Archival Reports

The Archive and Chieftainship Claims in Zimbabwe: Some Methodological Reflections

George Bishi

Abstract: This article focuses on the uses of the archive in contemporary Zimbabwe by individuals and families making claims to chieftaincy. A reading of the colonial archive on chieftainship histories reveals that there is an information gap especially for some years. For instance, from the 1960s to the present, there are relatively few documents specifically relating to the subject of chiefs and headmen in Zimbabwe. As a result, researchers working on chieftainships, hired historians, and claimants to chieftaincy face a frustrating challenge of limited sources. This article analyzes the sources that hired historians use to write chieftaincy claims reports in Zimbabwe for their clients. It also explores the use of oral evidence to complement or counter the narratives offered through colonial documents, and it also recommends the use of alternative sources on chieftaincy, both within and beyond the repositories of the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ).

Résumé: Cet article porte sur l'utilisation des archives du Zimbabwe contemporain par des individus et des familles faisant valoir leurs droits à un titre de chef. Une lecture des archives coloniales sur l'histoire des chefferies révèle qu'il existe un manque de documentation, en particulier sur des années spécifiques. Par exemple, depuis les années 1960, il existe relativement peu de documents spécifiquement consacrés à la question des chefs de différentes catégories au Zimbabwe. En conséquence, les chercheurs (professionels ou engagés pour l'occasion) ou ceux qui prétendent à un titre de chef font face à un défi frustrant lié à celui de

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la limitation des sources. Cet article analyse les sources utilisées par les historiens recrutés par les prétendants au titre de chef pour rédiger des rapports de réclamations. Il explore également l'utilisation de preuves orales pour complémenter ou contrer les récits proposés dans les documents coloniaux. Enfin, l'article traite des sources alternatives localisées dans les Archives Nationales du Zimbabwe ou en dehors.

Introduction[1]

In the late 1990s, the government of Zimbabwe seriously embarked on a move to recognize traditional leaders in the country. With the economic, political, and land resettlement programme of 2000, the relationship between chiefs and the government changed. Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform (FTLR) programme not only affected existing chieftainships in the country, it led to the configuration of territorial boundaries, the resuscitation of old claims, and/or the emergence of new ones. While the number of such claims increased as the land reform gathered momentum, this also coincided with determined moves by the Zimbabwean government to give more powers and packages to impress chiefs designed to win their support. Elsewhere in Africa, chieftainships are subject to contestation and power struggles between competing houses and individuals. In Zimbabwe, the shift of government to recognize chiefs especially after 2000, together with the packages that came with the title and position of chiefs, intensified fresh claims to chieftainships and contestations over existing ones. Some claims involved the restitution of precolonial territories, a matter ignored by all land reform policies to date. While many claimants undertake their own research using archival documents, family consultation involving oral histories, genealogies, family trees, and boundaries and succession sequences to reconstruct their past, others hire professional historians. The shared interest between historians and claimants has not only increased demand for a narrow band of sources in the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), but invites interrogation and critical appreciation of the use of the colonial archive with implications for archival policy and research.

In what follows, this article offers a critique of the sources deployed by contracted historians and claimants concerned with chiefly restitution. It uses the case study of the Sanyanga and Mutsango families in Manicaland Province as well as Seke chieftainship in Mashonaland East Province. I argue that the subject of chieftainship in contemporary Zimbabwe demands new approaches because the circumstance surrounding the recording and production of knowledge on this institution has changed in the postcolonial period. Europeans are no longer generating knowledge about or presiding

[1] I would like to thank Ian Phimister and Rosa Williams for their support in the development of this project. Prof Phimister read earlier drafts of this article and provided the necessary funds for the research. I would also like to thank Esther Chipashu for giving me access to some of her papers.

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over Africans through a "native" policy; Africans are now interpreting themselves. Moreover, the postcolonial government has transformed the official process of recording this information from general correspondence of traditional leaders in districts by native commissioners or delineation of chieftaincies for community development. The Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing, which is responsible for traditional leaders, has transformed and is concerned with other briefings beyond simply chieftainship. More importantly, under Zimbabwe's prevailing political climate and rising calls for indigenization and the proliferation of community shared ownership trusts, the office of the chief has assumed a new material status with accompanying benefits.

