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ARCHIVES AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN MEMORY AND SOCIETY: THE ROLE OF ARCHIVES IN RESOLVING CHIEFTAINSHIP WRANGLES IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

The growth of African family history and chieftainship wrangles have placed archivists under increased pressure to widen the scope of their holdings and make archives more accessible to the general public. Archives pertaining to chiefs and chieftainship (hereafter referred to as chiefs' archives) are among the most widely used documents at the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ). They have catered for the missing link, a bridge that connects memory and society, at a time oral traditions have failed to fully cater for the history of traditional leadership in Zimbabwe. However, at times, the required archives are not available, or are available in bits and pieces, or are allegedly defiled by political inclinations. This paper examined the role played by archives in resolving chieftainship wrangles in Zimbabwe. This qualitative study used the survey research design, where data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. Informants included 30 chiefs, 10 claimants to chieftainship and 12 archivists. The study established that although chiefs' archives have their own limitations, they are largely indispensable in resolving chieftainship wrangles in Zimbabwe. The study recommended that NAZ should make chiefs' archives more accessible to users especially in the provinces, patch gaps that were left glaring by earlier writers as well as to update its collections in order to make them more relevant and user-friendly to contemporary users.

Keywords

Archives, chieftainship, chieftainship wrangles, National Archives of Zimbabwe, use of archives

Introduction

Archives have been used as tools to construct and record memories as well as solve tension and wrangles among chiefs in Zimbabwe. Shepherd (2009) opines that archives have the potential to change people's lives as they underpin citizens' rights. As evidential documents of the past, archives act as raw materials for bridging the gap between history which is distant past and memory which is contemporary mind-set. The International Council on Archives (ICA) (2002) holds that archives are fundamental to democracy, culture, community and personal identity. A number of researchers, among them chiefs and contestants to chieftainship have visited the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ) to inspect archives of interest to defend their cases or to disapprove those of their rivals. Many such non-current records are unique in that they are hardly found anywhere else, making NAZ the focal point in pursuit of wresting the coveted traditional leadership position.

Background to the study

According to the Editor (2015), there is an upsurge in chieftainship wrangles in Zimbabwe. There have been disputes between rival families and at times between siblings on who should be the substantive chief. Wrangles which have made national headlines are the Svosve chieftainship wrangle in Marondera, Nehoreka in Rusape, Mudavanhu in Mberengwa, Ndiweni in Ntabazinduna, Sitauzi in Beitbridge, Makoni in Rusape and Katerere in Nyanga. The following three cases from Manicaland Province help to show the prevalence of chieftainship wrangles.

In Chimanimani District, rival camps were in 2014 fighting for Mutambara chieftainship following the death of the incumbent (Editor 2015). In Rusape District, the Katerere chieftainship wrangle reportedly entered its 56th year in 2015 (Charumbira 2016). Politicians have allegedly been accused of meddling in the appointment of chiefs and of siding with certain individuals some of whom were allegedly ineligible for chieftainship. Makoni (2014) claimed that the Makoni chieftaincy which was 386 years old was under siege because politicians were unprocedurally meddling in the traditional appointment of chiefs.

Chieftainship wrangles in Zimbabwe are normally resolved by District Administrators, Provincial Administrators, the Chiefs' Council, the High Court and the Minister of Local Government with the President of Zimbabwe endorsing whoever is appointed (Editor 2015). Without undermining the role played by other sources of history like oral traditions, written records are required by these authorities to determine cases. This assertion is supported by Kemp as cited by Madhusadhan (2008:1) who holds that "information is an indispensable factor in promoting the development of society...it has been called the fifth need of man ranking after air, water, food and shelter". Written material to support or disapprove chiefs and claimants' cases is sought from the NAZ since other information sources like libraries, bookshops and museums many times do not have such material.

Statement of the problem

While there has been an upsurge in chieftainship wrangles in Zimbabwe, there has been a dearth in information sources to support chiefs' cases and causes. This has made NAZ a focal point from where chiefs and contestants to chieftainship converge to research and prepare their defense in fighting for chieftainship. Unfortunately, archives pertaining to chieftainship and traditional leadership are at times not available, or are available in bits and pieces, and are allegedly defiled by political inclinations, raising questions about their authenticity and subsequently their importance.

