Patrimony, Power and Politics: Selecting, Constructing and Preserving Digital Heritage Content in South Africa and Africa[1]

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Abstract:
Memory institutions in South Africa and Africa, as digital heritage content creators and custodians, are engaging in a political, social, ideological and technological site of struggle. The decisions about what to digitise for long term preservation, why and also how this information is made accessible, speaks to notions of information control, the state of the archive, power, resources and passivity.

This paper will examine various African initiatives and collaborations to create and preserve digital heritage content. it will also explore the current infrastructure in place in south Africa to ensure and long-term and sustainable preservation of the digital heritage assets.

Keywords: Digital heritage, Africa, memory institutions, power.

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[1] This Paper uses the term 'Archive' and 'memory institutions' interchangeably with the term 'documentary heritage'.

The Archive of Memories
"... the motives of memory are never pure."[2]

It is necessary to locate digital documentary heritage firmly within the context of memory institutions and memory work. As collectors of cultural and political debris these institutions play a powerful role in framing and controlling our understanding of the past, in constructing the national psyche and in storylessness. Items found in these institutions, often treated as unproblematic representations of a 'recoverable past', may actually be deliberately preserved, power-infused creations of privileged authors and collectors of that residual past.

Memory institutions are gatekeepers to silences and competing narratives and interpretations. They are therefore sites of struggle and deeply located within power relations. By definition they are positioned within the intermediary space of reappraisal, refiguring and mediation and consequently they are not just simply housing but constructing and burying memory. In some cases these institutions are running projects where they are actively producing knowledge and adding to contested and conflicted memory and meaning as opposed to the perception that they are merely inert recipients, keepers and custodians. Key to their activities are issues of knowledge production, representation, interpretation, evidence and authenticity. Moreover, memory work has a contested ideology of its own, thus there is not only memory politics but there is the politics of memory construction and an ideological undercurrent to memory work. Ideological agendas and battles frame this contested terrain and notions of ownership, access, rights, control, privilege, monopolies, acquisitiveness, propaganda, lies and fabrication underpin and influence policies and processes.

Within this context, and in relation to documentary heritage in particular, it is important to unpack the nature of the Archive. It is an open secret that the Archive is not a neutral space but is habitually both actor and subject and is by its very nature controversial and contested. At the core of the Archive and archival activity is the debate about who owns history. It is not only within the realm of fiction [3] that the Archive and archivists are centrally placed in key moments of metamorphosis and transition and in the struggle for freedom and justice, all lo of which are full of intrigue, manoeuvring and the disclosure of secrets.

According to Pierre Nora archives are sites of memory (*lieux de memoire*) and "modern memory is, above all, archival. It relies on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image."[4] The shard of archival memory is fashioned by organisations, institutions and individuals and archivists play a key role in how these various identities are gate-kept, transformed, singled out for preservation, promoted, made accessible, interpreted and remembered. The added layer of the digitisation of documentary heritage and material culture re-emphasises the role memory institutions play in the construction, acceleration and eradication of memory and identity. This notion is reinforced by Derrida who argues that remembering can never be separated from forgetting, that the externalisation of memory, results in a weakening of that memory and that the Archive is about the future rather than the past.[5]

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[2] Young, JE. The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning (Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn.) 1993, 2.
[3] For example, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose,* Martha Cooley's *The Archivist* and Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code.*
[4] Nora, P. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire " translated by Marc Roudebush, Representations 26, p 13 (Spring 1989): 7-25.
[5] Derrida, J. Dissemination, Trans. Barbara Johnson. London: The Athlone Press, 2000.

In this globalised world, knowledge and information is seen as a strategic resource and tool. The manner in which information is used and transformed through technology and who controls it is therefore pivotal. And, as a result the *Soul of the Archive*, because it mirrors historical constructs of the past, (albeit only fragments) is often a sought-after commodity. As such, archives, as institutions of documentary heritage, are also about: propaganda, rights, desires, lies, ownership, trust, nationalism, freedoms, concealments, acquisitiveness and surveillance. But the key is not that they are sought-after as information but *how* that information can be accessed, used, interpreted, destroyed or hidden to suit the agendas of ordinary individuals, researchers, archivists, political parties, Capital and the State.

But at the same time, and juxtaposed, archives, documents and documentary heritage provide the bedrock for societies understanding of the past. They underpin citizen's rights, assert identities and are crucial to truth recovery. They are also irreplaceable evidential testaments of human experience on which social equality is built. Archives, particularly in countries in the process of transition to democracy or new and fragile democracies, are of fundamental importance as evidence supporting victims' rights for reparation, a means of determining responsibilities for rights violations, and a basis for reconciliation and universal justice.

Removed from the domain of the creators, who have already pre-selected or destroyed, Archives are compromised, even insidious spaces. And they are also hugely layered, secret and skeleton-in-the cupboard places. Rather than being inert and static, archives are continually transforming and taking on new meanings. Archivists, through whom archival practices such as appraisal, selection, arrangement, and description take place, are not passive guardians, but rather, they are active participants and contextualisers who posit layers of interpretative frameworks. They thus play a proactive role in the production of knowledge and in creating, preserving, controlling, altering, reinventing and reinterpreting the fragments of personal identities and social memories. It is within this context of the recreation of identities and the shaping of the present and the past that the Archive is viewed not only as Possessor, Collector, Destroyer and Witness, but also as Imaginer, Manipulator, Initiator, Instrument, Ideologue, Facilitator, Fabricator, Transformer and Catalyst.

Archivists are also active agents of social change. They can be biased and narrow-minded, shredders and removers. But they can also be activists and ideologues, analysts and critics, submissive and reactive. Archives and archiving are therefore not only social constructs but they are also contested locales of power, ideology and memory. As such, archives, as spaces, as records, as theory and as processes, are not impartial. There is no neutrality, no objectivity and no passivity, and interwoven with the meaning of archives and archivists are notions of power: power over identity, memory and evidence-seeking, where specific narratives are privileged and others marginalised and silenced.

