

Zimbabwe's Economic Decline, Archives Access Regimes, Professionalism, and Their Impact on Researcher-Archivist Relations at the National Archives of Zimbabwe

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Abstract: This article discusses the manner in which Zimbabwe's faltering economy affects the functioning of the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ). It also looks at the NAZ access regimes, ethical and professional issues, and their ramifications on archivist-researcher relations. It observes that the conflict of interest between the mandate of archivists to preserve and conserve archives and researchers' need for access to archives at the NAZ occasionally complicates researcher-archivist interaction. This is because, as professionals and government employees, archivists must follow ethical standards and archival regulations governing the preservation, conservation, and access to archives, even if the same access guidelines and archival practices are not always in the best interests of researchers. This article uses the term "archivists" to explicitly refer to the NAZ staff members who assist researchers at the control desk by identifying, retrieving, and acquiring photocopies of required archives/documents, whilst the term "researchers" refers to both academic and non-academic users of the archives. The issues discussed in this article are pertinent to professional archivists as well as local and foreign researchers, both seasoned and junior, who want to do research at the NAZ and other African archives.

History in Africa, Volume 49 (2022), pp. 367–388

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doi:10.1017/hia.2022.4

Résumé: Cet article traite de la manière dont l'économie chancelante du Zimbabwe affecte le fonctionnement des Archives nationales du Zimbabwe (NAZ). Il se penche aussi sur les régimes d'accès aux NAZ, sur les questions éthiques et professionnelles ainsi que sur leur impact pour les relations archivistes-chercheurs. Il observe que le conflit d'intérêts entre les mandats des archivistes de préserver et de conserver les archives et le besoin des chercheurs d'accès aux archives de la NAZ complique parfois l'interaction chercheur-archiviste. En effet, en tant que professionnels et employés du gouvernement, les archivistes doivent suivre les normes éthiques et les règles d'archivage régissant la préservation, la conservation, et l'accès aux archives, même si les mêmes directives d'accès et pratiques d'archivage ne vont pas toujours dans le sens des chercheurs. Cet article utilise le terme « archivistes » pour faire explicitement référence aux membres du personnel des NAZ qui assistent les chercheurs au pupitre de contrôle en identifiant, récupérant et faisant des photocopies des archives/documents requis, tandis que le terme « chercheurs » désigne à la fois les utilisateurs universitaires et non universitaires des archives. Les questions abordées dans cet article concernent les archivistes professionnels ainsi que les chercheurs locaux et étrangers, confirmés ou en début de carrière, qui veulent faire des recherches aux NAZ et dans d'autres archives africaines.

Introduction

The National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), like other national archives in Africa, serves as a resource center for historians, students, and other users of archives in Zimbabwe and beyond. It has extensive archive records, particularly from the previous colonial administration, going back to the 1890s. Archival institutions have extensive collections that are utilized as primary sources and for various purposes by both academic and non-academic users. As a result, a positive working relationship between researchers and archives staff (mostly records managers, archivists, and retrievers) is critical to the efficient flow of research. Using the NAZ as a lens to examine the significance of researcher-archivist relationships, this article contends that the NAZ's experiences are not unique to Zimbabwe because the institutional challenges, experiences, and arguments discussed in this article are applicable to other African archival institutions.¹ This article is based on interviews with

¹ For example, see Kago Ramokate and Trevor Moadlhodi, "Battling the Appraisal Backlog: A Challenging Professional Obligation for Botswana National Archives and Records Services," *ESARBICA Journal* 29 (2010), 67–86; Celina K. M Qobo, "Challenges of Digitizing the Endangered Lesotho Royal Archives," *ESARBICA Journal* 29 (2010), 248–261; Chrispin Hamooya, "Management of Public Sector Records and Archives in Zambia: The Past Present and the Future," *Zambia Library Association Journal*, 24–1–2 (2009), 71; Paul Lihoma, "Situation of Archives in Africa: The Case of National Archives of Malawi," *African Research and Documentation* 106 (2008), 3–11; Paul Lihoma and Stanley S. Gondwe, "'The Wonderful Treasure': A Case of the National Archives of Malawi," Annual General Meeting of the Society of Malawi in Blantyre on 30 May 2006, https://www.academia.edu/5586124/A_Case_of_the_National_Archives_of_Malawi, (accessed 12 December 2021); and Clement Mweso, "Taking Aim at Archival Practice: Constraints

researchers who commonly do research at the NAZ and archivists, as well as the authors' own reflections and experiences as archivists before becoming researchers.

The article is informed by, and makes connections with, the work of Randal C. Jimerson, Joanne Duffy, and Leslie Bessant on the role of archivists and the experience of researchers at the archives.² Jimerson's postmodernist perspective on the duty of archivists proposed that "we should embrace the power of archives. Archivists are not handmaidens of history, passive guardians of cultural treasures, or gatekeepers limiting access to endangered documents."³ Jimerson debunks the conventional view of archivists as a neutral party in the preservation and dissemination of historical collections. By analyzing the role of archivists at the NAZ, this article links to Jimerson's observations by placing archivists at the center of the study as they make preservation decisions that ultimately limit what researchers may access. It also refers to Antony King and Leslie Bessant's individual experiences and recollections at the National Archives of South Africa and the NAZ in the late 1990s and early 2000s. While the preceding literature discusses the role of archivists and researchers' experiences at archives, this article focuses on the contemporary era and the critical nature of archivist-researcher relationships for staff professional development and research in general, and in Zimbabwe in particular. Despite the abundance of literature on archives in Zimbabwe, scholars have paid little attention to problems of access and the interaction between archivists and researchers, as well as their influence on research and professional development for archivists.⁴ Of course, few studies examine the NAZ's access regulations, backlog difficulties, and their consequences for researchers' access to archives.⁵ However, this literature by former archivists

and Challenges of Malawi National Archives," <https://www.nyaraka.go.tz/uploads/publications/sw1510295746-Mweso%20C%20Taking%20Aim%20at%20Archival%20practice.pdf>, (accessed 12 December 2021).

