Moving with the times in search of permanence:
The digitization of "liberation struggle" archives in southern Africa

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Introduction

The struggle to liberate the continent of Africa from colonialism was a profound and all-time consuming one for Africans during the second half of the twentieth century and as such, this history needs to be documented accurately in whatever form for the benefit of posterity.[1] Amaral Cabral opined that the people's struggle for national liberation and independence from imperialist rule constituted one of the essential characteristics of contemporary history.[2]

The struggle for liberation that led to the attainment of national independence and the birth of new nations was a result of protracted efforts by different movements that had one common objective: that of dismantling colonialism. Southall could not have put it better when he remarked that these struggles took numerous different forms, yet all were characterized by the rejection of racism and imperialism and the demands of previously nationally oppressed peoples for sovereign equity with the colonial powers.[3]

Graham Dominy observed that "liberation struggle" archives are of differing types and status, reflecting the diverse nature of the struggle itself.[4] This broad view is adopted in this paper and a national liberation movement is thus defined as a non-governmental organization which, through violent or non-violent means, strives to win effective national independence in its crusade for emancipation. Liberation struggle archives have been created within and outside Africa to document the historic epoch from the 1950s to the 1990s, and these records have to be made available to the public for research, scholarship and general interest, because they are a treasured national asset. Moodley concurs on the significance of such archives, claiming that the papers and archival documents of the liberation movements in South Africa are

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1.   G. Dominy, *"Proposals on 'Liberation Struggle' Archives in Africa"*, Unpublished paper presented at the East and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) Executive Board meeting, Lilongwe, 21–23 June 2004.

2.   A. Cabral, "Identity and Dignity in the National Liberation Struggle", *Africa Today*, 19, 4, 1972, p 39. See also G. Nzongola-Ntalaja, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Africa: Essays in Contemporary Politics* (Institute for African Alternatives, London, 1987), p 31.

3.   R. Southall, *Democracy in Africa: Moving beyond a Difficult Legacy* (HSRC Publications, Cape Town, 2003), p 30.

4.   Dominy, *"Proposals on 'Liberation Struggle' Archives"*, p 1.

among the most valuable original source materials for historical research on the twentieth century.[5]

Accordingly, most southern African digitization projects have targeted documents related to the history of liberation struggles, reinforcing the view that these archives are part of Africa's heritage to be bequeathed to future generations and should be jealously guarded. Isaacman, Lalu and Nygren have underlined that there is a need to ensure that the records of this period in world history are not lost to posterity.[6]

A plethora of issues are under examination in this paper, including the threat to cultural patrimony; policy review on archival preservation needs; and the technical issues surrounding digitization. With regard to the digitization exercise per se, there is however the need to exercise extreme caution because of the politicization that has been synonymous with the process, particularly on matters of access and copyright restrictions.

This contribution seeks to underscore the fact that digitization epitomizes the ongoing transformation in heritage institutions worldwide as a result of advances in information and communication technologies. With no pretence of exhausting the issues covered, it belabours the various debates that have arisen on digitization, taking note of its drawbacks and the benefits that can be derived from it. The paper begins with a brief technical and policy overview of how digitization, as the base frame for "liberation struggle" archives, has evolved in both the developed (North) and developing (South) worlds.

Technical and policy discussion

Digitization is a method of capturing and storing images using computer technology to facilitate information availability online.[7] In other words, it is characterized by scanning analogue images, text and sound recordings to produce digital copies that can be used in an electronic environment.[8] The debate on the use of digitization technologies is growing in the archival community because digitization appears to offer excellent prospects for significant benefits for both archives and their users.

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5.   M. Moodley, "Black Heritage Resources: Dynamics for a New Historiography", *in* A.G. Coetzer (ed), *Proceedings of the Info Africa Nova Conference* (Info Africa Nova, Pretoria, 1993), p 606. See also Dominy, *"Proposals on 'Liberation Struggle' Archives"*, p 1.

6.   A. Isaacman, L. Premesh and T. Nygren, "Digitization, History and the Making of a Post-Colonial Archive of Southern African Liberation Struggles: The Aluka Project", *Africa Today,* 52, 2, 2005, p 56.

7.   E.P. Adcock, M.T. Varlamoff and V. Kremp, *IFLA: Principles for the Care and Handling of Library Material* (International Federation of Library Associations, Paris and Washington, DC, 1998), p 64; M. Deegan and S. Tanner, *Digital Features: Strategies for the Information Age* (Library Association Publishing, London, 2002), p 33.

8.   P. Ngulube, "Preservation Reformatting Strategies in Selected Sub-Saharan African Archival Institutions", *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science*, 12, 2, p 201. See also S.S. Lazinger, *Digital Preservation and Metadata* (Eaglewood, Colorado, 2001), p 17; R. Wato, "Challenges and Opportunities of Information Technology for Archival Practices in the 21st Century", *ESARBICA Journal*, 21, 2002, p 126; State Archives Department, Minnesota Historical Society, "Digital Imaging", 2004, available at http://www.mnhs.org /preserve/records/electronicrecords/docs_pdfs/erdigitalimaging.pdf (accessed 20 April 2008).

Digitization is not considered a primary preservation medium,[9] though its greatest strength lies in its preservation of fragile originals by the substitution of digital surrogates for access. Indeed, as noted by the Minnesota Historical Society State Archives Department, because of limited life expectancy, no digital storage medium is adequate for the long term archival preservation of records.[10]

Be that as it may, the benefits of digitization are many and include, inter alia, easier and faster access to multiple users worldwide; automated retrieval aids that facilitate the finding of information; portability of information; compatibility, etc., but this should not blind us to the negative side as well. Digitization is expensive in terms of hardware and software costs, expertise and sustainability. As has been pointed out, digital imaging is an investment with potentially very high up-front costs[11] and not many archival institutions can afford to create and then maintain fully digitized collections of their entire holdings in view of the prohibitive financial implications.[12] More importantly, the digitization process compromises the authenticity of the information in terms of originality.

