

African Studies in the Digital Age

DisConnects?

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Archives and the Past

Cataloguing and Digitisation in Uganda's Archives

Edgar C. Taylor, Ashley Brooke Rockenbach and Natalie Bond

For decades, scholars of East Africa have lamented the disordered state of Uganda's government archives, often assuming that a history of military coups, public disinterest and bureaucratic neglect has decimated much of the country's historical records. As this chapter will demonstrate, however, such fears are largely unfounded and in fact distort a far more interesting and uneven history of archives management and historical thought.

While it is true that archives in Uganda have not found sustenance in an enduring official conviction that the national past holds edifying, inspirational lessons for the present and future, much of the country's government archives have escaped systematic destruction. Public attitudes, moreover, cannot be easily defined in terms of interest or disinterest, for the role of archives in official and popular appreciations of the past has been dynamic and subject to change. Over the past few years a cadre of dedicated librarians, archivists and records officers has been cataloguing and preserving archival documents across the country at a time when public discussion of post-colonial history has been gaining new valence in prominent forums. As the cataloguing, and in some cases digitisation, of records proceeds in national and district archives, scholars, the Ugandan government, donors and Ugandan publics face new dynamics of control over, and access to, historical documents in a changing relationship with a contested past.

The present authors have had the opportunity to participate in cataloguing efforts at the Uganda National Archives (UNA) in Entebbe and the Kabarole District Archives (KDA) in Fort Portal, and this chapter draws from both on-site observations and archival research. It begins with a critical review of the history of archives in Uganda, before turning to a description of current cataloguing projects at the UNA and KDA. It concludes with some reflections on Uganda's changing archival landscape.

A History of Uganda's Archives

Prior to independence in 1962, the British protectorate authorities placed low priority on records management. Uganda's only two government archivists

before independence, P.T. English and J.P.M. Fowle, served for a total of just 38 months between 1950 and 1956, during which time they appear to have worked exclusively with the Secretariat files at the National Archives in Entebbe.¹ English organised the pre-1929 papers of the colonial secretary under regional deposits and some of the post-1929 papers under topical categories, but he and Fowle left this work unfinished. However, such intermittent cataloguing efforts should not suggest that colonial administrators or their post-independence successors failed to appreciate the political potential inherent in the organisation and deployment of such records. In the years preceding independence, officials in Entebbe as well as in provincial headquarters in Mbale and Jinja undertook the destruction of significant amounts of records pertaining to colonial administration, while others were shipped off to London. Such purges of files also occurred after independence, as with the burning of Lukiiko records by Idi Amin's troops in 1966.² However, these incidents were largely concentrated purges sparked by exceptional events, rather than part of sustained institutional editing and organisation. Under the stewardship of a clerical assistant, Martin Mukasa, between 1957 and 1971, it does not appear that any new cataloguing or organisational activity took place.³

If the British protectorate government and Uganda's first post-colonial administration of Milton Obote (1962–71) left a patchy infrastructure for archival management, the two decades surrounding independence did see heightened scholarly interest in government records. Academics as well as independent researchers, writing in the service of pressing socio-political aspirations, were busy in the 1950s and 1960s producing their own archives of oral histories with which they wove accounts of the social and political changes they perceived around them.⁴ Yet even as these writers established oral history as a source of intellectual authority, some were equally keen to mine the state's documentary trail. This interest focused largely on court files, official circulars,

1 P. English, 'Archives in Uganda', *American Archivist*, 18, 3 (1955), pp. 225–230.

2 M.W. Tuck and J.A. Rowe, 'Phoenix from the Ashes: Rediscovery of the Lost Lukiiko Archives', *History in Africa*, 32 (2005), pp. 403–414.

3 J.M. Akita, *Development of the National Archives and the National Documentation Centre: Report Prepared for the Government of Uganda by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)* (Paris, UNESCO, 1979).

