The microfilm of the new millennium: the digitization of the liberation struggle archives heritage in east and southern Africa[1]

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Abstract

New information and communication technologies have greatly affected archival institutions. It is therefore not surprising that the world of archival management has presently been confronted with many challenges as new technologies transform the archival landscape. Digital technologies are challenging custodians' abilities to preserve our archival heritage. This article provides an overview of digitization initiatives drawing, in the main, on a survey carried out in archival institutions within the east and southern African region. Modern technology has had a profound impact on how information is stored and accessed. A study carried out between 2006 and 2009 in heritage institutions, both private and public, with liberation struggle archives, within the Sub-Saharan region, revealed that digitization was the most widely used preservation strategy in the surveyed archival institutions. Resources permitting, archival institutions should adopt digitization for their liberation

struggle heritage as a reformatting strategy in order to counter the problem posed by deteriorating media. The methodologies employed for data gathering included a survey, observation and structured interviews. This article provides the reader with the findings of the research and the opinions of the researchers. However, this paper does not contend or claim to be exhaustive of all issues pertaining to digitization.

Introduction

The struggle to liberate the continent of Africa from colonialism was a profound and all-time consuming one for Africans during the second half of the twentieth century (Dominy 2004: 1) and as such this history needs to be documented accurately in whatever form for the benefit of posterity. Cabral (1972: 39) and Nzongola-Ntalaja (1987: 31) argued that the people's struggle for national liberation and independence from imperialist rule undoubtedly constitutes one of the essential characteristics of contemporary history.

Many African states hosted freedom fighters from Algeria in the north as well as Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana, the countries closest to the then apartheid South Africa. Many organizations supported the struggle, both within Africa and across the world and the geographic spread of this support in turn relates to the fact that records of these liberation movements were scattered globally. Moodley (1993:606), Namihla (2004: 226-227) and Johnstone (1987 cited in Mazarire 2002:40) correctly noted that black heritage resources have not only been marginalized but are also scattered all over the world. In addition, due to the nature of the conflict very few records were created because of the prevailing ethos of secrecy. Consequently, it is incumbent upon archivists and manuscript librarians to preserve the legacy of the liberation struggle that is contained in those few available records.

The Tchiweka Documentation Centre Project in Angola (2006), for instance, argued that the paucity of documents to have survived the turbulent process of the anti-colonial struggle and subsequent conflicts, largely explains why researchers and many institutions are increasingly concerned about the need to protect and conserve written and oral sources of information on the liberation struggle in southern Africa. It is therefore not surprising that one of the preservation strategies being employed by archivists and manuscript librarians to prolong the life of archival materials, is digitization. It can thus be argued that by digitizing the few records that are available, the use of surrogates may put

less strain on the originals in terms of physical handling thereby extending their life span.

The study from which this article is drawn was carried out between 2006 and 2009 in heritage institutions, both private and public, with liberation struggle archives, within the Sub-Saharan region, and investigated how these archival institutions were managing this archival material and the extent to which digitization was used as a preservation strategy in the surveyed archival institutions.

Concept of digitization

A definition of what constitutes digitization will suffice for clarity's sake. Pearce-Moses (2005) defined digitization as the process of transforming analog material into binary electronic (digital) form, especially for storage and use in a computer or as Wato (2002:126) and Ngulube (2002:71) have noted, the conversion of paper records into machine-readable format through scanning of the original document and storing the images in magnetic or optical media. Digitalization is sometimes incorrectly used as a synonym for digitization. Digitalization however refers to administration of the drug *digitalis*. Digital technology therefore refers to the design and construction of communications that transmit information in digital form. In other words, digitization involves creating an electronic record. The digitization process normally involves the use of either a digital camera or scanner, resulting in the creation of a 'digital object' (Muir and Astle 2002:67). Isaacman, Lalu and Nygren (2005:56) have noted that archivists, researchers and public intellectuals have begun a vigorous effort to preserve, digitize and disseminate on the web, collections of documents on the struggle for freedom in southern Africa. Accordingly therefore, it is appropriate to give a brief overview of these projects worldwide.