In view of its strengths and weaknesses, digitization has often been compared with microfilming. Patrick Ngulube has observed that the use of the hybrid approach that integrates digital archiving and microfilming as document preservation strategies, seems to hold some promise.[13] This view is shared by Shep and Gorman who note that due to the uncertainty of the stability of optical disk technology, it is probable that hybrid systems (microform and optical disks) will be the order of the day for some time to come.[14] The argument has been advanced that microfilm should be used for preservation and digital imaging for improving access; this sounds very plausible, although it remains an expensive option.[15]

In fact, as shown by Richard Wato, at present there is no stable electronic medium that fulfils every requirement of archival preservation quality.[16] Optical and magnetic media cannot be considered archival because their life and stability have not yet been scientifically proven. In Wato's opinion, as more and more digital records

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9. Ngulube, "Preservation Reformatting Strategies", p 121; J. Feather, "Managing the Documentary Heritage", *in* S.J. Shep and E. Gorman (eds), *Preservation Management for Libraries, Archives and Museums* (Facet Publishing, London, 2006), p 13; J. Dunlop and L. Hart, "Digitization Projects at the University of Cape Town Libraries", *Innovation: Journal of Appropriate Librarianship and Information Work in Southern Africa,* 30, 2005, p 32; E. Liebenberg-Barkuizen, "The Photograph Collection of the Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives: Arrangement and Access", *Innovation: Journal of Appropriate Librarianship and Information Work in Southern Africa,* 30, 2005, p 59.
10. Minnesota Historical Society, "Digital Imaging"; S.J. Shep and E. Gorman, "Redefining 'the Collection' in the 21st Century", *in* Shep and Gorman (eds), *Preservation Management*, p 188; B. Reed, "Challenges of Managing the Digitally Born Artefact", *in* Shep and Gorman (eds), *Preservation Management,* p 117.
11. Minnesota Historical Society, "Digital Imaging".
12. Wato, "Challenges and Opportunities of Information Technology", p 128; D. Peters, "Giving Form to the Future: Challenges to Preservation in the Digital Age", *SA Archives Journal*, 43, 2003, p 86.
13. P. Ngulube, "Implications of Technological Advances for Access to the Cultural Heritage of Selected Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa", *Government Information Quarterly*, 21, 2004, p 151.
14. Shep and Gorman, "Redefining 'the Collection'", p 188.
15. Ngulube, "Preservation Reformatting Strategies", p 123.
16. Wato, "Challenges and Opportunities of Information Technology", p 127.

are retained in electronic form, organizations must begin to address the issues of impermanence of electronic storage media and the rapid obsolescence of hardware and software.[17]

Despite these attendant teething problems, the developing world cannot be an exception to the advances in information communication technologies. As Barbara Reed observed, no cultural heritage institution can afford to postpone the challenges of managing digital artefacts.[18] Yahaya concurs, and has noted that the convergence of digital technologies has reshaped the information landscape.[19] Needless to say, this includes the work of the archivist; to survive, we must embrace change.

The need to keep abreast with the latest technologies hardly needs emphasis in view of the fact that the challenges confronting information professionals are not only technical but are multifaceted in the realm of socio-economic, political and cultural factors.[20] To help our focus, it is appropriate to give an account of the liberation struggle projects worldwide because this will identify the intended audience as well as the choice, content and extent of the digitization process, where applicable.

Liberation struggle projects

This section discusses various projects that engage with material on the liberation struggle in southern Africa, most of which have introduced digitization. These include the African Studies Centre at Michigan State University; the Aluka project; the Digital Innovation in South Africa (DISA) project; the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI); the Southern African Development Cooperation (SADC) project; the South African Research and Archival Project (SARAP); the Liberation Struggle Living Archive project; and the partnership between the University of Connecticut and the African National Congress. The authors point out that some data presented in this section is from previously viewed website pages that are no longer accessible.

African Activist Archive project at Michigan State University

The African Studies Centre at Michigan State University runs a project to preserve a record of the activities of organizations and individuals in the US who supported African struggles for freedom and had a significant collective impact on US policy in Africa during the period 1950–1994. Included are records on community activists, students, churches, unions, city and county councils, state governments, and others. The project focuses mainly (but not exclusively) on smaller local and regional organizations that supported the struggle against colonialism and white minority rule in Africa, especially in Angola, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.[21]

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17.   Wato, "Challenges and Opportunities of Information Technology".
18.   Reed, "Challenges of Managing the Digitally Born Artefact", p 117.
19.   D.H.Z. Yahaya, "Keynote Address", *ESARBICA Journal*, 21, 2002, p 63.
20.   M. Pickover, "Negotiations, Contestations and Fabrications: The Politics of Archives in South Africa Ten Years after Democracy", *Innovation: Journal of Appropriate Librarianship and Information Work in Southern Africa*, 30, 2005, p 8.
21.   African Activist Archive, available at http://www.africanactivist.msu.edu/index.php (accessed 21 April 2008).

Their advocacy reached a peak in the US anti-apartheid movement in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. They were involved in campaigns for sanctions against South Africa and divestment of US companies that did business with the apartheid government. These organizations produced newsletters, pamphlets, leaflets, policy papers, meeting minutes, strategy papers, correspondence and visual material such as posters, buttons, photos, slideshows and videos. Many were ad hoc in nature and no longer exist, but individuals associated with those groups preserved vital records.[22]

The project involves locating documentation and other source material produced by these organizations and individuals, preserving such material by placing it in archives at depository institutions, and producing a database directory of the organizations and material. Selected material is currently being digitized and placed on the web in order to make the material available to scholars and others in the US and Africa.[23]

Aluka project

The name Aluka is derived from the verb *ukuluka,* which in Zulu means "to weave". (In Oshivambo, spoken in parts of Namibia, the word means "to return" or possibly, "to repatriate".) The choice of this name reflects Aluka's overarching mission – of joining together, in a single place, resources from around the world. The Aluka project, focusing specifically on struggles for freedom in southern Africa, is in partnership with DISA (see below) and involves the collaboration of more than 100 prominent scholars, senior archivists, museum specialists, and engaged public intellectuals throughout the southern African region and the world.[24]

