

Migrated archives: the African perspectives

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Abstract

There are a number of cases of records and archives that have left their countries of origin and are now held in other countries. For example, on the eve of independence, vast amounts of records in African countries were repatriated to Western metropolitan cities. Efforts by newly independent African governments to locate and retrieve these records have not been very successful. This paper discusses the efforts made by national archives from the east and southern Africa region through their professional association ESARBICA to locate and retrieve records held in European countries. Through a mailed questionnaire to Directors of National Archives, the paper captures the current views of the Director's on the impact that the migrated archives has had on their respective countries and possible technological solutions that may be employed to solve the migrated archives issue.

Key words: migrated archives, records, repatriation, ESARBICA, Africa

Introduction

If there has been any topic that has stimulated interest and curiosity over the years among African archivists, researchers and politicians then it must be the issue of migrated archives. As early as 1969 when ECARBICA was inaugurated in Nairobi, this issue was among those that generated interest. Since then, the issue has been discussed and resolutions passed by the East and Central and African

Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ECARBICA later known as ESARBICA). In 1982, 8 papers on migrated archives were presented during ECARBICA's Biennial conference held in Harare, Zimbabwe. In 1994, three papers were presented at Pan African Conference on Archival Policies and Programmes in Africa held in Abuja Nigeria detailing the efforts that Ghana, Kenya and Tunisia had made in the copying of records that had been removed from their countries. However, to date, this problem remains unresolved and continues to generate considerable interest among African archivists. In May 2014, the author was invited to present a paper at the Institute of Commonwealth studies, London on the theme: The Secret Archive What is the significance of FCO's 'Migrated Archives' and 'Special Collections'? In preparation for presentation of the paper, the author sent out a questionnaire to Director of National Archives in the East and Southern African region. This article is a revised version of the presentation made by the author at the above conference.

The Society of American Archivists (2005) Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology defines migrated archives as "The archives of a country that have moved from the country where they were originally accumulated; removed archives". According Nsibandze (1996:86) migrated archives are archives in exile or archives unjustly transferred (removed) from one country to another. Garaba (2011) argued that "whether one employs the term "fugitive archival material," or "missing documents", "migrated archives", "removed" or "displaced archives", the common factor is that they are not where

they are supposed to be, in their rightful place of custody.

Why African nations should be interested in migrated archives. In my opinion, there are several reasons for doing so. Firstly, as was rightly pointed out in the Archives-Libraries Committee Resolution on Migrated Archives (1977); "Archives are recognized as an essential part of any nation's heritage providing documentation not only of the historical, cultural, and economic development of a country thereby providing a basis for a national identity, but also serving as a basic source of evidence needed to assert the rights of individual citizens." The Archives- Libraries Committee went further to state that "Every national community has the right to an identity acquired from its history. In the name of human solidarity, national communities are required to assist each other in the search for historical truth and continuity. Military and colonial occupation should grant no particular right to retain records acquired by virtue of such occupation." It can therefore be argued that as long as records relating to a group of people are held elsewhere that community is being denied one of its basic rights.

Secondly, migrated archives constitute a vital historical resource which should be readily available in the countries of their origin. Botswana National Archives (n.d) argues that migrated archives are important as they:

- (a) They bridge the gap in our national documentary heritage
- (b) They provide an insight into the history and development of our country that may have previously not been known

- (c) Migrated archives increase the diversity of our archives and the local research base.

Efforts to locate and retrieve archives from the UK have been on-going and to a large extent the UK government has been supportive save for its failure to return to Africa records that were exported to the UK on the eve of independence. Speaking at the Pan African Conference on Archival Policies and Programmes in Africa held in Abuja Nigeria 1994 Musembi the former Director of the Kenya National Archives and Documentation Services noted that:

Generally speaking, we have continued to receive sympathy and support from archivist and librarians in the UK and USA. We thank them most sincerely. However, attitude of the former colonial powers has not been very helpful as clearly demonstrated during the discussions on the Vienna Convention on the succession of states in respect of state property, archives and debts. This situation was also made more complicated by the position taken by developing countries mainly former colonies. Archivists, through the ICA Committee on the International Microfilming Project for developing countries, should now seek to achieve a compromise on this delicate matter (Musembi, 1994:125)

Ever since the formation of East and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ECARBICA later Known ESARBICA), several resolutions calling upon Britain to return records removed from the region have been passed. A summary of the key resolutions passed by ESARBICA on migrated archives is provided below:

Table 1. ESARBICA resolutions on migrated archives (1969- 2011)

