

Documentation and Memorialisation of the First Battles against Colonisation in Zimbabwe

Niya Mtombeni

Great Zimbabwe University
+263 773043864 /+263 715108028
niyam@gzu.ac.zw

Vimbai M. Matiza

Midlands State University
+263 773747808/ +263 715195287
matizavm@staff.msu.ac.za/matizavimbo@gmail.com

Abstract

The first few years of British occupation in Zimbabwe was characterised by power struggle between the indigenous population groups who were dissatisfied with systematic settler style of dispossessing them of their wealth and power. The result was local and regional wars, (Rebellions/ Uprisings/ Umvhukela/ 1st Chimurenga). After the war, the British South African Company (BSAC) documented and memorialised most prominent battles of the conflict and yet the indigenous people who could not read and write could not do the same. The article seeks to motivate Zimbabweans to recognise the participation of the indigenous people into this conflict as a historic event whose documentation and memorialisation is an important component of the liberation heritage of Zimbabwe. The documentation and memorialisation of the conflict by the other belligerent is enough authentication that the indigenous people staged a brave and heroic fight which doubtlessly was characterised by commitment to a genuine cause of the black people to protect their birth right. It is only the inability to read and write of our ancestry which has mandated us to accept the description of the era as a dark history, which is worthy documentation and memorialisation for the benefit of the present and future generation. The researchers employed qualitative research method of acquiring data through desktop research and observation techniques. The article came to conclusion that the war between Zimbabwe and the then Rhodesia and their opponents should be documented so as to assist the present generation appreciate the history of the nation and preserve their heritage.

Keywords: Colonisation; Documentation; Memorialisation; Liberation Heritage; Dark History

Introduction

The urge to honour the dead and remember violent struggles is as prevalent as the impulse to try to repress terrible memories and move on. Societies around the world undertake memorial activities to preserve historical memory relating to traumatic events. Documentation and memorialisation of the first battles against colonialism

has been given impetus by the fact that there was war which was fought during that time. This is manifested by the idea that some battle sites have been documented and memorialised by the other forces. The indigenous people's efforts are not recognised hence the history of the struggle during that time seems to be dark and yet that is the starting point of the history of the struggle for liberation. The same idea is cemented by Ranger when he says, 1st *Chimurenga* was dark history which was neither documented nor memorialised but it was the first confrontation which the indigenous people had with the colonial settlers. In light of this, the fact that it was the first time for the indigenous people to have an encounter with the white people is worthy documenting and memorialising. Thus Tamale and Bennett (2011) posit that the importance of documentation stretches to the point that whether victory is won or not, it is extremely important to carefully document these processes. This article initiates a discussion into the documentation and memorialisation of the first battles against colonisation in order to remove this dark nature which is associated with this type of history. Scholars, academics and researchers should be well versed with this particular history and its documentation and memorialisation should be done for the benefit of the future generation of Zimbabwe and for posterity.

The history of the liberation war in Zimbabwe has generated a lot of debate and gained so much attention because it has made the people of Zimbabwe owners of their land. This means that the history to do with the land is so important that it should not be taken for granted. The documentation and memorialisation of the first battles of colonisation has perpetrated the negative way of viewing Zimbabwe's history. The fact that some of the important issues that concern people were not documented made the colonisers to think that Zimbabwe had no history. Their failure to read and write necessitated the need for this study. This article advocates for the documentation and memorialisation of these sites so that the future generations would appreciate the origins and fruits of the struggle for independence in Zimbabwe. Brookner (1981, p. 5) argues that, 'once a thing is known it can never be unknown. It can only be forgotten. In a way that bends time, so long as it is remembered, it will indicate the future. It is wiser, in every circumstance to forget, to cultivate the art of forgetting. To remember is to face the enemy. The truth lies in remembering'. It is against this background that the researchers desire to cultivate the spirit of remembering by documentation and memorialisation of the first battles of colonialism in Zimbabwe.

The indigenous battles fought in the first rebellion against colonisation are regarded as the dark history in Zimbabwe because these battles are not documented for the sake of recognition by future generations. Against such a background, the article is advocating for the documentation and memorialisation of these events so as to keep the memory lane fresh and to be appreciated by people of different generations. Liberation heritage is key to the development of Zimbabwe as a nation. When these war sites are built and constructed, they will create and reproduce particular histories of the nation and mark occasions that constitute nationalist consciousness. Featuring specific events for celebration, they produce occasions for

observing the institutional formations that construct as well as contest hegemonic national narratives.

