

“KEEPING THE FLAME ALIVE” COMMEMORATION IN AN EX-RHODESIAN DIASPORA COMMUNITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

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In 1990 ex-Rhodesians—white former colonials who have emigrated from Zimbabwe after its independence in 1980—organized a commemorative event in South Africa in order to celebrate the Centenary of the founding of Rhodesia. In spite of the fact that Rhodesia no longer exists, it continues to have intrinsic weight in the present lives of former Rhodesians. It is held close by social memory practices, which are fundamental to how the diaspora community comes to understand itself and its place in the world. This article examines social memory practices in the context of the Centenary celebrations. The festivities involved the creation of an imaginary Rhodesianland in a holiday resort in South Africa. The key event during the festivities was the re-enactment of the arrival of the Pioneer Column in Fort Salisbury (Harare) and the founding of colonial Rhodesia. The main objective of the commemorative event was the creation of a ceremonial site in which people could come together to recall and to reflect upon their shared past by re-telling the community’s origin narrative. However, the article also suggests that the mnemonic power and emotional affectivity of commemoration rests on the fact that culturally meaningful experiences are bodily enacted.

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Keywords: Rhodesia, Zimbabwe, whites, social memory, commemoration

Introduction

This paper examines a commemorative ceremony—the ‘Centenary of Rhodesia’—which white former Rhodesians celebrated in South Africa in 1990, ten years after Rhodesia ceased to exist and Zimbabwe became independent. In my research (Uusihakala 2008) on this community of ex-Rhodesians, who have emigrated from Zimbabwe after the country’s independence in 1980 and settled in South Africa, I examine the many ways in which the colonial past is remembered and reworked in the present. I analyze how Rhodesia, a country that clearly does not exist anymore, becomes meaningful in the everyday lives of former colonials. Rhodesia is held close and embraced by social practices: in conversations and recollections, in communal gatherings, in social re-enactments and material displays. Such social memory practices, I suggest, are fundamental to how the diaspora community understands itself and its place in the world.

The ex-Rhodesians may be considered as forming a community of memory, not in a sense that their memories are solidly the same and unified, but rather, as Paul Connerton (1989) asserts, that they form a social entity with common interests in a common past. In

reminiscing about Rhodesia, people actively invoke past times and places in a social process whereby individual memories recollected evoke the memories of others. Rhodesia, the hub and nexus of the memory narratives and practices, emerges as more than a place or a territory. It is understood as phenomenal experience, a source and site of knowledge and involvement in the past. The ability to remember, and the motivation and determination to nurture and cultivate that experience in the past, connect the people in diaspora both vertically to the 'homeland' and horizontally to the world-wide community of ex-Rhodesians within which one's memories are socially sharable and within which one's memories are socially shaped. As Paul Ricoeur (1991) explains, it is in the transmission of such memory narratives that a cultural community comes to be constituted and through which it narratively interprets itself, thereby allowing its members to feel they belong together.

Rhodesia socially remembered was a colonial society, and colonialism continues to bear immense relevance—albeit ambiguous—and be present in a multitude of ways in the contemporary postcolonial lives of former white Rhodesians. In the past two decades there has been a rising interest in historicizing colonialism, in reconsidering and disputing earlier theoretical predispositions and in finding more ethnographically nuanced ways to explore colonial encounters (e.g., Jean and John Comaroff 1991, 1992; Stoler 1989b; Stoler and Cooper 1997; Pels 1997). Instead of analyzing colonialism as the unfolding of a grand imperial narrative, a process that homogenizes the conquered and exploited spaces (Thomas 1996: 3), the attempt has been to examine colonial processes through divergent actions and intentions, in everyday practices and relationships on the ground. However, despite this intent, as well as the contributing recognition by many scholars of postcolonial Africa that the dynamics of colonialism continue to resonate fundamentally with those of the postcolonial societies, there have been relatively few ethnographic studies that focus on white experience in postcolonial African societies.¹ My ethnography attempts to offer insight to these discussions by investigating the culturally distinctive ways in which the colonial past unfolds and is made sense of from the perspective of former colonials.