Yet, despite all these changes, the sources used to generate knowledge on the subject remain the same: mainly delineation reports, schedule of chiefs and headmen manuscripts as well as native commissioner's reports. The colonial government, specifically the Native Affairs Department and later Ministry of Internal Affairs, were responsible for the production of these archival sources mainly for administrative purposes. However, claimants and hired historians continue to derive information from these archival sources because they are reluctant to embrace or not aware of other sources generated during both colonial and postcolonial periods.

In addition, the provisions of the National Archives Act of 1986 that governs the NAZ limit hired historians and other researchers. In 1935, the NAZ came into being through an Act of Parliament now known as the National Archives Act of 1986. The Act provides for the closure of other records for twenty-five years before researchers can access them at the Public Archives. This article argues that despite the existence of the twenty-five year closure period, there are alternative sources of information about chiefs in Zimbabwe outside the NAZ. Within and outside the national repositories, there are some sources rarely used or cited in the reports authored by contracted researchers discussed in this article. If researchers use these sources, they will broaden our understanding of chiefly histories.

Sources on the Writing of Chieftainship Claims Reports in Zimbabwe

In most cases, families involved in chieftainship contestations contract historians, ethnographers, and archaeologists to write their family histories, genealogies as well as mapping boundaries. Hired researchers use oral evidence and archives – mainly delineation reports, chiefs and headmen files, *Native Affairs Department Annual* articles and "Native Commissioners" reports – to write claims reports for their clients to submit to the Ministry of Local Government for approval. For hired historians and families, the reliance on archives to extract evidence offers insight into the use of the colonial archive in contemporary Zimbabwe by users other than academics. It also shows how contracted researchers interpret the archives, including their value and shifting meanings with time.

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In postcolonial Zimbabwe, the value of archives on chiefs has changed. Claimants to chieftaincy rely on archives as evidence to validate their claims for political and social agendas. In some instances, they challenge the authenticity of the archives, especially when there are silences and distortions about one's family history. At the beginning of each chieftainship claims report, contracted researchers outline their methodology – mainly consisting of archival documents, oral interviews, and some publications by historians.

The first case study involves the Sanyanga family in Nyanga area, Manicaland province in Zimbabwe. In this particular case, the Sanyanga elders claim to have lost their chieftaincy around the 1890s. The family hired researchers to compile a claims report to submit to the government for the restitution of their "lost" chieftainship. The research team drew up a tentative list of would-be oral informants (mainly local chiefs and headmen in Nyanga area), archival documents at the NAZ, and publications at the Africa University in Mutare and the Museum of Human Sciences Library in Harare.[2] They also used *Native Affairs Department Annual* articles on chieftaincies, totems, and academic publications including visits to important cultural places in the Sanyanga area.[3] In order to investigate the "lost" Sanyanga chieftainship, hired researchers heavily relied on archives.

The second case study involves the Seke chieftainship in Mashonaland East province. The Seke chieftainship was embroiled in succession disputes dating back to precolonial times but escalated in the post-2000 period. One of the rival factions contracted researchers, a team in which I was also involved to outline the family history and draw a family tree. This team of hired researchers conducted oral interviews with various families interested in the conflict and relied on archives to come up with the Seke claims report. It heavily relied on delineation reports, recorded oral histories, schedule of chiefs and headmen manuscript, and native commissioners'

[2] Esther Chipashu and Blessed Magadzike, "A Historical Investigation of the Lost Sanyanga Chieftainship of Nyanga District, Eastern Zimbabwe" (unpublished report, 2011), in author's possession and researchers can access it from Esther Chipashu at the National Museum and Monuments of Zimbabwe, Harare).

[3] See for example: Jason Machiwenyika, "A History and Customs of the Manyika People," *Native Annual Department Affairs* 11 (1976), 300–305; Lionel Cripps, "The Umtasa Treaty: A Study in the Empire Building and Other Things," *Native Annual Department Affairs* 11 (1933), 91–95, 93; National Archives of Zimbabwe, S2929/1/8, "Umtali Delineation Report" (1964); Isaak S.G. Mudenge, *A Political History of Munhumutapa c. 1400–1902* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1988); David N. Beach, *A Zimbabwean Past: Shona Dynastic Histories and Oral Traditions* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1994).

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reports.[4] The research team used these archives to trace the history of the Seke people, map out a family tree and the succession dispute.