Aim of the study

The study aims to evaluate the role played by chiefs' archives in resolving chieftainship wrangles in Zimbabwe. The objectives of the study were:

- To identify NAZ archives pertaining to chiefs and chieftainship commonly used in resolving chieftainship wrangles in Zimbabwe.
- To identify common research interests of users of chiefs' archives.
- To assess the authenticity of chiefs' archives at NAZ.
- To assess the importance of chiefs' archives in resolving chieftainship wrangles in Zimbabwe.

Significance of the study

The study is important in three ways. Firstly, by helping to resolve chieftainship wrangles, the study demonstrates the importance of NAZ in national, social and political development. This makes NAZ an important, respectable and relevant institution in the country. Secondly, findings and recommendations made will serve as a wake-up call to archivists at NAZ to update their collections through collecting more relevant information to do with traditional leadership that is still in the custody of creating departments or in the hands of private individuals and organisations to cater for current demands. Gaps in genealogical collections need to be patched and so make research material readily available to users. Lastly, the study has the potential to entice the government to channel more resources to NAZ as its role transcends government's socio-economic and political policies which foster national development.

Literature review

Literature review refers to literary surveys on a particular topic, theory or research question (Rudolph 2009). There are three types of literature reviews. These are historical, methodological and thematic. This study uses a historical literature review approach. Rudolph claims that historical literature review helps researchers to trace events about or around phenomenon of interest through time.

According to Sharma (2004) the institution of chieftainship and its associated traditional structures have existed in Africa from pre-colonial times and it has survived through the vicissitudes of the colonial to the post-independence period. In pre-colonial Zimbabwe, chiefs were the custodians of tribal land and could allocate it to local people for farming or residential purposes and they were empowered to settle disputes, as well as to pronounce tribal customs and traditions. Dusing (2001) opines that chiefs in pre-colonial states provided societal, political, economic and religious leadership for their communities. According to Makahamadze, Grand and Tavuyanago (2009) traditionally, chiefs were installed by the most senior chiefs in their areas in consultation with the spirit-mediums. In such practices, the spirit mediums acted as the voice of the ancestors. They further hold that the procedure was also meant to curb any possible dispute that could arise from the people. Thus, the involvement of the ancestors in the choice and appointment of chiefs made them important religious functionaries. Vaughan (2003) claims that chiefs were the link between the ancestors and the subjects and were responsible for all religious ceremonies conducted in their areas. In times of drought, famine or diseases, the people looked up to their chiefs for guidance.

However, Kruger (1992) claims that during the colonial period, chiefs were disempowered as the white settlers got involved in the installation of new chiefs through local government authorities. Kruger further claims that the agents of local government, namely, the Native Commissioners, criminalised the procedures for chiefs' installation without the knowledge and approval of the spirit mediums and the people. This scenario eroded the role of spirit mediums in issues of governance and of appointing traditional leaders. Native Commissioners also had the authority to repossess land, remove land owners and rename such areas communal lands. As a result, many users have now made it a habit to visit NAZ to trace their family trees, traditional boundaries, customs and traditions as well as their eligibility to chieftainship.

In post-independence Zimbabwe (1980 to present), the government further eroded the role of chiefs. According to Bhebe and Ranger (2001), the government at independence adopted the socialist policies that excluded the roles of the traditional chiefs. Chiefs could no longer allocate land as the role was now transferred to district councils and local authorities. Bhebe and Ranger further noted that after independence, chieftainship in Zimbabwe was retained only as a symbol of traditional values, but the chiefs themselves were stripped of most of their administrative and judicial functions including collection of tax and other administrative customary functions. As from 1980, the Government of Zimbabwe assumed the role of appointing and anointing chiefs through the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing. The selection of chiefs by the Ministry is based on two notions, that of allegiance and clean criminal record. Disputes among chiefs are now resolved by the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing, Provincial and District Administrators. Ignatius Chombo, the former Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing stated that the government noted with concern, growing issues of boundary disputes and chieftainship wrangles among traditional leaders (Chronicle Reporter 2012). He went on to say that government had resolved to draw new boundaries in order to divide and allocate land between the squabbling parties.