Liberation struggle projects

A number of projects worldwide are striving to capture the history of the liberation struggle and the next section gives an overview of some of the projects.

Southern African Development Community (SADC) project: a history of the liberation struggle in southern Africa

The Southern African Development Community through its history project aims at collecting the history of the liberation struggle in the southern African region. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) Liberation Committee was wound up in 1994 following South Africa's attainment of independence and the southern African Development Community (SADC) has thus taken up the task of documenting that history. The project is operational in Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In an inspirational address to researchers in 2005, Ambassador Hashim Mbita, the project's patron, stressed the need to:

> record the inspiration, commitment, determination, sacrifices, means, strategies and experiences gained at different stages. The decolonization struggle which engulfed the African continent during the last 60 years was basically won, though fought in various parts and against different colonizing powers. History should be reflected in proper perspective through the African eye because many a time it has been written from outside the continent (The SADC Today 2006).

The project was approved by the Summit of SADC Heads of State and Government when they met in Botswana in August 2005 to mark the Silver Jubilee of the regional community. The project is funded entirely by SADC governments (The SADC Today 2006), but not all governments are honoring their financial obligations which threaten the success of the project. In an address to member states, King Mswati of Swaziland appealed to member states for funding and pointed out that it was imperative to note that the Hashim Mbita research unit had submitted the draft chapters on the liberation of southern Africa to the SADC Secretariat during the period under review as part of progress made thereof (Give alms to Hashim Mbita project 2009).

The SADC Council of Ministers noted that significant progress had been made in the implementation of this project, documenting the history of the liberation struggle both from oral interviews with participants in the liberation struggle, as well as with various liberation movements' leaders, guerrilla fighters and supporters of the liberation struggle in their ranks. In addition, research has been carried out in the core countries in which liberation wars were waged, namely, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, as well as in the frontline states of Botswana, United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia, and the other SADC member states of Lesotho, Malawi and Swaziland.

The research has now progressed into other African countries and organizations outside the SADC Region and the world at large which supported and contributed in various ways, to the success of the liberation struggle (SADC

Council of Ministers 2009). However, the SADC has not yet embarked on digitization.

South African Research and Archival Project (SARAP)

The South African Research and Archival Project (SARAP) is located on the campus of Howard University in Washington, District of Columbia (DC). SARAP was designed to identify, locate, create inventories and disseminate information pertaining to the involvement of Americans in the liberation struggle of South Africans, especially during the anti-apartheid movement. Although the project focuses primarily on the African American role in the struggle against apartheid, the scope extends into southern Africa, where many South Africans migrated, settled, and continued their struggle for freedom. This project also extends to other parts of Africa as well as to Europe and the Americas, reflecting the global reach of South Africa's freedom struggle (South African Research and Archival Project 2001). SARAP has engaged in digitization as evidenced by their provision of online researchers' guides.

The University of Connecticut–African National Congress partnership

The history of this project is traced back to March 8, 1999 when the University of Connecticut signed a partnership agreement with the African National Congress (ANC) to promote international understanding and cooperation based on the principle of reciprocal learning and consultation. The Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Connecticut and the ANC established a number of initiatives including the creation of the Comparative Human Rights Programme, which later became the United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Chair and Institute of Comparative Human Rights, the ANC Archives Project, and the ANC Oral History Project (African National Congress Oral History Transcript Collection 2007).

The goals of the ANC Archives Project are to share knowledge and expertise in archival administration, as well as to acquire, make accessible, preserve and publicize materials dealing with the African National Congress and human rights.

African Activist project at Michigan State University

The African Studies Centre at Michigan State University has an African Activist Archive Project which seeks to preserve for history the record of activities of United States (US) organizations and individuals who supported

African struggles for freedom and had a significant collective impact on US policy during the period 1950 to 1994. The organizations and individuals include community activists, students, churches, unions, city and county councils, state governments, and others. The project focuses mainly (but not exclusively) on smaller local and regional organizations that supported the struggle against colonialism and white minority rule in Africa, especially in Angola, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe (African Activist Archive 2008).