² Randall C. Jimerson, "Archival Priorities: Ten Critical Issues for the Profession, in Provenance," *Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists* 23–1 (2005), 57–70; Joanne L. Duffy, "Using Archives in South Africa: Planning a Research Trip in the 'Information Age,'" *History in Africa* 30 (2003), 421–430; and Leslie Bessant, "Descent from Privilege: A Researcher's Memoir of the National Archives of Zimbabwe, 1984–1993," *History in Africa* 24 (1997), 403.

³ Jimerson, "Archival Priorities: Ten Critical Issues for the Profession," 60.

⁴ For example, see Nicholas Vumbunu, "Disaster Preparedness at the National Archives of Zimbabwe: An Appraisal," *ESARBICA Journal* 20 (2001), 114–116; Livingston Muchefa, "Politicisation of Memory and the Creation of Dark Histories in Zimbabwe," *ESARBICA Journal* 31 (2012), 125–132; and Samuel Chabikwa, "Minorities and the Zimbabwean Archival Endeavour," *ESARBICA Journal* 35 (2016), 90–102.

⁵ Rudo Karadzandima, "Access and Use of the Illustrations' (Pictorial) Collection at the National Archives of Zimbabwe," *ESARBICA Journal* 31 (2012), 150–159; Livingston Muchefa and Tafadzwa Chigodora, "A Historical Account of Backlog Challenges at National Archives of Zimbabwe and the Access Implications,"

is based on their experiences and it is quite revealing on our part to write about researcher-archivist relations to allow others to have a perspective of the internal and emotional experiences by archivists.

“Descent from Privilege” to No Privilege: Economic Hardships and Service Delivery at the NAZ

During Zimbabwe’s first decade of independence (1980–1990), when the economy was performing well, the government was able to provide significant financial assistance to the NAZ. The NAZ also received international funding, which assisted in modernizing the archives, promoting training, and acquiring equipment.⁶ From 1980 through the early 1990s, the availability of resources and experienced personnel made the research environment at the NAZ favorable for both researchers and staff members. Leslie Bessant, for example, lauded the professionalism of archivists and the general management of archives after visiting the NAZ between 1985 and 1993.⁷ Antony King similarly recounted his experiences at the NAZ, including comparable recalls and encounters, despite the fact that service delivery standards had begun to deteriorate due to Zimbabwe’s faltering economy.⁸ Zimbabwe’s political and economic situation has worsened since the early 1990s because of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) and other causes.⁹ This predicament persisted after 2000, as the country’s economy continued to decline.¹⁰ This had a significant impact on the quality of service delivery in

ESARBICA Journal 35 (2016), 112–119; see also P. Ngulube, Norah Sibanda, and L. S. Makoni, “Mapping Access and Use of Archival Materials Held at the Bulawayo Archives in Zimbabwe,” *ESARBICA Journal* 32 (2013), 123–137.

⁶ National Archives of Zimbabwe, <http://www.archives.gov.zw/index.php/about/history>, (accessed 26 June 2021).

⁷ Bessant, “Descent from Privilege,” 403.

⁸ Antony King, “Of Mice and Manuscripts: A Memoir of the National Archives of Zimbabwe,” *History in Africa* 25 (1998), 405–411.

⁹ For more on ESAP, see for example Alois Mlambo, *The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme: The Case of Zimbabwe, 1990–1995* (Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1997); Amanda Hammar, Brian Raftopoulos, and Stig Jensen (eds.), *Zimbabwe’s Unfinished Business: Rethinking Land, State and Nation in the Context of Crisis* (Harare, Zimbabwe: Weaver Press 2003); Brian Raftopoulos and Alois Mlambo (eds.), *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008* (Harare, Zimbabwe: Weaver Press, 2009); Daniel Compagnon, *A Predictable Tragedy: Robert Mugabe and the Collapse of Zimbabwe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Richard Bourne, *Catastrophe: What Went Wrong in Zimbabwe?* (London: Zed Books, 2011); Patrick Bond and Masimba Manyanya, *Zimbabwe’s Plunge: Exhausted Nationalism, Neoliberalism, and the Search for Social Justice* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of Natal Press, 2002); and Rupak Chattopadhyay, “Zimbabwe: Structural Adjustment, Destitution and Food Insecurity,” *Review of African Political Economy* 27–84 (2000), 307–316.

¹⁰ For example, see Leonard Chitongo, Timothy Marango, and Prince Chikunya, “Do Economic Blueprints Work? Evaluating the Prospects and Challenges of

several government ministries and departments, including the NAZ funded by the central government (Treasury). Ivan Murambiwa, former director of the NAZ,¹¹ admits that these issues resulted in significant employee turnover, difficulty in attracting and maintaining experienced staff members, a lack of financing, degradation of purpose-built infrastructure, and the loss of data due to theft or misfiling.¹² The high staff turnover has gradually reduced the quality of service in several government departments, including the NAZ, as the institution continues to lose seasoned and competent archivists in the quest of better opportunities in the country or abroad.¹³ As the general civil service continues to deteriorate, more archivists and office orderlies transfer from one ministry to another or just resign from their employment. Between 2014 and 2017, the Public Archives and Research Section lost four archivists out of a total of seven.¹⁴ This number excludes those who departed the institution in the late 1990s as well as those who left in other sections. Due to the significant employee turnover and lateral transfers, the NAZ has generally inexperienced young archivists because experienced archivists leave before nurturing young archivists, who then have to learn the job the hard way.¹⁵ They are also responsible for aiding students who are doing practicums as they learn the trade. Given the organization of the archive, it takes time for new archivists and retrievers to get familiar with it before they can aid researchers. When they are unable to give professional help to new researchers inexperienced with archives and finding tools, seasoned researchers such as Ian Johnstone, who has extensive expertise with archives, often aid them.¹⁶ In general, the professional behavior of the present

Zimbabwe's Transitional Stabilisation Programme," *African Journal of Governance and Development* 9–1 (2020), 9–12; Chidochashe L. Munangagwa, "The Economic Decline of Zimbabwe," *Gettysburg Economic Review* 3–9 (2009), 110–129; and Jayson Coomer, *Zimbabwe's Economic Crisis and Hyperinflation, 1997–2009* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 2010), 1–68.

