

Digitization, History, and the Making of a Postcolonial Archive of Southern African Liberation Struggles: The Aluka Project¹

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This paper describes the history of an initiative to digitize a postcolonial archive on the struggle for freedom in Southern Africa. The authors outline the intellectual architecture of the project and the complex epistemological, political, and technical challenges that they confronted in their endeavor to construct a digital archive that might help reorient scholarly debates on the struggle for liberation.

Introduction

The liberation of southern Africa was a major political event of the twentieth century. The demise of colonial rule, the end of white-settler domination, and the dismantling of the apartheid regime had far-reaching consequences, not only for the continent, but also for the global community.

At a local level, majority rule created the possibility that millions of people would be free from racial oppression, economic exploitation, and political exclusion. For them, independence carried the hope of social justice and a better life for future generations. Nationally, it meant a radical restructuring of political power. It removed the state bureaucracies and police apparatus that had enforced white privilege and racial segregation. The process took more than thirty years. At a regional level, the revolutions in Angola and Mozambique, followed by those in Zimbabwe and Namibia, defeated Pretoria's military and political strategy of sustaining white regimes as a buffer against black Africa and isolating movements such as the African National Congress (ANC). The region included the other frontline states, Botswana, Tanzania, and Zambia, which provided critical diplomatic and material support to the liberation movement.

They represented a wider African involvement, including Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, and other nations. The struggle for freedom in southern Africa had significance that extended far beyond the continent. By the 1960s, the region was the world's last major bastion of colonial rule. Firmly entrenched racial minorities resisted a growing global consensus in

favor of majority rule and self-determination. Southern Africa became the site of an intense cold-war conflict, yet even during the cold war, a wide range of forces helped expand an international consensus that the apartheid regime was a pariah that had to be dismantled, even if only on the pragmatic grounds of avoiding a much-feared racial holocaust. As the cold war drew to a close, the spotlight focused even more intensely on South Africa, the remaining exponent of explicit racial discrimination. Given the long histories of the liberation struggles and their far-reaching consequences, it is hardly surprising that over the past three decades this set of histories has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. Much of this literature has been written from the perspective of victors, and has become the basis for the dominant nationalist narratives in the liberated countries.

Recently archivists, researchers, and public intellectuals have begun a vigorous effort to preserve, digitize, and disseminate on the web collections of documents on the struggles for freedom in southern Africa. Among the most important projects are the SADC project, "A History of the Liberation Struggle in Southern Africa," Howard University's South Africa Research and Archives Project (<http://sarap.howard.edu/>), The University of Connecticut-African National Congress Partnership (<http://unescochair.uconn.edu/ancpartnership.htm>), the African Archivist Project at Michigan State University (www.africanactivist.msu.edu/), the Nordic Documentation on the Liberation Struggle in Southern Africa (www.liberationAfrica.se) under the auspices of the Nordic African Institute, and Digital Imaging South Africa (DISA) (<http://disa.nu.ac.za>). Although differing in geographic scope, scale, and internal structure, all these projects share a common objective: to ensure that the record of this moment in world history is not lost to posterity.² In many parts of the region, much critical evidentiary material remains in a precarious state, even when housed in official repositories. Each year, thousands of personal papers, pamphlets, photographs, newspapers, and other critical documents not in secure repositories are inadvertently destroyed. With the passing of time, more and more elders who played critical roles in the armed struggle have died, as have the women and men who served as ordinary foot-soldiers. Gone with them are their personal narratives, which could have provided a valuable interior view of the combatants' experiences.