4 A. Richards (ed.), *Economic Development and Tribal Change: A Study of Immigrant Labour in Buganda* (Cambridge, W. Heffer for the East African Institute of Social Research [1954]); A.G. Katate and L. Kamugungunu, *Abagabe b'Ankole (Runyankore: History of the Kings of Ankole)* (Dar es Salaam, Eagle Press, 1955); H.F. Morris, *A History of Ankole* (Nairobi, East African Literature Bureau, 1962); J. Middleton, *The Lugbara of Uganda* (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965).

ordinances, records of parliamentary debates and departmental or district reports.⁵ District archives show that district officials occasionally loaned out material to aspiring historians or allowed them to access public material at district headquarters.⁶ However, the 1970s and 1980s saw a dramatic decline in both ethnographic and archival research in the country. In contrast with the previous entanglement of academic research and policy-making between the Ugandan government and scholars at Makerere University and the East African Institute for Social Research, Idi Amin's government (1971–79) was openly hostile to intellectuals. Most foreign researchers left the country in the early 1970s, unable to safely continue their research projects.⁷ Under Amin and the second administration of Obote (or 'Obote II', 1980–85), political insecurity and the dire financial situation of Uganda's research institutions permitted little research to continue within the country, particularly concerning the operation of the state. Those who did conduct research on Uganda mostly did so from outside the country, using old research notes, the oral testimonies of Ugandans in exile and foreign archival records.⁸

If the 1970s and 1980s were hostile times for researchers, they were less destructive for archives. During Idi Amin's rule, a time often assumed to have involved the degradation of routine administration and records management, the government sponsored the training of several archival students and appointed Uganda's longest serving and energetic archivist, E.J. Wani.⁹ During his quarter-century of service, Wani oversaw the cataloguing of the archive's oldest material, documents from the colonial Secretariat roughly dating from 1890 to 1928. He also facilitated the transfer of material to Entebbe from three regional archives, including 23 boxes from Eastern Province, five from Northern Province, and one each from Kigezi and Western Province. In the waning years of his rule, Amin commissioned an assessment of the country's archives by

5 L. Fallers, *Law Without Precedent: Legal Ideas in Action in the Court of Colonial Busoga* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1969); D. Apter, *The Political Kingdom in Uganda: A Study in Bureaucratic Nationalism* (London, Frank Cass Publishers, 1961 [1997]).

6 For example, Jinja District Archive (JDA), 'District History and Historical Notes', DC Busoga, file no. ADM 27; Kabale District Archive (KDA), 'History of Kigezi & Monument', folder 238 (no cover).

7 S. Bunker, *Peasants against the State: The Politics of Market Control in Bugisu, Uganda, 1900–1983* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991); G.N. Uzoigwe, *Uganda: The Dilemma of Nationhood* (New York, NOK Publishers International, 1982).

8 For example, M. Mamdani, *Politics and Class Formation in Uganda* (London, Heinemann, 1976); J.J. Jørgensen, *Uganda: A Modern History* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1981); M. Twaddle, 'The Nine Lives of Semei Kakungulu', *History in Africa*, 12 (1985), pp. 325–333.

9 Akita, *Development of the National Archives*, pp. 3–4.

UNESCO, which recommended projects for cataloguing and rehousing archival collections, though they were not implemented, as Amin's government was overthrown within two months of the report's publication. Although an extensive infrastructure for archival management did not emerge during the Amin or Obote II governments, neither did these years see the mass destruction of Uganda's archives. Indeed, Wani maintained a deep knowledge of his collections and opened them to researchers who began making use of the National Archives again in the mid-1980s.¹⁰

By the early 1990s, a resurgence of historical research in Uganda led some young historians to the pre-1929 records that English and Fowle had begun cataloguing in the 1950s.¹¹ However, in recent years scholars have also been stumbling upon and making use of a rich diversity of other archival sources. Some are maintained by churches or private individuals. For example, the Uganda Christian University in Mukono houses an excellently maintained collection on the Protestant missions and churches; the various Catholic cathedrals (notably Gulu and Rubaga) likewise boast valuable and well-preserved archival sources documenting the history of the Catholic Church in Uganda. Jon Earle's recent thesis¹² draws extensively on the Benedicto Kiwanuka papers, maintained on the Kiwanuka family's property, and the personal papers of E.M.K. Mulira, whose eldest son, Peter Mulira, worked with Earle to organise and catalogue this material, which is now deposited at the African Studies Centre, Cambridge University. In addition to these collections, we know of doctoral students conducting research in no less than eight district archives in Uganda. Others are making use of archives at the Ugandan High Court, various government ministries, and medical sites including leprosy hospitals and the National Referral Hospital, Mulago.