Heritage in the Doldrums
"The domain of heritage has become the most important sphere in which contests over South African pasts have been taking place."[6]

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6 Rasool, C., '**The rise of heritage** and the reconstitution of history in South Africa', Kronos, 26 (2000:21): 1 –21.

Although there has been some academic and intellectual engagement with the nature, composition mission and management of heritage repositories in South Africa, particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s[7], on the ground, the sector is in disarray, lacks adequate skills and training (this is true for both the non-state and state archival arena)[8], is under-resourced and introspection and conscious self-reflection is largely absent. In addition, for the most part it mirrors ruling party interests and there is no effective lobbying, campaigning or debate to counter or engage with this. Indeed, the dire state of the archive has led many to question the prudence of placing the National Archives of South Africa under the auspices of 'heritage' via the Department of Arts and Culture, where good and open governance, transparency and efficient record-keeping is not its priority.

As South African archivist Verne Harris as noted, apartheid administered memory institutions and heritage endeavours supported apartheid's sanitised grand narrative and the Apartheid State re-engineered and weighted what was remembered by shaping, naming, using and destroying records to consolidate power, create their own ruling categories, marginalise the 'other', or to escape accountability for their actions.[9] Although a considerable amount has been written about the role of museums and memorials in the construction of post-apartheid identity, the role of archivists in this recasting process has not adequately been interrogated. What is clear is that power relations continue to influence the way these institutions tell national stories. Digitisation merely adds an additional layer of complexity. Archivists and other memory workers in many ways are perpetuating this process and playing a role in fostering South Africa's post-apartheid collective amnesia by bolstering a linear master narrative, in mythmaking, in invention, in silencing, in the self-commodification and commodification of the Archive, in marginalising the 'other' and in the creation and re-creation of the cult of the 'national' hero. In this way the Archive is becoming merely a component of the perceived 'healing' and 'nation-building' heritage memorialisation enterprise aimed at positively influencing opinion on the present socio-political order.

In addition, the documentary heritage sector is disorganised and is also generally in poor physical condition and degrading. Many archival collections remain unprocessed, need description and are inaccessible. In practice in South Africa, low priority is afforded to Archives by the state, by parent institutions and by the public. Of concern, a combination of political interference, a culture of secrecy, poor record-keeping practices and totally inadequate staffing, capacity and resources in the pre and post 1994 archival record of local, provincial and national government, as well of that of parastatals, means that there is and will be a gapping silence and intellectual and public engagement and understanding will be limited and limiting.

The National Archives of South Africa, which is meant to provide inspirational leadership and cutting edge guidance to the archival enterprise, is certainly not doing so and is itself in crisis.[10] Iziko National Museums are also in crisis. In 2007 the South African National

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[7] *See* Refiguring the Archive. *Eds*: Hamilton, C, Harris, V, Pickover, M. Reid, G and Saleh, R. & Taylor, J. (Cape Town: David Philip), 2002.

[8] *See* Department of Arts and Culture.. The Demand for and Supply of Skills in Library and Information Services, Archival Services and Records Management. Final Report. 15 March 2010 URL: http://www.dac.gov.za/publications/reports/2010/Final%20Report%2015%20March2010.pdf.

[9] For examples see: Harris, V. 2002, "Archival sliver: power, memory and archives in South Africa", *Archival Science,* no. 2, pp. 63-86, and http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/7871/HWS-166.pdf?sequence=1; http://www.springerlink.com/content/6360115881748380/ and http://journals.sfu.ca/archivar/index.php/archivaria/article/viewArticle/12200

[10] The National Archivist has also been suspended since mid-September 2010.

Gallery 2007 it mounted an exhibition entitled *Why Collect?* The purpose of this exhibition was to highlight the crisis. One strategy was to quote facts and figures and make comparisons to highlight the low status accorded the visual arts, such as:
- R 52 Billion for the Arms Deal
- R 13.3 Billion in 2007 for 2010 Soccer World Cup
- R 90 million for our President's new security fence
- In 2006 only R 141 000.00 for the Iziko South African National Gallery to purchase works of art, plus zero tax incentives for donors to our museum and galleries.[11]

Indeed, it is not only in South Africa that national archival and other memory institutions are in a state of decay and decline, but this is largely the case throughout Africa.

As a rule, governments tend to view complete transparency as destructive and the decision-making process, because of the way it is structured, remains inaccessible to the majority of people and, largely, it is guarded by a plethora of unhelpful bureaucrats. The nature of bureaucracy is that it is closely associated with secrecy and within the South African civil service particularly, a culture of secrecy prevails. As individuals seeking access to information or as memory workers controlling information, particularly since many of these workers are officials employed by the State, we need to be aware of these dangers.

Much of the information on Apartheid human rights violations and security, military and intelligence matters has been removed from public accountability and access. Also of major concern for the provision of access to our documentary past is that the proposed Protection of State Information Act (the Secrecy Bill), in its current form, is retrospective and will give new protection to Apartheid government documents and secrets - those documents rendered *Geheim* (secret) and *Uiters Geheim* (top secret). The post-Apartheid State is not opening up apartheid-era and previously secret archival sources. For example the records of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) are not accessible, even when using Promotion of Access to information Act (PAIA) requests.[12] More than eight years after the TRC's final report was released the records of the TRC remain unprocessed and deliberately buried in what is essentially an inaccessible and closed archive guarded by the Ministries of Justice, National Intelligence and Arts and Culture.