Joining these archival initiatives is the Aluka Project, "Struggles for Freedom in Southern Africa," in partnership with DISA. In addition to preserving critical documents, Aluka intends to stimulate important debates on the liberation struggles and the analytical frameworks through which the freedom campaigns were originally studied and represented. The first phase of this project will focus on the freedom struggles in

Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa, and Botswana. Botswana is included to highlight the fact that independence was achieved not only through the barrel of a gun, but also by nonviolent means. Once independent, however, Botswana played a critical role by providing sanctuary and support to neighboring liberation movements—a subject that is documented in the Aluka Project. In a subsequent phase, we intend to expand the scope of the initiative to include Angola, Tanzania, Zambia, and other countries in the region that figure prominently in the larger freedom struggle.³

In less than two years, the Aluka Project has made considerable advances, but much remains to be done. We have created strong working partnerships with fifty prominent scholars, senior archivists, and engaged public intellectuals throughout the region. As a group, they bring extensive research experience and a deep commitment to preserving the region's history for future generations. They have organized national panels in Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, which meet regularly⁴ and provide the intellectual direction for the project. Toward this end, the panels have identified the critical themes, issues, and major collections of archival documents, newspapers, journals, nationalist publications, oral histories, iconography, films, and videos that will constitute the evidentiary base of the digital archive, and have determined the allocation of documents to be digitized within each category.⁵ The panels have selected local scholars and archivists to go through these collections and select critical materials that illuminate the histories of the liberation struggles. In some cases, particularly in South Africa, which has a long tradition of historical scholarship, the panels have enlisted the assistance of a wide array of researchers who have already worked through much of this material; more commonly, researchers and archivists have had to begin from scratch.

In this paper, we outline the history of the project and the intellectual architecture that we have developed. We explore many of the epistemological, political, and technical challenges that we have had to confront as we try to construct a digital archive that might help reorient scholarly debates or discussions on the struggles for liberation. We begin with a brief discussion of the historical antecedents of the Aluka Project and a description of two other digital projects that Aluka has recently begun.

The History of Aluka: An Overview

In the mid-1990s, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation launched JSTOR, a nonprofit organization providing an online archive containing back issues of leading scholarly

journals. The archive is now widely used in more than 2000 institutions in more than seventy-five countries. Its availability in developing countries showed the need not only for access to high-quality scholarly resources in those countries, but also for a mechanism to develop electronic content concerning Africa and other parts of the global south that could be made available online. These regions have rich historical, cultural, and scientific repositories, which are extremely difficult for local researchers and students in the region to access, and would greatly interest the international scholarly community.

At the end of 2002, with support of the Mellon, Hewlett, and Niarchos foundations, and working in partnership with JSTOR, a new nonprofit organization—Ithaka—was formed. Its mission is "to accelerate the adoption of productive and efficient uses of information technology for the benefit of the worldwide scholarly community" (www.ithaka.org). As one of its first projects, it launched an initiative to create an online archive of international scholarly resources, an archive known as Aluka (www.ithaka.org/aluka). Aluka's mission is "to build and support a sustainable, online digital library of scholarly resources from and about the developing world, beginning in Africa, for research and teaching worldwide." The content is for nonprofit educational purposes, primarily higher education, including research and teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The principal audience is envisioned to be colleges, universities, centers for advanced study, important research and training units, and cultural-heritage institutions.

The name **Aluka** is derived from the verb **ukuluka**, which in Zulu means "to weave." (In Oshivambo, spoken in parts of Namibia, the word means "to return" or, possibly, "to repatriate.") The choice of name reflects Aluka's overarching mission—of joining together in a single place resources from around the world. The content is organized as individual groups of related collections, each of which is built around a common theme.

In selecting the theme "Struggles for Freedom," Aluka is building on the pioneering work of the Digital Imaging South Africa (DISA) project, based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa—a project that has already digitized and made available online more than 50,000 pages of antiapartheid journals and publications. DISA continues to be a critically important partner with Aluka in South Africa.

Aluka is currently focusing on two additional themes in Africa. The first focuses on "African Cultural Heritage Sites and Landscapes." Its collection documents important cultural landscapes with material such as two- and three-dimensional models of architectural structures and monuments, GIS mappings, excavation reports, manuscripts, travelers' accounts, research papers, and cultural objects. The proposed landscapes for its

first phase include Kilwa Kisiwani (Tanzania), Aksum and Lalibela (Ethiopia), Djenne and Timbuktu (Mali), and Elmina and Kumasi (Ghana). The second theme aggregates data on African plants. More than forty herbaria and botanic gardens in Africa, Europe, and the United States are collaborating to create a database of African plant specimens, linked to a broad array of related images and data, including photographs, drawings, botanic art, field notes, and standard reference works on the characteristics, uses, habitats, and distribution of African plants. Because no such online resource currently exists, researchers must travel great distances to study specimens located in other countries.