Year	Venue	Resolution
1969	Nairobi, Kenya	Resolved to seek through the International Council on Archives the moral support of the United Nations and its agencies and OAU in persuading governments and national bodies presently possessing such records to secure their return or the supply of photocopies of them and also to seek financial support of the United Nations and its agencies in mounting a programme of copying where governments are unable or unwilling to finance themselves.
1974	Lusaka, Zambia	(a) Make concrete efforts to retrieve migrated archives from the former colonial powers. (b) The conference recommends that governments of the participating countries formulating policies for the retrieval of records originating from the countries of East and Central Africa and held in former metropolitan and other cities
1982	Harare, Zimbabwe	The seventh Biennial Conference of ECARBICA endorses the proposal for the establishment of an international Microfilming Assistance Fund with adequate support. Congratulates the government of Kenya on its support of the long established and successful programme of the Kenya National Archives for identifying and acquiring copies of archives and records located abroad relating to the history of Kenya and encourages the governments of the other ECARBICA countries to provide comparable support, financial and technical for the organization of similar programmes for their countries
2003	Maputo, Mozambique	Bearing in mind that the issue of migrated archives still remains unresolved in most of our member states, this conference urges them to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - explore the possibility of imitating joint programmes for the selection and acquisition of migrated records, and - seek the support of NEPAD in promoting the return of our cultural heritage from the former colonial powers
2005	Gaborone, Botswana	Bearing in mind that many archival materials have left their countries of origin through various ways, these conference calls for the formation of a task force which will be responsible for determining the extent of this problem and

		for recommending various strategies. (Gaborone, Botswana 2005)
2011	Maputo, Mozambique	Working collaboratively with other partners and stakeholders to assist in the repatriation of the remaining migrated archive

Source: Mnjama, (2007)

Another voice calling for the return of Migrated of archives was voiced by Ministers responsible for Archives when they met on 20th October at Cape Town in 2003. The ministers noted that:

That the archival heritage of Africa, in all its aspects oral and written – was ignored, marginalized, transferred and denied during the colonial era; That in the post-independence era urgent competing priorities and limited resources unfortunately resulted in further neglect of our archival heritage; That steps are being taken within Africa and the region to promote co-operation in the preservation of Africa’s archival heritage and in the improvement of records management practices, both paper-based and electronic; and That Africans have lacked access to records created in colonial capitals about African history and that this has resulted in the disempowerment of the African peoples.

The ministers recommended that “the African Union, through NEPAD, authorize the establishment of an archival steering committee to promote co-operation in archival matters including that of ensuring that all the archival material taken from or within Africa in whatever form should be repatriated to countries of origin” (Boel, 2008). Despite these efforts, not much seems to have been accomplished by African states in locating, copying or retrieval of migrated archives. The section below presents the findings of a survey that sought to determine the present views of directors on national

archives in the East and Southern African region.

Survey on migrated archives: views from ESARBICA member states

Between January and March 2014, a questionnaire containing 15 questions touching on migrated archives was emailed to the Directors of National Archives in the East and Southern African countries which form the East and Southern African Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives. The aim of the questionnaire was to solicit the views of archivists in the East and Southern African region on migrated archives as well as to determine the efforts being made by these countries towards the acquisition of migrated archives from the United Kingdom. As much as possible, the responses have been reported in this article as they were received from the directors, except for the fact that efforts have been made to conceal the identities of the directors who completed the questionnaire. Below are the responses to the 15 questions that were emailed to the directors of national archives in the east and Southern African region.

Question 1: Are you aware of any records that were removed from your country to England on the eve of your countries independence? Some of the comments from the respondents stated that:

- We are aware that records were removed from our country to England on the eve of our country's independence.
- Yes I am aware of records that were removed from my country to England on the eve of our Independence
- Yes, most colonial records were to the UK

Question 2. What impact has the removal of these records had on your country? Some of the comments from the respondents read:

- It has affected governance in one way or the other.
- The removal of these records has had the following impact on our country:-
The removal occasioned major gaps our archival holdings. The Country lost a natural part of its documentary heritage.
- This scenario evidently denied our citizens and research scholar's access to critical information and data relating to British colonial administration in our country and by extension impacting negatively on the compilation of our country's history.
- These records, the country recognizes, are of enormous potential value to the nation in terms of historical research and therefore the greatest justification for their return brings forth the very real possibility of rewriting our history.
- Endeavours meant to hold the colonial administration accountable for its actions have been difficult to pursue due to the scarcity of information occasioned by this removal.
- Over the years, the government has been spending its financial resources to obtain copies of these records.