¹¹ Ivan Munhamu Murambiwa became the Director of NAZ in 2000 until his death in mid-2021.

¹² M. Ivan Murambiwa, "Archiving to the Last Archivist Standing: The National Archives of Zimbabwe under Sanctions," *Comma* 1 (2012), 59–66.

¹³ In 2017, Chief Archivist Prisca Marowa and Principal Archivist Tafadzwa Chigodora resigned to join the private sector. Alfred Chikomba, Principal Archivist, and Livingstone Muchefa, Chief Archivist, both departed from the institution in 2020.

¹⁴ The Public Archives and Research Section is a Division within the NAZ that specializes in the processing of manuscripts and public archives, as well as providing access to them. It is the last stage of a research cycle that includes materials from both the Reference Library and the Records Centre.

¹⁵ See Murambiwa, "Archiving to the Last Archivist Standing," 59–66.

¹⁶ Ian Johnstone, a former NAZ director, is well-known for his willingness to help archivists find archives. Despite the fact that the authors have now left the NAZ, they continue to get requests from new archivists for help in finding archives during research trips and in assisting other researchers in identifying archives they will be searching for in the inventories.

generation of archivists is commendable, as they demonstrate incredible tenacity in doing their responsibilities under adverse conditions and doing all possible to aid researchers.

As funding dwindled, the NAZ amassed an enormous amount of unprocessed archives and manuscripts that it should have made accessible to researchers. Backlogs are a typical occurrence at a number of African archive institutions, not only the NAZ, according to research.¹⁷ One of the factors cited by researchers as contributing to the growth of backlogs at different African archival institutions is a shortage of employees and, of course, financial resources for the construction of additional purpose-built repositories and shelving materials.¹⁸ The NAZ, on the other hand, started reporting a considerable backlog of historical manuscripts in 1980 and ceased processing both manuscripts and public records in 1983, prioritizing Federal documents (1953–1963).¹⁹ According to Livingstone Muchefa and Tafadzwa Chigodora, the backlog increased from 2000 cubic feet in 1992 to 22,000 cubic feet in 2015.²⁰ As of 2019, the backlog of unprocessed documents has risen to 20 years, surpassing the 15-year period specified in the closure clause. Archivists from the Research and Public Archives Sections handled archives of different classifications up to 1975; however, they did not process the public archives from 1976 to 1995, that should have been available to the public.²¹ The archivists at the NAZ fail to meet the expansion of the public sector, which has a direct influence on the growth of public records.

¹⁷ Muchefa and Chigodora, “A Historical Account of Backlog Challenges at National Archives of Zimbabwe and the Access Implications”; Francis Garabha “An Investigation into Archival Appraisal Practices in the Member States of the East and Southern African Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA),” (unpublished MIS Dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2005); and Nathan Mnjama, “Dealing with Backlog Accumulations of Archival Materials in Eastern and Southern Africa,” *Information Development* 22–1 (2006), 48–56.

¹⁸ Mnjama, “Dealing with Backlog Accumulations of Archival Materials in Eastern and Southern Africa”; Garabha, “An Investigation into Archival Appraisal Practices in the Member States of the East and Southern African Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA).”

¹⁹ Federal Records were generated between 1953 and 1963 when the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was created and comprised of modern-day Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi. After Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, the NAZ prioritized the Federal Records, thereby increasing the backlog of other manuscripts and public records generated before the Federation.

²⁰ Muchefa and Chigodora, “A Historical Account of Backlog Challenges at National Archives of Zimbabwe and the Access Implications.”

²¹ National Archives of Zimbabwe Backlog Report. The report was produced to seek resources and financial support to clear/reduce this backlog. It was aimed at getting the support of University students to be engaged as part-time archivists. Prior to this, NAZ had engaged National University of Science and Technology (NUST) through arranged practicums.

Zimbabwe had 17 parastatals when it gained independence in 1980 and now has around 107.²² One of the NAZ's mandates is to make records produced by these parastatals accessible for research after they have completed their record cycle with the generating departments. Consequently, the NAZ leaves these documents in the hands of the departments that created them. In addition to backlog difficulties, the NAZ's inability to expand its personnel and build additional repositories makes it difficult for researchers to access unprocessed records held by the NAZ.²³ Arguably, the paucity of archival materials from certain eras has a direct influence on the themes chosen by junior and senior academics working on Zimbabwean topics at domestic and overseas institutions.²⁴ Inevitably, this conflict of interest between archivists and researchers creates a bottleneck for researchers seeking access to the NAZ's archives. At some point, it will look as if archivists do not want to provide researchers access to materials, despite the fact that they operate under challenging conditions, sometimes beyond their control. Although there has been a significant reduction in professionalism, other factors might strain the relationship between archivists and researchers apart from the NAZ's steady deterioration in service delivery.

