Mafela Trust, such as "Fallen Heroes," which is a project that identifies and commemorates those who died during the liberation war. Another project is the "War Graves" project, which deals mainly with the location and subsequent exhumation of war graves. Dube (2006, 3) when explaining the Mafela Trust projects, mentions that "our local communities in their various status and roles are viewed as owners of this initiative alongside mobilising resources in supporting the technical field from expert

input to this noble undertaking.” So it can be seen that when oral history programmes are done at a community level, more is achieved. Even their guiding statement speak volumes in terms of achieving more for the society than just collecting oral testimonies. The statement reads that these projects are mainly conducted “to build peace with the past through programmes initiated from community desire as pertaining to documenting the true history of the liberation struggle and the rehabilitation of war time graves” (Mafela Trust 2006, 1).

THE TSO-RO-TSO SAN DEVELOPMENT TRUST

The Tso-ro-tso San Development Trust (TSDT) was formed in 2010 and was registered as a trust in the month of May 2014. It was formed by the people of Tsholotsho together with the San to champion the resuscitation of Tjwao language and culture. Its objectives were to revitalise Tjwao language and restore the cultural pride of the San.

The San people of Zimbabwe are one of the so-called minority groups in Zimbabwe. They live on the fringes of Zimbabwean society and they are mainly not involved in the national programmes of the country despite the fact that they are indigenous people. They are mainly found in the Matabeleland regions of Tsholotsho and Plumtree. In Plumtree, the San are found in Bulilima District in the Makhulela Ward comprising the villages of Thwayithwayi and Siwowo. The pastoral ethnic groups in this area are the Khalangas. In Tsholotsho the San are mainly found at Sikente, Mgodimasili, Butabubili, Pelandaba, Mtshina, Mkandume and Maganga. Most of the San population is located in Tsholotsho, the place they originally called Tsoro o tso in their language, Tjwao (Ndlovu 2010, 17).

Robins, Madzudzo and Brenzinger (2001, 78) describe them as constituting a minority group in Zimbabwe both nationally and locally, and they are socially and economically marginalised by national policies and by their neighbours. In terms of their economy, they do not have sufficient resources to ensure food security. This insecurity has led to their political invisibility and the subordination of their interests to those of the dominant ethnic groups of the Ndebele and the Kalanga.

Assimilation to the dominant ethnic groups has been a challenge for the San people. Due to assimilation, they have lost their cultural identity and in the process their language has suffered the most, since it is even now facing extinction. It is believed that less than 20 people out of the population of around 1670 speak the Tswao language (Ndlovu 2010, 8).

THE ROLE OF THE TSO-RO-TSO SAN DEVELOPMENT TRUST (TSDT) IN THE SAN COMMUNITY

The role of TSDT in the San community is multifaceted. Whilst the National Archives of Zimbabwe may come into the community by documenting their history and other

cultural artefacts, the TSDT goes beyond that. It covers almost all social, economic and political aspects of the community. In fact, the TSDT is owned by the community. Not only does it document the history of the San community but the TSDT is also involved in the social development of the community. Not only is it concerned with the oral history testimonies of the community but it is an organisation which is there day in and day out in the locality.

Sometimes NAZ has found it difficult to gather oral testimonies for the minority groups, especially those who once suffered some form of “marginalisation” or trauma. The San community is one of those groups which does not easily open itself to the wider society, hence this plea by proponents of community archiving to allow the communities themselves to tell their stories. Again, oral history should not just end with oral testimonies stored in archival institutions. It should go beyond that, especially for those societies that once suffered trauma. It should heal, offer confidence and make the community realise that they are important and they have a worthy story to tell. Klopfer (2001) argues that therapeutic support should be offered for those silent groups when oral testimonies are gathered. Field (2012, 153) concurs by stating that “oral history will neither heal nor cure, but it offers subtle support to interviewees’ efforts to recompense their sense of self and to regenerate agency.” All this can be achieved if the “narrowness” of mind-set of some institutions concerned with oral history programmes is changed.

Sometimes archival institutions are concerned with filling the gaps in their collections but are not worried much about the people who are interviewed; their stories seem to matter more than their lives. Maybe through the adoption of a “communities telling their stories” approach, such issues can be addressed.

This approach seems to bear fruit in Zimbabwe if one looks at what the TSDT is doing for the San community. Not only has it collected voluminous oral testimonies for the San, some of which have even been donated to the NAZ, but it has also managed to address some of the social challenges faced by the community. TSDT has managed to lobby the Government of Zimbabwe to recognise the San language in the constitution. As this article was being written, the San language in Zimbabwe was being recognised as an official language. Language is very important in the development of society. Losing a language, irrespective of the number of speakers of that language, deprives humanity of a part of its universal human heritage insofar as the language embodies a unique worldview and knowledge of local ecosystems (Nettle and Romaine 2000, 5 in Maja 2008, 4). To see TSDT going beyond collecting oral testimonies by addressing language issues means, at the end of the day, that the community stands to benefit more from this community approach” methodology than from programmes that will only make contact with the people when they are interested in their stories.