The New Constitution of Zimbabwe of 2013 has done a lot to improve the status of traditional leaders. According to Chapter 15, Sections 280 to 287, the Government has 'rewarded' traditional chiefs, granting them among other things; powers to promote and uphold cultural values, resolution of disputes and powers to distribute communal land to their followers (New Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013). The same Chapter outlines how chiefs can be appointed, suspended and removed, leaving them at the mercy of the government in power. It is probably Section 284 (Remuneration and benefits of traditional leaders) that has brought a lot of interest and subsequently clashes among chiefs and aspirants to chieftainship. The section outlines traditional leaders' remuneration and benefits, for example, cars, modern brick houses and electrified homes. All of a sudden, there has been an upsurge in the status of chiefs and headmen in Zimbabwe, resulting in disputes and wrangles as many try to work their way to become government recognised traditional leaders.

Documentation regarding chiefs and chieftainship in Zimbabwe also has a history. According to Kruger (1992), during the British South Africa Company rule (1898-1922), Native Commissioners played a major role in writing documents pertaining to chiefs and chieftainship. They described boundaries, succession customs and traditions of local chiefs. Unfortunately, as Kruger (1992) notes, chiefs who did not have good relations with the political administration of the day were either demoted to headmen or completely lost their chieftainship. This set a precedent for chieftainship wrangles and struggles between families and siblings.

The NAZ was established on 1 September 1935 as the Government Archives of Southern Rhodesia (Murambiwa, Ngulube, Masuku and Sigauke 2012). The institution had a mandate to acquire, preserve and make accessible documentation which comprised the legal and historical

record of the country's past and present. This documentation included records about African chiefs, chieftainship, family trees and chief's relations with the government of the day.

The NAZ has the following documents which users can rely on in tracing the history of chieftainship in Zimbabwe; The Herald, The Sunday Mail, the Native Affairs Department for Africans (NADA) Journals' articles, delineation reports, textbooks, Native Commissioners reports and District and Provincial Administrators' reports. The NAZ has copies of the Herald and Sunday Mail newspapers from 1891 to this day. The 1891 to 1950 copies were microfilmed and this has helped to preserve such newspapers for the good of the researching public. NADA journals, which cover the period 1923 to 1979, have a number of haphazard articles on chiefs, origins of chieftainship and family trees. These articles were mainly written by missionaries stationed in different parts of the country during the colonial era. As noted by Murambiwa et al (2012), the collection of the former Central African Archives (the name of NAZ between 1953 and 1963) comprised of church and missionary publications, including vernacular productions of missionary presses, maps, photographs and drawings of historical value.

Delineation reports like NADA articles chronicled the history of chiefs, chieftainship and family trees. They were chronicled by the Department of Native Affairs of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Like NADA articles, their terminal point is 1979, just a year before Zimbabwe attained political independence. This leaves the post-independence period scantily covered. District and Provincial Administrators' reports for the post-independence period are either still closed to the public or still inaccessible because of archives' processing backlogs. Chigodora and Muchefa (2015) bemoan the backlog challenge at NAZ, a topical issue which has seen NAZ with a processing backlog of 29 000 cubic feet of records due for public inspection as at 2014.

Research methodology

The study used the qualitative research approach and a survey research design where data were collected using semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires. According to Golafshani (2003), qualitative research enables the researcher to gather findings without resorting to statistical procedures or other means of quantification. This approach portrays how people look at reality while focusing on their experiences, but without manipulating variables. NAZ archivists completed questionnaires, while chiefs and claimants to chieftainship were interviewed. Both data collection methods enabled researchers to collect as much information from informants as possible. The two data collection methods triangulated each other so that shortfalls of one method were covered up by strengths of the other method and vice versa.