- There is also loss of revenue that would have accrued from the exploitation of these records for research and reference purposes.
- We do not have a complete picture of our history and there are gaps in our holdings. A lot of money has been spent travelling to the U.K. to consult these records especially when historians and other researchers were writing books. It becomes very difficult and frustrating when you have to travel to another country to consult your archives (records that rightfully belong to the African countries).
- It created a gap in our documentary heritage and curiosity on the issues, which those documents dealt with.

Question 3. Do you have details in terms of the nature, quantities and formats of the records that were removed to the United Kingdom? The respondents stated that:

- It's a British secret.
- A survey had been carried out on what was believed to be available in UK and on what was presumably thought to be missing from our holdings, but going by recent developments in the UK (that is, England's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) releasing tranches of sensitive documents related to the decolonization of former British colonies) we do not know the exact nature, quantities and formats of the records that were so removed.
- The Archives are in Microfilm format, DVD's and CD's .These include maps, photos and text as well. Copies of migrated Archives were about 33,482
- Many files (such as Executive Council Minutes, correspondence

concerning xxx , etc.) were sent to England, as it was felt that their contents were of an embarrassing nature and should not be seen by the new X Government.

- Out of approximately 2,300 boxes of records that were sent to the UK during the independence period from different territories, 19 contain files (the post-World War II sensitive files, a large proportion of the more important secret and confidential files).

Question 4. Has your country made any effort to locate the records that were removed to the United Kingdom? If Yes, what was the response from the Public Records Office (now the National Archives of the UK) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office? The responses were:

- Our country has made efforts to locate the records that were removed to the United Kingdom.
- We have had cooperation from the Public Records Office (now the National Archives of the UK) over the years. They have been copying for us identified migrated archives at a cost.
- So far we have not yet contacted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the issue of migrated archives.
- Yes my country has made an effort to locate the records that were removed to the U.K. The Public Records Office (now the National Archives of the U.K.) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were cooperative to a certain extent. We have been repatriating since 2008. They give you what they want to give you and those that they feel you should not view are kept from you. We purchased practically all our colonial reports from the

commonwealth office. The records from the National Archives were microfilmed at a price and we have them in our repositories. We know for a fact that they did not give us everything pertaining to our country.

- No effort has so far been made but in 2012 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office informed us of the 19 boxes of files taken from our Government, now being released to The National Archives.

Question 5. Would you say the Public Records Office (now the National Archives of the UK) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been supportive in helping your national archives locate the records relating to your country?

- No, they are not. They consider it their heritage even though it is against international archival practice to keep them.
- The Public Records Office (now the National Archives of the UK) has been and is still supportive in helping our national archives locate the records relating to our country.
- Yes, they were helpful to a certain extent
- Although no formal request has been made to them on the matter, we feel they have done a great deal in letting us know the extent of our migrated archives held in London.

Question 6. How much money has your country already spent in locating and copying records that were removed to the United Kingdom?

- Despite the fact that budgetary estimates for retrieval of migrated archives have been erratic, our government's is still committed to retrieve the migrated archives.

- All the monies spend on surveys conducted in UK in the late 1970s and early 1980s
- Some of the costs of maintaining an office/officer in London during the ten years of the project
- Some of the microfilming costs during those ten years.
- The total money spent on repatriation of migrated Archives is large.
- No expenses have been incurred so far.

Question 7. In the event that the UK government was to return records that were removed from your country, do you think your national archives would have adequate facilities and resources to house and make accessible these archives?

- Our National Archives has adequate facilities and resources to house and make accessible in any records should they be returned by the UK government.
- Yes, the National Archives would have adequate facilities and resources to house and make accessible these archives. We have extended the building.
- Since the records are all in paper form contained in Y boxes, the National Archives would be happy to preserve and make them as widely accessible as possible.
- No. We need a bigger archives.

Question 8. Who should bear the costs for the return of migrated archives to your country?

- Britain
- The UK government should bear the costs for the return of migrated archives to our country.
- As the UK Government bore the initial cost of taking them from our

country and keeping them all this time, it would be a welcome gesture if the same Government took upon itself the responsibility and cost of returning them to our country. It would also be a good idea to share the cost equally, between the two Governments concerned. In the unlikely event the UK Government does not think it proper for them to bear any associated cost of returning them to us, then our Government must at all cost ensure that the records are repatriated.

- In my thinking, it should be the former colonialists because they had no business removing our national documentary heritage from our countries. However it is the other way around because we, the former colonies have to bear the costs, which I find to be very unfair.

Question 9. Will your country be willing to support financially any project that aims at digitizing migrated records relating to your country which are currently held in the United Kingdom?