Reflexivity about a sense of belonging to a place as well as to a culturally distinct community seems everywhere to be intensified when people are displaced from what they conceive of as their rightful place of belonging, their homeland. The question of homeland, however, becomes all the more complicated when not only has the country ceased to exist, but its legitimacy as a homeland for the whites can be justifiably contested politically and morally. While the ex-Rhodesians might have decisively made themselves at home in Rhodesia, the colonial politics of segregation very often excluded Africans from their ancestral lands, their 'places of belonging'. This ambiguity, a double dilemma of sensing a belonging to a place that does not exist anymore, and a realization that the belonging is fraught with disquiet and uncertainty in the first place, was, however, very rarely openly acknowledged or explicitly articulated as such by the ex-Rhodesians in my research. Yet, I suggest, the dilemma is *inaudibly* present in the community's self-reflection. It haunts the background, perpetuating an on-going obsession with the past.

In this paper, I want to explore how this passion to affirm and re-affirm the past manifests itself through social practices in a commemorative event. I focus on the fabrication of a temporary site of commemoration and consider the ways in which people remember together in a realm specifically designed for social memory: the creation of an imaginary Rhodesianland in one holiday resort. The key event during the week of festivities was a re-

enactment, in a flag-raising ceremony, of the arrival of the Pioneer Column at Fort Salisbury and the founding of colonial Rhodesia. The expressed objective in the ritual celebration of the Centenary was the creation of a specific ceremonial site in which people could come together to recall and reflect upon their common past by retelling the community's master narrative. This article argues, however, that the emotional and evocative power of commemoration does not rest solely upon verbal means such as reminiscence or the canonical re-telling of the origin story. By closely examining commemorative practices, such as ritual re-enactments, I suggest that people's bodily participation ensures the perpetuation of a continuity between then and now, there and here—thus, the refiguration of colonial memory.

Re-enactment of a Historical Event—Commemorating Community



"Welcome to Rhodesianland"

i. Rhodesianland

When pilgrims gather to pay homage to their forebears it's usually at the fountainhead of their race. But what to do if your country has been lost? If you're a Rhodie, you simply create another. (Blades 1990)²

In September 1990 more than a thousand ex-Rhodesians gathered together to commemorate the Centenary of the arrival of the Pioneer Column at Fort Salisbury and the founding of the Colony of Rhodesia. A temporary pilgrimage site was constructed at a recreational resort, Tshipise, in the Limpopo Province (then Northern Transvaal) in South Africa near the Zimbabwean border. The organizers aimed at "recreating a little bit of Rhodesia in South Africa" (Duff 1998: 17), and the site was re-named Rhodesianland, an imaginary land of commemoration. The impressive thatched entrance to the resort became a 'border

post'. There was a large 'Welcome to Rhodesianaland' sign at the entrance, and the green and white Rhodesian flag waved alongside the South African flag to welcome the visitors. On arrival, the 'residents' passed through 'Immigration and Customs', where they received a Rhodesianaland passport with visas entitling the 'citizens' to participate in the many events during the week of celebration. The roads and walkways of the resort were renamed with Rhodesian place names: Jameson Avenue, Pioneer Street, Lobengula Way and Cecil Square. True to the idea of a nation, a newspaper, *Rhodesianaland Herald*, was also published and delivered early each morning (Morgan 1991: 16; *The Settler* 1991: 23).

Since the Centenary could not be publicly commemorated in Zimbabwe, the chosen site of the ceremonies was as close as possible to the border in order to facilitate the participation of white Zimbabweans. In addition, the familiarity of the borderland scenery enhanced the sense of being 'at home' and bound the dreamed up, whimsical Rhodesianaland to the remembered landscape of Rhodesia. The landscape of Tshipise was very suitable in suggesting natural similarities that triggered spatial memories. Marjorie³ writes about the landscape of the location in her diary:

We were now into country that reminded us—with great nostalgia—of the Rhodesian countryside—with Mopani trees in their winter colours, hornbills and monkeys (...) The journey through the Soutpansberg Mountains, was one of picking out familiar landmarks and it was great to see the Baobab trees again. (Marjorie's diary, September 8, 1990)

Rhodesianaland was a memory-land, the geography of which was formed by *traces* of Rhodesia. Memory is very significantly anchored in places, but here the places are reflections of the actual physical experienced place. In this imaginatively constructed site, elements in the natural landscape are recognized in so far as they resemble and remind; as long as they are reminiscent enough of the landscape of the past. Thus, the baobabs, the *mopane* scrub, the rocky hills, the red dusty roads, the winter-white *veld* of tall grass were repeatedly recognized and noted in the descriptive accounts of the Centenary.