Due to economic constraints, several of the privileges granted by the NAZ to researchers are no longer available. For example, Bessant and King reminisce about their time sipping tea at the archives in the 1990s and the connections they developed. Except for staff personnel, researchers no longer have access to this privilege. Researchers, with the exception of staff members, no longer have access to this permission. To Bessant and King, tea provided both a source of refreshment and a chance for intellectuals to network. One of the researchers, Clement Masakure, expressed concern with the absence of tea and a café where researchers could buy meals.²⁵ Although regular users of archives commonly state this argument, it is difficult to support in light of the fact that many African archives lack such facilities, much alone in a country facing economic difficulties. Currently, researchers visiting the NAZ should bring their own meals or visit the adjacent Police Golf Club. Unaludo Sechele describes a similar situation at

²² Patience Rusare, "Zim@38: Closer Look at Parastatals," *The Patriot*, 19 April 2018, https://www.thepatriot.co.zw/old_posts/zim38-closer-look-at-parastatals/, (accessed 25 June 2021).

²³ We have seen many researchers asked by archivists (and we have told others) to approach various government departments and seek permission to access their records not yet deposited at the NAZ.

²⁴ We have seen many students abandoning their proposed topics after failing to access archives, especially on the postcolonial period. Their supervisors will even advise them to choose topics where archives are readily available so that they will be able to submit their theses in good time.

²⁵ Interview with Clement Masakure at the University of the Free State, 3 May 2017.

the Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS), where the absence of a restaurant forced researchers to bring their own lunch or walk five minutes to the mall.²⁶ Kudakwashe Chitofiri said recently during a visit to the Lesotho National Archives that the site's restaurant is closed; it is unclear if this because of COVID-19 measures or not.²⁷ Apart from the previously highlighted national problems, the policies regulating the NAZ controversially shape the researcher-archivist interaction as discussed below.

Policies, Practices, and Researchers' Experiences at the NAZ

The majority of African legislation and regulations governing access to archives and documents have their origins in their colonial history. The regulations governing access to records and archives in the United Kingdom (UK) have affected policies governing access to records and archives in the majority of Commonwealth countries.²⁸ This partly explains why, despite the country's emphasis on indigenization and the elimination of colonial practices after independence in 1980, access regulations imposed during the colonial period mostly continued at the NAZ. As will be shown below, this has created a conflict of interest between archivists' obligation to conserve and preserve archives and researchers' desire to access them. The 1986 NAZ Act reduced the retention time for different types of archives from 30 to 25 years (save for specified classes, such as personal files), commencing on the day the creating department created the record. The NAZ's closure date is different from that of South Africa, Botswana, and Zambia, all of which make their archives publicly available after 20 years.²⁹ The NAZ retains public documents for a considerably longer amount of time (25 years), which has an effect on research in general. Catherine Moyo adds that the 25-year closure period creates major barriers to access and study by limiting academics'

²⁶ Unaludo Sechele, "An Archive with a Facebook page—Doing Research in the Botswana National Archives—Unaludo Sechele," *Global South Archives*, <https://globalsoutharchives.wordpress.com/2018/01/29/researching-external-affairs-at-the-botswana-national-archives-and-records-services-unaludo-sechele/>, (accessed 14 December 2021).

²⁷ Interview with Kudakwashe Chitofiri, Rhodes University African Studies Centre, 7 December 2021.

²⁸ George Bishi, "The Colonial Archive and Contemporary Chieftainship Claims: The Case of Zimbabwe, 1935 to 2014," (unpublished MA Dissertation, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 2015), 19; Dagmar Parer, *Archival Legislation for Commonwealth Countries*, *Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers (ACARM)*, Cairns, Australia, 2.

²⁹ Tshepho Mosweu and Iwani Simon, "The Implications of the National Archives and Records Services Act on

Archival Practice in Botswana," *Journal of the South African Society of Archivists* 51 (2018), 90.

access to sources.³⁰ The lengthy lifetime is largely explained by the NAZ's combined responsibility with the creating departments (the public sector), where the NAZ just guides and oversees the establishment of Public Sector Retention and Disposal Schedules. The NAZ gives only guidelines to creating departments about the length of the closure term depending on the administrative value of the records. Researchers may be unaware of this information to some extent, which creates the chance of miscommunication between them and archivists. This restriction does not apply to Oral History (OH) files, since the legislation provides that they are not obliged to be closed in certain situations, as long as the informants agree to their accessibility.³¹ According to Rebecca Mbanyele, the current head of the OH Section, some researchers may be unaware of OH sources, while others allege that informants fabricate information to match their narratives during interviews.³² Another constraint, similar to manuscripts, is that OH materials lack standardized formats in comparison to public documents, making them more difficult to use.

We argue that, based on their personal experience as former archivists, the NAZ always possesses documents that should be made accessible to researchers as archives and that the institution should notify the public of their availability in compliance with international standards. The second principle of the International Council on Archives' Principles of Access to Archives states that "institutions holding archives [should] make known the existence of the archives, including the existence of closed materials, and disclose the existence of restrictions that affect access to the archives."³³ The point here is that archivists should make public the conditions that govern access to such restricted material, which includes:

Information on the nature of the restriction that applies, including whether the restriction is based only on the date of the material or on its content (without revealing the restricted information). Additionally, it also includes the extent of the period of closure and the date or event that will trigger the release of the material and the authority for the restriction (law, regulation, or donor agreement).³⁴

³⁰ Cathrine Moyo, "Access to Archives at the National Archives of Zimbabwe," in Ngulube, Patrick (ed.), *National Archives 75@30: 75 Years of Archiving Excellence at the National Archives of Zimbabwe* (Harare: National Archives of Zimbabwe, 2012), 79.

³¹ Interview with Rudo Karadzandima, former Oral History Archivist, 12 September 2014.

³² Interview with Rebecca Mbanyele, NAZ, 13 December 2021; Bishi, "The Archive and Chieftainship Claims in Zimbabwe," 396.