- There is need for mutual arrangements, understanding and cooperation between the two governments on all fronts
- Yes my country would be willing to financially support any project that aims at digitizing migrated records relating to our country which are currently held in the U.K.
- As the government already invests and spends on preserving its records and the migrated archives being part of its valuable historical records, our government is willing to support any efforts towards digitizing the portion of its migrated archives.

Question 10. When fully digitized, which country should hold the original records that were removed to the United Kingdom?

- When fully digitized, our country should hold the original records that were removed to the United Kingdom
- In my view the country where the records were removed should hold the original records. However, in reality this is never the case.
- In all manner of fairness, it would be sensible to have the original records returned to respective countries where they were taken from. The digitized copies should be shared between the two countries.

Question 11. Which country should hold copyright to the digitized migrated archives?

- Our country should hold the copyright to the digitized migrated archives.
- The original owner of the records should hold copy right to the digitized archives.
- If the UK bears the costs, it should hold the copyright to the digitized material; if both countries share the cost, they should jointly hold the copyright but if our country shoulders all the costs, then it should hold the copyright.

Question 12. Would your country support the idea of setting up a Mutual Cultural Heritage Project in which the United Kingdom would hold the original records but make available these records to your national archives and any other interested parties at a fee?

- No. They should return to us what belongs to us.

- First there is need to explore all available avenues before settling for such an idea
- I think it should be the other way round, but yes, I think my country would support the idea because we need the records.
- I think the country's position on this matter would be known after wider consultations with higher government authorities.

Question13. Past efforts to address problems of migrated archives at the international level by UNESCO, the International Council on Archives and the United Nations through the formulation of an international instrument such as the Law of Succession on State Property, Archives and Debts were a failure. What new approaches would you suggest in resolving these problems?

- Engage Britain on a one to one dialogue
- Legal settlement
- I have no idea, but what I know is that the creators of the records (African countries) should have the right to get these records whatever they were removed by former colonialists or any other way.
- As the migrated archives issue concerns the UK Government as the coloniser then and the governed territories, the best way to approach this important issue is to convene a meeting involving all the concerned parties to discuss best options for amicable solutions to it.

Question14. To what extent should your country be involved in decisions relating to records that were removed from your country?

- Fully (100%)
- They should be involved to a great extent.

- Since the migrated archives are an issue that concerns two countries, it would be recommendable that decisions affecting the records should involve both the concerned parties.

Question 15 What recommendations would you like to make in resolving the problems associated with migrated archives?

- Colonial governments should be responsible enough to accept that it was wrong to either destroy or migrate records from their colonies. They should therefore make amends by returning the migrated archives.
- One of the problems is that you are not given everything pertaining to your country. You are only given what they feel you should be given and yet these records are about your country.

Discussions

Based on the above findings, several observations can be made. First, there is general agreement that most of the countries in East and Southern Africa had some of their records repatriated to the United Kingdom, but that details relating to the exact nature and volume of records of these records from remain scanty. Secondly, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has in the past been reluctant to provide details on records removed from the colonies to the UK. Kenya is one country that made repeated efforts to locate these records, but never got to know exactly what was removed out of the country. Thirdly, it must be noted that the Public Record Office (now The National Archives of UK) has in the past cooperated with African countries in providing copies of records held in the United Kingdom, but none of these records relate to the period just before

independence. The help of PRO (now TNA) and other repositories in the UK is much appreciated. Fourthly, countries in the East and Southern Africa region are still calling upon Britain to return the records removed from the region on the eve of independence. Finally, there is general agreement among archivists from East and Southern Africa that in the event that digitization of records removed from East and Southern African takes place the UK Government must bear the cost of digitizing the records or on a cost sharing basis and that African governments should be allowed to hold copyright of the digitized materials. Above all, it is the desire of states that responded to the questionnaire that the original materials should be returned to Africa even after digitization. In conclusion, it can be argued that while the issue of migrated archives continues to generate great interest, efforts to resolve the problem has not received adequate attention from the governments involved. It is therefore recommended that as a way forward, discussions and bilateral arrangements be made between the UK government and individual African states in order to develop solutions that will be acceptable to all them. These arrangements should be based on sound archival principles and the need to preserve the records in question as well as their continued accessibility to users.

Conclusion

From the findings presented above, it is evident that interest in the retrieval of migrated archives still remains high, despite the limited resources allocated by African governments towards this programme. The findings have also revealed that countries in the East and Southern African countries have at various times made attempts to locate and identify records relating to their countries with varied degrees of success. The findings have also indicated that to a large extent African

countries have received support from UK repositories while seeking to locate and copy records relevant to their nations. The findings have also indicated that the main area of concern remains in Britain's failure to disclose or provide sufficient details on records exported to from Africa on the eve of independence.

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