In important ways South Africa's documentary heritage reflects the way in which the battle around how the sediments of colonial and post-apartheid history are being used, collected and interpreted, where archives are being shaped by the agendas of the ruling party and sympathetic funders and cultural and memory institutions which vacillate between the excavation of memory and memory construction and eradication. At the same time, rather than drawing a line between "ideology" and "truth," we should be "seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false."[13] Archival discourse and enterprise needs to be unpacked and interrogated. There needs to be critical engagement about the decisions that are being made around:
1. How the Archive is being constructed and what is represented and how.
2. What is being collected and selected for physical preservation.
3. What content is being selected for digitisation.

[11] Proud, H, *Our National Gallery: The 'Book' of our Art?* 2011:43

[12] *See* Pigou, P. Accessing the Records of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In Allan, K (ed). 2009. Paper wars: access to information in South Africa; Harris, V. "They should have destroyed more": the destruction of public records by the South African state in the final years of apartheid, 1990-1994 http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/handle/10539/7871 and McKinley, D. The State of Access to Information in South Africa. Prepared for the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, July 2003. URL: http://www.csvr.org.za/wits/papers/papmckin.htm

[13] Foucault, M. Power/Knowledge. Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977, p 118 (Harvester Press), 1980

4. What is publicly accessible and what is not (and why) and the rights of access.
5. How resources are allocated and what resources are assigned.
6. What policies and strategies inform and influence these decisions.

'Liberation Struggle' Archives and Post-Apartheid Notions of 'nation building'[14]
Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past. George Orwell (*1984*)

South Africa's history, particularly because it is a society still broken by its past, is not a single narrative but a complexly layered, elusive and contested one. And memory not only shapes current identities but represents a dimension of its own, beyond past and present. Power shapes national narratives of forgetting and truthfulness. An inclusive historical consciousness is not part of the post-apartheid landscape and our memories have been purposely lobotomised. According to Bundy, in post-apartheid South Africa "there have been three major discursive projects, three over-arching attempts to narrate the nation. In shorthand, these may be thought of as the rainbow nation (or "unity and diversity"); as the African Renaissance (or "African hegemony in the context of a multi-cultural and non-racial society"); and as ethnic particularism (or the assertion of sub-national identities as primary)."[15]

In reconstructing memory there is evasiveness, contradiction, ambiguity, induced silences and deliberate gaps. Consequently notions of reconciliation in South Africa are fragile. In South Africa, in the name of nation building and social cohesion, there has been an explosion of heritage projects via the development of new heritage sites (literally and online), monuments, memorials, institutions, spaces and liberation heritage routes and the lens of cultural tourism, memorialisation, commemoration, legacy and the cult of 'great leaders'. In many ways these reductionist heritage projects are fashioning and engineering a silencing and opacity of 'the other'. Some narratives are excessively present while others remain on the periphery. Located within the politics of patronage, in a country which has a fragile democracy and an increasing environment of censorship, intolerance, expediency and corruption, these are simplistic and shallow spaces where the stories of struggle and post-apartheid are fashioned. As Emden explains in relation to Freedom Park "seeking to render explicit a new national identity without having to acknowledge the contradictions, historical and otherwise, that come along with this….At the core, this is neither a discourse about reconciliation, nor a discourse of rights, but an exclusive claim about the land and its past."[16]

As the post-liberation South African state emerged there was the promise of national reconciliation, of unlocking the past, of lifting the veils of secrecy and of transparency. With this political optimism came the belief that the documentary heritage of the liberation movements would be opened and laid bare. But this was not to be, despite the fact that access

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[14] This section is largely based on a Draft Paper by Edwards, I. and Pickover, M. Open Secrets Liberation Archives and Scholarly Research, 2009

[15] Bundy, Colin, New nation, new history? Constructing the past in post-apartheid South Africa (73 – 97), History Making and Present Day Politics: The Meaning of Collective Memory in South Africa Edited by Hans Erik Stolten Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala 2007:80

[16] Christian J. Emden, Land, Race, and Citizenship: The Political Spaces of Monumentalism in South Africa. (Anglia 2013, 131 (2–3): 314–353) p 352

to the organisational records of national liberation movements is pivotal to the whole process of truth recovery, reconciliation and democracy and that the nature of, and access to the records of the liberation movements are woven into the wider discourses and debates around heritage, memory and identity. The archives of liberation movements are powerful political and financial forces and their histories and records need to be made available for robust scholarly interrogation and wider public use. This is because:

1. The construction of national liberation struggle history, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni noted with reference to Zimbabwe, is also "subject to complex differing regimes of truth... Within these narratives there are many silences as well as ...competing visions of the teleology of the national liberation struggle."[17]

2. Liberation movements on the African continent are not, as a rule, opening up access to their archives (instead they are closing them down), choosing what is recalled and how it is recalled; [18]

3. Liberation archive collections, such as that of the African National Congress (ANC), are being sanitised and denuded of `sensitive` material before being placed in the public domain. Many liberation archives contain little more than publicity and propaganda information, public statements, press cuttings and ephemera;

4. When they are in power they tend not to champion openness and transparency;

5. Fundamental practices within the liberation movements were intelligence gathering, propaganda secrecy, anonymity and concealment;

6. As ruling parties they are seeking to influence, control and present particular perspectives on the past, history and heritage to serve the political needs of the present. A heroic patriotic history which glorifies favourites and settles old scores is preferred;

7. Political expediency can dominate what is collected in liberation movements and party archives as well as in non-state and state archives and party political agendas can have repercussions on what is collected and what is made accessible to the public and researchers. In the case of non-state archives particularly, because of their complex interwoven links with state and party structures and individuals, they need to stay 'faithful' and tow the party line;

8. Political organisations hand over huge parts of their collections to their own loyalists, only to see pivotal material disappear from the public domain;[19]

9. Liberation archives have been deposited in state archives, with problematic implications and consequences.[20]

10. Political contestations remain endemic to these collections.[21]

Key to the ANC's liberation struggle triumphalist meta-narrative is, in an actively partisan way, the appropriation and incorporation of, and the rights to, all stories and "usable pasts" of colonial and apartheid oppression and resistance into its own history and it creates this through the cultural memory lens of memorials, rituals, the elevation and showcasing of

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[17] Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. Provisional Notes on Representations of National Liberation History in Southern Africa: Some Lessons from Zimbabwe, 2007:2 (The article was written as notes for the *Round Table on Struggles for Justice and the Archive: Representations of National Liberation History in South Africa and Southern* Africa organized by The South African History Archive (SAHA) and Rosa Luxemburg Foundation).