Continuing with the issue of language, the San still do not have an official orthography. Bhebhe and Chirume (2014, 60) note that:

Through oral history interviews, one of the interviewees (Peter, Interview 22 June 2012) categorically stated that because of their poverty, the Ndebele and Kalanga people despised them

and in the process their language was looked down upon. For them, they were forced to learn Ndebele or Kalanga because they tended to work for these people in order to sustain themselves since their nomadic life was disrupted. Since the Ndebele people have cattle, milk and grain, the San women were indirectly forced to get married to the Ndebele and the Kalanga for survival. In these intermarriages, the San people lost control of their language as they ended up learning the Ndebele and Kalanga languages.

Not only does the TSDT document oral testimonies that lament the loss of the San language; it goes beyond that by trying to address the problem. This has seen TSDT working with other institutions such as the University of Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and other interested groups in trying to come up with an orthography for the San language, which will lead to the language being taught at schools, as one of the interviewed TSDT employees said. In addressing these language and educational challenges, the TSDT has even gone to the extent of building two Early Childhood Development (ECD) facilities for the San community, which in most cases has failed to be part of the education system in Zimbabwe. The TSDT has also managed to produce language resource book to try to make it possible for the San language to be taught in schools. This was said by one of the interviewed employees of the TSDT.

Most if not all of the challenges faced by the San people are related to their failure to enjoy their human rights. They have been the victims of land dispossession since the colonial period to present. They have failed to enjoy their educational rights, not to mention their failure even to speak their language. They are generally not involved in the mainstream programmes of the government. Therefore these human rights violations have seen the TSDT managing to bring San issues to the attention of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, which is mandated by the constitution to address any problems associated with human rights violations, as one of the interviewed TSDT employees explained.

Even when it comes to the oral testimonies collected by the TSDT, the end product is not just the deposition and accessioning of these testimonies. More is done. It is known that some of the contemporary challenges of oral history are the issues of use and accessibility. Regarding this issue, Thompson (1998, 27) argues that in most cases oral history testimonies are archived and forgotten after the interview, especially if it is just an "outsider" who is conducting those interviews. It is interesting to note that TSDT is addressing such challenges by producing publications of collected oral testimonies which are accessible to the general public. One such publication is the book entitled *Tsholotsho-Holoyahou-Tsorozho: A Journey into the San, Dlamini and Surrounding Communities*.

The San people are not well known by other communities in Zimbabwe in terms of their lifestyle. This has seen the mushrooming of myths, some of them derogatory, when it comes to their ethnographic characteristics. It is interesting therefore to see TSDT not only using oral history testimonies to dispel these myths but coming up with innovative ways to do that. For example, early in 2015, TSDT organised a roadshow from Bulawayo to Tsholotsho where the San community showcased their lifestyle,

culminating in an all-night festival in Tsholotsho where people were entertained with various traditional dances. TSDT has also participated in and commemorated the United Nations International Days of Indigenous Groups. All this has managed to bring to the fore and onto the national agenda issues that are faced by the San community in Zimbabwe.

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

This article argued for the use of oral history in documenting silent voices such as those of the San people of Tsholotsho. However it is now time to pause for other voices, which are raising doubts over the effectiveness of these remedies, to be heard. Todorov (2010, 7–8) cited in Wallace (2011, 9) argues that “memory remedy seems to be ineffective.” In relating this theme to the global experiences of indigenous people who have been the target of much historical violence and erasure, Smith (1999) was quoted by Wallace (2011, 9) philosophises:

Is history in its modernist construction important or not important for indigenous people? ... We assume that when “the truth comes out” it will prove that what happened was wrong or illegal and therefore the system (tribunals, the courts, the government) will set things right. We believe that history is also about justice, that understanding history will enlighten our decisions about the future. *Wrong*. History is also about power. In fact history is mostly about power, and then how they use their power to keep them in positions in which they can continue to dominate others. It is because of this relationship with power that [indigenous people] have been excluded, marginalised and “Othered.” In this sense history is not important for indigenous peoples because a thousand accounts of the “truth” will not alter the “fact” that indigenous people are still marginal and do not possess the power to transform history into justice.

In summary the argument being put forward by these scholars is that “remembering alone, whether forced or wilful, will not offer a path to rectifying past evils” (Wallace, 2011, 9). However, taking all this into cognisance, it is important for archivists and others working in related disciplines to continue engaging with the politics of the memory as other studies have shown that remembering can have therapeutic results and therefore bringing some “closure” to heinous crimes that have been committed to mankind.