The project is locating material produced by these organizations, preserving that material by placing it in archives at depository institutions, and producing a database directory of the organizations and material. Selected material is currently being digitized and placed on the World Wide Web in order to make the material available to scholars and others in the US and Africa (African Activist Archive 2008).

Nordic documentation on the liberation struggle in southern Africa under the auspices of the Nordic African Institute

The Nordic region played a crucial role in rallying international support for liberation in southern Africa. These disparate regions of the globe were linked together by long-standing missionary ties and the extensive mobilization by solidarity groups beginning in the 1960s. The governments of four countries, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark, provided support to the movements in southern Africa and were significant sources of financing for parallel efforts by the United Nations and for anti-apartheid organizations elsewhere, such as the International Defense and Aid Fund. A fifth Nordic country, Iceland, supported these initiatives despite its lack of direct involvement. In every sphere of activity except the military, the Nordic region was almost certainly the single most significant source of direct support for southern African liberation struggles in the 1970s and 1980s (Aluka – Nordic Africa Institute, National Liberation in southern Africa 2006-2008).

The Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), based in Uppsala, Sweden, has taken the lead in documenting this history, beginning with a research project conducted at NAI from 1994 to 2001 titled *The National Liberation of Southern Africa: the Role of the Nordic Countries* co-ordinated by Tor Sellström. The project has been financed by the Swedish Foreign Ministry and its mandate was to identify archives that documented the Nordic countries' involvement in the liberation struggles in southern Africa (Svard 2009: 1). The research project has published

five volumes on the theme. SWAPO Party Archives (SPARC) in Namibia and the Tchiweka Documentation Centre Project in Angola have received funding and capacity building support from NAI to digitize their liberation struggle heritage.

The NAI is continuing with research on the history of Nordic involvement in southern Africa and supports similar efforts by partners in southern Africa. The NAI is thus working with Aluka (see below for more on this project) to ensure that the efforts of each are complementary and consistent with long-term plans for capacity-building of their southern African partners (Aluka – Nordic Africa Institute, National Liberation in southern Africa 2006-2008).

Digital Innovation South Africa (DISA)

The DISA project is based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa and its mission is to digitize and make available online anti-apartheid journals and publications to the public worldwide. DISA makes use of digital technologies to promote the efficient and economical delivery of information resources to students, scholars, researchers and the wider community, locally and internationally (DISA 2010).

Aluka project

The name *Aluka*[2] is derived from the verb *ukuluka,* which in Zulu means 'to weave'. The choice of name reflects Aluka's overarching mission – of joining together in a single place resources from around the world. The Aluka Project, Struggles for Freedom in southern Africa, is in partnership with DISA (Lalu 2007: 29) and intends to stimulate debate on the liberation struggles and the analytical frameworks through which the freedom campaigns were originally studied and represented. The first phase of this project will focus on the freedom struggles in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa and Botswana. In a subsequent phase, the scope of the initiative will include Angola, Tanzania, Zambia and other countries in the region that figure prominently in the larger freedom struggle (Isaacman, Lalu and Nygren 2005: 56; Struggles for freedom in southern Africa 2007). The Aluka project is on-going and Harlow (2010), JSTOR's specialist in user services confirmed that the digitized collections remain available for access at www.aluka.org. A visit to the site seems to confirm this despite the reported challenges amid concerns that the project has stalled.

The liberation struggle living archive project

The focus of this project is to digitize audio-visual archival material of the post-colonial liberation struggles in South Africa. The Liberation Struggle Living Archive Project intends to preserve crucial audio-visual archives and to develop resources on the history of the South African liberation struggle into a digital format and to make them accessible and to utilize these digital archives to create interactive knowledge environments. The Liberation Struggle Living Archive Project is a joint initiative between Doxa Productions, the Centre for Humanities Study (CHS) at the University of the Western Cape, the French Audiovisual National Institute (INA) and DISA (Digital Innovation South Africa) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (South African Liberation Struggle Living Archive Collection 2008).