The Centenary as a whole involved a great deal of both planned and spontaneous invention and improvisation. Most visibly this concerned the transformation of Tshipise into Rhodesianaland by creative place-making. Rhodesianaland was inscribed with clues meant to elicit memories that could be shared. In addition to replacing Tshipise signposts with the street names of Salisbury, Rhodesian placenames were employed in diverse ways. For example, the courses of the formal Victorian dinner—with the former Prime Minister Ian Smith and his wife Janet as guests of honor—had been given names that indicated significant places on the route of the Pioneer Column, such as avocado and tuna *Fort Tuli*, roast beef *Wagon trail*, cauliflower *Fort Victoria* and peas *Fort Salisbury*. On the first evening of the Centenary week, a large get-together was organized in the form of a Pioneer laager. The area of the laager was divided into Rhodesian provinces (Mashonaland, Matabeleland, Midlands etc.) in order to facilitate meeting up with old friends from one's home area. This practice of naming speaks of the significance of embodying memory to particular locations. In a study on Apache placenames, Keith Basso (1990: xvi) writes:

Placenames are interpreted as highly charged cultural symbols that work to establish binding ties between Apache people and specific features of their geographical landscape whose manifold meanings give shape and substance to the present by infusing it with timeless verities rooted in the past.

The evocative power of placenames is most dramatically displayed when a name is used as a substitute for an entire saga or historical tale. Although the descriptive specificity of the Apache placenames is very different from the way Rhodesian places were named (often by some historically significant persons, many of whom had very little to do with Rhodesia), the relationship with names, now that the places they stood for are lost to the people recalling them, is surprisingly similar. In both cases the places keep 'stalking' the people; they appear to act as moral guides. In speaking with names, the people come to represent a shared understanding of how they know themselves in relation to the past place (Basso 1988: 101).

By walking through the imaginative landscape of Rhodesianland, the participants meandered through familiar landmarks in the form of disconnected and re-attached placenames and natural features. These landmarks acted as triggers or codes to recollections that could be communicated and shared with other ramblers. Naming the site Rhodesianland and the site's roads with Salisbury street names, decorating the site with Rhodesian flags and re-enacting significant moments in Rhodesian history on this memory site, are all acts of representation. They are acts of representation understood as *re-*presentation, as causing to reappear that which has disappeared (Connerton 1989: 69).

Yet, there was a certain nondescriptness or emptiness about Tshipise in the accounts of it. The imagined Rhodesianland lacked a direct connection with the land. It also lacked a direct connection to the events and places inscribed upon it. This arbitrariness allowed for both recognition and fabrication. Don Handelman (1990: 42) notes, referring to a 1975 study by Mona Ozouf, that in public festivals celebrating the French Revolution there was a strict matrix of space. Space used for such occasions should be universal (not overly known about), arbitrary (and thus unconnected to the past), empty (thereby open to innovation), illuminated and in the open air without fragmentation. Within such an open space, allegorical allusions of the occasions could carry complex messages. The 'emptiness' of Tshipise, I propose, seemed to generate imagination and improvisation, and to enable the place to stand for another.

Making an empty space out of Tshipise was pivotal for the execution of the key event during the week of festivities: the re-enactment of the arrival of the Pioneer Column at Fort Salisbury. The ceremony was 'reproduced' as carefully as possible following the many existing historical accounts about the raising of the flag in 1890.