The population of the study comprised of 21 NAZ archivists, 277 chiefs in Zimbabwe (Cross 2015) and an unascertained number of claimants to chieftainship. From the population, 12 archivists, 30 chiefs and 10 claimants to chieftainship were selected for the study using purposive sampling. According to Kumar (2010), purposive sampling enables researchers to easily access informants adjudged to be relevant and knowledgeable. NAZ archivists had the required knowledge as they are responsible for arranging, describing, preserving and providing access to chief's archives. Chiefs and claimants to chieftainship are the major users of chief's archives (Control Desk Register 2014). Data were analysed thematically in line with the four objectives of the study.

NAZ informants' stations, sections and frequency

Archivists who participated in the study were distributed as shown in the table below.

Table 1: Informants' stations, sections and frequency (N=12)

Station	Section	Frequency
Harare	Research and Public Archives	7
Harare	Records Management Services	1
Bulawayo	Research and Public Archives	1
Masvingo	Records Management Services	1
Mutare	Records Management Services	1
Gweru	Records Management Services	1
Total		12

A total of 12 archivists completed questionnaires. As shown in Table 1, eight archivists were from the Research and Public Archives Sections in Harare and Bulawayo while four were from the Records Management Sections of the Midlands, Manicaland, Harare and Masvingo provincial branches of NAZ. Gweru, Mutare and Masvingo Provincial Records Centres only kept a few delineation reports, just for the convenience of the researching public since their core responsibility was the management of semi-current records from public departments.

A total of 30 chiefs and 10 claimants to chieftainship were interviewed. Out of a total of 40 informants, four were from Mashonaland West, eight from Mashonaland East, six from Mashonaland Central, 10 from Midlands, four from Masvingo, two from Matabeleland South and six from Manicaland Provinces.

Findings of the study

Findings in this study were presented in line with the objectives of the study. The study firstly sought to establish how many chiefs and claimants to chieftainship had used NAZ archives before in dealing with chieftainship wrangles, before looking at the commonest types of archives used for the stated purpose. Out of 30 chiefs interviewed, 11 (37%) revealed that they had used NAZ archives before while 19 (63%) had never used them. Chiefs who had never used archives stated that they had not faced problems that required archival research. Nevertheless, they expressed that they were aware of archives and appreciated the role that archives played in the social and political development of the country. Out of 10 claimants to chieftainship, 7 (70%) had used NAZ archives before while 3 (30%) had never used them. The 11 chiefs and 7 claimants who had used archives (hereinafter referred to as users) had experience using archives ranging between one and 12 years.

All seven archivists at the Harare's Research and Public Archives Section stated that users of chiefs' archives mainly inspected delineation reports, followed by NADA articles, Native Commissioners' reports and lastly, newspapers. They claimed that delineation reports were more accessible, comprehensive and covered many chieftaincies in the country. Delineation reports contrasted sharply with NADA articles, Native Commissioners' reports and newspapers which needed more time in carrying out research. Out of 18 users of chiefs' archives, 13 (72%) stated that they mainly used delineation reports because they were easily available (in the case of Harare and Bulawayo archival centres) and they were also well detailed and comprehensive. Three chiefs (17%) were not aware of the availability of other possible sources of data like textbooks, Native Commissioners' reports, NADA articles and newspapers.

Three provincial archivists from Mutare, Masvingo and Gweru stated that the only chiefs' archives they had at their stations were delineation reports, which were reproduced from the original copies from Harare and Bulawayo. Gweru only had nine delineation reports in a province which had more than 20 chiefs. Similarly, Mutare had 3 delineation reports in a

province with around 25 chiefs. The archivists stated that they had a few delineation reports for their provinces because their major mandate was managing semi-current records and not to provide research material to members of the public in their provinces.

Common research interests of users of chiefs’ archives

The commonest research interests by the 11 chiefs and 7 claimants to chieftainship who had used NAZ archives before are as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: **Commonest research interests of chiefs and claimants to chieftainship**

Research interest	Chiefs	Claimants to chieftainship
Tracing origins of chieftainship	3	2
Tracing family trees	5	4
Tracing traditional boundaries	2	0
Tracing lineages’ customs and traditions	1	1
Total	11	7

Chiefs were asked to state one major factor that mainly enticed them to consult chiefs’ archives. Five chiefs and four claimants to chieftainship were concerned with tracing family trees. Upon probing, all five chiefs expressed that tracing family trees provided overwhelming evidence that one was in the line of traditional leadership and therefore was an eligible candidate. Claimants to chieftainship held that family trees could easily show an anomaly that happened in the past and thus, they saw family trees as tools to expose usurpers to the throne. Seven out of 12 archivists (58%) confirmed that the issue of tracing family trees was the most sought after as informants either wanted to confirm their suitability, eligibility or merely to disapprove the status quo.

