

SUPPORTING CAPACITY BUILDING FOR ARCHIVES IN AFRICA: INITIATIVES OF THE COOPERATIVE AFRICANA MATERIALS PROJECT (CAMP) SINCE 1995¹

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Introduction

In May 1963, discussions between the African Studies Association (U.S.), the Midwest Interlibrary Center (now Center for Research Libraries), and Africana librarians from twelve North American institutions helped create the Cooperative Africana Microform Project (CAMP). Owing to the rise in digital information and preservation formats, CAMP renamed itself the Cooperative Africana Materials Project in 2010. Its mission has been to collect and preserve African newspapers, serials, and ephemera not typically held at U.S. institutions. As its original name suggests, microfilming continues to be an important method of preserving CAMP holdings. While building the collection involved some direct purchases of microfilm from Africa and Europe, the role of collaboration among U.S. and later African institutions enhanced collections and expanded the scope of CAMP's work. The history of these initiatives prior to 1995 has been documented by several CAMP members.²

Expanding on these writings, this article will examine collaboration efforts between CAMP and African archives giving particular interest to history and political economy. Issues concerning access, collection, and preservation of African archival materials continue to reflect the legacy of colonialism. CAMP has tried to carefully navigate these unequal power relations. Through collaboration, it seeks access and preservation of African materials for institutions and scholars residing largely in the Global North. However, collaboration between institutions in the Global North and South may still appear as one-way flows of information. African archival materials, in physical and increasingly digital forms, continue to experience this dynamic. With this in mind, CAMP-funded initiatives undertake preservation in situ or return preserved materials to their home African institution(s). In return, CAMP asks that its members be granted microfilm or digital access to these materials. While this arrangement has worked between CAMP and numerous African institutions, it has not suited others. Initiating projects in African countries with strict legislation protecting the export of national cultural heritage remains difficult. With the growth of projects digitising African heritage, tensions persist between protective policies of African governments opposing a "virtual stampede" (Lalu, 2007) versus seemingly greater access for all.

African archives, like African mineral resources, are a commodity usually exchanged unequally between the Global North and South. The rise of digitisation projects, funded by U.S. and European institutions, may continue to make Africans largely consumers and not producers of their own documentary heritage. One way to mitigate this problem is supporting capacity building for self-sustaining African preservation efforts. CAMP pursued this model beginning in the 1990s. Resources were first directed to the National Archives of Senegal to support microfilm equipment purchase and onsite training. Starting in 2010, CAMP again funded onsite staff training and equipment purchases to digitally preserve the Kabarole District Archives in western Uganda. These efforts suggest thoughtful capacity building initiatives may expand African-initiated archival projects. Even with the conscientious work of CAMP librarians and scholars, the history and political economy of preservation and access to African archival materials remain contentious.

Political Economy of Archives in Africa

Libraries and archives are social constructs. They are created and informed by present economic, social, and political conditions as much as the histories they claim to represent. Archival materials are also commodities, reflecting the social relations of capitalist exchange throughout much of the world. As South African archivist Michele Pickover suggests, archives are sought-after commodities, the soul of which is a fragmented construct of the past. Archives are really not so much about what information they contain, but how that information can be used, hidden, or destroyed to suit the needs of ordinary individuals, researchers, archivists, Capital and the State (2005). Many archives in Sub-Saharan Africa are constructs of European colonialism, demonstrating the deep structural and social inequalities that serve as the foundation for post-independence conditions.

The history of European colonialism and the looting of African cultural heritage are reflected in post-independence governmental policies concerning national archives. By the late 1980s at least 42 African countries had laws in place against the export of cultural property (Britz & Lor, 2005). The work of CAMP has been affected by these laws, especially as it relates to digitisation efforts. In 2010, CAMP agreed to fund the digitisation of the District Inspector Reports in the Arquivo Historico de Moçambique (AHM). Despite granting funding after years of discussions and a memorandum of understanding with AHM officials stating original materials would not leave the country, the agreement was voided in 2011. This was due to an interpretation of Mozambican cultural heritage laws that prevented even sending digital facsimiles out of the country (Irele & Johnson, 2010). A similar situation occurred in 2008 when the National Archives of Tanzania denied the Digital Innovation South Africa (DISA) and Aluka projects access to digitise its holdings. A project documenting Southern African liberation struggles,

DISA/Aluka has been criticised for its content selection process resulting in a largely two-dimensional repression/resistance narrative, subscription pricing structure, and bent towards the needs of Global North scholarship (Isaacman, 2005; Pickover & Peters, 2002). CAMP members have participated in this project as producers, consumers, and critics alike. Even with protective legislation in place, foreign collectors and institutions have not stopped acquiring, nor have repatriated African heritage removed during colonialism. In South Africa, the government's copy of the Rivonia Trial records was sold to foreign libraries and private collectors in 1996. This occurred despite South African law requiring all Supreme Court records be kept for posterity. While the government was given microfilm copies of these records, this legitimised private ownership and commodification of national heritage (Pickover, 2005). Even with legislation in place, the weight of capitalist exchange renders the flow of information from the Global South to North an economic, political, and moral issue.