ii. The flag raising ceremony

On the 12th of September 1890, the 180 men of Cecil John Rhodes' Pioneer Column arrived at their final destination in Mashonaland, "a barren piece of ground on the open high-veld adjacent to a prominent hill and flowing river" (Leach 1989: 18). It had taken more than two months for the Column to cover the stretch of 400 miles from Fort Tuli in Northern Bechuanaland (Botswana). The wagons laagered to form a square for the last time, as ordered by the Column Commander Lt.-Col. Edward Pennefather. A parade ground was prepared and a rough flag-pole cut from a *msasa* tree. The following day, at 10 a.m., the Column paraded in full dress. The Union Jack was raised and "in the name of Queen Victoria possession was taken of Mashonaland and all other unpossessed land (...) in South-Central Africa that should be found desirable" (Leach 1989: 18). Prayer was offered by the

Police Chaplain, the buglers sounded the Royal Salute and a 21-gun salute was fired by the seven-pounders of the Artillery Troop. The Colonel called for three cheers for Queen Victoria—“another territory had been added to the British Empire” (Leach 1990). The fort was named Salisbury, in honor of Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, the 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, then Prime Minister of Great Britain; the laager was called Cecil Square, after Rhodes; and the newly founded country was soon after referred to as Rhodesia.

Exactly 100 years after the first flag-raising ceremony, the event was re-enacted, and “a piece of Transvaal bushveld, dry and dusty in the September sunshine evoked for many the conditions in which our pioneer forefathers traveled to reach Fort Salisbury” (Morgan 1991: 16). Although many participants were unhappy that the commemoration could not be held at the factual site where the flag was originally hoisted, today in the very center of Harare, the landscape at Tshipise—with an adjacent kopje, thorn bushes and the yellow-white grass of the veld bending in the sharp, fresh wind—emphasized the feel of authenticity of the event. The flag-raising tableau, based on careful research of historical accounts, was as faithful to the original event as possible. The event was scheduled to begin precisely 100 years to the minute after the original ceremony. The key figures who took part in the original ceremony were represented by men dressed up in period uniforms especially made for the occasion.

The spectators, some of whom were also dressed in Victorian costumes, were part of the parade and as such “participating in this historic moment” (*Rhodesianland Herald* September 12, 1990: 2). Led by the Column commander, the men strode through the dry white grass and took their positions in front of the flagstaff. The Chaplain addressed the spectators and offered a prayer:

Here we stand on new soil, in a new country, with new hopes, new opportunities and new challenges. The past we know from our experiences, good or bad, but that's history. The present, the here and now, is but like an infant (...) Today is the first day of the rest of our lives. The future is in God's hands. May the light of God's wisdom endue us with courage, to give us this land to possess it and to give it our best even as we gave our homelands our best. (ibid.)

After the prayer, the bugler sounded the Royal Salute, during which the flag was slowly raised. As the last notes echoed from the near-by kopje, the 21-gun salute was fired to signify the birth of a new country akin to the birth of a Royal Prince. (In actual fact, instead of a gun salute, the South African Army had set up 21 explosive charges, “which went off together by sympathetic detonation after the third or fourth explosion” [Duff 1998: 17].) The gun-salute “echoed off the nearby kopje, just as the sound 100 years ago would have echoed off nearby Salisbury Kopje” (Morgan 1991: 16). The spectators then joined together in three cheers for Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, and were so “caught up in the historical significance of the moment, they spontaneously rose to their feet” (ibid.).

This re-enactment in South Africa was not only a reproduction of the “original event”; it was also a celebration of the continuity of a key commemorative ritual. The flag-raising ceremony—although in a simpler form—used to be performed annually in Rhodesia. Each twelfth of September, the first hoisting of the flag was re-enacted at the very site where the original flag-raising had taken place. And each year the raising of the Union Jack was performed by a direct descendant of the original Pioneers. This doctrine of direct descendants is observed whenever possible. The Centenary flag-hoisting ceremony was

celebrated in numerous ex-Rhodesian communities the world-over. In the reports it was invariably acknowledged that their flag was hoisted by a blood relative of an original pioneer. For example a report on festivities in George, Western Cape emphasizes:

We are very fortunate to have living in George, Cynthia Plowman, granddaughter of Reginald Bray who was part of the BSAP [British South Africa Police] contingent at the original ceremony in 1890. Cynthia raised the flag for us on Sunday 16th September 1990. Her father was a Pioneer in his own right, and raised the flag in Cecil Square in 1976. (Humphries 1991: 20)

