

## Chapter 6

# White British Diasporas in East and Central Africa: Resources for Study and Future Heritage Provision

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter offers a reflection on the experience of writing a biographical study of one White British family resident in East and Central Africa over the greater part of the twentieth century. It offers also some tentative generalisations on the subject of White British diasporas in East and Central Africa and heritage provision for them. Questions of class and classification in the colonial services and in the commercial sphere are discussed. The difficulties that arise in studying people who served in the lower echelons of the colonial services—which the author characterises as the ‘warrant officer’ class—are considered and potentially useful source materials are identified. This discussion is illustrated with particular reference to the Carr family. The role of memory institutions in Africa is discussed in relation to White British diasporas and it is argued that provision for this group is currently neglected. The potential for ancestral tourism is briefly explored.*

### INTRODUCTION

Diasporas – the mass migration of identifiable groups of people from their established areas of settlement to new areas – are a growing area of interest. As Zeleza’s work demonstrates, so far as African diasporas are concerned, the focus of attention is being re-balanced with East and Southern African perspectives supplementing an earlier focus on West Africa, the Atlantic and the Americas (Zeleza, 2014). At a conference held in Malta in 2015, ‘The Commonwealth and its People: Diasporas, Identities, Memories’ papers were given on a range of diasporas (Conference, 2015). These included: African diasporas in the West Indies; Indian diasporas in Africa, the West Indies and throughout the Commonwealth; Maltese diasporas in the former Ottoman Empire and Australia; and a range of diasporic communities in the UK.

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In this essay the author makes no special claims for the White British diaspora in East / Central Africa. It is worthy of study and consideration in just the same way as any other dispersal of people from their original homeland.

Literature regarding the White British diaspora in East / Central Africa understandably tends to focus on expatriate civil servants. This is hardly surprising given that expatriate civil servants had a leading role in establishing and running governments in the colonial era. Furthermore, works such as those of Ehrlich, Ferguson, Heussler and Kirk-Greene tend to give disproportionate attention to administrative officers – District Commissioners, Provincial Commissioners and Chief Secretaries – and the class to which they belonged at the expense of other parts of the civil service and of the wider diaspora (Ehrlich, 1973; Ferguson, 2002; Heussler, 1963; Kirk-Greene, 1999). This imbalance has been perpetuated by some African historians. Thus, for instance, Chipungu and his co-authors succeed in offering a nuanced portrayal of the varied roles of chiefs in colonial administration whilst continuing to adhere to the view that the colonial service was a single monolithic institution (Chipungu, 1992).

## **CLASS AND CLASSIFICATION**

Within the ranks of the Colonial Civil Service a key distinction existed between those who might be characterised, in the terms used by the armed forces, as commissioned officers and those who were effectively warrant officers. Characteristically, the commissioned officers entered the Colonial Administrative Service or the higher ranks of the technical branches of the colonial service. This part of the service was recruited in the United Kingdom via the Colonial Office, its members were entitled to regular home leave and retirement to the UK was standard practice for them (Furse, 1962). In contrast, the lower ranks of the colonial technical and support services were usually recruited via the Crown Agents for the Colonies or locally. Their leave and pension entitlements were often less generous. However, the boundary between the commissioned officers and the warrant officers was porous. Especially in times of expansion, as Baker has demonstrated, promotion to the more responsible and privileged positions was both possible and even commonplace (Baker, 2003).

The Colonial Administrative Service included in its ranks: District Commissioners (DCs) and Provincial Commissioners (PCs); Agricultural, Educational, Forestry and Medical Officers; graduate engineers; and, generally speaking, those with degrees or public school education. The colonial technical and support services included: sanitary officials; lower grade public works overseers; merchant marine services; senior prison staff; game rangers; compositors; nurses; and a range of others.

It may be argued that a similar distinction can be observed in the commercial sphere. Senior positions in mining companies and in plantation agriculture were often filled by those with degrees or public school education. Amongst their ranks were graduate engineers and geologists. The recruitment of premium apprentices served to bring public school men into the commercial sphere. Interestingly, the son of Lord Tweedsmuir (aka John Buchan) joined the colonial service because his father could not afford to purchase a premium apprenticeship for him (Tweedsmuir, 1971). Clerks, prospectors, mechanics and labour supervisors occupied a subordinate position in the commercial sphere. However, for them also the boundary was porous. This is exemplified by Ernest Carr who is mentioned below. He progressed from routine clerical work to become a surveyor and valuer.

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