Digitisation and internet technologies in Sub-Saharan Africa also present opportunities and challenges. While internet service and bandwidth continues to grow, access issues remain an impediment for many Africans. Proprietary software and changing interface platforms, licensing, hardware costs, let alone unreliable electricity and other infrastructure issues also limit access to African consumers. These factors demonstrate that digitisation and technology are not value-free nor panaceas giving individuals worldwide access to important archival materials (Limb, 2005). Instead, relations of political and economic power between the Global North and South and within Africa inform digitisation projects. Since 2000, the growth of digital collections of archives, scholarly journals, newspapers, and dissertations has been a boon to researchers in both the North and South (Limb, 2007). However where is the line drawn between mass digitisation and looting of heritage? Are we witnessing, as historian Premesh Lalu terms a "virtual stampede" for African archival heritage? Through a review of digitisation efforts in post-apartheid South Africa, Lalu asks for a re-examination of the intersections of knowledge and power through technology. His interrogation of these efforts, while noting the crucial issues of intellectual property, copyright, and national heritage, suggests the drift towards legalistic arguments is done at the expense of political considerations towards knowledge production as enabled by digitisation (2007). While Lalu asks not to completely presuppose a politics of digitisation based on political economy or good versus evil morality, the vast majority of funding for African digitisation efforts comes from donors and institutions in the Global North, which include CAMP. Without denying the agency of Africans, the economic and political influence of U.S. and European institutions in shaping the direction of African digitisation efforts should not be understated.

CAMP membership must negotiate this difficult landscape while weighing the needs of their home institutions versus those of African partners. CAMP members actively seek feedback, visiting African archives and librarians to discuss their priorities (Limb, 2007). While funding remains a major roadblock, as advocates, members can support and publicise African preservation efforts. While the work to preserve and make accessible all the information for researchers at both African and Global North institutions has similar difficulties, CAMP has examined equitable, common ground approaches for sustainable resource sharing. Through careful work, taking years and presenting many challenges, CAMP has moved towards supporting capacity building efforts for African archives. Discussing projects in Senegal and Uganda that received funding will demonstrate the strengths, challenges, and future possibilities of these efforts.

Capacity Building: Supporting the National Archives of Senegal

CAMP support of access and preservation efforts at the National Archives of Senegal (Direction des Archives du Sénégal)³ dates back to 1993. In that year CAMP received a proposal from Dennis Galvan, then a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley, to film colonial-era Senegalese regional court records. While CAMP had supported Sub-Saharan African archives in the past, the Senegalese project was the first between CAMP, U.S. libraries, and a major African institution in Francophone West Africa. Through a few years of diligent work, site visits, and discussions between CAMP members and Direction des Archives du Sénégal (DAS) staff, the collection “Justice Indigène, 1838-1954: Sous-Série 6M” was selected for filming as it was judged well-organised and film-ready (Simon, 2002). This collection of colonial court and administrative records is important to researchers as it covers little documented areas outside the four Senegalese colonial communes. The pilot project was completed in 1999 with 160,000 pages of materials preserved onto 206 reels of film. A copy was sent to the Center for Research Libraries and is available to CAMP member institutions.

CAMP’s early foray into capacity building for African archival access and preservation was not without challenges. Methods and best practices were accomplished through trial and error. While the project received consistent funding from CAMP, archive staff had difficulty obtaining film stock and faced equipment problems. Another issue was training. What made this project unique was funding granted in 1999 for CAMP librarian Yuusuf Caruso (Columbia University) and Robert Mottice (UMI/Bell and Howell) to give practical training in microfilming to archive staff (Simon, 2002). In 2008, Mame Ngor Faye of the Direction des Archives du Sénégal visited the U.S. for similar training, funded by U.S. Department of Education Title VI grants. Speaking at the Africana Librarians Council and CAMP meetings at the

University of Iowa that year, Caruso introduced Faye and elaborated on his training, noting he was “an investment in the future” (CAMP, 2008).

On the heels of this successful pilot project CAMP and Title VI funded libraries, along with Northwestern University, funded the filming of “Affaires Politiques et Administratives de Sénégal, Série D.” This collection contains valuable information on political and economic life in Senegal and about French colonial rule in West Africa. Further projects were proposed, including efforts in 2009 to secure funding to begin digitisation projects with DAS and other institutions in Dakar and Saint-Louis. While CAMP experienced past successes, the issue of sustaining capacity building efforts in Senegal faces many difficulties.