The existence of these records contradicts the oft-repeated assumption that the paper trail of so much Ugandan history was destroyed during the breakdown in administration and armed conflict of the 1970s and early 1980s. The scale of archival material, particularly in provincial headquarters, is impressive, though the condition of and care for these collections varies significantly.

10 For example, N. Musisi, 'Transformations of Baganda Women: From the Earliest Times to the Demise of the Kingdom in 1966' (PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1992).

11 For example, *ibid*; R. Reid, 'Economic and Military Change in Nineteenth Century Buganda' (PhD thesis, University of London, 1996); H.E. Hanson, 'When the Miles Came: Land and Social Order in Buganda, 1850–1928' (PhD thesis, University of Florida, 1997); S.D. Doyle, 'An Environmental History of the Kingdom of Bunyoro in Western Uganda, from c.1860 to 1940' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1998).

12 J.L. Earle, 'Political Theologies in Late Colonial Buganda' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2012).

In Jinja, over 600 boxes of material covering all of Busoga region and beyond are housed in the basement of the district headquarters. Though a former records officer composed a lead file, much of the material was disorganised as a result of flooding several years ago. In Mbale, the district's archival material has been organised, catalogued and mixed with semi-current records in a bat-infested basement. As of June 2013, several hundred bundles of material dating back to the 1910s in the Kabale District Archive are being catalogued by a group of students from the University of Michigan, led by the district records officer, in a newly refurbished storage and research space in the attic of the district headquarters. Equally impressive collections are preserved at district archives in Bundibugyo, Gulu, Kasese and Tororo. Below, we also discuss a recent cataloguing and digitisation project with the Kabarole District Archive in Fort Portal.¹³ The survival of these records, and the condition in which they currently exist, reflect Uganda's particular archival history.

In recent years, Uganda's archives have stood uneasily within a state-supported discourse that has simultaneously devalued the past as an object of reflection while promoting the modernisation of public service delivery, which includes public records. This has sustained a complex politics of archival sustainability that echoes enduring tensions among archival neglect, deliberate destruction and preservation. With its seizure of power in 1986, following a long armed struggle, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) encouraged reconciliation among the country's varied constituencies through a narrative of rebirth, in which the country's liberation marked a break with a violent and chaotic past. Drawing from a mix of ideologies including Marxism and Evangelicalism, the Movement rendered the past less a reservoir of knowledge and inspiration than a site of pain and chaos to be overcome and forgotten.¹⁴ Until recently, this approach was visible at one of Uganda's only official sites of memory dedicated to the national post-colonial past, Kampala's independence monument (constructed in 1962). Behind the monument, a mural was added in 2007 encapsulating Uganda's sordid post-colonial history in depictions of a hodgepodge of corrupt officials and murderous soldiers. The sobering

13 On district archives, see also K. Barrett-Gaines and L.S. Khadiagala, 'Finding What You Need in Uganda's Archives', *History in Africa*, 27 (2000), pp. 455–470; S.C. McConnell, 'Historical Research in Eastern Uganda: Local Archives', *History in Africa*, 32 (2005), pp. 467–478.