³³ International Council on Archives (ICA), "Principles of Access to Archives," 20 February 2013. <https://www.ica.org/en/principles-access-archives>, (accessed 16 March 2019).

³⁴ International Council on Archives (ICA), "Principles of Access to Archives."

Yet researchers are limited to the archives made available to them by archivists and records managers. However, there are also cases where researchers want to access unprocessed files that should be in public archives but the Records Centre still held them. This is often a cause of controversy and debate among archivists and researchers, as shown by a notable occurrence in February 2017.³⁵ Talent Munyori, a PhD student from a foreign institution, was doing research at the NAZ in February 2017, and, like many other foreign-based researchers, he was pressed for time. He had a maximum of three months to complete his research, a choice motivated by the low funding on his research grant. Munyori requested access to documents pertaining to postcolonial Zimbabwe, but the NAZ Records Centre refused due to a backlog, despite the fact that the materials are declassified and were ready to be accessible by the public. Additionally, despite the fact that the closing period for the documents he sought had elapsed, the NAZ warned him that they were “sensitive” and classified. This incident exposes a conflict of interest between researchers and archivists since the latter seems to be “gatekeepers” to records while carrying out their duty, depending on the state of the materials researchers request to access. Due to this predicament, some scholars reach different findings based on the sources that archivists choose to make accessible to them. In other words, archivists have an impact on what historians write because they determine what to preserve, destroy, and make public. As Eric Ketelaar succinctly puts it, “the archive reflects realities as perceived by the ‘archivers.’”³⁶ Further, archiving entails what should and should not be kept,³⁷ thereby shapes the process of remembering, forgetting, and the writing of history. The Munyori case brings new revelations to the complexity of researcher-archivist relations. It is about clear communication procedure, professionalism, and perceptions. The Transmittal lists (a compiled list of records transferred from creating Departments to the Archives) or Master Registers are not separated between semi-current records and those that are already archival (after lapsing of closure period). This creates an administrative challenge in trying to give researchers access by allowing them to handle mixed and different categories of records. This scenario has led to people advocate for the implementation of Electronic Document Records Management Systems (EDRMS) as an effective control regime.

Reprography policies, which govern the reproduction of archives and photographs at the NAZ, are detrimental to research since they limit photocopies to a weekly maximum of 25 pages.³⁸ This amount is insufficient for

³⁵ Interview with Talent Munyori (pseudonym), 20 February 2017.

³⁶ Eric Ketelaar, “Tacit Narratives: The Meanings of Archives,” *Archival Science* 1 (2001), 133.

³⁷ Ketelaar, “Tacit Narratives: The Meanings of Archives,” 136.

³⁸ National Archives of Zimbabwe, <http://www.archives.gov.zw/index.php/contact-us/2018-09-17-14-14-08>, (accessed 28 June 2021).

researchers with limited research time. For instance, if a file exceeds 25 pages, it becomes difficult to produce more than the needed number of copies. The purpose of this legislation is to preserve the collections, which usually has a detrimental effect on researchers who want to make copies of the archives and complete their research as quickly as possible. Certain documents are fragile because they are bound booklets with easily broken spines during photocopying. On the other hand, photocopying or scanning these fragile archives destroys them, defeating the purpose of archives conservation. Allowing researchers to use their equipment—cameras, mobile phones, and other devices—as long as they are not in flash mode is, perhaps, the most effective way to save documents. In the event of a fire or other disaster, researchers may donate their copies to the NAZ to aid in the archive's rebuilding.

Since the NAZ prohibits researchers from taking photographs without the Director's permission, this causes conflict between archivists and researchers.³⁹ All across the civil service, the requirement that all communication passes through the institution's head has been a cause of bureaucracy and other ineffectiveness. The more copies researchers make, the more money they spend, and the longer the process takes (since it is a manual process), forcing researchers to type their research notes onto notebooks or computers; this gives the impression that archivists are obstructing their research. At the same time, archivists may see researchers as being less aware of the importance of their responsibility to conserve archives by restricting photostatic of any kind and making them accessible only if the materials' life is not jeopardized.⁴⁰ Surprisingly, this tension occurs between researchers and archivists who are perceived to act as the eyes and ears of the Director and the Minister of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage. While archivists are civil servants who must obey orders and refrain from challenging numerous restrictions, they are also professionals capable of developing constructive, sound archives and records policies in compliance with the National Archives Act.⁴¹ Together with researchers, their suggestions contribute considerably to making changes that benefit both sides, even if the bulk of policies were already in place when many archivists joined the institution.⁴²

Along with reprography fees, the NAZ demands all visitors to pay an admission fee, the value of which varies according to fluctuating exchange

³⁹ This is probably a criticism given to all central government entities where all communication and approvals are done by the Accounting Authority or Head of Institution.

⁴⁰ *National Archives of Zimbabwe Act* (Harare: Government Printers, 1986).

⁴¹ *National Archives of Zimbabwe Act*.

⁴² Interview with the former principal archivist Tafadzwa Chigodora, 6 February 2017. Although we are familiar with the NAZ, we asked other archivists why they do annual stock take only in March and not in December during which many researchers will be on holiday; they indicated that they are not aware who suggested that it should be carried out in March. However, they encouraged researchers to write a petition to the Director to shift the month to December.

rates caused by Zimbabwe's fluctuating hyperinflation levels. However, there is presently an enticing offer of paying a \$ZW600 (equal to \$US4) annual charge. Compared to other National Archives, NAZ charges are quite low.⁴³ Annual membership is more cost-effective for people who spend more time in the archives than casual visitors do. The access fees are very beneficial for researchers, even more so in the current inflationary environment, when a local dollar is worth around US\$0.08c. The NAZ is unable to readily adjust these expenditures due to bureaucracy. Similarly, Bryson Nkoma adds that both foreigners and nationals must pay access fees to the Malawi National Archives, but unlike in Zimbabwe, the process is not cumbersome in Malawi.⁴⁴ This is in contrast to other archives in southern Africa, such as those in South Africa, Botswana, and Lesotho, which do not charge researchers for access.⁴⁵