The second commonest research interest was tracing the origins of their chieftainship. This was expressed by three chiefs and two claimants to chieftainship. Like in the case above, doing so enabled seating chiefs to get confirmation and claimants to chieftainship the basis to argue for their cases.

Two chiefs were mainly motivated by the desire to trace traditional boundaries. No claimants to chieftainship had ever carried out research in this regard. One of the chiefs consulted archives pertaining traditional boundaries because there had been a dispute between himself and a neighbouring chief. The other chief had carried out research on traditional boundaries because he entertained the idea of being turned into a paramount chief, a higher position which could be given to someone who had a very large area under his jurisdiction.

Lastly, one chief and one claimant consulted chiefs’ archives mainly because they wanted to trace lineages’ customs and traditions. The two informants gave as examples of customs and traditions; the hereditary pattern (whether chieftainship should be from father to son or elder brother to younger brother), the role of spirit mediums in appointing and installing chiefs and customs regarding acting chiefs or regents.

Authenticity of chiefs’ archives

Users were asked to comment about issues of completeness, consistency and usability of chiefs’ archives. Out of a total of 18 users, 11 chiefs (61%) claimed NAZ archives on chieftainship were complete while seven claimants indicated that they were incomplete. Completeness indicates that archives tell a full story and that there are no gaps left in between the chronicles.

The 11 chiefs expressed that they did not find chiefs' archives wanting in any way. However, claimants to chieftainship had a different story. Five out of seven (71%) claimants to chieftainship indicated gaps in genealogies which made it difficult to see how chieftainship passed from one incumbent to the next as well as from family to family. Two claimants (29%) indicated that archives lacked completeness because they had different terminal points. This point was confirmed by research archivists who stated that although NADA Journals and delineation reports generally covered the period up to 1979, some chieftaincies were covered up to the 1950s and 1960s.

Users also commented on consistency of chiefs' archives. A record is consistent when it maintains an argument or issue. However, 5 claimants (71%) expressed that some chiefs' archives mixed up issues and sometimes confused names or used them interchangeably. One informant gave the example where a NADA article mixed up the issue of primogeniture and the elder brother to younger brother succession system, leaving the researcher confused as to which custom applied in his chieftaincy.

A total of 10 users saw delineation reports as being usable. Usability covers locatability and ease of use. They expressed that it did not take much time for them to access delineation reports and carry out their research. However, eight users who had consulted chiefs' archives in the provinces stated that it was a mammoth task to locate delineation reports of interest in provincial records centres. One informant gave the example of Mukoba chieftainship in the Midlands Province, which he could not access at Gweru Records Centre, but easily accessed it at Harare Research and Public Archives Section. This point was further corroborated by four users (22%) who claimed that they knew of chiefdoms which were completely left out of the current NAZ chiefs' archival collections even at Harare Research and Public Archives Section.

In determining authenticity of chiefs' archives, users were also asked to comment whether or not archives were laced with political connotations. Even chiefs who had never consulted chiefs' archives commented on the issue basing their argument on knowledge obtained from experiences of others. All 30 seating chiefs in the study claimed that archives were free of politics of the government of the day. They claimed that the issue of politicisation was a gimmick used by potential usurpers to discredit the current archives holdings for selfish ends. Five archivists (42%) also dismissed the notion of politicisation of chiefs' archives. They claimed that Native Commissioners who chronicled some of the genealogies were not well-versed with African customs and traditions and so unintentionally made errors here and there, errors which some commentators now take as politicisation of public records.