By 2011 there were several issues facing the project. It was essentially suspended because the Dakar office of a major film stock provider closed. Film now had to be obtained from Europe or the United States, greatly increasing costs. There were staff changes as well, including a new director in 2012. Funding from the Global North became more difficult to obtain due to the post-2007 global economic crisis. This has further complicated situations at African institutions. CAMP member institutions also experienced consequences from the economic crisis. In 2011, the U.S. government reduced funding given to Title VI National Resource Center institutions by nearly 50%. Members were forced to reduce their funding contributions supporting CAMP’s work. As a network of libraries and other institutions, CAMP is not a well-endowed funding agency. As austerity measures sweep over public funding of U.S. higher education, attempts to support capacity building efforts like those in Senegal will prove increasingly difficult.

CAMP librarians have discussed and anticipated challenges to capacity building and preservation efforts. In 1999, Boston University librarian Gretchen Walsh praised the microfilm preservation training efforts in Senegal. She suggested members make clear to Title VI academic directors the complexities of running a viable and long-term microfilming project, noting individuals may harbour false impressions concerning the work needed to sustain these types of projects (CAMP, 1999). With that said, CAMP faces an uphill battle to help sustain capacity building efforts over the long haul. Increased support for digital archival projects may provide opportunities during the current economic crisis. It also presents new challenges.

New Approaches: Supporting Digitisation as Capacity Building in Uganda

Archives and the histories they contain have an ambiguous place in current Ugandan society. Consider the space where the National Archives preside; a sub-basement below the National Agricultural Research Organization in Entebbe. District, local, other archives throughout the country also have

preservation and access issues. Contrast this to Uganda's neighbor Kenya. Its National Archives are in central Nairobi. Patronised heavily by scholars, litigators, and activists, the archive is a place where Kenyan history is used to debate current society and politics (Peterson, 2011). The social and political weight given (or not given) state and other official archives in post-independence Africa is a reflection of current social and political dynamics. Under the Museveni administration archives and the study of Ugandan history may be given little social weight. It is from these conditions that the Kabarole District Archives project has emerged to perhaps challenge these notions.

The Kabarole District Archives, located in western Uganda, includes hundreds of boxes covering colonial and post-colonial judiciary, the Rwenzururu War of the 1960s and 1970s, and other papers of the Fort Portal District Commissioner. University of Michigan professor Dr. Derek Peterson, a scholar of Ugandan history, brought a proposal to CAMP in 2010 to fund digitisation, preservation, and safe storage of these archives at the recently opened Mountains of the Moon University (MMU)⁴ in western Uganda. The papers originally resided in an attic of the Fort Portal offices of the Resident District Commissioner, exposed to weather and insects (Irele & Johnson, 2010). The proposal stated the Kabarole District local government would retain ownership of the archives while MMU, one of its local universities, would steward the materials. Like the Direction des Archives du Sénégal project, Peterson proposed a capacity building effort. However, he focused on the newer medium of digital scanning. The proposal sought to provide hardware, purchased in the U.S., to MMU. Scanning would be completed onsite by four former students supervised by MMU lecturer Mr. Evarist Ngabirano. Original documents would be preserved, cataloged, and boxed for storage at MMU along with digital masters. CAMP endorsed the proposal, pledging significant funding in 2010. With further CAMP funds given in 2011 to purchase more equipment, digitisation was completed in 2013. Member institutions have digital access to the collection totalling 1,300 boxes. While CAMP had funded other digitisation projects since 2000, most notably Indiana University's preservation, filming, and later digitisation of the papers of Liberian President William V.S. Tubman, the Kabarole District Archives was one of the first digital-only projects supported using African capacity building efforts extensively.

The success of the Kabarole District Archives project gave momentum to pursue further digitisation and preservation of archival collections in western Uganda. Again proposed by MMU and Michigan's Dr. Derek Peterson, CAMP and CRL gave funding in 2012 for purchase, preservation, and digitisation of the District Forestry Office papers. These papers include unique climatology records from western Uganda during the colonial era. Preservation, cataloguing, and scanning will be completed in late 2013 with

work delayed due to periodic power outages. Other projects like the Tooro Kingdom archive, recently funded by CAMP, are in initial discussions. Housed in the basement of the kingdom's headquarters in Fort Portal, these papers are important as the Tooro Kingdom governed much of western Uganda during the first half of the 20th century.