Commemoration as mnemonic practice

By organizing the Centenary celebrations, RASA (The Rhodesian Association in South Africa) wanted to give “ordinary people the opportunity to look back with gratitude and pride at the events set in motion by that first simple flag-raising” (Duff 1998: 17). The very objective of the event was therefore to create a ceremonial space and a period in and during which people would have a chance to come together in order to remember together where they come from and who they are. Rhodesianland was an explicit site of remembering—an arena for commemoration. What characterizes commemoration as a mnemonic practice is the ceremonial call to remembrance the concept connotes. This implies a hovering consciousness about a fear of forgetting: we remember together in order not to forget. There is a risk that ‘we’ may be lost when stories of ‘us’ are no longer told.

In a classical work on collective memory Maurice Halbwachs makes a distinction between autobiographical memory and historical memory. The first is a memory of events which we have personally experienced in the past. The latter, on the other hand, may not be reached directly by the social actor but needs to be stimulated indirectly through “reading or listening or in commemoration and festive occasions when people gather together to remember in common the deeds and accomplishments of long-departed members of the group” (Cosser 1992: 24). Commemorative occasions such as the Centenary may be seen as specific ritual events and pivotal mnemonic practices through which social memory is generated. From this perspective memory may be considered as a set of remembering practices contextualized and formed in culturally specific frameworks. The process of remembering, as I understand it, is essentially social; the workings of individual minds are not only socially communicated and exchanged, but they are formed and pieced together by social arrangements.

Halbwachs has sometimes been criticized for the perceived lack of distinction he makes between individual and social “since [in his account] autobiographical memory is also the product of social contact” (Bloch 1998: 117). But emphasizing the social production of memory does not mean that a community shares some kind of a ‘collective mind’. Paul Connerton elucidates the idea about the social foundation of memory and of the relationship of individual experience with social order in a clarifying way. Every recollection, Connerton writes, albeit of events that we have witnessed alone, or of sentiments and thoughts that have not been expressed, are attached to an ensemble of notions that are not ours alone, but shared by many others. These notions about persons, places, dates, words or forms of language concern the whole material and moral life of the societies to which we belong or have belonged (1989: 36).

What we are dealing with here concerns a very basic question of symbolic consciousness, namely the incorporation of percept with concept. According to Marshall Sahlins: "From the first moment, experience undergoes a kind of structural co-optation: the incorporation of the percept with a concept of which the perceiver is not the author (...) Perception is instantaneously a *re*-cognition, a matching of the percept with some received social category" (2000b: 281–282). But re-cognition and matching never signify straight-forward reproduction. A sign is substantialized in action by reference to the lived world. Significantly, every such occasion is unique. There is always a chance that in action signs are set in new relationships with each other whereby the structure is transformed. Thus, Sahlins says: "The deployment of received cultural understandings to specific worldly contexts always harbors the possibility that things will never again be the same. The world is under no obligation to correspond to the categories by which it is thought" (2000b: 290). This is the relationship of individual perception or experience to a set of symbolic categories, the relationships of which form the cultural order. By this token, individual actions in and experiences of the past are particular and differ from one another. Yet there exists a meaningful order in the differences (Sahlins 2000a: 488). Individual memories, therefore, are from the first moment incorporated with notions or symbolic categories that are shared by others, and thus, by definition, social.

During the Centenary there was a strong conviction among the participants that they share a common past to which similar memories are attached in spite of the fact that the people did not necessarily know each other personally. This sense of shared experience in the past, according to Benedict Anderson (1991 [1983]), is a significant aspect of a sense of national identity. The conviction that a community shares experiences in the past creates an awareness of togetherness and camaraderie. Susan sums this up by writing: "Everyone felt as if they belonged to this 'great big happy family'. It wasn't necessary to be introduced; we were and still are all Rhodesians." Thus, to speak of social memory is not so much an attestation about a resemblance or contiguity of a group's memories, but rather it bespeaks of a community of interests and thoughts, of the fact that the same group is interested in those same memories and is able to evoke them (Connerton 1989: 37).