The third case relates to the Mutsago family, which claim that it lost its chieftainship during the colonial period to chief Marange in Bocha area, Manicaland province. The Mutsago family contracted researchers to document their claims report where I also participated. The research team used archives (mostly the Marange and Umtali delineation reports) and oral interviews.[5] Besides delineation reports, Native Commissioner Umtali reports were also used to understand the colonial land problems in Bocha area.[6]

More or less the same researchers authored the three reports described above; as a result, they use the same methodology and archival sources. In most cases, authors copy the methodology sections from the previous reports and use their previous experience to document a different report. Usually this compromises the quality and outcome of claims reports. However, the circumstances that claimants make their claim are different.

In the three case studies (Sanayanga, Seke and Mutsago), among other few documents, delineation reports, schedule of chiefs and headmen are

[4] Esther Chipashu and George Bishi, "A Survey of Seke Chieftainship Genealogy" (unpublished report, 2013), in authors' possession and Esther Chipashu at the National Museum and Monuments of Zimbabwe; National Archives of Zimbabwe, S2929/3/1, "Goromonzi Delineation Report" (April-July 1965); National Archives of Zimbabwe, MS746, "Schedule of Chiefs and Headmen" (1985); National Archives of Zimbabwe, AOH/5, "Jasper Zengeza Savanhu, interviewed by Dowson Munjeri, interviewed at Goromonzi" (28 February 1977); National Archives of Zimbabwe, AOH/35 "Madamombe Mudadi, interviewed by Dawson Munjeri at Madamombe Kraal, Seke" (9 February 1978); National Archives of Zimbabwe, AOH/18, "Nhamo, interviewed by Dawson Munjeri at Mudzudzu Kraal, Chinyika" (17 August 1977); National Archives of Zimbabwe, AOH/9, "Ntombiyaphansi Ncube, interviewed by Mark Dube at Dimpamiwa, Nyayi" (5 February 1982); National Archives of Zimbabwe, AOH/34, "Marufu Chikwaka, interviewed by Dawson Munjeri at Chikwaka Kraal" (6 February 1977); National Archives of Zimbabwe, Native Commissioner File N1/2/1-4, "Chiefs and Headmen, Marandellas 1910–1911." See also: National Archives of Zimbabwe, A3/18/18/13, "Chiefs and Headmen" (1910–1911); Joseph Savanhu, "The Waharava History," *Native Annual Department Affairs* 3 (1925), 59–62.

[5] Esther Chipashu and George Bishi, "A Historical Analysis of the Mutsago Chieftainship: A Reconstruction" (unpublished report, 2013), in Esther Chipashu's possession at the National Museum and Monuments of Zimbabwe and also the author's; National Archives of Zimbabwe, S2929/1/8, "Marange Delineation Reports" (1965); National Archives of Zimbabwe, S2929/3/1, "Goromonzi Delineation Report" (April-July 1965); National Archives of Zimbabwe, MS756, "Schedule of Chiefs and Headmen" (1985); National Archives of Zimbabwe, A3/18/18/1, "Chiefs and Headmen" (1915).

[6] National Archives of Zimbabwe, S1542/L4, "Native Commissioner Umtali to Chief Native Commissioner" (29 September 1938).

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the primary source of archival evidence. They contain information about chieftaincy boundaries and, in some cases, genealogies and family trees. At the end of each report, authors attach photocopies of archival documents as part of their justification to convince government officials to approve the claim. To some extent, government officials consider claims reports submitted without archival references to be less valid. This explains why delineation reports and schedule of chiefs and headmen manuscripts are the most sought after archival documents despite the fact that they were last generated in the 1960s. However, hired researchers use these documents uncritically when documenting claims reports for their clients. As a result, they duplicate colonial documents to produce knowledge, a practice that the historian David Beach defined as "antiquarianism."[7]

In some cases, it is difficult to reconcile archival documents and oral interviews, especially when the archives contradict the basis of the claim. Since the colonial government produced most of the archives for administrative purposes rather than personal histories, there are silences, omissions and the misrepresentation of names and facts concerning other chieftaincies. As a result, the colonial archive does not always contain information that supports the claimant's argument as chief, as in the case of Mutsago. The Umtali delineation report, which researchers relied on, places Mutsago as one of the headman, a subordinate under chief Marange.[8] This contradicts Mutsago's claim to be the paramount chief of Bocha area before the colonial regime allegedly downgraded the chieftainship to headmanship in the 1950s. The fact that David Beach supports the view that Mutsago was under Marange complicates their claim. The Mutsago elders vehemently reject Beach's analysis, alleging, "that he falsified their history and alleged he resided at chief Marange when he did his fieldwork."[9] The government requires that families engaged in claims to chieftaincy or succession disputes should provide some archival evidence. According to the Assistant District Administrator of Buhera, "colonial documents sometimes provide a starting point although they are not always accurate. In that case we supplement with oral evidence despite its weaknesses."[10] Ultimately, hired researchers produce compromised reports to support their clients. Such methodological challenges lead to the exclusion and suppression of evidence not supporting the client.