The efficacy of documenting and memorialising liberation war sites

Christiansen (2009) in his article 'Zimbabwe's liberation struggles recycled', has dealt much about how the liberation struggle of the country can be remembered in various political ways. In his article, he is inspired by the way in which liberation war history has been politicised in Zimbabwe over years. In his discussion the history he is referring to does not date back to the first battles which is the solid ground for this research to be done because already scholars and academics are basing their researches from documented history and yet there is the other side of the struggle which has not been documented hence, the impetus of this study.

Ereshnee Naidu of the centre of the study of violence and reconciliation in Braamfontan notes that memorialisation takes a variety of forms serving as an umbrella concept encompassing a range of processes to remember and commemorate. This idea brings out the point that putting up some memorial sites helps people to remember and in a way commemorate their heroes. Memorialisation then becomes a process that satisfies the desire to honour those who suffered or died during conflict and becomes means of examining the past. In light of this view, this study is done as a way of establishing efforts to memorialise and document the first battles against colonialism in Zimbabwe as they constitute a very fundamental history of the people. During this process, the past can be reinterpreted to address a wide range of political or social needs. The idea of memorialising then represents a powerful arena of contested memory and offers the possibility of aiding the formation of new national, community and ethnic identities.

Interestingly, Saunders (2009) in the article issues in writing on liberation struggle in Southern Africa, laments the idea that researches on the history of the struggles has received less attention in Southern Africa let alone Zimbabwe. In this regard, he mentions that (2009, p. 60) '... little of the writing on liberation struggles in Southern Africa was scholarly and much of it was highly polemical though of course there were exceptions'. This can easily be deduced that it is as a result of failure by the indigenous people of Zimbabwe to document their experiences of the first battle hence there was little effort put in researching in the area. It is as a result of this that the present study has been necessitated by the idea that there is need for the documentation of memorialisation of the first battles against colonialism.

Furthermore, Vamik Volkan, professor emeritus of the University of Virginia points out that many memorials honour ruling parties or victors in a conflict at the expense of losers or marginalised communities. The dark side of memorialisation involves efforts to use memories of the past to fan the flames of ethnic hatred, consolidate a group's identity as victims, demarcate the differences among identity groups and reify grievances. In short what this means is that regardless of what form it takes, memorialisation is a highly political process that is shaped by those in power. In relation to this study, it can be concluded that the memorials which were

put up after the first battles were put by the whites who were in power during that time hence substantiating the above view. This is the reason why the history is classified as dark history because it was not documented thus, this article aims to push the documentation and memorialisation of these first battles against colonisation.

Moreso, Feldman (2006) in his article, discusses claiming a past, making a future with reference to the liberation war museum of Dhaka in Bangladesh. He states that the museum in Dhaka was set up twenty-five years after independence. This is quite a long time but the most important thing is that the consortium of people who established it felt that history should be recorded for the purposes of future reference. This implies that the article is considering the documentation and memorialisation of the first battles as a measure to remove the stereotype of 'dark history' which is associated with that particular time. The process of recording also helps in the sense that the memories of the liberation war will be perpetuated so that future generations can 'know our rich heritage... draw... inspiration and pride to build a better future and pay homage to the great martyrs, the freedom fighters and people all over the world, who supported the Liberation War in 1971', (Feldman, 2006).

Tamale and Bennett (2011) argue that documentation is an integral part of communication. This is because when works are documented then the history and information on those documentaries are communicated to the generations to come. Documentation is an important and necessary element in the overall struggle of any social movement; it captures the complexity of historical process and social change and it is from this that people and movements can reflect and learn. In relation to this, the two authorities allude to the idea that whether victory is won through the enactment and enforcement of new women-friendly laws or via strategic action litigation, it is extremely important to carefully document these processes. The documentation referred to here, encompasses much more than simply an archival project. The documentation itself may take the form of paper or electronic (digital) files, microfilms, booklets, newsletters, photographs, audio or video recordings, art, blogs, music or any other media. It is also important that documentation goes beyond academic papers to include more popular and accessible forms. This article therefore, in a bid to communicate the history of the people to different generations is advocating for the documentation and memorialisation of the first battles against colonisation.

Documentation and Memorialisation defined

The terms documenting and memorialisation are two words which almost share the same meaning. They are defined in this section so as to guide the people to understand the concepts. In the case of this article these two words are key to the discussion hence they are defined to gain more insight on the topic under study.