[18] Examples include: the ANC closed public access to its archives housed at the University of Fort Hare after media reports accessed the archives and then revealed alleged corruption in the ANC; the Archives of Namibia's SWAPO are closed to the public.

[19] For example the South African Communist Party gave its archive to a faithful Party academic.

[20] It is rumoured, but unconfirmed, that the records of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) have been deposited with the National Intelligence Agency.

[21] Edwards, I. & Pickover, M. Open Secrets Liberation Archives and Scholarly Research. Draft Paper. 2009

fashioned icons and special events.[22] Where, down to the last minutia, ownership of the South African struggle for liberation and justice is the co-opted and sole domain of one political party. What exists in the 'formal' Archive is central to providing the ingredients for this alchemy and the role played by archivists and archival discourse in amplifying this linear one-dimensional narrative. Panitch refers to this as "the symbolic allure of records".[23]

The state and the ruling party lays claim, ownership and stewardship to South Africa's past and the 'liberation struggle' not under the guise of inclusiveness discourse or the construction of the homogenous 'rainbow nation' but through a carefully cultivated juggernaut which gives special advantage to a monolithic nostalgic legacy which has more value and is more valued. Deciding who has presence and who has agency. It is not about creating a common, inclusive national identity but about creating a monolithic lens through which a certain kind of struggle history is given superiority and fostered. Where the recent South African past is being reconstituted and venerated to an agenda of the present analogous to the dystopia of George Orwell's *1984*, where the past was constantly reedited to assure that the current view of the world (approved of by the government) was not contradicted by previous news reports. This narrative promotes selective amnesia, disinherits, accelerates forgetfulness, ignores the multiplicities of identity and has ascendency. Speaking to current political and State power issues while at the same time deliberately driving an alienating wedge between *this* narrative and all others. Similar to ethic nationalism, cultural chauvinism and rhetoric is lauded, privileging "a more emotional and exclusionary celebration of group identity".[24]

Through the increasing beatification and iconisation of archival holdings, through the notion of re-occurring archives - different protagonists but the same narratives and themes - the South African Archive is being refigured as Memorial and as Heritage Tourism. The archival space is being amalgamated into the commemoration space of monuments, rituals and museums. The Archive, through what it is collecting and why and how it is structuring its outreach programmes and projects is a reflection of the new liberation hagiographic historiography. Feeding and romanticising the struggle nostalgia industry, constructing national myths and amplifying memorialisation, this is the archive where politicians, and' key struggle figures' are canonised and where their true legacy is not clear.[25] Here archival institutions and collections are being popularised, creating the illusion that they are making everything about the struggle and the struggle icon available, warts and all.

In some cases these are subservient, self-replicating storage houses, co-opted subliminally or by default into promoting, institutionalising and memorialising 'liberation struggle' legacy projects, to be used in the construction of one-dimensional, over-simplified historical content and controlled memories. Globally, the trend is that archives need to 'justify their existence'. There is increasing pressure to service tourism, to make a profit and to provide kudos and this

[22] *See* Baines, G. The Master Narrative of South Africa's Liberation Struggle: Remembering and Forgetting June 16, 1976. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2007), pp. 283-302. URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40033914 And: Marschall, S. Reordering the Past: Monuments and Architectural Heritage in Post-Apartheid South Africa. L'histoire de l'urbanisme comme domaine inter-disciplinaire : franchissements de frontières dans les années de formation. URL: http://www.inha.fr/colloques/document.php?id=1691
[23] Panitch, JM. Liberty, Equality, Posterity?: Some Archival Lessons from the Case of the French Revolution. The American Archivist, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Winter, 1996). URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40293951
[24] Osborne, BS. Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration: Putting Identity in Its Place. Commissioned by the Department of Canadian Heritage for the Ethnocultural, Racial, Religious, and Linguistic Diversity and Identity Seminar. Halifax, Nova Scotia, November 1-2, 2001
[25] For example the Nelson Mandela Foundation Centre for Memory and other similar endeavours such as Ahmed Kathrada Foundation, Tutu Peace Centre, Steve Biko foundation, Albert Luthuli Museum, Sol Plaatje Museum, Liliesleaf Museum, Robben Island, etc.

is often seen as what has value and what has value. Archives want to show governments, funders and their host institutions that they are 'relevant'. To do this they are positioning themselves squarely within the heritage sector and the cultural economy to have economic, political and developmental value and currency. The danger is that archives are then largely being viewed merely as useful production houses for heritage products, for marketing and for branding purposes and, as a consequence, for embedding certain selected memories for the future. In this way the Archive is increasingly being transformed into commodity.

Since 1990 competition between Non-State archives has increased, particularly with regard to the records of the 'liberation movement'. There seems to be almost an obsession with possessing information and collections that are perceived to be politically fashionable and consequently prestigious and celebrated - reflecting ownership and control rather than process, access or protection. And of course these Archives, which are usually located in tertiary institutions, operate within the political and financial environment of their parent institutions and it impacts on their strategies, policies and procedures.

