

NATURE AND ACCESSIBILITY OF PUBLIC ARCHIVES IN THE CUSTODY OF SELECTED NATIONAL ARCHIVAL INSTITUTIONS IN AFRICA

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Abstract

*Social scientists and other researchers turn to archives in order to effectively and efficiently contribute to society's knowledge base and social development. The nature of, and access to archives in any part of the world is the business of everyone who is concerned with the utilization of resources in the archives. On the other hand, the promotion of African Studies in many academic institutions all over the world makes the discussion of the nature of, and access to African archives a very worthwhile exercise. The importance of publicizing archival holdings in Africa and abroad has also been underscored by the African Studies Association's **History in Africa** journal, which has published materials on Africa's archives since 1974 irrespective of where they are located in the world.*

Keywords: Access, Communication of Archives in Africa, International Standard Archival Description, Public Archives

Context and background

Globalization has led to a rapid increase in cross-border social, cultural and technological exchange. Information and communications technologies have made the sharing of knowledge and cultural experiences around the world relatively easier than before. There is a convergence in the way people are conducting their activities. For instance, research is increasingly becoming transcontinental and interregional largely due to globalization. Admittedly, the concept of globalization is not new. It can be partly traced to the expansion of the European sphere of influence to lands beyond Europe, especially from the sixteenth century onwards.

The forces that have shaped globalization have varied from time to time. The major driver of globalization in the twenty first century has been information. This partly explains why the century has been characterized in terms like, "global village", "global information society", "knowledge age", and "information age" (Currie 200:2). Information is found in a variety of sources and formats. Sources of information can either be primary or secondary. A few examples that come to mind are books, manuscripts, databases and archives. Archives are one of the primary sources of historical and social research information. Thus, any systematic evaluation, analysis and synthesis of evidence concerning human achievement largely depend on access to archives. Archives as major tools that facilitate efficient social and human research, also reflect humankind's common past and inter-relations.

Hence, archives belong to the whole world irrespective of their provenance, ownership or place of preservation because "each nation's fonds is an organic and interlinked element of the global memory of civilization" (Tarasov 1996:91). Social scientists and other researchers turn to archives in order to effectively and efficiently contribute to society's knowledge base and social development. The nature of, and access to archives in any part of the world is the business of everyone who is concerned with the utilization of resources in the archives. On the other hand, the promotion of African Studies in many academic institutions all over the world makes the discussion of the nature of, and access to Africa's public archives a very worthwhile exercise.

The importance of publicizing archival holdings in Africa and abroad has also been underscored by the African Studies Association's *History in Africa* journal, which has published materials on African archives since 1974 irrespective of where they are located in the world.

A brief reference to globalization and the interconnectedness of the collective global memory of civilization provides an appropriate backdrop against which to discuss the nature and accessibility of public archives in Africa. Archives are key to understanding the development of African societies and their relationship with other communities on the rest of the globe. Outlining the scope of the study and

defining key terms sets the scene, followed by the discussion of the concept of access, after which the nature and accessibility of archives in selected case studies in Africa is elaborated on.

Scope and definition

Some African archives are found both in Africa and abroad as result of Africa's contact with citizens and governments of other continents. For instance, archives emanating from Africa can be found in libraries, archives and manuscript repositories in the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, India, Portugal, Spain, France, Denmark, Indonesia, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Arabia, China and other parts of the world. However, this discussion is limited to the nature of, and access to public archives in selected countries of Africa. The so-called "migrated archives" or "disputed claims", that is, African archives outside the borders of Africa as result of having been removed from the continent by former colonial administrators, are beyond the scope of this article.

This article adopted a case study approach. Cases were selected from various parts of Africa to illustrate the nature and accessibility of public archives. There was no attempt made to outline the contents of specific archival holdings, as the aim was not to compile a guide to public archives in selected countries in Africa. Rather, the intention was to give researchers both in Africa and abroad a general overview of the archival landscape in Africa in order to provide them with a partial picture of the challenges they are likely to face when accessing information contained in archives in the custody of archival institutions in Africa. Some of the sources, which discuss the actual contents of the collections in some African archival institutions, ranging from brief surveys to detailed catalogues and finding aids, are listed at Appendix I. Some of the entries in the sources listed at Appendix I give a brief historical note about the creator of the fonds, scope and content notes.