Documentation is any communicable material that is used to describe, explain or instruct regarding some attributes of an object, system or procedure, such as its parts, assembly, installation, maintenance and use. *Documentation* consists of conducting interviews and focus group discussions and collecting written and

audio-visual material. Tamale and Bennett (2011) argue that documentation is a process of forming a reference record that can be used by future change agents in building the movement and in the forging of potential coalitions; they will know what worked and what did not within a given context. Hence, documentation provides retrospective wisdom, allowing for the “institutionalisation of memory” and saving future activists from “reinventing the wheel.” The concept of documenting creates an opportunity for marginalised groups to reflect upon their position and stimulates their collective introspection, discussion and action (what Paulo Freire termed praxis). Documentation provides the tools for such groups to visualise and interact with their social problems through various media, spurring them into further action. The fact that the first battles against colonialism are not documented limits the indigenous people to celebrate their past in a way demeaning their efforts thus the paper is raising awareness for the memorialisation of these events. Documentation serves to memorialise and celebrate the legacy of ordinary people that did extraordinary things in the struggle for liberation.

On the other hand, memorialisation has been defined by Barsalou and Baxter (2007) as a process that honor those who suffered or died during conflict and as a means to examine the past and address contemporary issues. It can either promote social recovery after violent conflict ends or crystallise a sense of victimisation, injustice, discrimination and the desire to revenge. This then means that when these sites are not clearly documented and memorialised, it will send a different and a wrong assumption of the people concerned just like the way the history of that phase is called dark. Furthermore, McCann (2013) views it as the process of developing public sites where societies affected by violence can reflect on and preserve memories of their past. It often forms part of broader ways of helping people come to terms with and comprehend what has happened. But memorialisation is about more than paying respects to the victims of past violence. It also has a key role to play in preventing conflict, according to Williams Nkurunziza, the Rwandan High Commissioner. Of course, there is more to memorialisation than just physical memorials, as chair of the debate and acting head of human rights at the Commonwealth Karen McKenzie pointed out: “It’s also about archiving, digitising, ensuring access in the future to what happened in the past.”

Research Methodology

This article sought to consider the documentation and memorialisation of the first battles against colonisation by the indigenous people. The indigenous people being referred to here are the Zimbabwean population. The investigation employed the survey research design and used the triangulation technique. The investigators analytically observed that the first battles which were fought by the indigenous people and their counterparts were documented and memorialised by the other group (whites) which shows that there was really contact between these people. Much of the information in this study was gathered through reviewing of related literature since most of the indigenous people who were involved in these struggles

have since died. Even though literature to do with these memorials was analysed, it was that which was documented by the whites. They had the resources to do that at the expense of the indigenous people. Observation method was also done especially in the areas where the memorials are put. These observations helped the researchers to read the contents on the inscriptions.

Findings and Discussion

From the findings that the researchers established in this study, documentation and memorialisation calls for accountability. It is a situation where one has to keep the history in memorials for the purposes of future recognition. According to Pierre Nora (1989), when real memory is erased, we create *lieux de mémoire*, which give voice to ethnic minorities, families, or groups who possess “reserves of memory but little or no historical capital” (1989, p. 7). In his account, he draws suggestive distinctions between memory and history:

Memory is life ... [i]t remains in permanent evolution, open to a dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation, and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived ... History ... is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond trying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past ... [it] belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority (1989, pp. 8-9).

In the case of the first battles against colonialism, the history of that time is referred to as dark now and yet there was contact between the indigenous people and the colonialists. For example, the battle at Shangani (the Pongo memorial) was recorded even though the whites erected this memorial to cherish their defeat but it was important to them. It is against this idea that if they could have these memorial sites to cherish their defeat what more would the black person feel if these memorials are put up to cherish their victory? The fact that the other group has documented its own battles means that something really took place so the notion of dark history is nullified. From the above view by Nora (1989) it can be deduced that when memorials are a preserve of the few, they create the spirit of possession where the minority group will claim that they have a history at the expense of the other. In this case the minority white group who had the opportunity to record and write managed to document some of the battles they fought with the fellow indigenous people but the other group’s history is deemed dark. Nora (1989) notes:

The most fundamental purpose of the lieu de memoire is to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish a state of things, to immortalise death, to materialise the immaterial. . . It is also clear that lieux de emoire only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications.... [I]ndeed, it is the exclusion of the event that defines the lieu de memoire. Memory attaches itself to site, whereas history attaches itself to events

This cements the idea that documentation and putting up memorials is quite an important undertaking to adhere to especially in Zimbabwe where the history and the success of the country is attributed to the war of liberation.

