

REPORT ON
A ONE DAY SEMINAR ORGANIZED AT THE S.T. MUNA FOUNDATION,
YAOUNDE- CAMEROON
ON APRIL 10TH 2013
ORGANIZED BY:
THE INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY,
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
IN COLLABORATION WITH
SCHOLARS OF THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF CAMEROON

THEME: “FUTURE AND PAST HISTORIOGRAPHY- GAPS AND
SILENCES IN THE ARCHIVAL RECORD, AND WHAT WE CAN
SAY TODAY ABOUT THE FUTURE ARCHIVAL RECORD.”

Sponsored by the
CARE FOR THE FUTURE PROGRAMME
(AHRC, UNITED KINGDOM)

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I- INTRODUCTION

On April 10th 2013, a seminar was held at the Solomon Tandeng Muna Foundation in Yaoundé-Cameroon, on the theme: “Future and Past Historiography- Gaps and Silences in the Archival Record, and what we can say today about the Future Archival Record”. The seminar was sponsored by the ‘Care for the Future’ programme (AHRC, United Kingdom). The seminar brought together thirteen researchers from across some of Cameroon’s state institutions and beyond.. As the listing (at the end of the report) shows they spanned many different academic backgrounds in history, anthropology, archaeology, fine arts and photography, and consequently discussions at the seminar were very diverse and interesting.

After registration and installation of participants, the seminar started with discussion of the workshop main themes. These revolved around strategies to ensure the sustainability of varied archival material. The seminar participants reflected on three main issues namely:

- The Historiography of archives with a special interest on what was available and what was not available.
- The fate of the future of archival material
- How will archival material be consulted since much documentation today is going digital?

II- Methodology

The seminar had seven presentations which were followed by active discussion. The seminar closed with a roundtable discussion and the suggestion of some concrete proposals (of which this journal is one). The papers were:

- 1) Looking Forward, Looking Back by **Prof. David Zeitlyn**
- 2) Arabic and Ajami Manuscripts in Cameroon » by **Prof. Hamadou Adama**
- 3) Material Archives in Archeology by **Prof. Denis Nizesete**
- 4) Oral Archives (Songs of Griots) by **Mahamat Abba Ousman**
- 5) Museum collections as archives by **Heumen Tchana Hugues**
- 6) The old photographs from Batcham, from the Golden Age to the age of decline in the 1980s by **Jacob Tatsitsa**
- 7) Threatened Indigenous Archives in the Mbum land : Which way forward ? by **Dr. Tanto Richard Talla.**

The following report covers those papers not published in this issue of Vestiges.

III- PRESENTATION OF PAPERS

1st Presentation “Looking Forward, Looking Back” by Prof. David Zeitlyn

In his paper titled “Looking Forward, Looking Back”, Prof. Zeitlyn summarized some themes connecting Historians, Anthropologists and Archaeologists. He established parallels between the past and the future. Drawing inspiration from his work in history, languages and photography (looking back), and his works with diviners (looking at the future), Zeitlyn talked of the “Thin Red Line” of actuality threading through the possible worlds created by choices made and options avoided during events of the past. This can be explored by the use of simulations to create Counterfactual History(ies). His paper suggested that because peoples the world over have different histories, different viewpoints, different aspirations, differences in ethnicity, differences in men and women histories etc, instead of talking of the single **past**, **present** and **future**, researchers should move from these singularities to pluralities, hence, the

pasts, the **presents** and the **futures**. Prof. Zeitlyn held that since the past may not be as unchanging as it appears, “Archives and Museums have to actively manage their collections in the light of changing understandings of what their collections contain and what they mean in the present”.

His paper further argued that present actions like speculations, predictions and forecasting affect the future and understanding of the present affects the past. So there is a dynamic inter-relationship between the past, the present and the future.

On the future of archives, Zeitlyn suggested that archivists will, in the future, have less material to work on than in the past because the new technologies like text messages, emails and digital documents are fragile. For example, he argued that there may be less photographic material today than fifty years ago due to the switch to digital photography.

Citing examples from the history of Cameroon, Prof. Zeitlyn argued that controversies can help clarify features which are also present in less controversial cases. He cited the cases of the date of the foundation of Banyo, the role of the northern lamidates in slavery, the UPC/Bamileke uprising and its suppression, or the political debates about the move from federal to unified republic. To adopt a more historiographical approach, participants studying these topics were asked to think about “the sources they do not have but would like to have” and the types of records that existed, but which seem not to have been created or survived. In this light Prof. Zeitlyn related examples in West Cameroon which made the maintenance of everyday life as a real achievement. These include baptizing a child, a wedding, a burial or death ceremony which local village photographers captured to maintain “continuity, tradition and domestic life. He concluded that historians, archivists and archaeologists should record everyday life as an achievement and a source of information. His presentation was followed by questions and answers.