The project is guided by regional and national committees, and has formal partnerships with many institutions. It focused specifically on the freedom struggles in Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa and Botswana before it became part of Journal Storage (JSTOR) in 2008.[25] JSTOR expanded the scope of the project to include Angola, Tanzania, Zambia and other countries in the region that figured prominently in the larger freedom struggle.[26]

Digital Innovation South Africa (DISA)

This project is based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa and its dual mission is to digitize socio-political issues pertaining to cultural heritage resources; and to make online liberation struggle material available to the public worldwide. The DISA project involves selecting serial literature covering the growth of opposition to apartheid rule. The project has also assembled for digitization material pertaining to trade unionism, religion, health, culture and gender, all of which

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22.   African Activist Archive.
23.   African Activist Archive.
24.   P. Lalu, "The Virtual Stampede for Africa: Digitization, Post-Coloniality and Archives of the Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa", *Innovation: Journal of Appropriate Librarianship and Information Work in Southern Africa*, 34, 2007, p 28.
25.   About Aluka, available at http://www.aluka.org/page/about/historyMission.jsp (accessed 23 August 2010).
26.   Isaacman, Premesh and Nygren, "Digitization", p 56.

is pertinent to the social and political history of the anti-apartheid era.[27] DISA continues to be a critically important partner with Aluka in South Africa and this arrangement at local level promotes networking and the sharing of resources; it also eliminates duplication of effort.

Nordic documentation on the liberation struggle in southern Africa

The Nordic region played a crucial role in rallying international support for liberation in southern Africa. These disparate regions of the globe were linked to southern Africa by long-standing missionary ties and the extensive mobilisation by solidarity groups beginning in the 1960s. The governments of four Nordic countries, notably Sweden but also (to a lesser extent) Norway, Finland, and Denmark, provided support to the movements in southern Africa and (again, predominantly Sweden) were significant sources of finance for parallel efforts by the United Nations and anti-apartheid organizations elsewhere, such as the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (IDAF). A fifth Nordic country, Iceland, also supported these initiatives despite its lack of direct involvement. In every sphere of activity except the military, the Nordic region was almost certainly the single most significant source of direct support for southern African liberation struggles in the 1970s and 1980s.[28]

The Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), based in Uppsala, Sweden, is at the forefront of documenting this history, and has launched a research project on "National Liberation in Southern Africa: The Role of the Nordic Countries", co-ordinated by Tor Sellström. A concluding workshop on the NAI's progress with this project from 2003 to 2009 was held in Pretoria from 26–27 November 2009. One of the workshop's objectives was the need to record and consolidate lessons learnt from documentation and digitization initiatives, in order to enhance the dissemination of information and the knowledge produced to critical constituencies in southern Africa and the Nordic countries.[29]

The NAI's research on the history of Nordic involvement in southern Africa is ongoing, and actively supports similar efforts by southern African partners. NAI is also working with Aluka to ensure that the efforts of each are complementary and consistent with long-term plans for capacity building and active partnership.[30] Their digitized finding aids are designed to facilitate information search on the involvement of the Nordic countries in the liberation struggles and directs interested researchers to

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27. D. Peters and M. Pickover, "DISA: An African Perspective on Digital Technology", *Innovation Journal of Appropriate Librarianship and Information Work in Southern Africa*, 24, 2002, p 14.

28. T. Sellström, "Sweden and the Nordic Countries: Official Solidarity and Assistance from the West", in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 3, International Solidarity*, Part 1 (Unisa Press, Pretoria, 2008), pp 421–531. See also Aluka–Nordic Africa Institute, "National Liberation in Southern Africa 2006–2008", at http://www.aluka.org/action/showCompilationPage?doi=10.5555/AL.SFF.COMPILATION.C OLLECTION-MAJOR.NAI&pgs (accessed 20 April 2008).

29. P. Svard, "Workshop Report: Concluding Workshop for the Nordic Africa Institute's Documentation Project on the Documentation Initiatives on the Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 26–27 November 2009, available at http://www.liberationafrica.se/events/doc_proj_workshop/workshop_report_nov09.pdf (accessed 15 March 2010).

30. Aluka–Nordic Africa Institute, "National Liberation in Southern Africa".

where information can be found. It also makes some archival material available in pdf-format for downloading.[31]

SADC project: A history of the liberation struggle in southern Africa

This project does not fall under the ambit of digitization projects, but has been included in the discussion because it is closely involved in the management and preservation of liberation struggle archives, and plans are on the table to have the materials digitized. Obviously, the question of permanence will arise when these plans come to fruition.

SADC, through its history project, focuses on collecting material on the history of the liberation struggle in the southern African region. The project is also known as the Hashim Mbita project after its Tanzanian patron, Brigadier Hashim Mbita. As is well known, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Liberation Committee was wound up in 1994 following South Africa's attainment of independence and SADC has thus taken on the task of documenting this history. The project is operational in Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The project was approved at the summit of SADC Heads of State and Government when they met in Botswana in August 2005 to mark the silver jubilee of the regional community. The initiative is funded entirely by the governments of SADC member states but not all of these are honouring their financial obligations; this threatens the success of the project.[32] In a communiqué addressed to member states, King Mswati appealed for funding. He pointed out that the Hashim Mbita research unit had made significant progress and had already submitted the draft chapters on the liberation of southern Africa to the Secretariat during the period under review.[33]

The Council of Ministers also noted the progress made. It mentioned that oral interviews were being conducted with those who participated in the liberation struggle, including guerrilla fighters; the leadership of various liberation movements; and supporters of the liberation struggle worldwide. In addition, the project also entailed research in the core countries involved in liberation wars (Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe) and the frontline states (Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland) as well as those further afield, such as Tanzania and Zambia. The ambit of the project has now expanded to include research in other African countries and organizations outside the SADC region and even to the world at large, particularly those countries and organizations that acted in solidarity with the liberation struggle.[34]

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31. The Nordic Documentation on the Liberation Struggle in Southern Africa Project, available at http://www.liberationafrica.se/ (accessed 9 March 2009).
32. The Southern African Development Community, "SADC Today", 2006, available at http://www.sardc.net/Editorial/sadctoday/view.asp?vol=436&pubno=v9n3 (accessed 21 April 2008).
33. M. Ndlangamandla, "Give Alms to Hashim Mbita Project", *The Swazi Observer,* 10 September 2009, available at http://www.observer.org.sz/index.php?news=7219 (accessed 30 September 2009).
34. SADC Council of Ministers, "Talking Notes for Post-Council Media Briefing", 2009, available at http://www.sadc.int/index/browse/page/468 (accessed 2 October 2009).