The long-term goal is that, like JSTOR, the new digital archives will be financially sustainable because of their value to the international scholarly community and institutions, generating an income flow for ongoing operations from subscribing academic institutions. To address the global digital divide and ensure access to the content that properly belongs to African countries and institutions, the Aluka archives will be free to appropriate institutions, such as universities, in Africa.

The Struggles for Freedom: Creating a New Kind of Archive and Transnational Epistemic Community

From its inception, in late 2003, one overarching principle has guided Struggles for Freedom." For the project to be successful, local scholars had to play the leading role in shaping and directing it, creating its intellectual architecture and filling it with meaningful content. Any other formulation was untenable on intellectual or political grounds, and would forfeit the opportunity to bring the public debate on archives and access to information in some parts of southern Africa to bear on the need for writing post-colonial histories. The term *postcolonial* here recalls the need for scholars to overcome the traces of colonialism and apartheid that persist through forms of knowledge production.

In the first year, Aluka sponsored planning meetings in Durban, Harare, Johannesburg, and Maputo. In all, nearly one hundred researchers, archivists, public intellectuals, and museologists attended these sessions. Aluka held subsequent meetings in Windhoek and, most recently, in Gaborone, where Allen Isaacman and Thomas Nygren met with local scholars and the board of the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA).

Many initial discussions, which focused primarily on the political economy of the project, were highly charged.⁶ Numerous participants expressed suspicion that this digitizing initiative would be yet another North American project designed to appropriate Africa's

patrimony and subvert intellectual property rights and national heritage. Many argued that digitization compromises the value of national heritage by locating it in unequal exchange relations, thereby rendering national histories as mere commodities to be bought and sold in the economic marketplace. Others wanted to make sure that digitized material would be disseminated widely throughout Africa and would not simply be a research tool available to Western scholars and students. A number of archivists expressed concern that Aluka's proposed online collection of documents would compete with their holdings; they feared that Western researchers would simply use the Aluka collection, thereby diminishing the international standing of their repositories. Finally, several discussants insisted that archives and cultural institutions that agreed to participate should receive a percentage of the presumed profits from the project.

Beyond these considerations, the discussions raised important epistemological questions and related issues about the production of knowledge, ethics, truth claims and power, and the politics of memory that have to be addressed in developing a digital archive on the history of the liberation struggle.⁷ These issues have been the subject of intense debates, particularly in South Africa, about the role of archives as part of the larger debate about histories of political violence and past human rights.⁸ In the introduction of the highly influential edited work *Refiguring the Archive*, the editors argue that such commitment to the debate on the archive "is much needed in a South Africa that seeks to imagine itself and its past in ways not constrained by the colonial and apartheid pasts" (Hamilton et al. 2002:17).⁹ Other participants in the initial planning meetings insisted that this critique must be extended to the entire southern African region.

These discussions made it clear to us that the task of a project like Aluka had to be more than simply accessing existing collections for digitization. We had a unique opportunity to begin the process of constructing a new archive with interpretive possibilities different from those offered by existing collections, especially official ones. In acting to achieve this end, we confront several challenges. Below is a provisional list of some of the most immediate questions that scholars, archivists, and public intellectuals who are engaged in representing histories of the liberation struggle should address. The questions are merely a point of departure for a larger and more sustained discussion.

A primary challenge is to avoid treating the liberation movements in southern Africa as discrete and insulated entities. Freedom struggles across the region were ideologically, strategically, and tactically intertwined in complex, shifting, and sometimes ambiguous ways. To meet this challenge, we seek to make available an evidentiary base that brings into negotiation the local and the regional on the one hand and the national and global on

the other. We want to consider the networks of solidarity and debate that connected seemingly different liberation struggles in the region with frontline nations. At the same time, we need to maintain a focus on the effects of apartheid's strategic alliances and program of destabilization.