2nd Presentation: « Arabic and Ajami Manuscripts in Cameroon » by Prof. Hamadou Adama, University of Ngaoundere

Prof. Adama’s presentation (see this volume for the published version) gave an overview of Arabic Manuscripts in Cameroon which include documents about so-called «muted groups». He discussed the main locations and availability of the manuscripts, their thematic classification and cataloguing.

Talking about the manuscripts, Prof. Adama indicated that the oldest manuscripts in the Lake Chad Basin dated back to 1830 and their main origins were in North Cameroon (Adamawa), and the wider Lake Chad basin region where many still remain, although some

are in south Cameroon (mainly in the Buea and Yaoundé National Archives). The latter documents were mainly intelligence reports, pilgrimage reports and letters. He noted that there were, however, other private collections in Adamawa and Bornu on Arabic history and culture.

These manuscripts were locally (re)produced by clergymen using the Arabic language and other associated languages such as Fulfulde, Hausa or Kanuri. Prof. Adama noted that they cover some topics which are not otherwise covered by documents available in the National Archives. These include medical and pharmacology reports, detrimental military accounts, judicial testimonies, dispute resolution and reports of daily life from both the Muslim and the non-Muslim cities and villages.

As concerns documents about so-called «muted groups», Prof. Adama pointed out that they are only rarely found since when Islamization occurs, non-Muslim ethnic groups were mostly depicted unfavourably and are generally invisible in Arabic & Ajami manuscripts. Only uncommon physical performance and the high fertility among the non-Muslim people is valorised in some poetry manuscripts.

On the thematic contribution, historically oriented writings include chronicles, jihad accounts, pilgrim registration files, local traditions and communities and intelligence reports. This category of writings initiated under the German rule (1884-1916) continued under the French colonial administration (1916-1960). The calligraphy employed is that inherited from the Emirates from the west of Lake Chad region, in other words, imported from Borno and the Hausa states. Meanwhile, pedagogically oriented writings include a combination of Gazâli tradition and pastoralist values of the Fulani people and Sermons and teachings delivered by itinerant scholars or Shaykhs.

Prof. Adama also discussed devotionally oriented writings, found in Arabic and local languages, locally (re)produced for prayers and on devotion for the Prophet, panegyric poems and some items have been used in the soundtracks of local films (part of the so-called Kanywood film industry).

As to how best to preserve the manuscripts, Prof. Adam advised the reliability of hand-listing as a necessary first step before moving to the possibilities of digitalization, enabling remote consultation. For the distributed collections of manuscripts many in private hands a complex program of education and knowledge is needed to ensure interest and trust. The use of the documents in teaching will promote their valorisation. Finally, he distinguished memory museums from physical museums. Ajami documents intriguingly span the divide.

3rd Presentation: « Les Archives Matérielles d'ordre Archeologique » (Archeological material as Archives) By Prof. NIZESETE Bienvenu Denis (Institut Supérieur du Sahel/Université de Maroua)

Prof. Nizesete started his presentation by supporting the views of Jean Devisse (1979) that Africa's history laid underneath her soil. After a classic definition of archaeology, Prof. Nizesete argued that the soil was the best archival deposit and the first source of historical writings in Africa; hence, according to him, there is no history without archaeology. He stated that the vestiges of archaeology are made up of fragments of bones, metallic objects, ancient objects, fragments of pottery objects etc which could all be kept and consulted in museums. He however noted that there was inadequate means for archaeological works and poor connections for local archaeologists to what foreign archaeologists had found in Cameroon.

As to the knowledge of archaeological archives in Cameroon Prof. Nizesete revealed that most work has been done in the Far North, North Centre and North West Regions of the country. In the Adamawa, South and Littoral Regions archaeological works were average, while archaeological research in the East, West and South West Regions have been very weak. All these are explained by the inadequate means for archaeological research.

Prof. Nizesete further argued that archaeology has to play a role in the restitution of Africa's past, but as far as Cameroon is concerned there are threats to archaeological archives. Such threats include: the extension of farmland due to increase in population, rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation, frequent wild bush fires and inadequate legislative dispositions to protect archaeological sites.