South African Research and Archival Project (SARAP)

SARAP is located on the campus of Howard University in Washington, DC. The project was designed to identify, locate, inventory and disseminate information pertaining to the involvement of Americans in the South African liberation struggle, especially those who were active in the US anti-apartheid movement. Although the project focuses primarily on the African American role in the anti-apartheid struggle, its scope extends to South Africans who migrated to the US, settled, and continued their struggle for freedom. The project also includes other parts of Africa, Europe and the Americas, reflecting the global reach of South Africa's freedom struggle. SARAP has engaged in digitization as evidenced by their provision of an online guide for researchers.[35]

The Liberation Struggle Living Archive project

The focus of this project is to digitize audio-visual archival material of the post-colonial liberation struggles in South Africa. The project aims to preserve crucial audio-visual material and develop resources on the history of the South African liberation struggle in a digital format. This digital archival material is then made accessible and is utilized to create interactive knowledge environments. The Liberation Struggle Living Archive project is a joint initiative between Doxa Productions; the Centre of Humanities and Research (CHR) at the University of the Western Cape; and the DISA project at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.[36]

The University of Connecticut–African National Congress partnership

The history of this project traces back to 8 March 1999 when the University of Connecticut (UConn) signed a partnership agreement with the ANC to promote international understanding and cooperation based on the principle of reciprocal learning and consultation. The agreement established a number of initiatives including the creation of the Comparative Human Rights Programme (which later became the UNESCO Chair and Institute of Comparative Human Rights); the ANC Archives Project; and the ANC Oral History Project.[37]

The goals of the ANC Archives Project and UConn are to share knowledge and expertise in archival administration, as well as to acquire, make accessible, preserve and publicize materials dealing with the ANC and human rights. The partnership continues to focus on copying, organizing and cataloguing ANC archival materials, and shares online resources. Since 1999, a number of South African representatives have visited the University of Connecticut to learn archival techniques and receive training from the staff of the Thomas J. Dodd Research Centre. In 2000, archivists from the University of Connecticut travelled to South Africa to assess the

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35.   SARAP Project, 2001, available at http://sarap.howard.edu/intro/welcome.htm (accessed 20 April 2008).

36.   South African Liberation Struggle Living Archive Collection, 2008, available at http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla73/papers/084-Matthew-en.pdf (accessed 23 May 2008).

37.   ANC Oral History Transcript Collection, 2007, available at http://www.lib.uconn.edu/online/research/speclib/ASC/findaids/anc_interviews/MSS20070040.html (accessed 20 April 2008).

status of the ANC collections housed at the University of Fort Hare, as well as to assist in the development of a long-term preservation strategy.[38]

Another facet of the project is to research the locations of ANC materials held in repositories in North America and to assist in obtaining copies or returning collections to South Africa.[39] The ANC Oral History Project is designed to preserve the first-hand accounts of the lives and struggles of those who fought against apartheid in South Africa. The University of Fort Hare has been officially designated as the custodian of ANC archives and oral recordings by prominent ANC stalwarts have been digitized and made available online.[40]

Discussion

On the whole, the fact that there is an impressive catalogue of these liberation struggle projects demonstrates the importance attached to this emancipation crusade. More importantly, as noted by Limb, the struggle for sovereignty over southern Africa's intellectual property rights and cultural heritage did not end with the political victories of the national liberation movements.[41] Although differing in geographic scope, scale and internal structure, all these projects share a common objective: to ensure that this historical epoch is adequately documented lest it be consumed by the tides of time.[42]

These projects are commendable and resemble the Contemporary Culture Virtual Archives in XML (COVAX), the European programme for the dissemination of European cultural heritage using XML. This project aims to combine document descriptions and digitized surrogates from libraries, archives and museums to build a global system for search and retrieval.[43] The project, which began in 2000, has the following objectives:

- to build a web service for search and retrieval of European Contemporary Culture descriptions and documents from memory institutions;
- to make accessible over the internet, existing document descriptions in libraries, archives and museums;
- to satisfy the needs of memory institutions, regardless of their size or document types; to provide access to their collections; and
- to implement standards and achieve inter-operability between systems.[44]

What can be discerned from this project is the need to make resources available online through optimum utilization of information communication technologies. This

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38. ANC Oral History Transcript Collection. 2007.
39. Memorandum of Understanding between University of Connecticut and the ANC, 1999, available at http://www.lib.uconn.edu/online/research/speclib/ASC/findaids/anc_interviews/MSS20070040.html (accessed 20 April 2008).
40. University of Fort Hare, "Archival Collections", 2009, available at http://www.liberation.org.za/digital_documents (accessed 2 October 2009).
41. P. Limb, "Ethical Issues in Southern African Archives and Libraries", *Innovation: Journal of Appropriate Librarianship and Information Work in Southern Africa*, 24, 2002, pp 51–57.
42. Isaacman, Premesh and Nygren, "Digitization", p 56.
43. Contemporary Culture Virtual Archives in XML (COVAX), 2007, available at http://www.covax.org/primera.htm (accessed 27 September 2008).
44. Contemporary Culture Virtual Archives in XML (COVAX).

development shows the leap from physical to virtual repositories in line with the changing times.

Two schools of thought have emerged on the digitization of African heritage. The first is that digitization promotes access and enhances the preservation drive. On the other hand, there is a polemic view that these schemes to digitise Africa's heritage constitute a neo-imperial information grab in the form of digital capitalism. It can thus be seen that digitization has technical and political connotations that are closely intertwined, depending on one's ideological persuasion.