The usefulness of the study is contingent on the clarity of the key terms it employs. Archives and access are key terms in this article. The meanings commonly attached to them are sufficiently varied, however, to warrant preferred definitions for the purposes of this paper. Archives have been defined differently in terms of the

materials, that is, records; facilities where they are kept or archives repository; and institutions concerned with their acquisition, preservation and communication (Hunter 1997:2; Smith 1987:357; Walne 1984:25). For the purpose of this paper, archives are defined as non-current records that have been transferred to a building or institution where they are preserved and utilized. Hence, in many African countries archives are regarded as records of continuing or enduring value in the custody of an archive repository irrespective of their provenance.

That is not to say that there is a no distinction between public archives which are records resulting from the conduct of government business and historical manuscripts that emanate from the activities of individuals and private organizations. While, legislative frameworks govern access to public archives, the availability of historical manuscripts largely depends on the restrictions imposed by their donors. In line with the definitions given in archival legislation of many African countries, any reference made to archives and records in this article pertains to records and archives at a national archives repository irrespective of their origin.

National archival institutions were established to preserve and give access to records and archives. All things being equal all national archives aim at making their holdings "accessible and knowable across time and space" (Guercio 2001:244). Access refers to the availability, ability and opportunity to consult records and archives (Couture & Rousseau 1987:233; Walne 1984:15). Generally speaking, access includes both the legal right of access and the means of arrangement and description that enable users to examine and study individual records and archives (Hyman 1982:1; Smith 1987:355).

Access and use of archives

According to Brough (1953:100) access has three elements, namely, bibliographical, physical and intellectual. The ensuing sections examine these three factors as they pertain to the availability and use of archives by researchers in general and Africa in particular. Knowledge of the existence of archives is not of any utility if one is not going to have access to them as a result of physical, intellectual and bibliographic barriers. As is going to be explicated in the following

sections these factors largely hamper access to information contained in national archival institution in Africa.

Physical access

Physical access is governed by factors like hours of service and the availability of materials for consultation. Regulations and legal frameworks largely govern physical access to archives in Africa. Archival legislation in Africa accentuates the right of the public to inspect public archives of a certain age subject to the provisions of other pieces of legislation. In conformity with international norms, access to public archives in Africa can be restricted on the grounds of national security, maintenance of public order, public morality and health, safeguarding the revenues of the state or protection of the privacy of living individuals. As a result public archival records are subject to closed periods at one stage or another.

The closed periods, which are a common feature of much archival legislation in Africa, ensure the availability of the archives or records for continued administrative use and protection of their confidentiality. The closed periods vary from country to country. For instance, in Lesotho it is 35 years; in Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone, Swaziland and Tanzania it is 30 years; in Malawi is 40 years, in Mauritius it is 60 years; in Sudan records are closed for 50 years; in Gambia and Zimbabwe for 25 years; and in Botswana, South Africa and Zambia for 20 years. Some public archives may be closed for public inspection for longer than the closed periods because of the sensitive or personal nature of their contents. However, the restrictions imposed do not normally exceed those, which are reasonably justifiable in a democratic society. Researchers wishing to access government archives or records which fall within the "closed" category can sometimes make an application for special access.

However, the existence of legal authority to access information does not guarantee physical access. As it going to be demonstrated later, access to information can be totally denied by virtue of the absence of means of locating it. Some archives can be physically unavailable even if they are described in the finding aids. For instance, in Zimbabwe some public archives that are considered to be highly confidential are processed and the resultant finding aids compiled,

but the records remain subject to restrictions imposed by the Director beyond the 25-year closure period stipulated in the archival legislation of that country because of the sensitive nature of the information they contain. To all intents and purposes, the archival records would be physically inaccessible to those who may need them even if they have been arranged and described by the archives staff.

Physical access to archival materials held in public archival institutions in Africa is largely through an intermediary. Typically the researcher completes a request form and then archives staff collects the materials from the repository. Materials are then consulted in the reading room. The bulk of the materials found in many repositories in Africa can be classified according to their provenance and nature of the media as follows: government records, ecclesiastical records, personal papers; newspapers; photographs; film, videotapes and posters. Archives are generally not available for browsing.