Re-enactment

Commemorative ceremonies, Paul Connerton (1989: 61) writes, may be distinguished from other rituals by the fact that they refer explicitly to historical, prototypical actors or events. In a commemorative ceremony the community is reminded of its common identity as told in its master narrative. The side of remembering which may be verbalized, however, is but one facet of the commemoration. Although memory does need to be articulated in order to be social, the articulation or communication need not be in words (e.g. Connerton 1989; Fentress and Wicham 1992: 47). In addition to reading and writing, telling and listening, the origin narrative is also repeatedly represented by physical enactment. According to Connerton (1989: 4–5), the social formation of memory rests on particular types of repetition, namely commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices. He stresses that although these are not the only constituents of social memory, a focus on such performative or embodied aspects of memory leads us to see that images and recollected knowledge of the past are essentially conveyed and sustained by (more or less) ritual performances (1989:

40). Therefore, in addition to the re-telling, and re-reading and re-hearing about the founding event (and the events, trials and tribulations to which it led), it persists in the social memory as a memory of re-enactments and of bodily incorporation.

During the Centenary celebrations, the individual bodily participation in ritual acts was what made the commemoration particularly persuasive and emotionally evocative for the participants. The corporeal experiencing is tied to the emotional and cognitive memorability of an event. Don Handelman notes that it is emblematic of public events—such as commemorative ceremonies—in modern Western nation-states to be “obsessed with the feeling-states of the participants, with expressiveness, and so with the capacity of an event to affect” (1990: 277). In the schema of the Centenary, the intent was to create a ‘memorable occasion’. In this context, a memorable occasion is precisely such; it is an event designed to evoke sentiment and arouse emotion via individual bodily participation.

Juan Eduardo Campo analyzes how the Gettysburg Civil War battlefield in Pennsylvania was gradually transformed into a pilgrimage site between the actual event in 1863 and the centennial ceremony held in 1963. This was accomplished through acts of “commemoration, monumentation, reunion and re-enactment” (1998: 48; see also Archibald 2002: 76). In the early days Civil War veterans gathered to the battlefield to recollect their experiences through re-enacting key moments of the battle. But even with the passing of the last veterans, the site has continued to attract new generations of visitors, some of whom began to re-enact the critical scenes with careful attention to detail. The Rhodesianaland re-enactment of the flag hoisting ceremony shared many similarities with the Gettysburg performance. The attention to historical detail was carefully observed. The costumes were tailored as exact replicas; the flagpole was a simulacrum of the original. The timing of the event was also precise: the event was scheduled to begin at exactly 100 years to the minute after the original ceremony. The sequence of events, with the six men entering the scene, the offering of prayer, the sounding of the trumpet, the raising of the flag and the gun salute attempted to replicate the original event. The prayer was a verbatim reproduction of the original: its fateful present-tense phrases promising a new beginning in a new land. But like that at Gettysburg, the Rhodesianaland re-enactment was a tableau performed to live spectators and to filming cameras. In the flag-raising ceremony there was a commentator who explained the course of events as they were unfolding to the audience. In both events, the performance ended in the spectators joining the act. The Gettysburg crowd came together in singing the national anthem. Summoned by the commentator the Rhodesianaland assembly joined in three cheers for Queen Victoria. But so caught up was the audience with the ceremony that unwritten and unrehearsed they spontaneously rose to their feet while cheering.

Thus, the mnemonic power of commemoration rests on the fact that primal events—culturally meaningful experiences—are bodily re-enacted; the participants give the rite a ceremonially embodied form. In rites the bodily poses, gestures and movements are prescribed. The participants have knowledge, experience and expectation about the forms and sequences of ritual language and bodily gestures, which makes the ceremonial procedure both emotional and mnemonically effective. Such habitual memory connected to performance is one example of how memory gets passed on in non-textual and non-cognitive ways (Connerton 1989: 102–103). The performativeness of ritual also relies on utterances used, particularly on the characteristic use of personal pronouns, namely the ‘we’. “In

pronouncing the 'we' the participants meet not only in an externally definable space but in a kind of ideal space determined by their speech acts (...) performative utterances are the place in which the community is constituted and recalls to itself the fact of its constitution" (Connerton 1989: 59). In the flag-raising tableau, the words of the prayer were the only spoken utterances (the commentator's voice excepting) inherent in the ritual. "Here we stand on new soil, in a new country, with new hopes, new opportunities and new challenges", the prayer begins. Here the 'we' is firstly 'we the pioneers' set in a definite historical beginning of 'us', at a moment of founding. The 'we' is set standing on 'newly established soil', in a 'newly created country' with a duty to conserve, control and cultivate the God-given newly created land "and to give it our best even as we gave our homelands our best".