At the same time, seven claimants to chieftainship held that chieftainship archives at the NAZ were politicised by the colonial regime as well as by the post-independence Government of Zimbabwe while three did not comment on the matter. When asked to comment why they thought politics tarnished the image of chiefs' archives, seven claimants to the chieftainship claimed that missionaries and Native Commissioners who compiled most archives on traditional leadership during the colonial period favoured people who were subservient to the colonial system as well as those who converted early to Christianity. The issue of politicised archives was also expressed by seven archivists (58%) who held that truly chiefs' archives were to some extent affected by the politics of the day. They argued that politics is ubiquitous and unavoidable in many socio-economic and political persuasions.

Importance of archives in resolving chieftainship wrangles

The study concluded by making a general assessment of the importance of chiefs' archives in resolving chieftainship wrangles in Zimbabwe. Table 3 shows responses obtained from three sets of informants.

Table 3: Importance of archives in resolving chieftainship wrangles (N=52)

Informant	Very important	Important	Less important	Not important	Total
Archivists	6	4	2	0	12
Chiefs	8	17	5	0	30
Claimants	3	5	1	1	10
Total	17	26	8	1	52

A total of 17 informants (33%) saw archives as "Very Important" in resolving chieftainship wrangles, while 26 (50%) saw them as "Important", 8 (15%) as "Less Important" and 1 (2%) as "Not Important". Informants who viewed archives in a positive manner were 10 archivists, 25 chiefs and 8 claimants to chieftainship. Two chiefs pointed as examples the Chigwedere (Marondera) and Musikavanhu (Chipinge) chieftaincies as examples where chieftainship wrangles were resolved using archival documents. Thus despite issues of gaps, inconsistencies and politicisation, the majority of informants, that is, 41 out of 52 (that is 79%) saw archives as important tools that could be used to solve chieftainship wrangles in Zimbabwe.

Discussion of findings

NAZ has a number of records that can be used in researching about chiefs and chieftainship in Zimbabwe. These are delineation reports, NADA articles, Native Commissioners' reports, books and newspapers. Nonetheless, according to the Control Desk Register (2014), on average, 20 researchers visited the Harare Research and Public Archives Section per month and they mainly consulted delineation reports in researching about chiefs and chieftainship. Other records consulted were NADA articles, Native Commissioners' reports, books and newspapers. The Control Desk Register is a record that documents names of researchers, research interests, research material requested and form of assistance rendered.

The commonest research interests by users of chiefs' archives included family trees, lineages, customs and traditions. Vansina (1985) argues that such was the case because in pre-historical times, there were no written records about chiefs, family trees and lineages. During these times, such roles were played by oral traditions which safeguarded the family and chiefs' histories and traditions. Now that the institution of oral tradition has been shaken by modernisation, there are very few chieftaincies, if any, which still had oral tradition and oral history reciters. Schwartz and Cook (2002) argue that with the disappearance of traditional village life and the extended family, memory based on personal, shared story-telling is no longer possible, thus making archives the foundation of historical understanding. In addition, oral history has failed to live up to expectations. As Chaterera and Mutsagondo (2015) note, the living sources of the oral history of Zimbabwe are fast disappearing from the scene through death. These scenarios leave archives as the major source of chiefs' histories and genealogies.

Completeness, usability, reliability and integrity are characteristics of good records. According to International Council on Archives (ICA) (2005), a record is said to be reliable when it contains a full and reliable representation of the facts which the record documents; integrity is whereby a record is complete and unaltered while completeness is whereby a record does not have items

added or removed from a set of documents. Like any other type of records, chiefs' archives have a number of characteristic shortfalls, which at times make them difficult to use or to take at face value. Some chiefs' archives are rather incomplete as their starting and terminal points are not well defined and uniform. While some delineation reports begin in the 1930s, others begin in the 1940s and 1950s. This prevents users from getting a fuller and clearer picture when researching.