Photocopying facilities are available in many archival institutions in Africa. As a rule of the thumb researchers cannot photocopy or request for photocopies that constitute more than a third of any record series or archival document. Variance to this rule is to be expected in cases where copyright rules are vigorously enforced. Photocopying fees vary from country to country. In some case photocopying services are done by the researchers themselves or it is done on their behalf by archives staff while they wait, while, in other cases researchers have to wait for several days before their orders are processed.

It is also possible to make postal requests for archival records provided the required information is clearly specified in the order. It is generally not very easy to get full bibliographic details of many archival records held at national archival institutions in Africa because the finding aids in the form of guides are either outdated or not available. The list of publications relating to archival materials of Africa at Appendix I, though not exhaustive, tells a sad story about the state of, and the lack of up to date guides to Africana archivalia (archival materials).

Using the closed periods as a benchmark for making public archival records available for public inspection, it can be safely argued that any guides that have not been updated in the past twenty years deprive researchers in Africa and abroad the means to locate information that has been added to many archival holdings. It is evident that guides can be widely accessible as compared to records inventories, which are relatively difficult to circulate as a result of their size and diverse formats. As a matter of fact, records inventories tend to be bulkier than guides.

However, the National Archives of South Africa which has current guides, and slightly less than half of its records inventories available online are an exception. The identification of the materials required by researchers is far much easier in the case of South Africa than in many African countries. The automated retrieval system of the National Archives of South Africa is going to be discussed later under the relevant section pertaining to South Africa.

According to a recent survey microfilming facilities are available in many archival institutions in Africa (Coates 2000). Therefore, it is also possible to request microfilm copies of archival documents, although, in some cases researchers are required to supply their own film. No cases have been reported where digitized record surrogates have been supplied. In fact, very few archival institutions in Africa have electronic or digitized archival records in their custody.

In order to use archival holdings, it is not sufficient to get into the building and lay one's hands on the materials, but it is important to understand the language used in the documents as well. Intellectual and bibliographic access is the subject of discussion in the ensuing sections.

Bibliographic access

The use of archival materials depends on the level of bibliographic access. Archives users gain bibliographic access through finding aids. Finding aids are a result of processing of archives in order to make them accessible. The lack of finding aids ultimately affects access to information. Their absence is a clear indicator that access to records and archives is limited or not possible.

Thus, finding aids are key to bibliographic access. Thus, it has been argued that the major barrier to accessing archival records in Africa is not the legislation that limit and prevents access, but simply the lack of finding aids (Mazikana 1999:75; Ngulube 2002:575). The availability of a variety of finding aids can enhance bibliographic access to holdings in an archival repository.

Bibliographic access is key to identifying a specific document or a series of documents. It is inextricably linked to archival description. Archival description is fundamental to capturing, analyzing, organizing and recording information that serves to identify, manage, locate and explain archival materials. For most archival institutions in Africa, the major sources of bibliographic information are guides, descriptive inventories and indexes. The finding aids can be either in electronic or analog formats. Electronic formats include computerized databases. On the other hand analog formats comprise of cards, guides or books, bound volumes and microforms.

The level of bibliographic description in Africa differs from archival institution to another. The situation is like that because many archival institutions do not adhere to any international standard of archival description like the International Standard Archival Description ISAD (G), which sets the minimum number of pieces of information needed for a basic archival description to adequately identify archival materials in a way that meets international standards for information exchange (International Council on Archives 2000:9). Consequently, some finding aids do not give sufficient bibliographic detail to enable the researcher to make an informed decision about the need to access the materials.

Bibliographic access is also limited by the existence of backlogs of unprocessed records. Many countries in Africa are struggling with backlogs of unprocessed records. Backlogs of unprocessed archives can constrain access to public records and archives. Although records and archives would be physically present and access to them permitted in terms of the existing legislation, to all intents and purposes, the documents would be inaccessible to those who may need them because of lack of means of locating information in them, as they lie unprocessed in an archival repository. The existence of backlogs severely compromises the capacity of archival institutions in

Africa to make their holdings accessible.