As noted above, hired researchers use oral interviews to augment colonial documents. Yet colonial officials, who produced most of the archival documents about chiefs and headmen, originally compiled them from oral

[7] David Beach, *War and Politics in Zimbabwe 1840–1900* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1986), 1–165, 120.

[8] National Archive of Zimbabwe, S2929/1/8, "Umtali Delineation Report" (1965–1969).

[9] Interview with Solomon Mutsago at Mutsago Kraal, 17 September 2013.

[10] Interview with Edgar Zidya at Buhera District Office, 16 September 2014.

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traditions. Gleaning bits and pieces of facts from oral testimonies and traditions helps hired historians to reconstruct the histories of their clients. In most cases, hired researchers interview individuals selected by their clients. This compromises quality since the interviewees usually support the claimant's argument. Because of factionalism among competing houses, oral traditions and oral histories usually contradict each other. This predicament befalls the Seke chieftainship, where several sub-houses gave different narratives – each supporting their own claim. The colonial official's narratives contained in the archival documents usually capture authors responsible for documenting histories of their clients. According to Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, "documents are viewed as records of 'simple truth.'"[11] The bulk of the hired historians, ethnographers, and archaeologists are "ardent" and "faithful disciples" of a rigid empiricist archival tradition. When contracted, they resort to the same documents they are limited to at the NAZ.

The Contradictions and Challenges of Zimbabwe's Colonial Archive

In colonial Zimbabwe, officials responsible for the production of knowledge had agendas other than producing histories about Africans. They were concerned with labor mobilization, the collection of taxes, and control of their subjects through knowledge gathering about "natives."[12] Interestingly, their collections form the bulk of primary sources used not only by academics. For example, the delineation reports created in the 1960s contain useful information on borders and populations of chieftaincies but remain silent on their political nature. Another example is the schedule of chiefs and headmen manuscript, chiefs and headmen files and native commissioners' district reports. The schedule of chiefs and headmen only contain a list of chiefs according to their districts and family trees. It does not explore the general or specific histories of each chieftainship. Since they were no longer used for administrative purposes, these documents were deposited to the Records Office and then to the Public Archives in Harare.

[11] Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, "'Records of Simple Truth and Precision:' Photography, Archives, and the Illusion of Control," *Archivaria* 50 (2000), 1–40.

[12] Terence O. Ranger, "The Mobilization of Labour and the Production of Knowledge: The Antiquarian Tradition in Rhodesia," *Journal of African History* 20–4 (1979), 507–524; David N. Beach, "NADA and Mafohla: Antiquarianism in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe with Special Reference to the Work of F.W.T. Posselt," *History in Africa* 13 (1986), 1–11; Diana Jeater, "Speaking like a Native: Vernacular Languages and the State in Southern Rhodesia, 1890–1935," *Journal of African History* 42–3 (2001), 449–468; Eric Worby, "Maps, Names, and Ethnic Games: The Epistemology and Iconography of Colonial Power in North-Western Zimbabwe," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20–3 (1994), 371–392.

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Claimants to chieftaincy consult these documents to extract or counter colonial accounts. In some instances, the colonial archive has gaps – delineation officers did not delineate certain chiefdoms properly or not recorded at all. In his search for the Chishanga history, the historian Gerald Mazarire faced the difficult task of locating it in the colonial archive. Because of the fluid nature of Chishanga, wrote Mazarire, "it failed to fit specific descriptions that these early administrators considered to be 'states,' 'tribes' or 'chieftaincies.' It therefore escaped their attention and was not readily available in this public record."[13] However, by the time of colonial rule, Chishanga had ceased to exist; and it was not entirely in the best interests of colonial officials to record its earlier existence. This is one of the many examples where researchers fail to locate specific files about chieftaincies.