It is very interesting to note that there are some scholars who appear to be against this emphasis on favouring ethnic groups' archival systems. Ketelaar (2012, 30) argued that:

Archival documents are boundary objects, shared across the boundaries of different communities, even though each community will probably seek to use them in different and perhaps competing ways (Yeo, 2010). Each of these communities of memory of suffering as a sacred asset, to be framed in a space only trusted and accessible for members of their own group (Misztal, 2004). This “ethnization of memory” (Corkalo et al, 2004 p157) may lead to ‘ghettoization of history’ (Williams 2007, p168). Archives, however, cannot be split up according to the ethnic, religious, or political provenance of the perpetrators, victims, or witnesses (Ketelaar 2009a). Archivists should be vigilant and ensure that appropriation of archives by a particular group or

for a particular cause does not endanger the integrity of the archives and the rights of other users, now and in the future (Cox 2009).

This is exemplified by the National Archives of Australia (NAA) turning down the proposal to transfer Aboriginal archives to the indigenous community claiming that by doing so these archives will lose their context and become meaningless. In the words of Jankie and Lacovino (2011, 166), “the NAA noted that practical problems in isolating indigenous records and transferring would render the records meaningless and less useful. Whilst it did not support transfer, it did support copying”.

THE OPINION OF THE ARCHIVIST

Archival institutions are “notoriously” known as instruments that can violently erase other groups of people from the national memory, as this article has tried to show. Archives can be loci to replicate the biases and erasures of the past (Wallace 2011, 8). Butler (2009, 58), coming from the critical perspective of cultural heritage discourse, apprehends the archive as both a technology of disinheritance and one of potential inclusion and re-inheritance. It is therefore the argument of this article that while archival institutions in Zimbabwe have been found wanting in disinheriting archiving minority groups, they can still undo the damage by partaking in oral history methodologies that favour the “marginalised” communities to play a leading role in the documentation of their testimonies and therefore give them back their disinherited heritage.

It is undeniable that constitutionally mandated departments such as archival institutions and other heritage management portfolios play a major role in filling the gaps, especially those of minority groups, when it comes to a nation's history. However, it should be noted and emphasised that these institutions in most cases are not worried much about the people in these communities but they are “only” interested in their stories and in updating their collections. It therefore becomes necessary to note that this is not enough. Oral history can do more than that. It can even offer therapeutic treatment to those who were involved in traumatic incidents. Oral history is a powerful tool that can bring confidence to those communities that feel despised and marginalised. All this can be achieved by giving room to the communities to tell their stories themselves without having “the big brother” to dictate who, how and what should be noted in an oral history programme.

Even those archival documents, oral history recordings included, found at mandated archival institutions are in most cases not accessed by these minority groups, as this researcher has observed. This seems to be the issue again with the indigenous people of Australia as Jankie and Lacovino (2011) quoting an ALRC Report (1998, 356) noted by arguing that “many indigenous people feel that is unjust that records of great sensitivity and importance to them should be owned by non-indigenous organisations and people. The records are often held far away from the communities to which they relate.” This then brings us to the core of this article: that if local communities are given a leading

role in documenting their testaments, as Thompson has argued, then such problems as mentioned by the ALRC Report will be greatly reduced.

This article selected two cases in order highlight what can be achieved when communities are given a leading role in telling their oral testimonies. Whereas it should be noted that there are still challenges with this approach such as lack of funding, the benefits seem to far outweigh the limitations. This is so because the community does not just collect to archive the oral testimonies but it appears that it goes beyond that by trying all means possible to make that information public knowledge. It brings a sense of ownership to the community, therefore boosting their confidence, because of finally noting that they can be the authors of their history.

What the mandated archival institutions can do in this context of supporting local communities in telling their stories as Jankie and Lacovino (2011, 166) put it, is

to assist the recording of indigenous culture by indigenous people, not just as authors of books, but also as filmmakers, sound recordists and database owners. There will be new challenges for archival institutions to take copies or custody of this material, without taking ownership ...A central depository [like a legally mandated national archive] may be the place for safekeeping if something happens to the site or office where the information is held.

CONCLUSION

It has been observed, as this article has tried to argue, that mandated archival institutions are not doing enough when it comes to the documentation of minority groups. Those that are doing something are usually faced with challenges of using “proper” methodologies in documenting the voices of the minority groups. In Zimbabwe, it has been noted by this researcher that the voices of minority groups, especially those of indigenous groups such as the San people, are “stifled,” “silenced” and “ignored” in the historical national narrative. Where attempts have been made to document the oral testimonies of the minority groups, challenges have been met as those people are not willing to cooperate, one of the reasons being that the language of the interviewer is used while that of the interviewee is discarded. This becomes a source of animosity between the archivist and the interviewee.

Another reason is that in the planning phase, archivists fail to factor out how they are going to deal with trauma as most of these minority groups in Zimbabwe were once victims of traumatic experiences involving the liberation war and civil strife, which, in most cases, involved state violence against defenceless citizens. This then leads the affected communities to barricade themselves against outsiders and to prefer to remain silent, as has been noted with the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) cadres. This can be summed up as motivated forgetting in order to induce self-preservation or protection from the memory of trauma.

It is therefore the recommendation of this article that local communities be encouraged and allowed to tell their testimonies, with the mandated archival institutions such as the National Archives of Zimbabwe playing only a periphery role.

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