Another source of worry is the issue of research permits, which the Research Council of Zimbabwe (RCZ) regulates; and researchers are of the opinion that the permits must be handled by the authority of the NAZ. Zimbabwe created the RCZ in 1986, and the Research Act (Chapter 10:22) empowers it to carry out a range of functions, including promoting, directing, supervising, and coordinating research in Zimbabwe.⁴⁶ According to Section 27 of the Research Act, all non-Zimbabwean researchers conducting research in Zimbabwe on behalf of foreign institutions or organizations must apply for research permits with the RCZ and pay a non-refundable \$US500 application fee as well as a \$US500 Temporary Employment Permit (TEP).⁴⁷ The RCZ requires that all foreign researchers affiliate with a local institution or organization, but it is up to the hosting departments to approve or deny their affiliation applications depending on a variety of factors, complicating the process further. As a government department, the NAZ denies access to the archives to foreign researchers who do not provide valid study permits.⁴⁸ One of the cited shortcomings or the inflexibility of NAZ is that they do not allow membership or affiliation status to be granted to foreign researchers, which would otherwise allow these researchers to be able to harvest from this pool. Bessant and King recounted the bureaucratic difficulties they encountered in the late 1990s while applying for research permits and the Temporary Employment Permit (TEP) as foreign researchers. That was over 25 years ago, indicating that the process has grown more onerous since the 1990s.

⁴³ This is according to official exchange rates as of April 2022.

⁴⁴ Interview with Bryson Nkoma, Mzuzu, 14 December 2021.

⁴⁵ Sechele, "An Archive with a Facebook page."

⁴⁶ Research Council of Zimbabwe, "Overview of RCZ," <http://www.rcz.ac.zw/overview-of-rcz/>, (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁴⁷ Research Council of Zimbabwe, "Overview of RCZ."

⁴⁸ Acting within their mandate, archivists deny foreign researchers with no research permit to access archives. They allow them three days to look at the catalogues and inventories but do not permit them to access the actual archives.

With the government's shifting attitude toward foreign researchers after the Fast Track Land Reform in 2000 and the government's anti-Western posture, the process and standards for acquiring a research permit in Zimbabwe have grown more stringent and difficult. Dennis Young (pseudonym), a foreign researcher, recounts his experiences applying for a research permit and the TEP in the early part of 2017. He explains that the application process is long since the host institution submits the application to the RCZ on the researcher's behalf, and the researcher provides 13 copies of the application, which costs around US\$100 in stationery. He first asked for affiliation with a Harare-based university but, after getting a verbal response that they would not support him, he applied to another university, which responded instantly. He argues that the fact that universities' vice-chancellors have ultimate approval authority over research permits is an unusually high-level form of granting research permit. When another foreign researcher applied for a research permit, he had a different experience since the host university was highly supportive and his topic was politically neutral—and his permit came in within three months. However, after going through the process of applying for a TEP and submitting his application, he never received his visa from the immigration.⁴⁹ The impact of these experiences is that they leave a negative perception on the researchers about the whole process of applying for a research permit and the TEP. This also forces some international researchers to end up finding or hiring local research assistants in Zimbabwe in order to circumvent the time-consuming bureaucratic difficulties involved in acquiring research permits and TEPs.

The advent of the “Second Republic” in 2018 (a term used to refer to the Government led by President Emerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, who came to power with military assistance following the November 2017 removal of late President Robert Gabriel Mugabe),⁵⁰ theoretically paved the way for some changes at the NAZ. The institution has written to authorities asking for an exemption of the requirement that the NAZ and its parent Ministry (now Ministry of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage) accredit international researchers visiting the archives. The underlying assumption is that other departments have no difficulty receiving visitors or foreigners. If the government grants this proposal, it should be seen positively by international researchers and provide the NAZ with the opportunity to earn much-needed funding through the issuance of research permits. By placing the NAZ under a security ministry rather than an

⁴⁹ Interview with Brian Haigh, London, 10 January 2022.

⁵⁰ Godfrey Maringira, “The Military Post-Mugabe,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 56–2 (2021), 176–188; Blessing M. Tendi, “The Motivations and Dynamics of Zimbabwe's 2017 Military Coup,” *African Affairs* 119–474 (January 2020), 39–67; and Mkhululi Nyathi and Matshobana Ncube, “The 2017 Military Coup in Zimbabwe: Implications for Human Rights and the Rule of Law,” *African Human Rights Law Journal* 20 (2020), 825–851.

information ministry, the state allegedly securitises archives. Since Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, the only time the state moved the NAZ was from 2015 to 2017 when the government formed a new short-lived Ministry of Rural Development, Preservation, and Promotion of National Heritage and Culture.⁵¹ Since the start of the twenty-first century, the government has limited access to information and has labelled some private organizations and independent researchers as unpatriotic and in need of extensive governmental supervision and surveillance. Thus, blaming archivists ignores the broader changes and difficult circumstances in which the NAZ operates, as well as its efforts to address problematic policies. Apart from the archive laws and rules that define researcher-archivist relations, both archivists and researchers' conduct has an effect on archivists' professional development and the smooth flow of research on the part of researchers.