Moreover, the delineation process was fraught with many discrepancies. According to Gwangwawa, who identified himself as the spirit medium of the Rozvi, "people who were interviewed during the delineation process were biased; some of them were chiefs who supported the colonial regime."[14] "Archives are corrupt and contain nothing because they were documented by Europeans," stated Julian Maodza, who claims to be a descendent of Nehanda.[15] Fungai Mutsago, a leading member of the Mutsago family fighting for the resuscitation of their "lost" chieftaincy, supports this claim. Mutsago argues that, "some documents contain wrong spellings for names and some are missing. For example, the Marange delineation report deliberately reduces the Mutsago chieftaincy to a headmenship and the family tree is not in order."[16] Arguably, the colonial archive does not offer a true representation of "national" history or fit the definition of a "national memory" site.

A reading of chiefly and headmen archives provides insights into colonial Zimbabwe's administrative history. Firstly, files produced during the administration of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) and settler rule in Zimbabwe inform the reader about the structure and nature of the colonial administration as it grappled with "native" administration. In some instances, colonial administrators collaborated with African men and women (usually elites) to produce knowledge about Africans. Colonial officials were collecting such information not to document their general histories but for administrative purposes. African agency in the processes involving

[13] Gerald C. Mazarire, "Reading Chishanga: Some Issues of Process and Method," in: P. Ngulube (ed.), *National Archives 75@ 30: 75 Years of Archiving Excellence at the National Archives of Zimbabwe* (Harare: National Archives of Zimbabwe, 2012), 42–63, 43.

[14] Interview with Gwangwawa, interviewed at his homestead in Chikomba, 20 August 2014.

[15] Interview with Julian Maodza, interviewed at Harare Queens Hotel, 2 September 2014.

[16] Interview with Fungai Mutsago, interviewed at Mutsago Kraal, 5 July 2013.

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archival generation was not given full attention it deserved by the native commissioners. When knowledge about chiefs and headmen was required, colonial officials collected traditions, customs and beliefs over their conquered subjects for the government. Nevertheless, I argue that African subjects were not passive in the production of their histories. Instead, chiefs and headmen in advantaged positions used their political and social standing in a colonial economy to submit narratives that fitted their own goals.

Some colonial documents are not accurate in presenting general histories of chieftaincies. This owes much to the way colonial officials generated knowledge about Africans. As Beach observed, "when it comes to quotations from colonial officials obsessed with conspiracies and 'superstition,' there is a danger that the author may get too close to the evidence and unconsciously accept basic assumptions that should have been questioned."[17] Archival documents about traditional leaders have inconsistencies and inaccuracies. For example, the Schedule of Chiefs and Headmen manuscript contains only estimated dates because records used in its compilation do not have accurate dates. In his introduction to the manuscript, the author highlights that limitation.[18] Indeed, the Schedule of Chiefs and Headmen actually omits some chiefs and headmen. As Mazarire notes, among other archival documents, chiefs' registers, minute books, chiefs and headmen files, and native commissioners' files provided the bulk of the data to compile the schedule, which are not all consistent.[19] This observation confirms the gap in the colonial archive from the 1960s. Consequently, this gap limits research on chieftainships in Zimbabwe since the 1960s.

The attainment of national independence did not directly translate to the decolonization of the archive. The colonial archive continues to stand as a symbol of colonial prejudice where the brutal colonial past remains in written canonical texts. The use of such records requires critical attention and researchers must read colonial records and archives critically. As argued earlier, hired historians continue to use this narrow band of archives without fully utilising other useful alternative sources about traditional leaders.

The Nature and Usefulness of Alternative Sources about Chieftaincy in Zimbabwe

It is possible for researchers to reconstruct precolonial African history not only relying on the colonial archive. In addition to drawing from primary evidence to justify chieftaincy claims from canonical colonial documents

[17] Beach, *War and Politics in Zimbabwe*, 120.

[18] National Archives of Zimbabwe, MS 746, "Schedule of Chiefs and Headmen Zimbabwe" (12 December 1985).

[19] Mazarire, "Reading Chishanga," 45.

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and oral traditions from senior members of the families, there are alternative sources within and beyond the national archives repositories. The use and availability of these sources should change the way people understand chieftaincy institution. Not only do these sources deal with traditional leadership questions, they also cover national challenges. However, this does not mean they all fit into the definition of the colonial archive. Most importantly, these sources cover the period since the 1960s to bridge the information gap in the colonial archive. A limited number of scholars have used these documents. In the claims reports I co-authored, I was able to use my knowledge of the archives because I was working at the NAZ. This gave me the opportunity to appreciate fully the value of these documents to other researchers interested with chiefly histories in Zimbabwe.