Records and archives are completely inaccessible in many countries in Africa because most unprocessed records do not have any rudimentary tools for retrieving them. Like many countries in Africa, Botswana has been struggling with backlogs of unprocessed records for a long time (Nengomasha 1998:18). In the case of South Africa, backlogs of unprocessed records without even a rudimentary finding aid amounted to 8 877 linear metres in the year 2000 (Directorate State Archives and Heraldic Services 1998:18). The situation is worse in Zimbabwe where materials transferred to archives in the 1980s are not yet processed (King 1998:408). Anthony King's assertion is still currently valid as the Research Section, which is charged with processing public archives is grossly understaffed as result of massive staff resignations. It seems that the problem of backlogs is going to be worse before it gets a little bit better.

It is evident that efficient access to the information which users require can only be secured when the records are appropriately arranged and described. Arrangement and description of archives help to 'unlock' the contents of archives. The primary purpose for arranging and describing archives is to establish physical, administrative and intellectual control over them (Gracy II 1977:19). Archives can be easily identified, managed, located and interpreted as a result of arrangement and description. Arrangement and description also facilitate the creation of finding aids like descriptive inventories, calendars, item catalogues, indexes and guides, which are essential to accessing information contained in archives.

Intellectual access

The question of cognitive accessibility, that is, the intellectual and educational capacity to understand the materials also comes into play when dealing with issues related to accessing information. Barriers such as language could inhibit intellectual access (Wilson 1991:97). As an example, archives that are in Shona and Ndebele in Zimbabwe; Afrikaans in Namibia and South Africa as well as in Arabic in Egypt, may not be intellectually accessible to people who are not proficient in those particular languages. Although linguistic barriers can inhibit intellectual access to documentary materials, information

professionals seem to be paying little attention to them when designing their access policies.

This article will not dwell a lot on intellectual access, because the impact of language barriers is very difficult to quantify. In the first place, we need to know the quantity of records that are inaccessible as a result of language barriers before we can conclusively argue that language has a significant impact on accessing information contained in public archives in Africa.

Some national archival institutions have embarked on oral history programmes in order to document the past history of the communities that were sidelined by the colonial processes. A lot of valuable information on the collective memory of the former marginalized groups has been collected in Africa. However, many archival institutions in Africa have backlogs of oral interview transcripts that have not been translated from local languages into the most dominant foreign languages like English and French. Transcripts of oral interviews that are only in the local languages can seriously hinder intellectual access to the information they contain, or they can only be accessible to the researcher at a considerable expense.

Nature of the archives and research facilities for researchers

Using the access typology presented above as a theoretical framework, the following sections examine the nature of archives kept at selected archival institutions in Africa as well as the conditions regarding access to the holdings by researchers. The institutions were selected on the basis of how well their activities are documented in the Internet and the availability of the guides to holdings. Brief background information is given on the selected archival institution, including classes of records in its holdings as well as access conditions. The selected archival institutions are from Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The institutions are presented in the following sections in alphabetical order.

Egypt

The development of the National Archives of Egypt can be traced to the first national archives established by Mohammed Ali Pasha at Al-qalaa (the citadel) in 1828. Ever since, the major mission of the

National Archives of Egypt has been to locate, acquire and preserve records documenting activities of the government. The National Archives of Egypt is one the oldest archives in Africa. The activities of the National Archives of Egypt are governed by Law No. 352 1954. Most of the archival manuscripts and records are in Arabic, Turkish and Persian languages.

The major archival holdings relate to state policy, education and training, military affairs, religious activities, industrial affairs, agriculture activities, transportation, governance (provincial and local councils), and the era of Mohammed Ali, Abbas and Said, which is a collection of original archives in foreign languages. The other holdings are comprised of American Archives, Swedish Archives and French Archives.

The Archives research centres are open to the public every day throughout the year, except on Fridays and national holidays. Reading rooms are accessible to researchers from 9.00 am to 7.00 pm and 9.00 am to 6 pm in summer and winter respectively. Further information in French, English and Arabic is available at <http://www.darelkotob.org/> (Accessed 10 June 2002). Inventory list and bibliographies constitute the major finding aids at the National Archives of Egypt. Most finding aids are not automated.