14 J.R. Quinn, 'Constraints: The Undoing of the Ugandan Truth Commission', *Human Rights Quarterly*, 26, 2 (2004), pp. 401–427; R. Kassimir, 'Reading Museveni: Structure, Agency and Pedagogy in Ugandan Politics', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 33, 3 (1999), pp. 649–673.

juxtaposition of triumphant national independence with images of post-colonial chaos resonated deeply with many older Ugandans who suffered during the tumultuous first quarter-century of independence.¹⁵ However, such a view has come under increasingly prominent critique from some Ugandans seeking positions from which to articulate alternative political visions. Uganda's fiftieth anniversary of independence in 2012 has given occasion for some to look to the colonial and post-colonial pasts not only to identify the culpability of particular individuals positioned in time and place, but also in search of inspirational lessons with which to orient contemporary political demands.¹⁶

The NRM has thus found compelling intellectual and political reasons to sustain an obscurity about Uganda's administrative and political history before 1986 – not so much to conceal controversial episodes as to enable a monopoly on claims to a progressive socio-political vision. In this cosmology, Uganda's archives constitute detritus of a painful past, whose management is simply peripheral to the task of promoting development and aspirations for a non-sectarian modern politics. However, embedded in a government discourse of rebirth is a commitment to administrative modernisation. As such, the decay of government archives contradicts an official commitment to public service modernisation. The Ugandan government, in line with the conditions of World Bank aid to the Ministry of Public Service, has expressed its commitment to improving the National Archives, particularly in the form of a long-delayed multi-million dollar building in Kampala. Also, despite its stalled implementation, the 2001 National Records and Archives Act provides the most comprehensive rules ever articulated for the maintenance, organisation and accessibility of Uganda's official archives. In addition to setting standards for the appraisal and maintenance of semi-current and archival records under a single authority, it also calls for the upkeep of regional archival centres for records emanating from district governments.¹⁷ In recent years, government, archive officials, a variety of donors and both Ugandan and non-Ugandan scholars have shown a commitment to producing comprehensive electronic catalogues and, in some cases, digital copies of national and district government archives. These efforts – and the questions they present – are situated within and made possible by this particular convergence of contemporary

15 As this article was going to publication, the mural behind Kampala's independence monument was replaced with a plain green and white background for Uganda's 50th anniversary of independence celebrations.

16 D. Peterson and E. Taylor, 'Rethinking the State in Idi Amin's Uganda: The Politics of Exhortation', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 7, 1 (2013), pp. 58–82.

17 Government of Uganda, *The National Records and Archives Act* (15 June 2001).

approaches to the past in Uganda, as well as the country's particular political and archival histories.

District Archives

The ambivalent position of archives in official and popular thought in Uganda has posed particular challenges for the archives of district governments. In July 2011 in Kampala, a conference on 'Archives in Uganda' organised by the Makerere Institute for Social Research and the University of Michigan brought together government officials, donors, scholars and archivists from across Uganda to reflect on the state of Uganda's archives and to consider ways forward.¹⁸ While government officials and donors spoke almost exclusively about the National Archives, the most impassioned and insightful speakers were five district records officers, who each discussed their efforts to maintain their archival collections with limited space for storage and conservation purposes, limited manpower and insufficient funding for basic resources such as boxes or metal shelving. Many face leaky roofs, periodic flooding and severe insect infestation. It very much appears that tenacity and drive on the part of individual district archivists is often the crucial factor in keeping these archives alive. Elsewhere, district officials, local academic institutions and researchers have sought innovative arrangements to preserve district collections for official and public purposes.

The Kabarole District Archives, currently housed at Mountains of the Moon University (MMU) in Fort Portal, highlights these innovative local efforts. The KDA contains files that passed through the district commissioner's office dating as far back as 1905. Like other district archives, the materials cover a wide range of subjects, often with perspectives on local governance that are absent from national archival files. Until 2010, the KDA was located in the attic of the Kabarole District Headquarters building, where many of the files were rapidly succumbing to the work of insects and water damage from a leaky roof. As the attic was infested with wasps until 2005 and there was no lead file, the records remained largely inaccessible to district officials and the public alike. However, in 2008, the district records officer welcomed two interns from the British Institute in Eastern Africa to re-box the collections, create a basic catalogue