But the 'we' of the prayer ceremonially performed is also the 'we' who are present at this very moment honoring and remembering the pioneer ancestors, with whom a direct connection is formed through this memory performance. The founders become the ancestors of all of 'us' present in the ceremony. This direct genealogy is ritually maintained in insisting that the flag should always be raised by a direct descendant of the original pioneers. Thus, commemoration is integrally linked to ceremonies of the body. Connerton indicates that noble privileges in a society of 'orders' and 'estates' are ceremonially attached to ancestors, whose merits and achievements are considered to have endured in the blood. The blood-relative performing the ritual act further enhances the authenticity of the ceremony. In the accounts of the flag-raising tableau, Hal Pennefather's likeness to his great-uncle, the column commander Lt-Col Edward Pennefather, whose role he played, was emphasized over and over again: "Like his forebear, he stands six feet and six inches tall" (Morgan 1991: 16). In his body and posture he stood for and bestowed on the event a direct continuity of past and present.

In the ceremony of re-enactment, each participant relives the experience of the ancestors and thereby links him/herself to the chain of generations. The re-enactment of the founding moment—an event which is beyond autobiographical or experiential memory of any of the participants in the ceremony—has to do with repetition and return of experience. But it is a question of return and repetition of an experience no individual present has intimate knowledge of. How then is it possible to 'remember' the past of the ancestors? Maurice Bloch shows how the Zafimaniry of Madagascar frequently visit historical sites where some culturally significant events have taken place. These visits may make the descendants of those who took part in the original event re-experience what happened to their ancestors and thus 'remember' the distant past as if it were their own (1998: 115). The same can be said to happen in a commemorative ceremony. Indeed, Jeffrey Olick and Joyce Robbins (1998: 123) argue that much of what we remember, we did not individually experience. Through this "sociobiographical memory", Olick and Robbins write, we are able to feel pride, pain or shame in regard to events that happened to groups we belong to before we joined them. In the re-enactment, the participants thus *return* to an experience of their forebears through ritual performance.

And yet, in Rhodesianaland the re-enactment of the beginning of the community took place in an imaginary memory-land, after the colonial nation thus founded had ceased to exist and the community of white Rhodesians had been dispersed worldwide. Through the commemoration they called to remembrance their constitution as a community. The commemoration was a reflexive cultural performance through which the participants—at

once actors and audience—became conscious of how they saw themselves. This reflexivity included the acknowledgement that the enormous confidence and certainty expressed in the founding did not assure an immortal endurance and permanence of the world-as-we-knew-it. This un-verbalized acknowledgment seemed not, however, to weaken the power of the re-enactment. Instead, the hindsight appeared to intensify the multiplicity of emotions—pride, respect, pain, disappointment, and longing—that dynamized the event. The bittersweet pathos cracking the voices that joined together in singing “Rhodesians never die”, the spontaneous thrill and excitement that surged over the audience at the re-enactment while they were listening to the founding words of the prayer expressed a deep involvement of the participants in the event. It is this involvement, which makes the event into a repetition with difference, and which makes the event socially memorable.

Conclusion

Considering that *Rhodesiana* is a concept the former Rhodesians use to refer to Rhodesian memorabilia—artifacts and things inscribed with categorical Rhodesian symbols, which are meant to evoke and embrace memories of Rhodesia—Rhodesianaland may be envisaged as an explicitly make-believe, artifact-like realm for collective remembrance. If, in the everyday, memories of events, people or places may be evoked by quite arbitrary phenomena, in Rhodesianaland the awakening of memory was not entrusted to haphazard triggers. Instead, Rhodesianaland was imbued with clues and signs and traces reckoned to remind and call forth sharable memories. It was a temporary pilgrimage site secluded and withdrawn from the ‘real world’, especially constructed for a ritual period. However, despite the make-believe, Rhodesianaland implied a ‘return’; the week of celebration was a nostalgic journey during which the participants traveled back to homeland.