When these two schools of thought are subjected to closer examination, it is clear that that information and communication technologies have had a pervasive influence on how information is created, distributed and stored. Ngulube has shown that these technologies have led to such a proliferation of digital information that cultural heritage institutions are confronted with significant challenges on the access to these resources and the preservation of digital materials in the future.[45] This explains why there is a need for information professionals to move with the times in search of permanence; they must make sure they remain conversant with these new technologies.

Page-Shipp has observed that digitization is driven by two forces:

- the need to have digital descriptions and full text files of the items that can be widely shared via the worldwide web, (i.e. access); and
- the creation of digital replicas of the items to insure against deterioration of the originals (i.e. preservation).[46]

As for the second issue, there has been pointed criticism on the pitfalls of digitization as a preservation medium. Lor has argued that:

> Digitization is not as such a means of preservation. It is a powerful tool for promoting awareness and appreciation. It enables us to provide access across barriers of time and space. But the digitized medium is vulnerable and ephemeral; if long-term preservation is the objective, preservation of originals and preservation microfilming may be more appropriate.[47]

Ngulube concurs and has suggested a hybridized approach with digitization used for access and microfilm for preservation.[48]

This brings us to the second school of thought on digitization, the view that involves political overtones. The digitization of "liberation struggle" archives is a site

45. Ngulube, "Implications of Technological Advances", p 144.
46. R. Page-Shipp, "An Audit of Digitization Initiatives, Ongoing and Planned in South Africa", National Research Foundation Digital Heritage Survey Report, 2009, unpublished, available at http://www.archivalplatform.org/projects/resources/report_on_digitisation_projects_in_south_africa/ (accessed 30 April 2010).
47. P.J. Lor, "Digital Libraries and Archiving Knowledge: Some Critical Questions", *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science,* 74, 2, 2008, p 119.
48. P. Ngulube, "Challenges to Preservation of Our Archival Heritage", Unpublished paper presented at the South African Society of Archivists conference on "Renaissance in Archives", Johannesburg, 11–13 September 2000.

of contestation because of the politicization that has been synonymous with the process, particularly on matters of access and copyright restrictions. As correctly noted by both Reed and Forde, physical ownership of digital resources is no longer a given for cultural heritage organizations in the digital world.[49] Page-Shipp begged to differ, arguing that there is widespread nervousness over raiding of intellectual property, usually grossly exaggerated, especially where the real nature of copyright protection is not properly understood. He further noted that much of the risk of "looting by cultural imperialists" can be eliminated if custodians observe appropriate procedures by participating in digitization partnerships.[50]

Notwithstanding these differences of opinion, the issue that needs to be addressed centres on the commodification of African heritage by those with the necessary financial and technological muscle; meanwhile, the purported beneficiaries are left impoverished vis-à-vis capacity in terms of ownership, sustainability, expertise, funding etc. In other words, through externally controlled digitization, Africa's cultural heritage is rendered vulnerable to commercial exploitation by people in the developed North, thereby entrenching the digital divide. It remains a fact that most digitization initiatives in Africa are donor funded. Donors certainly have their own interests and agendas – and the temptation of financial aid might lead to a new form of imperialism.

Spectacular examples that are instructive with regard to subversion of intellectual property and ownership rights (thereby lending weight to this cultural imperialism crusade) are the Nelson Mandela Rivonia Trial speech; the Aluka case; the Mayibuye Centre Archives website project; the Tutu Archives; and the Athol Fugard manuscripts. According to Page-Shipp, Nelson Mandela's famous statement at the Rivonia Trial was recorded on magnetic tape of a type no longer used in South Africa, and for which no playback machine is available locally.[51] By collegial arrangement with an overseas institution, the recording was transcribed onto a CD and returned, with the original tape, to South Africa. Unfortunately, it soon appeared on the website of the transcribing organization as if they owned the copyright. This understandably aroused the ire of the South African archivists and librarians, and news of the misdemeanour spread like wildfire in these circles. On the other hand, major digitization projects in South Africa have been funded by the same US-based Mellon Institute. The claim is made that the material selection as it relates to freedom struggle archives, is driven by a US agenda. The recent transfer of Aluka into JSTOR, another Mellon-funded initiative with similar access provisions, has only served to increase the nervousness among sceptics.[52]

The Mayibuye Centre Archives website project, an important collection of material dealing with the South African freedom struggle, is now hosted at Michigan State University.[53] In view of the fact that the physical location of the server is outside

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49.　Reed, "Challenges of Managing the Digitally Born Artefact", p 121; H. Forde, "Access and the Social Contract in Memory Institutions", *in* Shep and Gorman (eds), *Preservation Management,* p 174.
50.　Page-Shipp, "An Audit of Digitization Initiatives".
51.　Page-Shipp, "An Audit of Digitization Initiatives".
52.　Page-Shipp, "An Audit of Digitization Initiatives".
53.　S. Morrow and L. Wotshela, "The State of the Archives and Access to Information", *in* J. Daniel, R. Southall and J. Lutchman (eds), *State of the Nation: South Africa 2004–2005* (HSRC, Pretoria, 2005), p 326.

South Africa, there is the imminent danger of a takeover of material by well resourced First World institutions. However, Morrow and Wotshela argue that South Africa has the capacity to manage the situation.[54] In another case in point, a recent project to digitize the papers of Archbishop Tutu saw efforts by a British university to remove the papers to England, whereas South Africans could have capably managed and executed the process.[55]

Another intriguing example is that of the National English Literary Museum (NELM) in Grahamstown, which for years cared for the private papers of dramatist Athol Fugard until he put his collection on the open market. The papers were bought by an American university that earlier had purchased Nadine Gordimer's papers. A magazine of the university claimed that the Fugard papers were now "safe from the ravages of politics [and] neglect" and that NELM had "no climate control, no acid free storage boxes, no security to speak of … If South Africa explodes, a repository for white writers is probably going to be torched". The university also expressed the hope of acquiring the papers of "other South African writers and artists" and this appears to prefigure a document drain.[56] Scholars have rightly pointed out that Africans should control the rate and nature of digitization of their own intellectual heritage and have access to these resources unhindered by external interests.[57] Put bluntly, Africans should be able to set their own digitization agenda and thus counter cultural pillaging.