Dutch anti–apartheid and southern Africa solidarity archive project

In March 2008 the Netherlands institute for southern Africa (NiZA) handed over to the International Institute for Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam, the archives and related documentation collections of the former Dutch anti-apartheid groups which merged into NiZA in 1997. In order to realize the transfer of the NiZA collection, its description and integration into the IISH holdings, an extensive project was commissioned running from April 2008 to April 2011.

The focus of this project is on anti-apartheid material from organizations such as the South Africa Committee (from the 1960s), the Dutch Anti-Apartheid Movement, the Angola Committee/Holland Committee on southern Africa, the Eduardo Mondlane Foundation, Institute for southern Africa and Broadcasting for Radio Freedom. The archives and collections cover the period 1960 to 2000. The documentation currently being digitized is made up of a large number of books, journals, photographs, posters and hundreds of videos, cassettes, badges, flags, T-shirts and other memorabilia (International Institute of Social History 2009).

The Tchiweka documentation centre project

The Tchiweka Centre in Angola is a private repository documenting materials collected by Lucio Lara in order to preserve and inform about the history of the liberation struggle in Angola. Plans have been mooted to transfer Lucio Lara's

collections to the National Historical Archive of Angola in the near future, once it has suitable premises and better conditions for housing this kind of archive. The project aims at digitizing documents in order to make them readily available to the public. To date, the project has digitized photographs and documents in spite of financial and administrative problems (The Tchiweka Documentation Centre Project 2008).

SWAPO Party Archive (SPARC)

SPARC, the SWAPO Party Archive Centre, is a modern digital archive containing the history of the liberation struggle in Namibia from 1960 to 1990. The archive is open to the public and aims to preserve the historic documentation for posterity. The archives contain written documentation, photographs and audio- visual material. SPARC is a state-of-the-art archive which is fully digitizing all material in its possession (SWAPO Party Archive Centre 2009).

The fact that there is an impressive catalogue of liberation struggle projects demonstrates the importance attached to this emancipation crusade. This article therefore highlights the findings of the study and underscores the view that noble as the reformatting strategy is, in so far as digitization is concerned there are pitfalls that need to be safeguarded against to ensure that proper professional care is taken of the liberation struggle heritage. In addition some commentators view this digitization as cultural imperialism. The digitization of liberation struggle archives is a site of contestation in view of the politicization that has been synonymous with the process particularly on matters of access and copyright restrictions. In other words, through externally controlled digitization, Africa's cultural heritage is made vulnerable to commercial exploitation by people in the North thus entrenching the digital divide. It remains a fact that most digitization initiatives in Africa are donor funded. Donors have their own interests and agendas and the temptation of financial aid might lead to a new form of imperialism (Britz and Lor 2003; Limb 2005; Pickover 2005; Lalu 2007; Saunders 2007; Lor 2008; Page-Shipp 2009).

Purpose, objectives and research question for the study

The purpose of this study was to identify and locate where these archives of national liberation movements reside and to examine whether they are being managed throughout their lifecycle. To achieve this purpose, one of the research objectives that guided the study was the need to assess the extent of the use of

digitization processes to enhance preservation and access to the records. Accordingly, the research question guiding the study was as follows: have ICTs provided new opportunities for the management of the liberation struggle records?

Methodology

This paper relied on a multiple research approach. It used the survey method with a self-completion questionnaire[3] and interviews directed to manuscript librarians, archivists and directors of both private and national archival institutions as the key sources of data. Within the Sub-Saharan region, both public and private archival institutions have custody of the liberation heritage and so do individuals who were stalwarts of the struggle. In order to establish how these archival institutions were managing this archival material in as far as their digitization efforts were concerned, a questionnaire was distributed to the 23 institutions which hold this material. The survey method, with a self-completion questionnaire as the major tool for data collection, was deemed appropriate as it was successfully used by Seton (1984) to gather data on the principal categories of private archives. In addition, Mazikana (1995) and Ngulube (2005) used questionnaires to collect data on the preservation of archival collections.