- PER/5 Files

These files, classified as PER/5 for reference, are different to other records on chieftaincy at the NAZ. The archivists at the NAZ could not tell me the meaning of PER. When I checked the files, I could not clearly establish the meaning. However, these documents are more elaborate and show how the state tried to understand chieftaincy during the last stages of colonial rule at least at district level. District Commissioners produced these documents in the course of their rural administration. PER/5 files cover a wide range of issues such as rural development and general chieftainship histories, genealogies, family trees, boundaries, and chieftainship disputes. They cover the period from the 1960s to the early 1980s, which makes them useful to researchers facing challenges of accessing archives on this period in the national repositories. Since these documents are under the custody of the Ministry of Local Government, researchers can seek permission from this Ministry if they want to use them. The NAZ has managed to collect few documents from few districts in the country although financial limitations affect this process. Some individual researchers such as Gerald Mazarire secured funds to scan these documents for the NAZ; however, the institution still has a long way to collect these rich documents.

Under the National Archives Act, these documents were supposed to be available for researchers in 1985. However, because of the financial limitations and other logistical challenges, the NAZ was not able to make them available to researchers according to the stipulated time. Despite these shortcomings and limitations, few researchers have been able to access these files in the district offices.[20] Those who used them in the 1970s such

[20] For example: David N. Beach, *The Shona & Zimbabwe 900–1850: An outline of Shona History* (London: Heinemann, 1980); Terence Ranger, "Tradition and Travesty: Chiefs and the Administration in Makoni District, Zimbabwe, 1960–1980," *Journal of the International African Institute* 52–3 (1982), 20–41; Jocelyn Alexander, *The Unsettled Land: State-Making and the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe 1893–2003* (Oxford: James Currey, 2006), 126.

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as David Beach worked for the Internal Affair Ministry, which was responsible for producing these files. Those who accessed these classified files in the early 1980s had the permission from the newly created Ministry of Local Government. However, the number of researchers privy to these files has generally remained small. Moreover, many researchers, claimants to chieftaincy and hired historians are not aware of the existence of these documents both at the NAZ and in district offices.

- Oral History Collection (OH)

Since I participated in the writing process of some of the chieftainship claims reports discussed earlier, I had the privilege of referencing Oral History files using my knowledge of the archives as an archivist. The development of the oral history collection at NAZ dates back to the 1970s when the section was established.[21] This makes some of the oral history files fit the definition of the colonial archive because the colonial regime produced some of them in its quest to understand African people. The collection of African oral histories was an initiative to add the African voice to the colonial archive. Kenneth Manungo, one of the Chief Archivist at Oral History at the NAZ in the early 1980s, was responsible for collecting African oral histories, especially in the rural communities.[22] The government initiated this programme in the late 1970s because it was saying, as Manungo puts it, "we don't know much about Africans so let's get more ideas; let's get more of their experiences too."[23] Dawson Munjeri was the first Oral Historian working for the NAZ in the 1970s. He started collecting African histories, traditions and customs and interviewed other leading people in the communities such as chiefs and political leaders. Most of the African Oral History (AOH) files constitute interviews conducted with various chiefs and notable individuals in Zimbabwe. After independence, the archivists changed the indexing to Oral Histories (OH) as the former had racial underpinnings. Oral histories are available in Shona and English languages while those recorded in Matabeleland are in Ndebele and are accessible at the Bulawayo NAZ station.[24]

Currently, the OH section is gathering various histories of individuals or clans covering many subjects on the history of Zimbabwe. These include

[21] Kenneth D. Manungo, "Oral History as Captured by The National Archives of Zimbabwe over the Years," *National Archives 75@30: 75 Years of Archiving Excellence at the National Archives of Zimbabwe* (Harare: National Archives of Zimbabwe, 2012), 64–67.

[22] Kenneth Manungo and Stephen Peet, "'We Have a Tradition of Story-Telling:' Oral History in Zimbabwe," *Oral History* 16–2 (1988), 67–72, 69.

[23] Manungo and Peet, "'We Have a Tradition of Story-Telling,'" 68.

[24] The National Archives of Zimbabwe Public Inventory of Public Records contains information on these files.