The celebration of the Centenary can be considered as a repetition of key themes central in the pioneer narrative of conquest, of marking and making a new place. Significantly, the re-enactment of the founding moment involved the fabulation of an empty land. Elsewhere (Uusihakala 2008) I have analyzed how the solidification of the traveler’s story into the pioneer origin story involved the shifting of natural features, as well as any traces of human involvement in the landscape, to the background; it entailed the narrative creation of a blank space in which the core action— ‘the opening up of the country’—could be played out. In early travelers’ accounts, landscape was hardly empty; human involvement was undoubtedly present. However, as the pioneer narrative gradually fell into its form, the experience on which the story is grounded was subdued. Pace by pace, inch by inch, the traces of human involvement are set aside as the landscape in the emanating colonial canon is construed as an open stage for the heroic action of the pioneer ancestors (Uusihakala 2008: 90).

In the Centenary re-enactment, the participants created an ‘empty space’ out of Tshipise. The virtually total absence of black people as significant actors in the Centenary events re-enforced the moral core of the origin myth. The re-enactment was, therefore, not so much about the reproduction of the original event as it was about the reproduction of a myth, underlying and constituting the whole colonial endeavor. The embodied ritual participation of the commemorators in the founding offered the participants a chance to integrate their individual biography to the socially shared origin narrative and thus to re-establish a sense

of belonging to 'us' and to the homeland. As I have shown, the mnemonic power and emotional affectivity of commemoration rests on this individual bodily participation. In the re-enactment the participants, through ritual performance, 'return' to the experience of their ancestors. In commemorating and thus in calling to remembrance the constitution of the community, continuity is formed through ceremony; a continuity, however, which when extended to new contexts involves improvisation and re-creation.

The expressed objective in the ritual celebration was the creation of a specific ceremonial site in which people could come together to recall and reflect upon their common past—to uphold that past by retelling the community's master narrative. But, what I have argued here, is that the emotional and evocative power of commemoration does not rest solely upon verbal means such as reminiscing or the canonical re-telling of the origin story. As a memory site, Rhodesianaland was packed with signs and traces of Rhodesia that would with certainty evoke memories in the perceivers meandering in their midst. Playing with names and stressing similarities in the natural milieu served as reminders of past places in the homeland. Those places were transported into Rhodesianaland by imaginative representation in which the past was fashioned vivaciously to reappear. Returning to the experience of the ancestors through ritual performance was at the core of the ceremony. Individual bodily involvement in the re-enactment made the occasion compelling and moving and thus memorable. Re-living that experience through ceremony, united the participants in a profound sense, for it spelled out their shared origin, and thus their constitution as a community in the past as well as in the present. By examining diverse ways of remembering integral to the commemorative event I have wanted to emphasize how meanings in compelling and sententious ways emerge in specific memory practices. Such practices in implicit ways carry phenomenal experiences of the past place; it is through such practices that people not only actively re-enter the no-longer lived worlds, but those worlds re-enter the present practices of the people.

NOTES

¹ I imply here works that build on ethnographic long-term fieldwork. Historical analysis of white colonials as well as research focusing on 'white discourse', particularly regarding South Africa, form fields too broad to be covered here. In passing, it may be noted that there has been considerable absorption in the historical construction—and the malleability—of racial categories and boundaries in the research on colonial cultures (e.g., Stoler 1989a, 1989b, 2002; Young 1995; McClintock 1995), and coincidentally in the social construction of 'whiteness' in cultural studies (e.g., Frankenberg 1993, 1997 (ed.); Hartigan 1997). For example Steyn (2004) and Nuttall (2001) represent repercussions of this discourse in South Africa. My own work, however, is not about 'whiteness' as such.

² This was a caption to a full page report about the Centenary Celebrations in a major South African newspaper, *The Sunday Times*.

³ I use first name pseudonyms for all my informants in order to protect their identity. Two of my close informants, Marjorie and Susan, kept diaries during the week of celebrations at Tshipise, which they lent me to read. Susan had also saved all *Rhodesianaland Herald* newspapers and other associated papers.

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