Within the context of this study, the set of specifications were the twelve national archives' repositories within the east and southern African region and archival repositories housing the records of former national liberation movements within east and southern Africa. As for the former, the countries were as follows: Angola, Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The one set in the population was derived from the ESARBICA website (ESARBICA 2004). The other set in the population were the archival repositories housing the records of former national liberation movements within east and southern Africa and the focus here was on the ANC struggle records and archives (seven in all),[4] FRELIMO, MPLA, SWAPO, ZANU PF and ZIPRA archives. Archivists, manuscript librarians and directors of archival institutions were interviewed and a physical inspection of the facilities and the state of the records was also undertaken.

Findings

The findings of the research revealed the following:
A significant number of respondents, eight (88.9%) acknowledged that they did not have written policies for managing digital records compared to one (11.1%) that had despite the fact that they were digitizing their collections. It can be concluded that digital technology was still in its infancy and was thus slowly making significant inroads in archival institutions. It has been argued that the computer has brought a more significant paradigm shift to society than any other technology since the invention of the printing press (Millar 2003) and this impact has also had a bearing on archival institutions. The surveyed organizations were embracing the new technologies in search of permanence for their records.

Seven (77.8%) of the nine institutions confirmed they had digital material pertaining to liberation struggle archives but lacked the technical capacity to read and access it, compared to two (22.2%) who had the capacity. This technical incapacitation was mostly encountered with microfilm, reel-to-reel tapes and floppy disks which is concrete evidence that the products of computer technologies are extremely fragile and their life span as accessible records unknown. This finding shows that archival institutions are still grappling with preservation problems.

Two (22.2%) of the surveyed institutions reported that they were migrating their records to new platforms compared to five (55.6%) that did not confirm that their equipment and expertise were severely lacking in this area. This finding was corroborated by Mnjama (2007) who noted in his study of university libraries within the Sub-Saharan region that most institutions expressed an interest in digitizing their collections, but lacked the equipment or other resources.

Technological obsolescence and lack of resources were considered by five (55.6%) institutions as constituting the major threats to the survival of digital records. These problems largely explained why donor assistance was sought. Evidence of such assistance was found in the donor-funded state of the art equipment used to build up the digitization infrastructure observed in visited institutions. This trend epitomized the shift from physical repositories to archives without walls – the virtual world.

Accordingly, the digital archive at these institutions had an orientation towards storage, use, and accessibility of audio-visual, photo, audio, and electronic documents. Resources were available in various information carrier formats. For audio-visual documents: motion pictures - 35mm; 16mm; 8mm; super8mm; videocassettes (VHS); BETACAM SP; DVCAM; mini-DV; Hi8; DVD-R. For photo documentation: CD-R; magneto-optical disks (MO) and negatives. For phonographic documents: magnetic tapes 6.25mm and 35mm; audiocassettes; videocassettes (VHS); matrixes (metallic discs); vinyl records; CD-R; DAT cassettes; mini discs (MD) and DVD-ROM discs. For electronic documents: CD-R; CD-RW; DVD+R; DVD-RW and MO. In addition, the state-of-the-art equipment and the interactive nature of their websites were impressive.

Discussion and recommendations

The advent of information communication technologies has had a transformative influence on the archival operations of the surveyed institutions. Reed (2006: 117) correctly observed that no cultural heritage institution can afford to postpone the challenges of managing digital artifacts. The large-scale digitization projects currently underway reflect the fact that digitization is either functional or preservation orientated. Functional digitization is aimed at improving the ease of large scale access to materials already in regular and fairly widespread use. Wilford (2008) submitted that the documentary material is now being delivered by electronic caravan, meaning that it is travelling to remote places. Roberto (2008:225) pointed out that the online digital world provides numerous opportunities for the archival profession – opportunities that professionals should take or make for themselves. Taking responsibility requires taking an active role in the process of collecting and constructing the archival heritage.