The scholarship of students and faculty like Peterson is a source of many CAMP proposals for archival access and preservation. As mentioned earlier, the archives microfilming project in Senegal was initiated by a graduate student request. What is interesting about the Kabarole project is how the preservation and content of these records reflect Peterson's historiographical methods. In the introduction to his edited work *Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in Modern Africa*, Peterson (2009) uses the term "homespun historiography" to demonstrate that African histories and archives are not solely the domain of professional academics, the state and official society. He examines the development of archives in post-independence Africa, the development of oral history methods, and then locates the development of homegrown intellectuals and their efforts at self-documentation. Peterson goes on to suggest homespun historiographies likely told more about present social and political conditions, viewing the past through a partisan lens. These homegrown or organic intellectuals ranged from radicals looking to explain the roots of present inequalities to kingmakers mining their people's history to seek political legitimacy. The Kabarole District Archives helped Peterson detail the latter, the royalist historiography used by the Rwenzururu polity to garner political power in late 1960s western Uganda. The Kabarole archives may open more possibilities to learn about homespun historiographies in Uganda or for future ones to be produced. Whereas state and institutional archives in Africa are social constructions, born of post-independence conditions, so too are homespun historiographies and informal literacies. The latter's existence challenges conventional notions of what constitutes history and "the archive".

The Kabarole District Archives project has provided CAMP an ethical, equitable and sustainable model for digital capacity building. Work in Uganda is still fairly new and its long-term sustainability is unknown. However, the continued work and support of staff and administration at Mountains of the Moon University, demonstrating the importance of preservation and access to archival collections within Uganda and beyond, is encouraging. As Peter Lor suggests, projects to digitise African heritage must carefully note sensitivities concerning the unequal capacities of the Global North and South. Projects should ideally build the capacities of African national and regional libraries, as well as institutions (2005). With this in mind, perhaps the most important development is the growing partnership local Ugandan officials have with MMU, itself a local institution. This benefits scholars throughout Uganda as new resources for the study of local history and culture become available. The

project's initial success also comes from the multiple partners involved both in Uganda and the Global North. Another is the training of individuals, based in Uganda, in digitisation and preservation methods. It is hoped they will share these skills with others. The sustainability of the work though remains unclear, especially as it relies largely on funding from the Global North. The changing landscape of digital technology also poses sustainability questions. These factors illustrate why CAMP has moved cautiously toward supporting digital-only initiatives. It has not abandoned microfilming, which is still a commonly used preservation medium.

Conclusion: New Directions for CAMP

Digitisation and new technologies may lead CAMP initiatives in new directions. While microfilming is frequently used for preservation purposes in Africa, methods of access to CAMP materials, held at the Center for Research Libraries (CRL), are changing. CRL now scans small microfilm sets to fulfill loan requests for its members, with larger sets still loaned. This constitutes a de facto digitisation-on-demand programme. CAMP members are now able to access a growing digital collection through the CRL catalogue. CAMP is also funding the digitisation of materials previously filmed. This includes portions of the President Tubman papers and Nigerian state-level government documents. Another change is membership status for African institutions. In 2012, CAMP voted to give affiliate membership to African institutions engaged in digital collections and archival work where users on the continent and beyond have access. In exchange for CAMP member access to digital collections from African affiliate members, they in turn can access CAMP digital collections free of charge. Mountains of the Moon University and the University of Cape Town (South Africa) became the first affiliate members based on their digital collections and current work with CAMP. While this model may benefit institutions mainly in South Africa and larger African research institutions, CAMP is seeking partners that can be real participants in an international African Studies library consortium to help construct equitable resource sharing models. In seeking to narrow digital and national divides, this membership plan will likely face the hurdles of copyright and national heritage laws in the future. Government austerity measures currently facing Global North educational institutions pose another challenge to continued partnerships between CAMP and African institutions. It will take continued advocacy by CAMP members and scholars to challenge the rising tide of the commodification of African archival materials. Creative solutions, such as those pursued by CAMP and its partners, must be envisioned for capacity building projects to succeed.

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Notes

¹ This paper was originally presented as 'History of the Cooperative Africana Materials Project, 1995-2012' at the conference *Archives of Post-Independence Africa and Its Diaspora*, 20-23 June, 2012, Gorée Island, Senegal.

² See Easterbrook, D. (1989) 'The Archives-Libraries Committee and the Cooperative Africana Microform Project: A Brief History', in *Africana Resources and Collections: Three Decades of Development and Achievement: A Festschrift in Honor of Hans Panofsky*. J. Witherell, ed. pp.18-38. London: Scarecrow; Finnegan, G. (2005) 'The Africana Librarians Council and the Cooperative Africana Microform Project Since 1989', in *Africanist Librarianship in an Era of Change*. V. Evalds and D. Henige, eds. pp. 31-47, London: Scarecrow; Center for Research Libraries. (2004) 'Cooperative Africana Microform Project: Forty Years of Collaboration and Scholarship.' *Focus on Global Resources*, 23(4) 2011.

³ Direction des Archives du Sénégal project website and background: <http://www.crl.edu/area-studies/camp/related-projects/african-archives/senegal> (Accessed 29 August 2013).

⁴ Details of the Kabarole District Archives at Mountains of the Moon University: <http://mmu.ac.ug/index.php/research/centre-for-african-development-studies/promoting-archival-research> (Accessed 29 August 2013).

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