Ghana

The first attempt to select and arrange public records scattered all over Ghana was made in 1946. But it was not until the 1950s after the passing of Archives Ordinance of 1955 and the Regulations of 1958 that meaningful strides were made in terms of accessioning, arranging and describing archival records. During the same period the records were made available for consultation through the establishment of a reading room. Currently, Act 535 of 1997 defines the functions of the National Archives of Ghana.

The main classes of fonds at the National Archives repository are comprised of the Administrative Records, Supreme Court Records, Ecclesiastical Records, Maps and Plans, Special Collection, and Ministerial Record Group, which mainly covers the post-independence period. In addition, there is a large Newspaper Collection comprised of newspapers like the Gold Coast Aborigines, Methodist

Times, Daily Graphic and Ghanaian Times, Chronicle, Spectator, Free Press and others. Although, the major holdings are English, there are documents that are in Dutch and German.

The mission of the archives is to preserve Ghana's collective memory by facilitating and overseeing the efficient management of public records. Non-current records that are more than thirty years are generally open to the public. Permission to have access to semi-current records in the custody of the National Archives can be sought from the creating department. Researchers are required to have readers' ticket in order to utilize archival resources.

Finding aids comprise of accession lists, inventories and guides. The search tools are inadequate (Akussah 1994:11). There are no comprehensive guides to the total holdings of the archives. Most of the findings aids are not automated. However, the inventories of the slave trade records are automated. The National Archives of Ghana only has microfilm copies of the slave trade records as the originals are in the Royal Danish Archives. Some records are not accessible to researchers due to their advanced state of deterioration. Many archival institutions in Africa are authorized by the law to prevent the public from consulting records that are fragile or deteriorating.

Some useful publications for locating information contained in the archival documents of Ghana are: Abdulai, I. 2000. The Ghana Public Records and Archives Administration Department-Tamale: A guide to users. *History in Africa* 27:449-453; Akotia, P. 1981. A guide to the judicial and legal records in the National Archives of Ghana, 1926-1965. MA, Department of Library and Archival Studies, University of Ghana: Legon; Akotia, P. 1993. Judicial and legal records in the National Archives of Ghana/Accra: an introduction for users. *History in Africa* 20: 361-67; Akussah, H. 1981. A guide to the records relating to education in the National Archives of Ghana, 1830-1950. MA, Department of Library and Archival Studies, University of Ghana: Legon; Akussah, H. 1994. A guide to the post independence ministerial records in the National Archives of Ghana, 1920-1988. *African Research and Documentation* 64: 11-21; Austin, G. 1986. The Kumasi Branch of the National Archives of Ghana: A situation report and introduction for prospective users. *History in Africa* 13:383-389; Dumett, R. E. 1974. Survey of research materials in the National

Archives of Ghana. *Mitteilungen der Basler Afrika-Bibliographien* 11: 1-48; Henige, D. P. 1973. The National Archives of Ghana: a synopsis of holdings. *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 6: 475-86 and Jones, A. 1988. Ghana National Archives: A supplementary note. *History in Africa* 15:385-88. Further details on the National Archives of Ghana are available at <http://www.praadgh.gov.org> (Accessed 10 June 2002). The Archives can also be contacted on this e-mail address: praad@internetghana.com.

Kenya

The National Archives of Kenya was officially established in 1965. Section 6 of the Public Archives and Documentation Service Act Chapter 19 governs access to public records by researchers. The mission of the National Archives of Kenya is to preserve public records and make them accessible to present and future generations. They are over 1.5 million individual documents pertaining to government records, ecclesiastical, personal papers, newspapers, photographs, film or videotapes, sound recording, music and electronic archives. The archival records open to public scrutiny date from 1896 to 1972, that is, going by the 30-year closed period regulations. There are regional branches of the Kenya National Archives and Documentation Service Records Centres in Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru, and Kakamega. Some archival records are in the custody of these regional offices. Records are in the Swahili, English and Arabic languages. Some 1 773 reels of microfilm of Kenyan public archives are available to researchers at the University of Syracuse in the United States (Musembi 1985:27). These records do not fall under migrated archives or disputed claims mentioned earlier on in this discussion because they were sent to the University of Syracuse between 1965 and 1974 as a result of the microfilming agreement that was entered into by the University of Syracuse and the National Archives of Kenya.