Functional digitization is evidence of public programming as the majority of the surveyed institutions stated that through digitization, they wanted to ensure access to archival resources irrespective of location. Page-Shipp (2009:25) and Mnjama (2009) have argued that this was a worthwhile endeavor, considering that collections that remain sequestrated provide no value to anyone barring the few who can afford to travel to the source and overcome the resistance of collection guardians. Conversely, some archival institutions hold the view that making their resources available online deprives them of much needed revenue as researchers will no longer be required to pay research fees as they will be able to access material from the comfort of their homes, offices and so on.

On the other hand, preservation orientated digitization is targeting unstable materials prone to deterioration and technological obsolescence but digitization is not a recommended preservation strategy. Still others view this digitization as cultural imperialism as noted above (Britz and Lor 2003; Limb 2005; Pickover 2005; Lalu 2007; Saunders 2007; Lor 2008; Page-Shipp 2009).

Depending on the angle at which one looks at digitization, the onset of new technologies can be seen as a double edged sword as there are a number of positive and negative benefits that can be harnessed in order to put the information profession on a sound footing thereby safeguarding the liberation struggle heritage.

The conclusion that can be reached is that the leap into the info-tech world, whilst welcome, has its own fair share of challenges and provides archivists and manuscript librarians with numerous challenges. This conclusion could be the reason explaining why donor assistance was welcomed.

Appropriate procedures that need to be adopted include countries developing national policies on the digitization of the heritage sector to regulate best practice. Allied to these national policies is the need for further research to establish an ethically grounded middle road that satisfies all stakeholders including researchers, the public and archivists. This middle road might for example embrace the accessibility which digitization offers while not neglecting the irreplaceable uniqueness of the hard copy, the original record, not to mention keeping in sight the fact that many of those with an interest in the records (ordinary citizens without internet access or computer literacy, for example) may be excluded by an over-reliance on digitization.

It remains an established fact that digitization raises considerable preservation problems and Smith (1999; cited in Ngulube 2002) argued that digitization has made a challenging preservation problem worse. It is therefore recommended that archivists should marry digitization with microfilm whereby digitization is mostly used for access whilst microfilm is used for preservation. Shep and Gorman (2006:188) noted that due to the uncertainty of the stability of optical disk technology, it is likely that hybrid systems (microform and optical disks) will be the order of the day for some time to come. The recognition and implementation of these hybrid documentary strategies will ensure that the liberation struggle heritage is safely captured for the benefit of posterity irrespective of the problematic nature of the medium and its content. Archival institutions are also encouraged to migrate their records to new hardware and software platforms for compatibility purposes. Heslop, Davies

and Wilson (2002) rightly pointed out that in view of the fact that technology cycles are short, it therefore follows that product lifetimes also tend to be short. The implications of this largely market-driven instability are two-fold: rapid decay and technological obsolescence. The intervention by archivists and manuscript librarians to preserve the source and process is therefore called for and this is realized by establishing a constant media refreshing programme in order to ensure the survival of digital material.

It is proposed that archival institutions adopt the two long-term preservation approaches often advocated within the archival and library preservation communities, namely migration and emulation. Migration is the process of converting a digital object from one data format to another. Generally, archivists use migration as a way of ensuring the accessibility of a digital record when the software it depends upon becomes obsolete. Concern has been raised that some attributes of the record may be lost during the conversion process and therefore the record so created may not be authentic or equivalent to the original. Heslop, Davis and Wilson (2002) argued that the level of data loss through migration depends on the number of preservation treatments applied to the record, the choice of process, the new data format, the level of human intervention and post-migration descriptive work.