Provision of access to information is one of the core mandates of archival institutions. In emphasising the importance of access, Tsvuura and Mutsagondo (2015:131) quotes Murambiwa and Ngulube (2011) who hold that "access to information is a democratic right of every citizen...acquisition and preservation of archival material without provision of access to them is a futile exercise". Access alone is not enough as there is need for users to access reliable and complete records. Access to post-independence chiefs' archives is rather complicated due to two factors. Firstly, according to Section 2 sub-section (a) (i) of the NAZ Act (1986), records become archives after a 25-year closure period. This means possible archives from 1991 from District Administrators, Provincial Administrators and other sources like personal papers, are not open for public inspection as of 2016. Secondly, NAZ has been overwhelmed by archives' processing backlogs (Chigodora and Muchefa 2015). As a result, some records which should have been archives are currently inaccessible to researchers as they have not been processed. Citing Murambiwa and Ngulube (2011), Tsvuura and Mutsagondo (2015) argue that archivists are bound to fail to make an impact if material in their custody is not processed as a result of accumulated backlogs.

Authenticity of chiefs' archives is also affected by the politics of the day. Ignatius Chombo, the former minister of Local Government clearly pronounced that his Ministry could appoint and anoint chiefs, suspend and expel chiefs, paying special attention to their loyalty to the government in power and criminal record (*Chronicle Reporter* 2012). Likewise, Makoni (2014) stated that it was painful to realise that Makoni chieftainship which was 384 years old was by 2014 facing its demise because of undue political interference. Similar sentiments were expressed by Charumbira (2016) with regard to Katerere chieftainship in Nyanga which had a 56 year old standoff between competing rivals where unnamed politicians allegedly sided with certain contestants.

This shows that like in the olden days, chiefs have been manipulated by politicians in one way or the other (Kruger 1992). As a result, some written documents were written in favour of certain chiefs or certain individuals in line with the political relations between those chiefs and the government of the day. Chaterera and Mutsagondo (2015) argue that the history of Zimbabwe, like the rest of post-colonial Africa, is replete with bias, prejudice, inaccuracies and misconceptions, since some of it was a product of colonialists who had their interests to serve. Schwartz and Cook (2002) also argue that archives, ever since the mnemonics of ancient Greece, have been about power and maintaining power as they dictated the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory and national identity. Thus while chiefs' archives remain indispensable in studying chronicles of chiefs and chieftainship in Zimbabwe, they should at times be inspected, of course, with a pinch of salt.

Archives are unique documents because they are not found anywhere and anyhow as is the case with ordinary books in schools or libraries. They are one of a kind, irreplaceable and only found in archival institutions. Thus, they are indispensable in providing access to past events as they link memory and society where oral traditions and other sources of history have failed to do the job (Menne-Haritz 2001). Towing the same line are Schwartz and Cook (2002) who hold that memory, like history is rooted in archives and without archives, memory falters, knowledge of accomplishment fades and pride in a shared past dissipates. Thus, archives are and remain

important documents in researching about chiefs and chieftainship and in resolving chieftainship wrangles in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion and recommendations

There has been an upsurge in the social and political status of chiefs in Zimbabwe. This owes much to the financial and social benefits that chiefs now get. Unfortunately, this has in turn resulted in many chieftainship wrangles, pitying seating chiefs, claimants to chieftainship and some spoilers. This study has shown that archives on chiefs are among the most sought after records at NAZ thus, pointing to the utility of archives in social and political development. Like any other types of records, chiefs' archives have shortcomings of their own, some of which border on completeness, usability and consistency. However, by and large, chiefs' archives are indispensable in nourishing memory, thus helping contemporary researchers re-visit the past in order to live the present as well as plan for the future. This is especially true today as the role of oral traditions has waned, thus making archives an indispensable source of history.

In order to uphold as well as to improve the role that archives play in resolving chieftainship wrangles, the study proposes the following recommendations:

- NAZ should complement its current archival collections on chiefs and traditional leadership paying particular attention to patching gaps that exist in chiefs' lineages and genealogies. This will help to reduce consistency, usability and completeness challenges that are associated with some chiefs' archives.
- Provincial Records Centres should increase archival collections on chiefs and traditional leadership which apply to their provinces. As has been outlined Mutare and Gweru had very few delineation reports for their provinces.
- NAZ should also market its collections on chieftainship so that users are aware of the existence of such vital records a feat which may make more chiefs consult archives in researching about chiefs and chieftainship. The study has revealed that researchers mainly used delineation reports as some researchers were not aware of the existence of other useful records like Native Commissioners' reports and NADA articles.

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