For the foregoing to be realised, a number of challenges need to be addressed and these focus on increased demand and usage of digital products; globalization and access; the digital divide; and ethical considerations. A brief examination of each of these issues will suffice.

Increased demand and usage of digital products

It is fashionable nowadays to talk of democratization of information, which in turn has led to its omnipresence. Some scholars have rightly pointed out that advances in technology help us with the noble work of making the unending range of fascinating treasures accessible not only to local people but to the world at large.[58] The Timbuktu manuscripts offer a striking example.

These manuscripts provide insight into the societies and intellectual traditions of Western Africa from the fifteenth century onwards, but for decades these have been largely inaccessible. However, with the help of Aluka, the manuscripts have been

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54. Morrow and Wotshela, "The State of the Archives".
55. P. Limb, "The Politics of Digital 'Reform and Revolution': Towards Mainstreaming African Control of African Digitization", *Innovation: Journal of Appropriate Librarianship and Information Work in Southern Africa,* 34, 2007, p 19.
56. Limb, "Ethical Issues", p 53.
57. P. Limb, "The Digitization of Africa", *Africa Today,* 52, 2, 2005, pp 3–20; J.J. Britz and P.J. Lor, "A Moral Reflection on the Information Flow from South to North: An African Perspective", *Libri: International Journal of Libraries and Information Services,* 53, 2003, pp 160–173; Pickover, "Negotiations, Contestations and Fabrications".
58. Yahaya, "Keynote Address", pp 63–64; S.W. Halpern, "Copyright Law and the Challenge of Digital Technology", *in* L. Gross, J.S. Katz and J. Ruby (eds), *Image Ethics in the Digital Age* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2003), pp 143–170.

digitized and will feature on Aluka's online archive as part of its African Cultural Heritage Sites and Landscapes Digital Library.[59] It is commendable that Aluka is committed to building its technical capacity so that this scholarly resource can be safeguarded for current and future generations. The National Archives, the South African Library, and the North-West University library, in partnership with Aluka and Library of Congress, have also assisted in the digitization of these valuable treasures. South Africa has thus thrown its weight behind efforts to preserve the priceless Timbuktu manuscripts.

In addition, South Africa is driving a project to build a new library to house between 200 000 and 300 000 ancient manuscripts currently housed in 24 private libraries in and around the Malian city, and to train local librarians in the preservation of a treasure trove that is threatening, literally, to disintegrate. The South Africa–Mali manuscript project is the first official cultural project of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). It is also a South African presidential project, co-ordinated by the Presidency and the Department of Arts and Culture through the National Archives in Pretoria. The initiative aims to make good on an offer of help made to the Malian government by President Thabo Mbeki while on a state visit to Mali in 2001.

Commenting on the importance of this digitization project Wilford notes that the written words of the legendary African oasis are being delivered by what he calls "electronic caravan".[60] This preservation and access oriented digitization is a welcome initiative in view of the fact that special collections like the Timbuktu manuscripts have to be rescued from physical decay; this applies equally to liberation struggle archives and other material of enduring value with the ultimate aim of promoting scholarly research online. However, Ngulube has observed that noble though these developments might be, technological advances are likely to become one of the causes of inaccessibility of the cultural heritage of sub-Saharan Africa if strategies of harnessing the potential advantages of information and communication technologies overlook measures to facilitate continued access to information generated during the process.[61] What this means is that because of technological obsolescence, for example, information professionals need to move with the times in search of permanence by ensuring that the human element and the technological toolkit remain compatible with the new technologies. Despite this, a question immediately springs to mind: To whom is this digitized information being directed in terms of content, literacy levels and access provision? What this means is that all digitized material must have intellectual property right protection or be patented before it is disseminated online.

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59.   Aluka, "The Manuscripts of Timbuktu: An In-Depth Look at an International Effort to Digitize and Help Preserve Timbuktu's Rich Intellectual Heritage", available at http://tsden.aluka.org/fsi/img/misc/timbuktu/Timbuktu_Community_Focus.pdf (accessed 30 September 2009).

60.   J.N. Wilford, "Project Digitizes Works from the Golden Age of Timbuktu", *The New York Times*, 20 May 2008, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/20/science/20timb. html?r=1 (accessed 2 July 2009).

61.   Ngulube, "Implications of Technological Advances", p 144.

Globalization and access

Peters and Pickover have argued that information technology is an important North–South issue that present a complicated set of challenges.[62] Problems that arise centre on issues of access and social abyss which link into global socio-economic and poverty issues. The divide between the rich and wired and the poor and unconnected, is growing ever wider.

The digital divide

Bridges has defined the digital divide as the gap between those who have access to information communication technology and are using it effectively, and those who do not. [63] The digital frontier creates an information aristocracy because not all people can afford access to information. In this way, existing patterns of inequality are reinforced.[64] The question that arises, as Saunders correctly observed, is whether online documents on the national liberation struggles of southern Africa should be readily accessible only to the wealthy in the North or the tiny elites of Africa.[65] In all these equations, one faces the need for self-sustainability and funding.

Equally important is the need to eliminate poverty in an effort to bridge the divide between the info-rich and the info-poor. The urgent need for digital literacy and internet accessibility, especially in marginalized African communities, cannot be overemphasized. Ngulube has argued that the digital divide is exacerbated by lack of planning and formulation of policies that give strategic direction in the management of digital information.[66] He has further elaborated on the lack of clear policies governing the management of electronically created information. This is bound to have negative implications for access to this valuable cultural resource in the face of constantly changing technologies.[67]

Ethical issues

Peters and Pickover have argued that digital technology is a form of cultural imperialism in view of the following:

- English is the *lingua franca* on the web;
- Orality is being displaced;
- US culture is pervasive on the internet; and
- The lure of financial aid has led to looting of African heritage in the name of preservation.[68]

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62. Peters and Pickover, "DISA: An African Perspective", p 17.
63. Bridges.org, "Overview of the Digital Divide", 2006, available at http://www.bridges.org/digitaldivide (accessed 20 September 2008).
64. Peters and Pickover, "DISA: An African Perspective", p 18.
65. C. Saunders, "Content Selection Issues in Digitizing Material on South Africa's Freedom Struggle", *Innovation: Journal of Appropriate Librarianship and Information Work in Southern Africa,* 24, 2007, p 20.
66. Ngulube, "Implications of Technological Advances", pp 148–149.
67. Ngulube, "Implications of Technological Advances", p 144.
68. Peters and Pickover, "DISA: An African Perspective", p 18.