18 F.E. Muhereza and S. Mbatudde, 'A Report on a Workshop on Archiving in Uganda held on 18 July, 2011' (Kampala, Makerere Institute for Social Research, 2011), available at <http://misr.mak.ac.ug/old.site/uploads/MISR%20Public%20Policy%20Dialogue%20no1.pdf>, accessed 6 June 2014.

and place the entire collection under plastic sheeting. In 2010, Kabarole District officials signed an agreement with MMU that allowed the collections to be moved to the university's Kabundaire campus, located less than a kilometre away. MMU faculty and staff members, led by Mr Evarist Ngabirano, have overseen the cleaning, organising, re-boxing, scanning and digitising of these archival documents. Derek Peterson of the University of Michigan helped secure funding for digitisation equipment and to hire additional staff to assist with this laborious process, with which one of the authors (Natalie Bond) has also assisted (Fig. 8.1).

The arrangement between Kabarole District and MMU provides district officials with an organised and accessible archival collection, while allowing MMU students and researchers to access public records. The pending relocation of the district headquarters from their present location had made this move particularly timely. Many of the documents, all of which remain under the district's ownership, are in extremely fragile condition, such that they may not survive sustained physical handling. This fragility made their digitisation particularly important, and we briefly discuss here the work involved in this project.

Under Mr Ngabirano's supervision, up to 12 trained employees have been working to clean, scan and re-house the KDA collections. This has been particularly challenging given the fragility of some documents. When the digitisation began in May 2011 during the time of Bond's work with the MMU team, two trained employees worked simultaneously with a ScanWizardDI scanner and Lenovo ThinkPad laptop to save 1 bit bi-tonal TIFF images at 300 dpi, Group IV compression. Although the document feeder is helpful for some documents, many are too fragile for the feeder and need to be individually scanned on the flatbed, which is a much more time-consuming process. An additional obstacle lies in the many oversized maps, blueprints and other documents that cannot fit a scanner. While such documents remain *in situ* in the physical collection, it has not been possible to produce digital images of them. The digital data are stored on external hard drives at the archive, but according to the memorandum of understanding between the district and the university, MMU may share this data with other academic institutions for a minimal management fee. In our conclusion, we consider questions that such arrangements present for the owners, custodians and users of these collections.

Uganda National Archives

The situation at the Uganda National Archives (Fig. 8.2) is somewhat different. While many of the older documents are quite brittle, they have not been



FIGURE 8.1 *The entrance to the Centre of African Development Studies at Mountains of the Moon University in Fort Portal, where the Kabarole District Archives are housed*

CREDIT: EDGAR C. TAYLOR



FIGURE 8.2 *A new banner outside the Uganda National Archives' Director's office within the National Agricultural Research Organisation building in Entebbe, which once housed the offices of the secretary to the Protectorate Governor. There is no sign for the UNA on the exterior of the building*

CREDIT: EDGAR C. TAYLOR

subject to leaking roofs or flooded basements. While plans for a new National Archives building near Makerere University continue to be discussed, and the archives would certainly benefit from greater space, the UNA's collections are not immediately endangered by the conditions of their present home. Whereas documents at the KDA faced imminent disintegration, requiring digital images if they were to be read in the future, the National Archives needed the staff time to organise its collections. Thus, in 2010 UNA Director Mr Okello Ajum invited scholars from the University of Michigan to assist in an ambitious cataloguing endeavour. At that time, the only catalogued collection at the UNA was the A Series, which consisted of those files through the 1920s that P.T. English had organised in the 1950s, which a group sponsored by DANIDA had re-catalogued in the late 1990s. This left well over a thousand boxes of material in the UNA's basement undocumented. In July and August 2011, a group of five graduate students, including the three present authors, assisted senior archivist Justine Naloga and four members of staff, Eve K. Irene, Roscoe Mbalire, James Kikubira and Ruth Nakasujja, to begin organising and cataloguing these undocumented collections under the direction of Mr Ajum.