In a more positive note, Prof. Nizesete suggested a way forward for safeguarding and protecting of Cameroon's archaeological sites. These include the training of professional archaeologists, undertaking a systematic inventory of all archaeological sites in Cameroon, the putting in place of a mechanism for financing research throughout the national territory, the fight against the destruction of archaeological sites and the illicit trafficking of cultural artefacts, the respect of the 1991 text on the conservation of national patrimonies and the creation of Museums. At this juncture, and at the end of his presentation, Prof. Elouga Martin, Chair of the Department of Arts and Archaeology in the University of Yaoundé I, announced that Cameroon's National Assembly had just legislated on the protection archaeological sites and material, a day before the workshop, that is, on April 9th 2013.

Second Session: 11:30- 1:00 pm

After the first session, it was decided that since the discussion which had followed the previous presentations had taken a long time, all presenters for the second session should give their papers before questions, answers and discussion. During this session, four presentations were made.

4th Presentation: “Oral Archives (the Songs of “Griots” or Praise-singers)” by Mahamat Abba Ousman (Doctorate student at the University of Maroua)

In his presentation, Mahamat Abba Ousman highlighted the problems and limitations of Oral Archives ranging from inadequate consultation of old people (‘moving libraries’) by researchers, lack of interest by the young people in their traditional activities and cultures thereby breaking the line of cultural transmission as well as the influence of the modern state (including Western education) which leads young people to leave their communities for urban centres. According to Mahamat, this resulted in youth losing contact with local realities. He also suggested that some researchers are not willing to undertake research in their areas of origin thereby not fostering research on such areas.

Mahamat Abba touched on the methods of collecting oral data and proposed ways through which such oral data should be promoted. These include: the establishment of archives of oral culture, songs and tales; the opening of audio-visual centres to promote the culture of oral tradition, organising colloquia and conferences and encouraging students to do work on such material.

In conclusion, Mahamat Abba recommended the following: that an inventory of oral data should be made in all cultural milieus; old people should be encouraged to do research with younger researchers in order to pass on information, while students should be encouraged to preserve oral tradition by developing interest in the African values.

5th Presentation: “Museum Collections as Archives” by Heumen Tchana Hugues (of the University of Maroua).

Heuman Tchana Hugues’ presentation was centred on museums as a form of archives in Cameroon. Using contrasting examples from Canada, France and the UK, he demonstrated that museums are very important archives for research. He argued that while the Yaounde and Buea archives were the official archives in Cameroon, family archives could become museums. These could be composed of photos, memoirs, letters, and manuscripts which

describe the ordinary life of the people. Such need to be conserved to provide important historic information.

He used the example of the Golden Book of the Royal Museum in Foumban which has opinions of high status visitors of the museum such as Cameroon's first president Ahmadou Ahidjo (1967) and President Paul Biya (1985). He also noted that objects and artefacts have important resonances in the present day which archival research can help reveal.

6th Presentation: “The Old Photographs of Bacham: From the Golden Age to the Decline of the 108s” by Jacob Tatsita (The University of Yaoundé I)

Jacob Tatsita presented background on some photographers from Batcham. Their work provides a rich documentation of Cameroonian history from the immediate post-independence period and beyond. He argued that Black and White pictures were better than the digital photos taken today because although fragile they are more stable than digital pictures. Tatsita's presentation was given increased interest by the presence of Tatang Gaspard Vincent, whose personal archive was the main subject of Tatsita's paper. Tatang is an old experienced photographer, who has taken pictures from the 1960s till date and has a very rich collection (archives) of photos beyond Cameroon. They both regretted that Tatang's photo archives, like many other private collections may soon deteriorate and disappear if nothing was done to assist preserve such historic collections. Their conclusion was that participants should engage in the identification and collection of important photos of public and private events which could serve as archives for posterity.

7th Presentation: “Threatened Indigenous Archives in the Mbum Land: Which way Foward?” By Dr. Talla Richard Talla (University of Buea)

In his presentation, Dr. Talla traced the history of the Mbum people, revisited the definitions of archives and archaeology before discussing shrines, local museums found in palaces, and “cultural reserves” which are all threatened. He argued that such secret societies like the *Nwarong* and *Ngiri* and shrines within palaces and reserves are all aspects of culture and contain important materiel relevant to understanding the historical evolution of the Mbum society. Dr Talla argued that archaeological sites, local museums and shrines could be treated as conventional archives because they all contain some of the evidence, which when studied, also reveal past human activities.

Despite this important source of information, Dr. Talla, like Dr. Nizesete regretted that archaeological sites and local museums are threatened in Cameroon by rural-urban migration caused by witchcraft in rural areas, the attraction of urban areas, absentee chiefs, transferred palaces, abandoned shrines, chieftaincy crises, increased population and extension of farmland, destruction royal graves, the advent of Christianity and western education.