Limb shares similar sentiments but adds that the digitization of archives has potential for the "virtual repatriation" to Africa of collections taken from the continent.[69] On the other hand, Hillebrecht and Saunders have argued that the involvement of the North in digitization projects such as Aluka is more helpful and far better than the physical removal of archives from Africa.[70]

Limb further noted that considering the vulnerability of African archives to vagaries of climate, economics and politics, digitization is justified.[71] This sounds plausible but there is need to be cautious in adopting this approach lest the propagation of the Afro-pessimist myth becomes rabid. In other words, because of the multitude of problems faced by the African continent, the perception is that nothing good will come out of Africa. However, as noted by Hillebrecht, African countries have always had strong archival traditions in terms of collection management per se.[72]

The challenge for all involved in the digitization of African resources, as noted by Limb, is to ensure access, sustainability and fairness in the sharing of these resources.[73] In other words, as mentioned above, Africans should be able to control and direct the rate and nature of the digitization of their own intellectual heritage. This view is acknowledged by the Michigan State University in its "best practices" motto which notes that "digitizing projects must respect the rights of individuals, cultures and nations that own the materials".[74] Scholars have echoed similar sentiments and have noted that copyright laws should protect the legal rights of individuals, groups and society. To ensure equitable distribution of resources,[75] there is a need to develop partnerships between stakeholders for the mutual benefit of all in view of the ever changing technologies.

The way forward

Heritage institutions are in quandary when it comes to digitization programmes pertaining to their "liberation struggle" archives as well as their entire collections. Whilst it is true that information and communication technologies (ICTs) in Africa are still in an embryonic stage when compared to their applications in the North, the options are limited when it comes to embracing the new technologies.

Peters feels it will be suicidal to adopt a "wait and see" attitude,[76] while Ngulube and Bailey claim that the success of the "renaissance in archives" (the transformation in the archival discipline in search of relevance vis-à-vis the onset of digital technology) will remain a pipe dream if archivists fail to take the initiative.

69. Limb, "Ethical Issues", p 51.
70. W. Hillebrecht, "Archives, Ethics, Salaries and the Struggle: A View From Namibia", *Innovation: Journal of Appropriate Librarianship and Information Work in Southern Africa,* 24, 2002, pp 25–31; Saunders, "Content Selection Issues", pp 12–17.
71. Limb, "Ethical Issues", p 54.
72. Hillebrecht, "Archives, Ethics, Salaries and the Struggle", p 29.
73. Limb, "The Digitization of Africa".
74. Limb, "The Digitization of Africa".
75. G. Mahesh and R. Mittal, "Digital Libraries in India: A Review", *Libri: International Journal of Libraries and Information Services,* 56, 1, 2008, p 20; Limb, "The Digitization of Africa", p 20; Dunlop and Hart, "Digitization Projects", p 39.
76. Peters, "Giving Form to the Future", p 91.

This could lead, they argue, to a situation where those in other disciplines prescribe solutions on digital heritage management.[77] Yahaya concurs, and remarks that archivists need to reposition and equip themselves with the right approach to the acquisition of knowledge and skills that are necessary to meet the new challenges of the digital heritage.[78]

Maele has asserted that the challenge for Africa is to adopt effective ways of preservation and to make documentary materials accessible for the future.[79] In similar vein, according to Peters, in this rapidly changing field with many new developments constantly taking place in the appropriate technologies, we need to be methodical.[80] Considering that the demand for information is on the rise, a number of immediate measures need to be implemented. These include:

- Institutions must take advantage of local, regional and international networks in order to foster preservation and access policies. There is a need for integration of information centres at local, national and international levels so as to benefit from information technology.[81] Liebetrau rightly notes that collaboration will become a key component of most digital initiatives as a means of sharing expertise and risk as well as providing a supportive platform for technical and professional development.[82]

- There is a need to initiate local ICT investment. Governments and companies should increase funding of local projects to reduce dependency on external funding.[83] This sounds untenable considering that governments in post-colonial Africa, as noted by Ayittey, have other pressing priorities like health, land reform, education, black pride, the need to control basic resources and industry etc.,[84] rather than focusing on ICTs.

- Joint projects need to have their agendas set or at least agreed to, by African partners. Archival institutions in Africa should strive to ensure that in any digitization engagements with Northern players, they remain the original proprietors of the information from a copyright point of view.[85] This should also apply to digitized copies. Furthermore, contractual agreements should be legally binding and have clarity to this effect.

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77. Ngulube, "Challenges to Preservation of Our Cultural Heritage"; S. Bailey, "Taking the Road Less Travelled: The Future of the Archive and Records Management Profession in the Digital Age", *Journal of the Society of Archivists,* 28, 2, 2007, p 123.
78. Yahaya, "Keynote Address", p 68.
79. V. Maele, "Africa in the Digital Age: Opportunities and Threats to the Preservation of Library and Archival Materials", *SA Archives Journal,* 43, 2003, p 75.
80. Peters, "Giving Form to the Future", p 91.
81. Limb, "The Politics of Digital 'Reform and Revolution'", pp 18–27; Maele, "Africa in the Digital Age", p 75.
82. P.C. Liebetrau, "Gearing up for Change: Building Digital Resources in a South African Cultural Heritage Context", *Innovation: Journal of Appropriate Librarianship and Information Work in Southern Africa,* 30, 2005, p 30.
83. Limb, "The Politics of Digital 'Reform and Revolution'", pp 18–27; Maele, "Africa in the Digital Age", p 75.
84. G.N. Ayittey *Africa in Chaos* (Macmillan, London, 1988).
85. Maele, "Africa in the Digital Age", p 75; Limb, "The Politics of Digital 'Reform and Revolution'", pp 18–27.