Finding aids comprise of electronic catalogues, card catalogues, accession lists, inventories and guides. Very few records inventories are available online. Some sections of the website of the National Archives of Kenya are still under construction. Many records inventories will be available online once construction work has been completed. Some of the publications that can help researchers to locate information at the National Archives of Kenya are: Kenya

National Archives. *A Guide to the Contents of the Kenya National Archives, Pt. II. Nairobi, 1985 and Part I, Nairobi, 1995*; Kenya National Archives. 1989. *Guide to Records Retrieved from U.K. and U.S.A.* Nairobi: Printed by the Government Printer; Kenya National Archives. 1983. *A Guide to the Content of the Kenya National Archives.* Nairobi; Kenya National Archives. *Index to Kenya National Archives with some provincial and district files not transferred to the Kenya National Archives.* Compiled by J. H. Lonsdale; Syracuse University. 1967. *A Catalogue of the Kenya National Archive collection on microfilm at Syracuse University.* Compiled by N. W. Fedha and J. B. Webster. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University; and Kenya National Archives. 1984. *A Guide to Selected Documents on Political Organizations in Kenya.* Nairobi: Kenya National Archives.

Researchers intending to use the archival holdings in the custody of the National Archives have to be above the age of eighteen. The Reading Room is open to the public from Monday to Friday between 8.15 am and 4.15 pm and on Saturdays between 8.15 am and 1.00 pm. The National Archives remains closed on Sundays and all public holidays. The National Archives charges a registration fee of Kshs.50 for the use of the archives for more than one day, while, researchers carrying out research for a single day may do so free of charge. No advance booking is required. Further details on the National Archives of Kenya are available at <http://www.kenyarchives.go.ke/collection.htm> (Accessed 10 July 2002). Most of the links on their website are not yet active. The e-mail address is: knarchives@kenyaweb.com.

Nigeria

The archival records at the National Archives of Nigeria are both of public and private provenance, although, public records constitute the largest classes of records in the custody of various repositories. The major finding aids at the National Archives of Nigeria are inventories, guides and indexes. The Guide list to Nigerian non-official publications in the National Archives Headquarters, Ibadan published by the National Archives of Nigeria in 1966; Guide to sources of Nigerian history at the National Archives of Nigeria, Enugu Branch compiled by Chief U. O. A. Esse in 1991; A preliminary inventory of the administrative records assembled from Ondo Province, compiled by L. C. Gwam in 1963; An inventory of the administrative records assembled

from Benin Province, compiled by L. C. Gwam in 1961 A Provisional guide to official publications at the National Archives, Kaduna compiled by J.C. Enwere in 1962; and An inventory of the administrative records from the Old Calabar Province compiled by J. E. N. Nwaguru in 1965 remain indispensable gateways to information contained in public archives in Nigeria, although they do not contain all the records available in the various repositories across the country. Consular dispatches and records of the Protectorate Administrations, Civil Secretary, provincial and district offices, Local governments and Native Administration, Judiciary, Ecclesiastical, the Civil War, and various ministries and parastatals constitute a greater part of the archival holdings in Nigeria.

Researchers intending to use the archival holdings in the custody of the National Archives have to apply for admittance to the National Archivist at least three days before admission is required. The Reading Room is open to the public from Monday to Friday between 8.00 am and 2.30 pm. The National Archives charges a registration fee for the use of the archives. Further details on the National Archives of Ghana are available at <http://www.praadgh-gov.org> (Accessed 10 June 2002). The Archives' Enugu Branch can also be contacted on this e-mail address: uesse@enugu.nigpost.com.

South Africa

The system of formally filing or registering documents was brought to South Africa by the Dutch colonisation of the Cape in the seventeenth century. Consequently, the Cape Archives Repository contains the oldest archives of the country. The oldest original document at the Cape Archives Repository bears the date 30 December 1651. The prevailing political and constitutional arrangements between 1652 and 1910 meant that archival services developed separately in the Cape, Free State, Natal and Transvaal. The Act of Union in 1910 brought the archival services of these four colonies together under the jurisdiction of a Chief Archivist (Olivier 1995). The National Archives Act of 1996 aligned public archives administration with the South African Constitution of 1996 that ended the apartheid system that perpetuated the development of separate public archival services on the basis of race. The activities of the National Archives of South Africa are governed by the National Archives of South Africa Act No 43 of 1996.