These non-state archives have a responsibility to respond to changing social dynamics. The role that research archives in tertiary institutions can play in encouraging myriad voices and multiple interpretations rather than privileging one voice, one narrative or iconography, and in self-consciously elevating repurposing the archival landscape is becoming pivotal in acting as counterweight to the power of ruling groups or those holding power in society. They are not merely filling the gaps in the official record but they have their own important place and serve a vital function. Such repositories need to reflect both current and emergent ideological and social trends and concern themselves with collecting and focusing on the lives of individuals, civil society, marginalised groupings and organisations or minority movements who oppose dominant structures and ideologies. These should include new global social movements, gay and lesbian organisations, women's groups, environmental and animal rights movements, social justice advocates, community-based organisations, one-issue campaigns and the like. It could also include right-wing entities, vigilante groups and non-state actors.

However, most research archival units at universities are not given adequate support or resources, either by government, foundations or the universities themselves, to develop and maintain collections. Little cognisance is taken of their specialised and specific needs and they are often viewed as merely a 'small unit' within the library that takes up 'too much' physical space. In addition, research archives too can be prisoners of their own selection criteria and succumb to political and economic pressure. This has repercussions for collection policies, what is preserved, what is digitised and what is made publicly accessible.

So, documentary heritage and the instrumentalisation of digital heritage projects in South Africa in the 'post-liberation era' has a gloomy side. Obviously all is not triumphal and cause for celebration. If the reductionist landscape of liberation archives is to be untangled these critical sources need to be made available for scholarly research, their own history of creation must be analysed, their future freed from political interference and renewed attention given to allowing scholarly responsibilities to override the whims of political interest. There remains the need to craft extra-archives and multi-vocal post-colonial archives. Academic scholarly associations, nationally and internationally, should be paying more attention. This is a struggle which is only beginning.

Digitisation of Documentary Heritage: A Site of Struggle

"Technology is society, and society cannot be understood or represented without its technological tools"[26] Manuel Castells

"Historians of Africa have found that the question of the archive in contemporary Africa activates the tensions that once defined the struggle against different forms of domination."[27] Premesh Lalu

As I have argued, archival holdings generally tend to speak to power and ideology and tend to ignore the marginalised in society, and the selection of content for digitisation and digital preservation not only reflect this unequalness but in many ways evoke Africa's histories of violence and exploitation. Certainly, in the African context, content selected for digital projects should not be a new form of colonial 'discovery' of the African 'other', who through the selection of content for digitisation are relocated from an invisible space to one that is hyper visible.

The process of preserving and making available heritage digital content does not mean opening access in the real sense of the word because the same gatekeeping issues and processes play themselves out in the digital world: privileging some voices and silencing others. So, digitisation is organisation and disorganisation, simultaneous voicelessness and a cacophony of information. And the business of selection and preserving digital content continues to bolster the bias already implicit in the Archive. In the South African context, ambitious digitisation projects are proving a highly ambiguous development and the representation of the "liberation struggle" through digitisation is intensifying contests over the redefinition of the archive.[28]

The Archive is facing a new battle – this time on the digital front - and what is plainly surfacing is wide-ranging apprehension around the ownership and hegemony of these newly aggregated and continually morphing digital assets. Many of these projects are fundamentally located in uneven power relations and perspectives which compromise national heritage; do not represent the views and interests of the developing nations; bolster inequities in globalisation; and exacerbate historic North/South imbalances. Increasingly the digitisation of South African heritage material for publication on the worldwide web is a space where the real challenges are not technological or technical but social and political.

Digitising archives is more than merely aggregating documents in cyberspace. There needs to be more debate about the politics of memory in digital form. There needs to be more discussion about how *what* is selected for digitisation projects frames research agendas and plays a role in curriculum strategies. And there needs to be a conversation about how these projects: enhance the public interest; service researchers in the South; promote South-South dialogue; and how they engage in the mounting debates about the politics of collecting and the construction of an archive on liberation struggles. There needs to be an understanding of the political economy of digitisation projects, the politics of digitisation, the ethics of representation and the issue of digital repatriation. Digitisation projects need to be aligned to local and regional discussions and debates about the archive. As Lalu asserts, "globalization reinforces the old pattern of the intellectual division of labour: the Western producers vs. the

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[26] Castells, M. *Rise of the network society,* (1996:5), Blackwell, Oxford.)

[27] Lalu, P. The virtual stampede for Africa: digitisation, postcoloniality and archives of the liberation struggles in Southern Africa, 2007:40.

[28] Pickover, M. The DISA Project. Packaging South African heritage as a continuing resource: content, access, ownership and ideology *IFLA Journal* Vol. 34, (2008), pp.193-197

African consumers of knowledge. Combined with the legacies of the Cold War, this makes for particular conditions for the writing of Southern African history."[29]

The DISA Project provides the opportunity to open up to scrutiny and criticism the mediations of technology in knowledge production and intellectual production. Digital Innovation South Africa (DISA) was a national, not–for-profit collaborative initiative, funded by the Mellon Foundation that pulled in a number of stakeholders from, memory institutions, scholars and government. The first phase of the DISA project was entitled *South Africa's Struggle for Democracy 1960-1994* and began in 1999. In 2002 DISA sought to complement this first phase of digitising journals of the liberation struggles by building on the serialised digital resource through archival content about the liberation struggle. The identification and selection of content was to be centred round the efforts of local scholars. This second phase began in 2003 and was entitled *Southern African Freedom Struggles, c.1950-1994*. An important element of the this second phase DISA project, particularly from the perspective of content selection was that through digitisation 'a new form of archive' would be assembled, one that would "unsettle the seamless narrative of the liberation struggle".[30]

DISA was thrust headlong into the highly politically and ideologically charged, and fraught, nexus of constructing culture and knowledge through attempting to digitise Liberation histories from the global South within the existing frustration with the current South-North flow of information. An additional layer of complexity is that the sources of the materials for digital project are social constructs and contested locales of power, ideology, identity and memory where specific narratives are privileged and others marginalised and silenced. How digital resources are assembled and shaped means that definite choices have been made around selection - what to digitise, who decides, how decisions are made and what influences those choices. These decisions then intellectually frame, mediate and control a digital project such as DISA.