At the time of writing, basic catalogues now exist for almost all of the UNA's holdings. The cataloguing work in which the authors participated focused on eight collections. These consisted of: the C Series, Secretariat Minute Papers from 1906 through the 1940s deemed to be confidential during protectorate

rule; the Secretariat Papers, the governor's secretary's files from the 1900s through the 1950s that were not among those catalogued by P.T. English; the Provincial Papers, those files from district archives that Wani brought to Entebbe; the Office of the President, files from the President's and Prime Minister's Office from independence into the late 1970s; the Public Works Department, files from this standalone department that became a ministry after independence; the Civil Reabsorption Office, a slim collection from this office dedicated to managing the demobilisation of soldiers after the Second World War; and Elections, concerned with various elections from the 1950s to the unrealised ballot of 1971. In addition, Ms Irene catalogued the Confidential Collection, which consists of over 100 boxes of material from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s deemed confidential at the time of its creation.

During this time, doctoral students from the Makerere Institute of Social Research assisted in cataloguing the Chief Secretariat Office (CSO) Papers, which consisted of nearly 100 boxes. A second group of graduate students from Makerere University, the University of Michigan and Cambridge University recently worked with Naloga and Irene to catalogue the Secretariat Lettered Papers, which consists of those Secretariat Papers previously organised by themes. There remain several collections of personal papers, civil service files and Provident Fund papers that have not been catalogued at the time of writing.

From 2010, Mr Ajum's primary goal was to have a basic catalogue documenting which files were in his collections. Thus, UNA staff and visiting cataloguers have only been able to conduct minimal preservation work (such as providing new file covers and replacing rusty paper fasteners) to particularly fragile files in imminent danger of physical disintegration, leaving the less severe cases to be dealt with by future caretakers. Some collections needed to be physically reorganised so that the organisation of files matched their reference numbers. Where possible, the catalogues retained the collections' original ordering principles. In some cases, such as that of the Office of the President, a collection contained too many overlapping cataloguing systems (or none at all for some files), making it necessary to create a new number for each file. In these cases, the collections were organised according to how the material was already stored in each box. The catalogues themselves consist of file names, reference numbers, start and end dates and notes where applicable in Excel spreadsheets. The UNA and the Ministry of Public Service, under whose jurisdiction it operates, hope to encode these data using archival software in the future, but they have placed primary emphasis on the collections' quick documentation. In addition to multiple bound copies of each catalogue, the UNA maintains digital versions of each catalogue in Excel and PDF formats on at least two computers.

At the time of writing, the contents of nearly all the UNA's collections are now fully documented and – with the exception of confidential material

– available to anyone with clearance from the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology. The reorganisation of this material into a neatly boxed, catalogued and accessible entity enables new approaches to Uganda's history, influencing the sorts of stories that may be told from collections with their own chequered history of organisation and neglect. With the UNA's collections now accessible to government officials, Ugandan publics and researchers, it remains to be seen how users and UNA administration will shape the archives' future use. How will various publics and the government incorporate the archive into the types of stories they want to tell about the past? The institutional identity of the UNA remains open to interpretation: as a repository of data on the past, as a propagator of biased narratives of past regimes, as a refuse dump of the past. Recent cataloguing work challenges scholars to consider how the UNA will fit into a broader economy of the production of history of which it is only a – until recently, fairly neglected – part.

Concluding Reflections

This article has traced the uneven history of archives management in Uganda from colonial times to the present, and has highlighted the surprising disconnects between bureaucratic practice, authorised state narratives and Ugandan historiography in a shifting political arena. Specifically, it challenges the commonplace assumption, still held by many East Africa scholars, that Uganda's troubled political history has resulted in the loss or destruction of most of the country's archival resources. Although previous autocratic regimes endeavoured to monopolise information circuits and censure free speech and academic research, they did not seize on archives as a resource to be ordered, edited and made accessible to Ugandan publics in order to promote a particular national myth or historical vision. Decisions to edit or destroy certain records, or to deny access to certain patrons, appear to have been made on the spot and in response to specific situations rather than through sustained institutional protocols. Institutional neglect, rather than systematic destruction, has proven to be a far more powerful force in shaping the archival landscape in Uganda, and has done much to minimise the archive's public profile.¹⁹