In accordance with schedule 5 of the South African Constitution of 1996 and the National Archives Act of 1996 nine provincial archives services have been created. The provincial archives services comprise Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West, Northern Cape and Western Cape. The archival holdings in South Africa range from paper-based textual records, electronic records as well as audio-visual, photographic and cartographic materials. Currently about 5% of the holdings are non-public records. Audio-visual materials constitute the greatest number of archives of non-public provenance. The major finding aids are descriptive inventories, indexes, guides and directories. Some of the inventories are available online.

The National Archives of South Africa is, perhaps, the only archival institution in Africa that has taken full advantage of information and communications technology applications to systematise and facilitate access to information on the nature and whereabouts of both private and public archives in South Africa. The automation of finding aids project that was started in 1974 culminated in the National Automated Archival Information Retrieval System (NAAIRS), which serves as a finding aid to assist users of archives to identify and locate archival materials that are relevant to their requirements.

Although NAAIRS also incorporates national registers of non-public records in the custody of a large number of repositories throughout South Africa, the majority of the archives described in the NAAIRS database are public records in the custody of the National Archives Repository and provincial archives repositories.

NAAIRS only contains information about archival materials and not the actual texts of documents. Having identified relevant material, the onus is on the user to arrange for physical access to the information contained in the actual archival documents. Currently there are over six million records available on the database. Public records are described as individual archival units, like a correspondence file, whereas, the National Register of Manuscripts (NAREM) communicates information on a collection or group of papers. However, a significant part of the archival holdings, probably more than half, are not yet incorporated into the NAAIRS database.

Currently, the databases defined in the NAAIRS system relate to the South African Genealogical Society on gravestones; the Bureau of Heraldry on heraldic representations registered; Cape Town Archives Repository; National Registers of Manuscripts and Photographs; Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository; National Register of Audio-Visual Material; National Register of Oral Sources; National Archives Repository (public records of central government since 1910); National Archives Repository (public records of former Transvaal province and its predecessors as well as of magistrates and local authorities); Durban Archives Repository; Port Elizabeth Archives Repository; Cape Town Records Centre and Free State Archives Repository.

Every repository in South Africa has regular hours of operation (National Archives of South Africa 1999). Reading rooms are open to the public on Monday to Friday from 8 am to 4 pm and during one Saturday every month from 8 am to 1 pm. Research is free of charge. Users complete registration forms before using the materials. Each researcher is limited to three to four items at any given time. Further details on the National Archives of South Africa are available at: <http://www.national.archives.gov.za/> (Accessed 10 June 2002).

Zimbabwe

The National Archives of Zimbabwe was found by an Act of Parliament in 1935 and operates according to the National Archives of Zimbabwe Act 1986. Its mission statement is to acquire, preserve and provide access to documentation in whatever format, which comprises a legal and historical record of Zimbabwe's past and present. The materials in the custody of the National Archives are of both public origin and non-public provenance.

Materials that do not emanate from the conduct of government business complement the public archives, often throwing light on aspects not adequately covered in the "official" record. These comprise of papers of individuals and non-governmental organizations. The oral history programmes in Shona, Ndebele and English supplement or fill the gaps in the information held in archival documents. Oral historians on the staff interview those who are deemed to have contributed to, or are able to throw light on the nation's development

and historical background. The interviews are recorded on tape and subsequently transcribed and translated. Many Shona and Ndebele interviews are neither transcribed nor translated due to resource constraints.

In addition there is a pictorial collection of over 30 000 photographs reflecting all aspects of Zimbabwe's history and development which can be reproduced to order. The photographs are arranged in a classified order with a detailed index to names and subjects. The collection includes paintings by famous artist-explorer, Thomas Baines.