The questions of what intellectual product is being created, how that information is packaged, how liberation history is being rewritten and how this speaks to and shapes post-colonial and post-apartheid research agendas and debates about the Archive is therefore intricately bound into this construct and in creating new monopolies.

In DISA 2 content selection has been largely influenced by production targets set by ALUKA (ALUKA is an online digital resource based in the USA which includes African Cultural Heritage Sites and Landscapes, African Plants and Struggles for Freedom in Southern Africa to which DISA was strongly affiliated) and an intellectual architecture which is declining into an awkward one-dimensional repression/resistance narrative mainly aimed at an undergraduate studies audience in the USA. This reductionist structure obviously has implications, not only for the form this knowledge resource is taking or the form of the archive that is being constructed, but also in terms of its usefulness for South African researchers and public intellectuals and its inability to contribute towards critical citizenship in South Africa. Subscription models such as ALUKA, places conditions on access to its

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[29] Lalu, P. The Virtual Stampede for Africa: Digitisation, Postcoloniality and Archives of the Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa. 2007

[30] Allen F. Isaacman, Premesh Lalu, and Thomas I. Nygren, 'Digitisation, History, and the Making of a Postcolonial Archive of Southern African Liberation Struggles: The Aluka Project', Africa Today 52, 2 (2005), pp. 55–77.

digital resource – even if it is supposed to be 'free' to 'appropriate' educational and cultural institutions pending the signing of a licensing agreement. For example:

- Paying users who would ordinarily been able to access libraries do not usually have access to digital/electronic resources.
- In this context copyright owners and creators – particularly organisations as would be the case in South Africa- are not given 'free' access to their own resources.
- How long will it be made available 'freely'? For 5 years? For ten years? Forever?

Sustainability issues could also negatively impact on access over time in the country where the documents originate, particularly where national collaboration takes place. This is because funding for digitisation projects is usually directed at production and so is inevitably short-term, transient and has strings attached. Long-term preservation is a very time consuming, energy intense, technical and expensive process and the financial temptation to hand over control of completed digital projects initiated in the South to eager, well-resourced institutions in the North is ever-present. Grant applicants usually guarantee notions of posterity and long-term access to the digital resources but collaborative projects such as DISA have shown that the issue of who takes responsibility for them once the project comes to an end and the funding dries up remains unresolved. Currently, the sustainability of the DISA-produced archival Master TIFFs and the sustainability of, and access to, the DISA resource remains unresolved and under threat.

The DISA project raises a number of issues for digitisation of documentary heritage in Africa. It is the *Zeitgeist,* the deeper set of moral and ethical questions that relate to the digitisation, harvesting and extraction of heritage information about and from the South which are well worth analysing and interrogating. And it is the content component of digitisation projects which elicit the most interest and demands discussion. What is sorely needed is more public discussion and debate locally, regionally and with other countries in the South about the more substantive questions, including: the political economy of projects like DISA; how these projects relate to the construction of democratic public spheres and what tools and policies need to be in place so that valuable and meaningful digital resources can be developed for and engage with scholars, researchers, educationists, archivists, librarians and public intellectuals.

Ultimately, what we are really talking about is the nature of partnerships that countries in the North, other African countries and Institutions, have with custodians, governments and the education sector as well as other stakeholders. We do not want to be mere suppliers of documents held together with a veneer of inclusivity (a shop-floor that supports a massive infrastructure with bigger ambitions elsewhere.) Mazrui argues that we need to make ''African culture available on equitable terms to the wider world … without exploiting Africa.''[31]

As a continent, as civil society we need to vigorously engage in what partnerships bring to the table and whether local, regional and institutional mandates, missions and expectations are complementary or in opposition. In this regard some of the key questions that need to be raised are:

- How do we share knowledge without being exploited and deepening the digital divide?

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[31] Mazrui AA Africanity redefined: collected essays of Ali A. Mazrui, vol 1. (2002:213) African World Press, Trenton, NJ

- How do we enter into partnerships with countries in the North in ways that address and not reinforce the digital divide?
- How do we ensure that such partnerships do not merely reformulate issues of heritage plundering and cultural asset stripping?
- How do we take into consideration issues of connectivity and context, use and power?
- How do we ensure that these digital projects do not serve to merely replace repatriation of actual heritage items?

In addition to DISA there have been several interventions relating to the digitisation of heritage and research resources:
- The National Research Foundation (NRF) conducted a national research project and training on digitisation and preservation with the first phase being an register of digitisation projects in South Africa in 2009.[32]
- A Draft National Policy on Digitisation of Heritage Resources (version 9 of 2011) prepared by the Department of Arts and Culture with input from national stakeholders (this draft policy will become official policy in the second half of 2014). The policy is structured over six key strategic focus areas:
  - Capacity and institution building
  - Creating support systems for digitisation
  - Establishing a community of practice
  - Creating financial and economic management frameworks for digitisation
  - Clarifying regulatory management frameworks
  - Promoting research and development

  Key elements of this policy include:
  - An Endangered Collections Digitisation Fund to ensure that such collections are given priority in the digitisation process so as to decrease the risk of loss.
  - A range of scholarships and bursaries to support tertiary and sectorial education in various elements of digitisation.
  - An outline of for explicitly identified controls for contracts for funded projects to prevent the risk of loss of rights and to deal with issues of ownership, access, preservation and authenticity.
  - The establishment of a National Institute for Digital Heritage.
  - The promotion of Open Source and Open Access.
- The establishment of the South African Digitisation Initiative in 2013. SADI's Brief is to:
  - Identify appropriate, guidelines, standards and metadata for digitisation projects
  - Develop a national aggregator/portal of South Africa digitised heritage
  - Provide training and skills development
  - Lobbying and Advocacy

In the global North digital heritage initiatives are well established, growing and pervasive. In Africa such initiatives are in their infancy and patchy. Digital content about Africa is still largely produced in the North and many African countries continue to rely on foreign sources for data about their own country. The stewardship of digital information is disorganised, the

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[32] See: http://digi.nrf.ac.za/

sharing of experiences scarce and there is insufficient expertise in managing digital information.

