



Call for Papers
Archives of Post-Independence Africa and its Diaspora
Dakar, June 20-23, 2012

Conference Theme

Archives of Post-Independence Africa and its Diaspora is an international conference to be held in Dakar, Senegal, June 20-23, 2012, organized by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the African Studies Centre, Leiden (ASC), and the University of California African Studies Multicampus Research Group (MRG). The conference features an interdisciplinary array of activities that include a public debate, training workshop, film screening, as well as four keynote addresses and academic panels. The event is conceived as a forum with pre-circulated papers and contributions from a wide range of academics, archivists, librarians, public intellectuals, and artists from the African continent, Europe, North America, and beyond.

This English-French bilingual conference builds on the longstanding critique of the colonial library *pace* Valentin Mudimbe by featuring official and alternative archives of transition in contemporary African societies. In spite of exclusionary practices of the colonial era, its archive has provided a continuous record of colonial administration on the African continent until the 1960s. More recently, scholars working on histories of independence have attempted to excavate alternative archives addressing the absences and disparaging depictions of the colonial subject. Further, these histories reposition the African and Diasporic subject against an assumed totality. Archives of post-independence Africa have been dispersed within and beyond the continent, and imply practices and techniques of collecting by individuals, institutions, and collective entities. Its fragmentary nature leads us to examine how these dispersed collections contribute to identity formations on the continent and in the Diaspora. Some collections may take the form of “tin-trunk literacy,” as described by Karin Barber, life histories, as well as audio-visual media, including photography, film, radio, and emerging digital forms. We are interested in the interaction between institutional and alternative archives that allow insight into the contingencies and expressions for the articulation of African modernities.

Thematic Areas

The academic papers presented at the *Archives of Post-Independence Africa and its Diaspora* conference will be organized around five thematic areas:

1. Archival Absences and Surrogate Collections of the African State (2 panels)

In the aftermath of independence, African states were charged with administering the colonial archive within the emerging context of nation building. Intermittent social, political, and economic crises mitigated against responsible custodianship. By the 1970s, an array of collections had emerged and supplanted the primacy of national archives. While some well-funded government agencies established their own collections, non-governmental organizations, such as Oxfam, created archives that continue to serve as “surrogates of the state.” In addition, scholars turned to archival holdings of multinational corporations whose collections frequently straddle the colonial and the postcolonial period. Private libraries and foundations created resources centers, several of which are located in Europe and North America, but others on the African continent itself such as the important Arabic manuscript collections in Timbuktu. Often located outside the former colonial metropolises, these archives reflect the diasporic effects of the post-independence era. This section seeks to address critical approaches to understand the practices that enable the study of fragments, gaps, and absences, such as oral histories and alternative archival sources. We hope to create a forum that interrogates a selection of archival clusters as a meaningful semantic field.

2. Performing the Archive (2 panels)

The context for performance on the African continent provides particular challenges to conventional understandings of the archive. Live performances embody the past and challenge a conception of the archive as storehouse dedicated to the preservation of inanimate documents and objects. Instead, this thematic area asserts that the living archive is equally being spoken and performed. It is defined by its relevance and immediacy in creating a social space for reception and social action. Some of these practices have been recorded creating an ambivalent ethnography of Africa and its Diaspora. With independence, longstanding practices of ethnic performance were amalgamated within programs of nation building. Music, dance, theater, and arts festivals have served as an important means by which to refashion colonial stereotypes in the name of a national consciousness remade as instrument of political power. This section examines how performing the archive in the post-independence era has functioned as a form of selective memory, whose performative language communicates a lived archive of interaction enabling the Diasporic encounter.

3. *Post-Independence Media Formations* (2 panels)

In the independence era, control over audio-visual media came to function as instruments of state power. Significantly, film, radio, and publishing were conceived as unidirectional forms of mass media establishing a critical divide between producers and audiences. In this section we seek to address the multi-directional quality of post-independence media which repositions the relationship between production and reception. This divide has typically been associated with the limited functionality of colonial media that continued into independence. Multi-modal forms of “reproducibility,” instantiated by colonial print and radio culture, is part of a continuum with contemporary forms of digital production—as with digital filmmaking and photography, mobile phones, social and interactive media, as well as online publishing. Some scholars have argued that enhanced digital media functionality substantially challenges established practices of “mass media,” generating dissent and rumor as evidenced by the recent popular protest in North Africa. Such new digital techniques may reposition the relationship between intellectual property rights holders and citizens. We ask participants to reflect on the manner in which changing media forms in Africa produce an aesthetics and rhetoric beyond the fold of the state.

4. *Spatialization of Art and the Archive* (2 panels)

Public monuments, temples, cemeteries, and other edifices have served as important sites of nationhood and state power during the post-independence era that speak to a reterritorialization of the public sphere. The broader context of monumentalizing the state directly addresses the effect of branding and creating a context for tourism both within Africa and from without. This section seeks to address how public heritage sites function as a selective archive of memory that aestheticizes and asserts contested narratives allied with national identity. In the post-apartheid era, Robben Island and District Six provide compelling examples alongside the remaking of Sun City. The slave castles and outposts of Gorée Island and Elmina Castle serve as important sites within the transatlantic imaginary. Additionally, Heroes Acres in Harare commemorates the *Chimurenga* struggle against settler colonialism. In Dakar, the massive African Renaissance statue channels the postcolonial will to power. We invite participants to examine the archival contexts for these contested sites of memorialization and their attendant spatial imaginaries.

5. *Administering the Archive* (2 panels)

Whereas well-funded digital initiatives, such as ALUKA and a wide array of Arabic language manuscript projects, have focused on preserving records of the (pre)colonial era and anti-colonial struggles, there is a growing need to preserve local collections across the African continent. These may include archives of unions and other professional organizations; genealogical imagery; personal

photo albums and manuscripts (tin-trunk literacy); religious texts and commentary; customary regalia and court records; vinyl records and other recording formats. We are interested in reflections about the challenges faced by archives on the African continent in relation to the digital revolution. This transformation implies a shift with regard to conventional archives and scholarly practices. As such, who are the beneficiaries of these digital innovations, and to what extent are these technologies an attempt to privatize the African archive? Finally, we seek to examine meaningful instances that have enabled more democratic and open forms of access.

Call for Papers

We invite submissions of a 500-word abstract that explores the conference theme *Archives of Post-Independence Africa and its Diaspora* that specifically reference one of the five thematic areas. Please submit your abstract with a short bibliography and a 50-word biographical statement by November 30, 2011 to the following website: <https://sites.google.com/site/dakarconferencecfp/>

Abstracts, bibliographies, and biographical statements may also be mailed to:

CODESRIA

Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop, x Canal IV

P.O. Box 3304, Dakar 18524

Senegal

For questions, please write to:

archives.diaspora@codesria.sn

Accommodation and Travel

Accommodations, meals, and local transportation will be provided for all conference participants for the duration of the conference in Senegal. Travel subsidies to Dakar for conference participants might be available and are contingent upon funding. Participants are encouraged to seek travel funding from their own institutions and other sources. Further information about the availability of travel stipends and flight logistics will be provided by March 15, 2012.

Conference Conveners

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Mirjam de Bruijn, Senior Researcher, African Studies Centre, Leiden

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