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the liberation struggle, which the NAZ collected in association with the University of Zimbabwe History Department. The project started around 2000 under the theme "capturing a fading national memory." The project aimed at collecting oral histories of people who participated in the liberation struggle. Researchers working on various topics can find Oral History files useful as they cover aspects of precolonial to postcolonial history of Zimbabwe. Some of the recorded oral histories and oral traditions cover many aspects of Shona and Ndebele customs, chieftaincy succession systems, Stone and Iron Age developments, and colonial rule and its impact on Africans. Hired researchers working on chieftainship histories will find these documents very useful. It will save their time by providing a starting point on some of the recorded chieftainships histories. Most importantly, the fact that OH files are in English, Shona, and Ndebele makes them accessible to a wide range of users. These files are accessible in print and audio-visual format. This could be useful to researchers who would want to listen to the original interview before transcription.

Despite the relevance of OH material, the section is not popular with users or members of the public researching on chieftaincy and other related subjects. University students and overseas researchers are the primary users of these documents.[25] The former Oral Historian, Rudo Karadzandima, pointed out that "the section is not popular despite how much we try our best to advertise our collections to researchers."[26] Usually, archivists display newly processed archives and manuscripts at the public catalogue area for researchers to familiarize with the latest material. However, researchers do not observe such notices. They are often preoccupied with catalogue cards and inventories to locate files, making recently acquired or processed files less visible. It is unfortunate that many users are not aware of this section at the NAZ.

-University of Rhodesia History Department Texts (URHD Texts)

These manuscripts complement the Oral Histories collection and they cover oral traditions and several chieftainships and headmenships in Zimbabwe. David Beach and his group of Honours students collected them in the late 1970s.[27] The NAZ has a small collection of these neatly bound manuscripts; they are both in Shona and English, making them accessible to many users. These manuscripts inform researchers about the precolonial history of Zimbabwe and other themes in general. They cover important themes such as the Shona-Ndebele relations, changes brought by the Iron Age and the

[25] Manungo and Peet, "'We Have a Tradition of Story-Telling,'" 72.

[26] Interview with Rudo Karadzandima, interviewed at the National Archives of Zimbabwe, 19 August 2014.

[27] National Archives of Zimbabwe, MS1212/1-4, "University of Rhodesia History Department Text" (1978).

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early colonial encounters, Frederick Selous' hunting activities and his relationship with African chiefs. The succession politics among chieftaincies that were a product of internal political tensions, the Ndebele activities of the 1840s, and the extent of their alleged raids on the Zimbabwean plateau.

Some of the themes explored include how the Rozvi exercised their authority among other nearby Shona communities. They also focus on the use of Portuguese guns and the resultant effects on the precolonial power politics among the Shona communities, especially in the eastern parts of the country. This information will help researchers understand the societal changes brought by colonialism as well as how Africans remembered such colonial encounters. The availability of these manuscripts will improve our understanding of chieftaincy from seeing the institution as a mere repository of tradition. Chieftainship institution has changed over time due to internal and external political and economic developments.

The shortcoming associated with these manuscripts is that they are limited to those who know of their existence. Like Oral Histories, the URHD Texts are not popular with researchers. Hired researchers do not use these manuscripts to document chieftainship claims reports. Researchers have no access to these manuscripts because archivists did not accession them into the inventory of Public Archives at the control desk.[28] However, researchers can access them upon request, as they are not under closure period. If researchers do access these manuscripts, it will significantly shape and improve our knowledge about chieftainship and other related themes of Zimbabwe's precolonial history.

- Ministry of Local Government Files on Chiefs and Headmen

The dissolution of the Ministry of Internal Affairs gave birth to the development of two Ministries – that is, Home Affairs and Local Government, Rural and Urban Development. For the greater part of independent Zimbabwe, traditional leaders have been under the Ministry of Local Government. The Ministry of Internal Affairs produced different files from the delineation reports and native commissioners' reports. However, the new practice reflects on the changes of administration from the colonial system of producing "native" histories through a "native policy." However, the postcolonial government did not change much as far as recording traditional leadership filing system. Chiefs and headmen have their different files dealing with their histories, family trees and succession systems. For example, the Neshava headmanship file in Buhera deals with succession conflicts bedevilling the headmanship since the early 1990s to date.[29] The file covers

[28] Inventory of Historical Manuscripts at Research Section at the National Archives of Zimbabwe.

[29] The Buhera Assistant District Administrator was generous to me to give access to these files on 16 September 2014.

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the minutes of meetings held by the Neshava families and the district administrator, reports and letters, the clan's history, family trees, topography, and other useful information related to Buhera district. To some extent, these files are composed of some extracts and cuttings from the delineation reports. In this way, district administrators not only rely on the current records but also delineation reports of the 1960s. This perpetuates the reliance and use of the colonial archive even by government officials.