Current efforts within the various consortia in Africa and the region at large are fragmented with limited national or regional coordination. Most of these initiatives are by individual institutions with a few collaborative efforts. Apart from the obvious exceptions of countries in north Africa such as Egypt and Morocco, there are very few examples of initiatives driven by national libraries or archives to develop coherent national digital resources to provide integrated access to the collective national digitised collections. One exception seems to be Kenya. Since 2007, the Kenya National Assembly has been digitising its proceedings and providing free access to them through its website www.parliament.go.ke. In 2011 Google partnered with the National Council for Law Reporting and the Kenya government to digitise the historical copies dating back to 1906. In 2007 the Kenya National Archives and Documentary Service also digitised 1,685,000 items from the Coast Province, but as yet these have not been made publicly accessible online. In June 2014 the Kenyan government announced that the Kenya National Archives and Documentary Service will be digitising and making publicly accessible online, 40,000 documents "that chart the history of this great country".[33]

A major African forum focusing on digitisation of heritage is the International Conference on African Digital Libraries and Archives (ICADLA), which was initiated in 2009. Various research studies and papers given at the various ICADLA meetings have shown that there are major challenges to the production, preservation and management of documentary and digital heritage in Africa – both through retrospective conversion and born digital. The challenges that can impede sustainability and access include:

- Lack of political will and inadequate government and political support particularly to National Archives and National Libraries and limited understanding of the risks and advantages.
- Lack of leadership.
- Weak policy and regulatory frameworks and effective strategies at the institutional and national levels.
- Archives and records, as fundamental components of good governance, transparency and democracy, are not accorded the profile and prominence they deserve precisely because they are seen as the competency of 'heritage', that is, something old, in the past and irrelevant.
- Limited training, professional capacity and skills to undertake digitisation (including resources to acquire and develop capacity and skills and IT development).
- Inadequate infrastructure to manage digital records over time.
- Limited connectivity and bandwidth.
- Lack of coordination of digitisation at institutional, national, and regional levels.
- Lack of national or regional implementation of best-practice technical standards.
- Marginal understanding of intellectual property rights and copyright in the digital environment.
- A shortage of financial resources to:
  - Sustain digital resources in the long-term, including the created web resource (for access) and the archival masters, and to deal with technological obsolescence and the implementation of risk management strategies to mitigate and manage digital assets.

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[33] See: **http://kenyanewsagency.go.ke/?p=28216**

- Acquire and maintain hardware and software.
  - A passive citizenry and civil society formations that are not well informed engaged or resourced and are not effective at holding their governments to account.

In Africa we need to undertake digitisation projects that help us to find ways of negotiating the present and engage with the difficult and ever-morphing issues that continue to confront us, those of identity, representation and renewal. Digitisation projects and programmes need to service South-South dialogue, research programmes and knowledge production. The combined efforts of individual memory institutions (which is taking p lace regardless of the disintegration of national Archives and Libraries) needs to be synergised so as to build digital heritage resources in Africa and to develop interconnected repositories and portals to national and regional resources.

More specifically, the following issues need to be focussed on in in Africa in order to tackle the digital divide and to build digital content strategically:
- Institutional and national strategies and policy frameworks.
- Audits and surveys – at institutional, national, regional and continent level.
- Consistent application of technical guidelines and standards.
- Developing and investing in human resource training and capacity – technical and digital project management.
- Content selection guidelines to service access and preservation.
- Implementation of effective policies for the long-term preservation and sustainability of digital information objects and digital research resources.
- Support from leaders whether at institutional, government or government-to-government level.
- Effective governance and management frameworks.
- Funding at institutional, national and regional level.
- The inclusion of digitisation activities in Africa in the programme thrusts of international funding agencies.
- Increased investment in digitisation at the highest political levels.
- Establishment of national collaborative digitisation initiatives.
- Establishment of trusted digital repositories nationally.
- Greater coordination across countries in Africa in relation to funding, technical interoperability, the exchange of information about available resources and the creation of registries and aggregators.
- Collaborative inter-African projects and partnerships and the development of common positions and prioritise regional discussions, interactions and perspectives so as to promote coordination, regional knowledge sharing and understanding and to share lessons learned.
- Long-term sustainability and preservation of digital objects and digital resources.
- Improving Internet connectivity and ICT infrastructure on the continent.
- Benchmarking.

Another issue that affects the selection of content for digitisation in Africa is the messy and emotionally charged imperialistic relationships African countries have with their old colonial masters continue, particularly when it comes to accessing their own histories. This relationship is dealt an additional blow because of the secrecy, gatekeeping, lack of access to,

and destruction of, these records by countries such as Britain and France.[34] The old colonial powers argue that these documents may legally be their property and the decolonised countries argue that they are not. It cannot be disputed that are of interest to both parties and it cannot be denied that are inextricably bound to the history of the once-colonised State. Adding to the problem is that, according to the ICA and the International Law Commission, there is established European decorum through clauses in cession of territories treaties between European states, that archival materials will be returned but this is glaringly absent in cases of 'decolonisation'. And this controversial and morally uncomfortable situation can sometimes be exacerbated by digitisation. For example, recently the National Archives of the UK has allowed a commercial company, Adam Matthew Digital, to digitise and make available only through a subscription model, *Apartheid South Africa, 1948- 1980* documents of formerly restricted British files. It includes in-depth analysis of events, international reaction and policy dilemmas and numerous first-hand accounts and reports. Even well-resourced universities in South Africa cannot afford to pay the subscription fees to this kind of resource.