On the other hand, emulation is an approach which keeps the source digital object in its original data format but recreates some or all of the processes required to view it (for instance, the hardware configuration or software applications such as operating systems), enabling the performance to be recreated on current computers (Heslop, Davis and Wilson 2002; Williams 2006:193). Advocates of the emulation approach often maintain that the exact 'look and feel' of the record must be preserved, and that recreating the exact functionality of the original process is the best way of doing this. The 'look and feel' includes not only the content of the record, but also the tangible aspects of its presentation, such as color, layout and functionality.

It should however be pointed out that both approaches have their limitations in terms of sustainability, 'look and feel' and accessibility. Migration and emulation require a large amount of resources upfront and over the long-term. Migration involves intensive cyclical work to convert objects in obsolete format to current formats whilst emulation requires highly skilled computer programmers to write the emulator code and sophisticated technologies to deal with any intellectual property and copyright issues that may arise when emulating proprietary software.

In view of the fact that most archival institutions are operating on shoe string budgets, these approaches would be unsustainable. In terms of the 'look and feel' issue, neither approach (migration and emulation) has an informed, formal mechanism for capturing this aspect. Furthermore, in terms of access, emulation requires one to have access to the emulation environment on the computer and to learn the original computing environment. These restrictive requirements however, give migration the advantage as fewer specialized skills or software are required to make records accessible.

Suggestions for future research

In terms of future research:

- There is a need to research more on digitization as a preservation strategy thereby identifying how far this method can go in terms of providing long term maintenance of the records. The paucity of reliable information on the management of digital objects within ESARBICA is because preservation efforts are biased towards paper records and archives;
- There is a need for a study that examines the role of historians and ICT professionals in archival management issues particularly on ethical matters concerning preservation;
- Further research should be conducted on records of social movements, pressure groups and voluntary organizations that do not fall under the genre of liberation struggle archives. The precise definition of the national liberation movement is fraught with complexities in view of the variables involved;
- There is a need for more research to establish how outsourcing is assisting in digitization and the extent of the availability of outsourcing facilities;
- Further research should also establish how donor funding is impacting on digitization projects and this could possibly help clarify some of the outstanding issues surrounding the technical, political and social implications synonymous with digitization and;
- There is a need for more research to examine how advocacy and awareness efforts can be bettered in order to regain the confidence of liberation struggle veterans, their associations or families for them to access these private materials (Mazarire 2009). The feasibility of creating alternative repositories that compliment whatever efforts have been in place to archive this liberation heritage needs to be explored and given serious thought.

Conclusion

Archival materials, be they in paper or magnetic format will lose their stability and deteriorate sooner or later (Weber 1999). Although resources are limited, archival institutions should commit themselves to preserving the liberation struggle heritage for the benefit of posterity. Reformatting through digitization provides a solution to addressing preservation problems posed by deteriorating media. Digitization is the catch phrase in archival preservation today. The onset of digital technology, whilst still in its infancy has transformed the archival landscape and the majority of archival institutions must strive to ensure that they remain relevant in these changing times. The conclusion that can be drawn is that the popularity of digitization is in line with the dictates of information communication technology and it can therefore be argued that digitization is the microfilm of the new millennium.

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Endnotes

[1] This article is drawn from a PhD thesis entitled; An investigation into the management of the records and archives of former liberation movements in east and southern Africa held by national and private archival institutions (submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal in February 2010 under the co-supervision of Prof. C. Stilwell and Prof. P. Ngulube).

[2] In Oshivambo, spoken in parts of Namibia, the word means 'to return' or possibly, 'to repatriate'.

[3] The survey instrument used for this study is available from the researchers upon request.

[4] The seven archival institutions housing ANC archives are:

African National Congress Archives

Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg)

Digital Innovation South Africa (DISA)

Gandhi-Luthuli Documentation Centre (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Westville)

Liberation Archives - University of Fort Hare

Nelson Mandela Foundation

University of the Western Cape (UWC). Robben Island Mayibuye Archives