Currently, these documents are not available at the NAZ since some of them are current records under the Ministry of Local Government district offices in the country. Some of these documents should be now available at the NAZ because they are above the closure period. However, because of the financial challenges facing the NAZ, these documents remain housed in district offices. However, researchers can seek permission from the Ministry of Local Government in order to access these files. Since these documents relate to the postcolonial era, they complement information gaps in the colonial archive. Their use will also change the way researchers understand chiefs and headmen especially in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Most researchers are not aware of the existence of this rich archival collection found in various district offices in Zimbabwe. They prefer to go to the NAZ whenever they want to conduct research without further exploring other alternatives sources.

- High Court Files Online

These comprise of High Court rulings for a number of cases including incidences where chiefs are involved as either defendants or plaintiffs. Researchers can access them freely on the Zimbabwe Legal Information Institute (ZimLII), an independent not-for-profit trust hosting an online repository of legal information from Zimbabwe and beyond.[30] Despite the legal language, which defines the court files, they can be easily accessible and are very useful for the study of chieftaincy. Some of these cases involved chieftaincy succession disputes. They provide detailed background to the contestation leading up to the case, which give researchers an appreciation of the general history of the chieftainship in question. These files inform researchers on how the state interferes in customary and succession practices of different chieftainships in Zimbabwe. In the event that customary succession principles impede governance, the President uses executive powers stipulated in the *Traditional Leaders Act*. In this way, these files expose the intricate relationship between chiefs and the government. Since researchers can openly access these files online, it is an advantage because if the High Court deposits them at the Records Centre, they will have to go through the record life cycle and closure period. Technically, NAZ cannot provide access to High Court files of the period before

[30] https://www.zimlii.org/index.php, accessed 7 July 2017.

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2001 because they are still under the closure period. However, as mentioned above, researchers can access these files freely online.

Conclusion

The centrality of the colonial archive as far as chieftaincy is concerned in contemporary Zimbabwe is undeniable. The NAZ receives many researchers conducting research on the subject of chieftainship. The institution also attracts a new crop of users other than academics. Still, most researchers or hired historians tend to rely on the same type of archives – mainly delineation reports, schedule of chiefs, and headmen files, as well as native commissioners' reports. The colonial government last updated these documents in either the 1960s or late 1970s. As shown, there is a frustrating information gap in the colonial archive itself as far as chieftainship histories are concerned. This article has shown that most of the claims reports about chieftaincy drew heavily from colonial archival documents and oral interviews. When documenting chieftainship claims reports, contracted researchers are often uncritical of the colonial archive. More often, they produce biased narratives and accounts, which support their clients. Sadly, the Ministry of Local Government eventually deposits these compromised findings at the Records Centre. In the end, researchers will access these manuscripts at the NAZ oblivious of how they were produced, thus reproducing the same information in a manner which recalls how colonial officials produced knowledge about Africans.

This article has demonstrated that in most cases, hired researchers and other users interested in the subject of chieftaincy rely on a small collection of documents at the NAZ. However, researchers should pay particular attention to the circumstances leading to the generation of archives and manuscripts. The colonial government was more concerned with administrative aspects other than producing knowledge about Africans. The production of that knowledge was fraught with colonial conspiracies, omissions, silences, and prejudices. These contestations also demonstrate how the colonial state exercised its power and interacted with its subjects. Yet, it is also difficult to exonerate African men and women's debatable contribution to knowledge production in the colonial era. Some skilfully used the chance to settle personal and familial disputes, while the colonial officials coerced others to record their customs and traditions. As a result, the colonial archive reflects how chieftainship continues to be contested, indelibly marked by power politics and its relationship with the state. In contemporary Zimbabwe, since chiefs are part of rural administration and of the rhetoric of development, this has increased the use of the colonial archive to compete for chiefly positions.

This article has therefore presented alternative and complimentary sources within and outside the NAZ that researchers should use. In terms of methodology, this will greatly improve the quality of the claims reports

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and chiefly histories in general. The use of these sources will help scholars to understand how the institution of traditional leadership functioned and changed over time. The institution underwent several changes since the precolonial era because of internal power relations among chiefdoms, colonialism and postcolonial state politics. To fully explore these dynamics, scholars should engage with many sources that are available that previously were not accessible.

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