- Projects funded from the North must focus squarely on capacitization of Africa players.[86] Motsi noted that capacity building should transcend training and skills development and should include resource mobilization and legal framework development.[87] A case in point is the DISA project, which aims to provide South African archivists and librarians with knowledge of and expertise in digital imaging. Equally significant is Aluka's Timbuktu digitization project which is striving to achieve excellence in this regard. Peters and Pickover comment that the DISA project seeks to advance technological capacity, build the capabilities of human resources and provide scholarly research materials on a sustainable basis.[88] Such empowerment is necessary to narrow the digital divide between the developed and developing nations.

The issue of digitization is a minefield that rouses tensions when viewed from a North–South divide and vice-versa. The onset of new technologies is a double-edged sword because there are a number of positive and negative benefits that can be harnessed in order to put the information profession on a sound footing, thereby safeguarding Africa's cultural heritage. Government must devise national policies on digitization of the heritage sector to regulate the expropriation of cultural property. Allied to such national policies, there is a need for further research to establish an ethically grounded middle road that satisfies all stakeholders.

Conclusion

While the convergence of ICTs has transformed the information landscape, certain challenges still face heritage institutions. Among the potentially most damaging is cultural pillaging if intellectual property and ownership rights on policy issues are not ironed out from the onset. It hardly needs emphasis that there is need to introduce legislation that regulates the export of cultural property. The digitization of "liberation struggle" archives is a welcome initiative but ownership should be vested in the local society because they remain the rightful custodians of this treasured national heritage. Overcoming the subversion of copyright regulations remains one of the greatest challenges for information professionals. Any digitization crusade should be driven by locals to ensure that there is equitable sharing of resources; that there is empowerment; and that the content is structured to suit the intended beneficiaries. The aim is for information professionals to bridge the digital divide by adopting effective policies that are consistent with sound digital heritage management.

Abstract

The struggle to liberate southern Africa was an important epoch in contemporary history. It follows then that this history must be preserved for posterity's sake. Of late, there has been a concerted effort by academics and archivists to preserve, digitize and

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86. Maele, "Africa in the Digital Age", p 75.
87. A. Motsi, "Capacity Building in Context", Unpublished paper presented at the first international conference on African Digital Libraries and Archives (ICADLA-I), Addis Ababa, 1–3 July 2009; Peters and Pickover, "DISA: An African Perspective", p 15.
88. Peters and Pickover, "DISA: An African Perspective", p 15?

disseminate on the web the "struggle archives" of southern Africa. The wide range of material reflects the diverse nature of the struggle; liberation was achieved by violent as well as non-violent means. The digitization of such records reinforces the view that these archives are part of Africa's heritage to be bequeathed to future generations and that they should be jealously guarded because they are a treasured resource. In carrying out the digitization exercise there is a need to exercise extreme caution in view of the lack of permanence of digital objects and the challenges posed by access and copyright restrictions. The issue that needs to be addressed centres on the commodification of African heritage by those with the financial and technological muscle, whilst the purported beneficiaries are left impoverished due to a lack of ownership and sustainability. In other words, through digitization Africa's cultural heritage is made vulnerable to commercial exploitation by people in the North, and the entrenchment of the digital divide.

Opsomming

Aanbeweeg met tyd in die soeke na permanensie:
Die digitalisering van die "bevrydingstryd" argiewe in suidelike Afrika

Die bevrydingstryd was vir suidelike Afrika 'n belangrike tydperk in die moderne geskiedenis. Gevolglik moet hierdie geskiedenis akkuraat vir die nageslag opgeteken word. Die afgelope tyd was daar 'n doelbewuste poging deur akademici, argivarisse en inligtingpraktisyns om versamelings dokumente wat met die bevrydingstryde in suidelike Afrika verband hou, te bewaar, te digitaliseer en op die web te versprei. Digitalisering is die rekenaarmatige vasleggings- en bergingsmetode vir beeldmateriaal ten einde die aanlyn beskikbaarheid van inligting te bewerkstellig. "Bevrydingstrydargiewe" bestaan uit 'n verskeidenheid vorme wat illustreer hoe divers die bevrydingsproses was. Die stryd om selfbeskikking is deur middel van gewelddadige en nie-gewelddadige metodes gevoer. Die gewapende stryd weerspieël die gewelddadige aard van die stryd, terwyl weerstandsbewegings en drukgroepe die diplomatiese inisiatief verteenwoordig. Die digitalisering van rekords wat op hierdie manier geskep is, bevestig die uitgangspunt dat hierdie argiewe deel van Afrika se erfenis is wat vir toekomstige geslagte bewaar moet word. Dit moet jaloers as 'n waardevolle hulpbron gekoester word. By die uitvoering van die digitalisering daarvan, is dit egter nodig om buitengewone omsigtigheid aan die dag te lê binne die raamwerk van die politisering wat sinoniem met die proses was, veral wat toegang en kopieregbeperkings betref. Die saak wat aangespreek behoort te word, het betrekking op die kommodifisering van die Afrika-erfenis deur diegene met die finansiële en tegnologiese slaankrag, terwyl die sogenaamde bevoordeeldes verarm ten opsigte van eienaarskap, volhoubaarheid, ondervinding, befondsing, ensovoorts. Met ander woorde, digitalisering kan Afrika se kultuurerfenis kwesbaar laat ten opsigte van kommersiële uitbuiting en dus die digitale kloof verskans.

Key words

Access; African heritage; digital divide; digitization projects; ethical issues and digitizing records; liberation struggle archives; liberation struggle projects; preservation; southern Africa.

Sleutelwoorde

Afrika erfenis; digitale kloof; etiese vraagstukke en digitale rekords; bevrydingstryd projekte; bevrydingstryd argiewe; suidelike Afrika; digitaliseringprojekte; bewaring en toegang.