Current efforts to 'modernise' Uganda's state archives have the potential to produce an infrastructure that may, in time, facilitate greater accessibility and

19 This low public visibility is illustrated by the fact that most scholars (both Ugandan and foreign) struggle to locate the UNA on their first visit, even when they are equipped with maps, addresses and phone numbers.

public patronage. State officials and donors often present these efforts in apolitical terms, framing public service modernisation as a straightforward, technocratic project. Yet the work of ordering an archive is always political, whatever the intentions of the archivist. An archive's organisation reflects the priorities, values, concerns and capacities of its creators, and influences how patrons might access, read and interpret historical files. By making state archives easier to access and use, Ugandan policymakers and international donors are paving the way for future patrons to critically engage with Uganda's documented past. Who these future patrons will be and how they will take up archival resources is difficult to predict; the archive's political significance will only be realised with time. However, it is possible – even probable – that future usage will give rise to pressing political and legal debates about accessibility, ownership and rights to information.

The work of digitisation, in particular, raises critical questions around the political implications of archives modernisation. The ability to digitise and electronically store rare government documents can help ensure their preservation for future generations of Ugandans. However, such work – and the international relationships that currently finance much of it – also changes how archives might be accessed, and by whom. To date, digitisation projects have depended heavily on donor funding, which has required the owners of these collections and their donors to negotiate terms of access, even as popular and state discourses surrounding Uganda's archives undergo rapid change. In the case of the KDA, district officials, MMU and the Center for Research Libraries (CRL) have signed agreements that require MMU to make a portion of its digitisation work available online to CRL-affiliated institutions.

Such arrangements present two challenges for the institutions and individuals involved. First, digitisation has the potential to exacerbate unequal access to historical sources between publics in Uganda and those in the global North. Universities and institutions positioned to gain access to digitised records, such as those affiliated with CRL, are disproportionately in the North. If conditions for receiving funding encourage institutions to make their collections more accessible to global audiences without consideration of accessibility within the country, regimes of access to such collections will likely come to favour non-Ugandan publics. Such arrangements would not only help reinscribe the privileged position of scholars at Northern institutions, but would enable generations of researchers to write about Ugandan history without setting foot in the country. Much to the detriment of engaged scholarship, foreign academics could thus be insulated from engaging with Ugandan intellectual, social, institutional and political networks, even as access to Ugandan archives would enhance the scholarly authority of their work.

Second, while digitisation may preserve archival materials against physical decay and deliberate destruction, it also partially removes control over users' engagement with the collections from their owners and archivists. If government officials and archivists are now enthusiastic about digitised archives accessible via the internet, it is difficult to predict what concerns may arise as users put both digital and paper archives to varying uses. On one hand, many of Uganda's archivists and donors share a commitment to securing archives' potential use as a resource with which citizens may hold colonial and post-colonial governments to account. On the other, the present convergence of symbolic meanings of Uganda's archives – detritus of a painful past and object of public service modernisation – may change rapidly. For example, as has happened elsewhere, concerns over criteria for access, or over archives' symbolic significance in national identity, may lead future officials to seek to rework agreements signed by predecessors who considered the archive in a different context. Flexible legal agreements and memoranda of understanding which are sensitive to both current and potential future concerns are particularly needed in contexts where the value and significance of archives in public discourse and institutional practice is changing so rapidly.

As Ugandan state and donor organisations endeavour to create streamlined catalogues and orderly archival spaces, they may be paving the way for more Ugandans to use archival sources, to challenge official narratives and to explore controversial episodes in the Ugandan past. Digitisation, furthermore, holds the potential to redefine the boundaries of the archive's reading publics. The depoliticising language of public service modernisation conceals dramatic shifts in how different publics can engage with the paper trail of the Ugandan past.

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