Professionalism, Ethics, and the Interactions Between Staff and Researchers

Professional and ethical conduct of archivists, as well as good work relationships with researchers, is crucial for both parties' professional development and research. Certain visitors to the archives come for reasons other than research.⁵² Because these visitors are mainly interested in the gallery, statues, paintings, and antiquities at the NAZ, their interactions with archivists do not provide more insight into archivist-researcher relations and their implications for research or archivist professionalism. On the control desk, daily or frequent users of the archives interact with the archives' rules, regulations, and archivists' professional conduct. At the NAZ, the phrase "control desk" refers to the area between the reading room and the catalogue where archivists welcome researchers and assist them in identifying and acquainting themselves with finding aids, regulating file movement, and monitoring the reading room.⁵³ Since they apply the legislative mechanisms controlling access to archives under the NAZ Act, control desk personnel serve as the institution's face and public image. Except for the Director, Deputy Director, Chief Records Officer, and Chief Archivist, all archivists alternate staffing the

⁵¹ Ministry of Rural Development, Promotion and Preservation of National Culture and Heritage, <http://www.gisp.gov.zw/index.php/en/component/spsimpleportfolio/item/6-ministry-of-rural-development-promotion-and-preservation>, (accessed 25 June 2021).

⁵² Apart from documents, the NAZ contains several tangible collections—the Alfred Beit Gallery, the sculptures of Cecil John Rhodes and Alfred Beit, the Physical Energy, the Traction Engine, dugout canoe, rondavel hut, and the decommissioned armored vehicle parked at the Conservation Unit captivate some visitors.

⁵³ National Archives of Zimbabwe, <http://www.archives.gov.zw/index.php/contact-us/2018-09-17-14-14-08>, (accessed 28 June 2021).

control desk. Consequently, researchers anticipate them to demonstrate the highest level of professionalism, ethics, and public relations. They must be conversant with the archive's operations, including its accession, organization, and description in inventories and catalogue indexes. They must have a firm grasp of Zimbabwe's history in order to perform their duties properly. They ensure that researchers are not photographing, making noise, or writing on or destroying documents in the reading room in an unauthorized manner.⁵⁴ Enforcing these restrictions requires archivists to use soft force in order to manage the activities of researchers. Therefore, everyday interactions between researchers, archivists, and retrievers on the control desk involve power dynamics that affect research.

In other contexts, researchers take photographs while turning the camera flash off on their devices to protect papers from light damage.⁵⁵ This complicates matters for researchers wishing to incur risks by photographing illegally. Researchers may report grievances or make comments in the visitors' book situated at the reception. Only the Director and senior archivists, however, have the authority to view the comments in order to take necessary steps and respond to researchers' complaints.⁵⁶ Numerous factors contribute to researchers' reluctance to disclose unpleasant experiences with management. For instance, frequent researchers may have developed relations with staff members and do not want to expose them; so, they prefer anonymity and sympathize with the staff.⁵⁷ Other researchers are aware of the archivists' predicament, as well as the economic situation in the country. Therefore, they go out of their way to be courteous to archives staff and to help in any way possible.⁵⁸ The environment at NAZ allows researchers to develop friendships with staff members who assist them in doing their research smoothly.

Due to the depressing and difficult economic and working conditions endured by archivists, it is natural to find a lack of trust between them and the researchers who depend on them to deliver quality service. In this case, researchers would see archivists' conduct as unprofessional, despite the fact that they are working in hazardous environments without adequate protective equipment to shield them from paper dust. They may express

⁵⁴ There are notices placed in the reading room on each table reminding researchers how to use archives in a conservation manner.

⁵⁵ At the South Africa National Archives and the National Archives, Kew, researchers take pictures, provided the flash mode of their devices is off.

⁵⁶ The second author contributed to this project, which was started in response to an increase in negative comments in the Visitors Comments Book. The authors refrained from accessing the visitors' book due to the sensitive and ethical nature of this research, which is also against NAZ regulations. The book is confidential; it includes the identities of researchers and their comments, which the Director should keep private.

⁵⁷ Interview with Petros Mohapi (pseudonym), researcher, 15 January 2019.

⁵⁸ Interview with Caleb Wazvaremhaka (pseudonym), researcher, 17 April 2020.

unhappiness on rare and sporadic occasions when they feel researchers do not appreciate their efforts to deliver the best service possible under difficult circumstances. For instance, one archivist joked with a researcher that “your one dollar is nothing in relation to the risk associated with getting your archives. If I fall off the ladder, it will not help me pay for my medical expenses.”⁵⁹ Clearly, this episode demonstrates the archivist’s lack of professionalism, given that researchers are not liable for the archivists’ poor working conditions, even if this was a joke.

This is not to say that all researchers have the same amount of responsibility; as one archivist highlighted, some researchers and top government officials violate archives restrictions on occasion. For instance, in specific circumstances, researchers have refused to sign the logbook at reception, pay the access fee, or produce identity cards. Aides to prominent government ministers often seek access to the archives without signing in and repeatedly threaten archivists to write request slips for them.⁶⁰ Others choose to be critical of receptionists and make nasty comments about them. For example, one receptionist said that she once requested payment of an access fee from another male journalist who seemed to be pressed for time, but his response was uncalled for, implying that she was less educated.⁶¹ While there is no explanation for his obnoxious statements, he was a rare guest who was unfamiliar with the NAZ’s policies and decided to vent his frustration on the innocent woman. Clearly, the average researcher is not that arrogant. Others are inclined to speak about their academic qualifications, accolades, and achievements in order to get around the NAZ’s regulations.⁶² NAZ employees eventually treat them with contempt or spend an inordinate amount of time responding to their requests out of exasperation. Archivists, on the other hand, are not passive actors; rather, their relationship with researchers is critical to the research process.⁶³ They select what gets in the archives and manage, preserve, and provide access to archives, which researchers use as primary materials to reconstruct the past.⁶⁴ This is especially true of the NAZ, given the institution’s poor working conditions, deteriorating standards, and staff members’ professional dissatisfaction.