A further issue that affects the selection of content for digitisation in Africa is funding. Digitisation of heritage materials demands funding and support – either from the State or from mainstream and international donors and foundations- so clearly the selection of content will reflect dominant and mainstream positions which are rooted in neo-colonial and patriarchal arrangements, thereby excluding marginal voices and contestations of a colonial, popular or superficial past.

The task of managing digital collections can only be made easier if we actively engage with the tough political, ethical and moral issues around content selection. There also needs to be a conscious component of ensuing accountability, transparency and good governance as well enabling public scrutiny when selecting content for digitisation. Selection of content for digitisation is crucial in the making and re-making of 'memory' and 'histories' and 'historical meanings'. As content selectors we need to actively engage with the making and formation of heritage. For Witz and Rasool its "not about 'what happened' that is of importance but how, why and which stories, in which forms, did or did not gain currency at certain instances and at specific places".[35]

With all of this in mind, the all-important 'preamble' for memory institutions to manage digital collections in the African context (and elsewhere), is to ask the following issues and questions:

What are you managing and where does it come from?
- Are you planning to undertake retrospective conversion, and if so what are physical analogue formats?
- What is the pre-digitisation physical condition? Does the material require conservation work prior to digitisation?

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[34] For example, a claim for damages brought by a group of elderly Africans against the British Government for alleged torture during the Kenyan 'Mau Mau' emergency in the 1950s and 1960s led to a demand by the High Court that all relevant documentation be produced. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) subsequently admitted the existence of withheld official documents from 37 former British dependencies sent to London at decolonisation. See: Banton, Mandy. 'Lost' and 'found': the concealment and release of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office 'migrated archives', 33-46, Comma, No.1/2012.

[35] Witz, L. and Rasool, C. Making histories, Kronos (Bellville) vol.34 no.1 Cape Town Nov. 2008:10

What shapes content selection?
- What Archive? What documentary heritage?
- How do you prioritise and select content?
- What criteria are being used to select content?
- How do you decide what is important and what is not?
- What social, cultural, political and technological conditions are affecting our decisions?
- What is the physical condition of the possible selected content?
- The format?
- What is the extent of arrangement and description of the originals - are there detailed finding aids, or do they need to be enhanced and expanded to item level to provide adequate metadata for digitisation purposes?[36]
- Are there Deposit Agreements and do these cover your planned digitisation endeavours?
- Are there restrictions on use of parts of the collections?
- What are the copyright/intellectual property clearance issues?

Do you know what you have, what you want to digitise and the model for access and preservation?
- Have you done an audit of your holdings for digitisation purposes?
- Have you met with your stakeholders, custodians and other role-players in terms of selecting content?
- Is preservation of content the main driver? Or is it Access? Or both?
- Does your digitisation project speak to and ensure the preservation of the physical/original materials?
- Open access versus fee-based models?
- How are you going to ensure long-term preservation and access to the original digital data (the digital masters) and the digital resource – the end product?
- Who is the target audience?

Whose Agenda? Who Decides?
We need to decide on *what* Content to digitise. How do we select content and who makes the decision about what content is selected – this is a very political and intellectual intervention.
- What will be included and what excluded? And why?
- Whose interests are reflected?
- What is the role of funders funding agencies and grant-makers in the selection process?
- How are our limited resources being allocated?
- How do collaborative projects and partnerships influence what is selected for digitisation?
- Are collaborations and partnerships fair and equitable?
- Digitisation of entire collections or cherry picking? The deliberate creation of a virtual exhibition, thematic, mass digitisation, entire collections, everything we have? Some of these? All of these?

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[36] A huge problem in the South African context, particularly in many memory institutions is that there is a vast amount of unprocessed material which is not arranged or described or not adequately described (this is particularly pertinent if you are planning to digitise).

- Will the content selected for digitisation service your research agendas and collection policies and priorities?
- How do we provide context, provenance and relationships (particularly if we cherry-pick)?
- Are you balancing resources on retrospective digitisation content with preserving and making accessible new data or collections and materials that have not yet found their way into institutional archives?
- Are you perhaps selecting only content that is more visual and aural because of the context of online exhibition design, and if so how will this affect the usefulness of the end resource?

Have you considered the political and contested nature of digital resource creation?
- What role is digitisation playing in framing research agendas, repackaging history and shaping national histories?
- Is digitisation of specific types of content reinforcing the dominant economic and political milieu and a uncontested metanarrative?
- Is your digitisation project enhancing public interest, servicing researchers and scholars in the South and promoting South-South dialogue?

Aluta Continua

Much of our documentary heritage is already invisible and hidden through: neglect, secrecy, inefficiency political agendas and government and party control over important information that ordinary citizens and civil society organisations, who are seeking justice, openness, equality and accountability, should have access to. The selection of content for digitisation not only occurs within this context but it also adds additional layers of entanglements. Despite this, however, it would be counter-intuitive to attempt to try not to engage with it. Indeed, as memory workers, institutions, counter-hegemonic research archives and scholars we should actively and innovatively explore and critically engage with it so as to create self-critical, independent and introspective spaces for knowledge production and public scholarship, particularly in fragile and transitional democracies. We need to ensure that there is not only one fixed, all-encompassing understanding but one that is nuanced, contradictory, ambiguous and multi-layered, challenges the dominant discursive and reflects competing accounts of our past. As Fleckner has noted, "…without the documentary record there could have been no calling to account, no investigation, no prosecution. And that record, the tapes, the documents, and all the rest-stands as witness in the future to those who would forget or rewrite that past".[37]

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[37] Fleckner, JA, "Dear Mary Jane": Some Reflections on Being an Archivist, Society of American Archivists residential address, 30 August 1990. http://www.archivists.org/governance/presidential/fleckner.asp