Archival holdings are described in inventories and guides, which are supplemented by indexes and accession lists. Some publications that can facilitate locating materials at the National Archives of Zimbabwe are: Baxter, T. W. 1960. "Research at the National Archives of Rhodesia and Nyasaland". Leverhulme History Conference, September 1960; Baxter, T. W., and E. E. Burke. 1970. *Guide to the Historical Manuscripts in the Archives of Rhodesia*. Salisbury: National Archives of Rhodesia; Baxter, T. W., and E. E. Burke. 1970. *Guide to the Historical Manuscripts in the National Archives of Rhodesia*, Salisbury: National Archives of Rhodesia; National Archives. 1989. *Guide to the Photographic Collection of the National Archives of Zimbabwe*. Harare. Compiled by Jane Bourdillon; National Archives of Zimbabwe. 1988. *Researcher's Guide to the Collections*. Harare (pamphlet); and National Archives of Zimbabwe. 1987. *Zimbabwean political materials published in exile, 1959-1 980: a bibliography*. Harare. Compiled by I. Johnstone; National Archives of Rhodesia. 1956. *A guide to the public records of Southern Rhodesia under the regime of the British South Africa Company, 1890-1923*; and National Archives of Zimbabwe. 1989. *Documents on the Portuguese in Mozambique and Central Africa 1497-1840*, volume 1-7. The Director of National Archives' annual reports also give details of any record inventories created during the year under review.

Like in Uganda foreign researchers intending to use the holdings of the National Archives of Zimbabwe should be affiliated to a local institution (Barrett - Gaines, K & Khadiagala 2000). They are required to produce either a Research Permit or Work Permit before they can

be given access to the archival holdings. The Research Permit is applied for from the Research Council of Zimbabwe before going to do the research in Zimbabwe for a fee of US\$200. The form to apply for the Research Permit and a list of address of institutions that foreign researchers could be affiliated to is available from the National Archives of Zimbabwe. The National Archives is open to members of the public on Monday to Friday from 8:30 to 4.00 pm and on Saturdays from 8.00 to 12.00 noon. The Reading Room is closed on Sundays, public holidays and in March for annual stock-take. Further details on the National Archives of Zimbabwe are available at: <http://www.gta.gov.zw/NatArchives/home.htm> (Accessed 10 June 2002).

Concluding remarks

Using the case study approach, this paper discussed the nature and accessibility of public archives in Africa. Permission and conditions to use archival records in Africa vary from one country to another. It is evident that access to many public archival records is not efficient because of the inadequacy of finding aids and the existence of backlogs of unprocessed records. Guides to some of the holdings do not conform to any international standard and they are generally out dated. There are no comprehensive guides to the holdings. It would be important for archival institutions in Africa to clear backlogs of unprocessed records and up date their guides and records inventories before they can take advantage of information and communication technologies to make their finding aids available via the cyberspace.

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APPENDIX I: Selected publications and websites relating to archival materials in Africa

Some of the following sources contain a wealth of information relating to African Archives.

(a) Websites for materials relating to African Archives (All websites were active when they were accessed on 10 June 2002).

Africa Research Central available at <http://www.africa-research.org/mainframe.html> serves as a clearinghouse of African primary sources in order to facilitate international research in African Studies.

Howell, John Bruce and Scheven, Yvette. *Electronic Journal of Africana Bibliography*. Vol. 1. List of published guides to the archives of Africa, especially those in microform. Available at: <http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/ejab/1/index.html>.

University of Idaho available at <http://www.uidaho.edu/special-collections/Other.Repositories.html> provides a list of 4900 websites on archival holdings of international archival institutions.

University of Iowa available at <http://sdrc.lib.uiowa.edu/ejab/1/contents.html> provides list of publication and guides to materials written about archives located within Africa and about African related archives located outside Africa.

UNESCO portal available at <http://www.unesco.org/webworld/portal> at the moment it lists only 15 archival institutions in Africa.

(b) Some publications relating to archival materials in Africa

Agyei, S. K. 1988. *A Guide to records relating to Ghana in repositories in the U.K. excluding the Public Record Office*. Thesis (M. Phil.): University College London.

Burdett, A. L. P. 1988. *Summary Guide to the Archive and Manuscript Collections Relevant to the Former British Colonial Territories in the United Kingdom*. London: Commonwealth Archivists Association.

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