Certain rare researchers have attempted to recruit archivists as research assistants, constituting a conflict of interest. The NAZ Act mandates archivists

⁵⁹ Name withheld. However, these comments occurred several times.

⁶⁰ Interview with Sarudzai Tashayawedu (pseudonym) archivist, 16 May 2019.

⁶¹ Interview with Mildred Chipanda (pseudonym), receptionist, 16 December 2020.

⁶² Interview with Clarience Mbijo (pseudonym), records manager, 15 June 2021.

⁶³ Terry Cook and Joan M. Schwartz, “Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002), 1–2.

⁶⁴ Verne Harris, “The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002), 65.

to assist researchers with finding aids and they are expected to follow their professional ethical norms. However, the NAZ access policy also allows researchers to look for further assistance in carrying out their research if it qualifies under what they call “protracted research.” To prevent a conflict of interest, the researcher should seek the assistance of the archivist, which both parties should indicate by signing the contracts forms which are submitted to the management. Due to the persistent economic crisis in Zimbabwe, which directly affects NAZ, archivists have decided not to declare these contracts to the management for fear of being victimized or accused of allegedly not doing their work and prioritizing clandestine arrangements with researchers for financial benefits.

Way Forward and Conclusion

While some of the issues described in this article reflect the government, the NAZ, as an institution, has the ability to arbitrate on certain of them. This article advocates for more understanding and education on the workings of archives among both archivists and researchers. While other local universities and polytechnic colleges in Zimbabwe have been offering records and archives management degrees and diplomas, the University of Zimbabwe (UZ) has recently joined them by offering BA Honors Degree Digital Archival and Historical Information Records Management.⁶⁵ This is positive in terms of increasing knowledge among young scholars, since the UZ is one of the few institutions in Zimbabwe that teaches history. When students are required to complete honors and MA theses, they are often bewildered when they learn about the archive's function.⁶⁶ Many students, particularly those doing Bachelor of Arts Honors dissertations, are unaware of the archives' functions. They are shocked and irritated when their supervisors request that they go to the NAZ. When the authors worked as archivists, they saw how misinformed and puzzled several students were when they came to the archives for research. They had no idea where to begin except to aimlessly flip through inventory pages and desperately pull and fumble the index cards, since the NAZ, like other archives in southern Africa, has not yet automated its cataloguing system.⁶⁷ To make matters worse, most first-time visitors of the archives are unaware of how colonial authorities filed records in the establishing departments. They leave the files disorganized after utilizing them, making it harder for the next user.

The professional training of archivists at the NAZ is an essential aspect integral to archivists' ethical and professional conduct. In Zimbabwe, the

⁶⁵ University of Zimbabwe, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, <https://www.uz.ac.zw/index.php/faculties-units/arts>, (accessed 10 December 2021).

⁶⁶ Some students even graduated without even visiting the archives – especially those who did a BA general degree.

⁶⁷ Sechele, “An Archive with a Facebook Page.”

National University of Science and Technology (NUST), Midlands State University (MSU), and Harare Polytechnic College were among the few universities that offered courses and degrees in archives and records management, with University of Zimbabwe joining recently. Prior to then, the bulk of archivists at the NAZ was/are UZ graduates who studied History, Economic History, or Archaeology, followed by those from MSU, NUST, and Harare Polytechnic. As a result, most archivists will learn on the job. While the historical aspect is important, the profession also has its own technical and scientific criteria. This highlights how some archivists must learn on the job since they do not understand the fundamental components of archives and records management concepts, particularly if they have not completed practicums at the NAZ or other records management departments and institutes. A basic understanding of Zimbabwean history, on the other hand, is essential for archivists since it gives them intellectual tools and enables them to engage with researchers working on various aspects of Zimbabwean and southern African history.

There must be some form of understanding between researchers and archivists. Usually, researchers are not aware of the professional limitations of archivists. Some academics see archivists as harsh gatekeepers who deny them the right to photocopy and photograph everything. In the present political atmosphere, researchers must file a petition to the Director requesting a review of NAZ policy. Although there is a true need to safeguard archives, the NAZ must also be flexible in order to stimulate research. This is significant since most researchers would have fancied using other archive institutions with less stringent restrictions. For example, at the National Archives, Kew,⁶⁸ Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford,⁶⁹ researchers only need to obtain a reader's card. In some institutions, there are no rigorous regimes controlling how much researchers may photocopy. Similarly, there are no restrictions on what researchers may photocopy or photograph in South African archives.⁷⁰

Despite these difficulties, the NAZ has extensive archive materials that are unquestionably valuable to researchers and well organized. Furthermore, interacting with its largely jovial, young, and energetic staff members is a lot of fun. It is simple to form networks and long-lasting connections with NAZ staff members, which will help with research. As King points out, "the best way to make a research trip successful is to be open and friendly with the staff, which will often go out of their way to be of assistance."⁷¹ Many researchers fail to

⁶⁸ See the National Archives, "Booking a visit to view our documents," <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/visit-us/about-the-book-a-reading-room-visit-service/>, (accessed 28 June 2021).

⁶⁹ Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, <https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/services/pcas>, (accessed 28 June 2021).

⁷⁰ National Archives and Records Service (NARS), Services to the Public (Use of Archives), <http://www.national.archives.gov.za/>, (accessed 28 June 2021).

⁷¹ King, "Of Mice and Manuscripts," 411.

make use of this platform. We conclude by recommending the NAZ to explore methods of raising funds in order to purchase new equipment, spare parts, and undertake staff development programs, all of which boost research. It may also provide consulting services to other private records management firms, conduct research, and provide research permits to overseas researchers.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the people who volunteered to provide information. This research is a part of George Bishi's postdoctoral fellowship at the Rhodes University African Studies Centre. The research was funded by DFG, the German Research Foundation, under Germany's Excellence Strategy, funding number EXC2052/1.

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