Dr. Talla recommended the establishment of good documentation in local shrines by the Ministry of Culture. He also suggested that culture-sensitive areas like the archaeological sites and sites around the palaces should be mapped out and officially declared out of bounds for any developmental activities by the people. Dr. Talla advised on the rescuing and preservation of archaeological sites like the Royal graves at Mbajeng which in 2003 had four stones representing four chiefs who were buried there, but today none survive due to farming activities on the abandoned site. He also recommended that the government/ universities should promote studies aimed at restoring and understanding the various cultures of Cameroon in particular and Africa at large, the training of staff for continuity and the institution of the African culture day.

This paper has been published separately as Richard Tanto Talla and Ignatius Womai Song 2014 'Endangered Indigenous Archives in Mbum Land of Cameroon: Which Way Forward?' *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)* 1(7) 157-170 ISSN 2349-0373 (Print) & ISSN 2349-0381 (Online) arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijhsse/v1-i7/18.pdf

IV- Discussions and Reflections

Following all the presentations and the questions and answers, seminar participants were engaged in frank discussions on how to improve on the lot of archival material in Cameroon. As Secretary General of the Association of the Friends of Archives and Antiquities of Cameroon (AFAAC), Dr. Willibroad Dze-Ngwa highlighted some of the work done by AFAAC including the rehabilitation of the National Archives of Buea and the Bismarck Fountain in Buea among others. He noted that the Buea Archives which had no personnel should perhaps be placed under the control of the University of Buea for proper management, but this was not possible because the University and the Archives are under two different ministerial departments, the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Arts and Culture, respectively. He however noted that, due to the determination of AFAAC's President, Professor Verkijika G. Fanso some of the deadlock has been broken. Dr. Dze-Ngwa announced that the situation has greatly improved under the current Minister of Arts and Culture, H.E. Ama Tutu Muna, who is doing everything to improve on the lot of national

patrimony. The Ministry has recruited and posted archivists to the National Archives of Buea and Yaoundé, and in many of the other ministries.

Prof. Verkijika G. Fanso agreed with Dr. Dze-Ngwa and noted that the Minister of Arts and Culture was doing much in her ministry for the interest of Historians, Archaeologists, and Artists. He spoke of the work being done in the National Museum and the collection of photographs and other data for the celebration of the Fiftieth anniversaries of the Independence and Reunification of Cameroon under the auspices of the Minister of Arts and Culture.

V- Conclusions and Recommendations

The seminar ended with the following conclusions and recommendations:

- Participants at the workshop were exhorted to do everything possible to identify, collect and preserve important archival documentation. They were also requested to educate Cameroonians of the necessity to protect archival matter for the sake of posterity.
- That an official letter of thanks and recognition should be written to the present Minister of Culture, Mrs Ama Tutu Muna, to support her initiatives at the head of her ministry.
- That appeal letters should be sent to other Archives abroad like in the Nigeria, Germany, France, the UK etc to provide copies of documents concerning Cameroon for inclusion in Cameroonian archives.
- That placements should be arranged at the various ministerial departments for students who wish to do internships on documentation and archives.
- That AFAAC should be encouraged to develop projects on archives and antiquities, organise seminars, workshops and conferences at the national and regional levels.
- That a Scientific Journal be created with Prof. Hamadou Adama of the University of Ngaoundere and Dr. Willibroad Dze-Ngwa of the University of Yaoundé I as Editors.

In conclusion, the Moderator of the seminar, Prof. David Zeitlyn thanked every participant for the frank and fruitful seminar. He announced that the proceedings of the seminar will be published in due course, (in *Vestiges* and *History and Anthropology*).

List of Participants

| Name | INSTITUTION |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Pr. David ZEITLYN | Université d'Oxford |
| Pr. VERKIJIKA FANSO | Université de Yaoundé I |

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|-----------------------------|---|
| Pr. HAMADOU ADAMA | Université de Ngaoundéré |
| Dr. NIZESETE Bienvenu Denis | Université de Maroua |
| Dr. DZE-NGWA Willibroad | Université de Yaoundé I |
| Dr. TANTO Richard TALLA | University of Buea |
| M. MAHAMAT ABBA OUSMAN | Université de Maroua |
| HEUMEN TCHANA Hugues | Université de Maroua |
| Y. SOBSEH Emmanuel | Université de Bamenda |
| TATSITSA Jacob | Université de Yaoundé I |
| M. TATANG Gaspard Vincent | Batcham |
| SANNAH N. | Ambassade de l'Afrique du Sud au Cameroun |
| Ms Izzy Durham | Fulbright Scholar |

Dr. Willibroad Dze-Ngwa

Notetaker on behalf of all participants.

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