Contemporary Zimbabwe (former Rhodesia) was a British colony from September 1890 to April 1980. The White Settlers consolidated their rule over the indigenous people through the use of military force despite the resistance which the black majority waged during the early wars of resistance of 1893 and 1896-7, also known as First Chimurenga. They are these first battles which have not received attention in terms of documentation and memorialisation for the benefit of the future generation. The researchers establish that although these were documented but the fact that the other group have done theirs, is evidence enough that something has happened so the need to document and memorialise these sites. During the Mid-1950s, the indigenous Zimbabweans embarked on reformist national politics which was meant to persuade the white settlers to give them majority rule through one-man one vote, to no avail. Instead, the minority white settlers continued to enact more repressive laws. In 1965 a renegade white extremist group under the leadership of Mr Ian Smith unilaterally declared independence from Britain. The move was a clear signal that the white settlers were not in a position to compromise their stance against the black majority's request for political reforms and this became one of the main causes of an armed struggle which ensued thereafter straddling between 1966 and 1979.

From the research findings it was established that, the period 1966 to 1979 witnessed one of the main historic events of the colonial era in the former British colony of Rhodesia, contemporary Zimbabwe. During this period, the black indigenous people decided to militarily confront the colonial white regime of Mr Ian Smith. The historic event known as the Zimbabwe War of Liberation or Second Chimurenga, took place between the Nationalist Forces and the Rhodesian Security Forces. The Nationalist Forces were divided into two groups, Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) commanded by Josiah Magama Tongogara and Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) commanded by Jaison Ziyapapa Moyo, on one hand, and the Rhodesian Security Forces commanded by General Peter Walls on the other. The Zimbabwe War of Liberation was a culmination of a deadlock between the nationalist politicians who had failed to successfully negotiate for some political reforms in favour of the black majority. When the two main nationalist political parties the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) led by the late Dr Joshua Mqhabuko Nkomo and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) first led by the late Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole (later led by Robert Gabriel Mugabe) realised that political negotiations were not yielding results and the intransigence of the white settler regime of Mr Ian Smith, especially after its Unilateral Declaration of Independence, they resorted to an armed conflict which lasted close to sixteen years.

Unlike most historic events or wars world over, the Zimbabwe War of Liberation is neither effectively nor accurately documented for posterity. The documentation which currently exists, is the one sided chronicle of the event which obviously has

bias in favour of the other belligerent, who had the documentation potential during and after the war. Thirty years after the conflict, the indigenous people who waged the bitter armed struggle, have no place where they can revive their memories about the Liberation War from. The other disturbing factor is that the generation which participated in the war did not have sufficient skills to document their war experiences due to depressed education levels as well as other restraints from the nature of the conflict and the result is that there is no first hand documentation of conflict from those who participated in the actual combat. The researchers established that the problem is further compounded by some pseudo historians whose documentation efforts have dented the zeal of the combatants to release information due to some unprofessional handling of the information which had been volunteered and given to some professional bodies in the few instances where documentation was attempted. In addition, the natural wastage rate over three decades has also unsparingly affected some of the vital sources of information.

Furthermore, it was observed that commemoration of the Zimbabwe War of Liberation is not institutionalised at local level, unlike in other nations where such events are commemorated through memorial museums or other monuments like war memorials. When the National Heroes Acre was established in 1982, the nation was made to understand that one of the features of that National Shrine was going to be a Revolutionary Museum dedicated to the country's revolution. In that Museum, a variety of war materials would be exhibited as a permanent record for posterity. But to date the latter has not materialised to fruition. Logical assumption is that if the museum had been established at the National Heroes Acre, then at least a gallery could have been dedicated to the War of Liberation since it is one of the primary events of the liberation struggle for Zimbabwe. Such an institution could have been a source of essential liberation war heritage value which would have filled the information gap which exists between the generation which waged the armed struggle and that of Zimbabweans born after 1980.

The inability by the present generation to document the Second Chimurenga battle sites poses the problem that future generations will fail to substantiate that the country's independence from white colonialists was won after a bitter war against the white minority regime of Mr Ian Smith. The realisation that there is little to virtually no documentation of the Zimbabwe Liberation battle sites has resulted in this research paper advocating for the proper documentation from the first battles up to the battles of the second Chimurenga for posterity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Having highlighted the above discussion, the article concludes that liberation war history is quite an important documentary in the Zimbabwean people's lives. The article has highlighted the role of documentation and memorialisation in preserving such a heritage amongst the people of Zimbabwe. When the memorialisation and documentation is done, class struggles will also be a perception of the past as everybody even those who are considered to be the low class would be seen

to have participated in a common cause. The article concludes that liberation war memorialisation and documentation is crucial because it forms the country's backbone to economic and political development thus, giving the nation the knowledge of what has transpired and in turn national identity is upheld.

The article recommends that liberation war memorials both for the first battles and second Chimurenga should be erected so that future generations and generations of children in Zimbabwe will appreciate the history of the country. The article also recommends that these memorials and documentations should be done at different levels, that is from local to national so as to accommodate everyone in the exercise and that everyone will have access to the information.

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