It is equally important to shift emphasis from a narrow formulation of victors' narratives to more nuanced and inclusive histories of struggle— histories that do not simply reproduce the dominant nationalist narrative, even as we document the role of major political movements, such as ANC, the BPP, FRELIMO, SWAPO, and ZANU. In the same way, we are committed to documenting the role of movements such as the PAC, COREMO, SWANU, and ZAPU, as well as the minority regimes, although not on their own terms. We should consider how persuasive these political programs were and open up new research areas on the reception, interpretation, and implementation of their political projects.

A third challenge is to move beyond organizational histories by encouraging research on the struggles of workers and peasants, women and men, old and young, who sought to subvert systems of oppression and elaborate political concepts of change. With this goal in mind, we wish to build an evidentiary base that begins to test the possibility of recording the struggle for freedom and the politics of an emergent public sphere.

We are aware that the project must not be bound by the categories and orthodoxies that have shaped our understanding of the struggles in the past: instead, we want to create an evidentiary base that unsettles the seamless narrative of the liberation struggle by documenting the modalities of contestation within and between liberation movements that helped to shape the politics of the region. It is important to move beyond the cold-war framework that shaped the debates about political struggle and the conceptual basis for forming postcolonial and democratic societies.

Fourth, we should consider the collections that are in the process of disappearing, either because they are thought of as private collections and therefore not worthy of public attention, or because they have been thought of as unimportant in documenting the history of political struggle. We have in mind the everyday struggles against colonialism and apartheid. In addition, given the fragility of the written documentation, much of which is not archived or preserved, it is a matter of urgency to uncover resources that can contribute to a critical understanding of the struggles.

Together with this impulse to enlarge the sphere of the archive, the expansion of oral history research and the growing interest in oral accounts of political struggles requires a

special focus in the overall architecture and aims of the Aluka project. Here, the collections on exile experience in South Africa, the interviews of Mozambican freedom fighters, the Botswana interviews with leading nationalists, and interviews with antiapartheid activists in Western Europe and North America offer new and unique insights into the daily workings of political formations and key actors in the struggles for independence.

These oral testimonies fill in many of the gaps in the written literature, but they do far more: taken together, they tell a story about the complicated and contested changing world of the freedom fighters—a story which rarely emerges from conventional historical sources. Oral accounts not only flesh out the lives of real people, but also expose new areas of inquiry. They may, for example, open new areas of research on gender relations in military camps and segue into much-needed research into African masculinities.

We recognize that these oral testimonies benefit from, but are also constrained by, their interiority: they must be treated as significant social texts in their own right, with hidden, multiple, and often contradictory meanings (Hofmeyr 1995; Minkley and Rassool 1998; Mpe 1998); they do not exist outside of the present. Problems of memory loss, silences, presentations shaped by political realities, and narratives adapted to the perceived social and cultural position of the interviewer—all compound the challenges of interpretation (Collins 2004; Gengenbach 2000; Nuttall and Coetzee 1998; Roberts 1990; Trouillot 1995). As Carolyn Nordstrom reminds us in her study of the culture of violence in contemporary Mozambique, "People protect themselves through silences as well as through speaking" (Nordstrom 1997:84). Like all other forms of historical evidence, these oral testimonies require careful and critical reading. Interrogating texts, whether oral or written, is, after all, the fundamental responsibility of researchers.¹⁰

Establishing a Cross-Regional Intellectual Architecture

After extensive discussions and debates around the intellectual and political challenges posed by constructing an online archive, the national panels, with Aluka's Regional Advisory Committee,¹¹ developed an innovative cross-regional framework around which to organize the documentation on the struggles for liberation. The intellectual architecture of the Aluka Project is built around five broad themes that figure prominently in the history of the individual countries and the region at large. The architecture is designed to encourage students and researchers to address the history of the freedom struggles as part of a broader discussion about the region's past, present, and future, and to bring in as many new perspectives, voices, and stories as possible. It explores the systems of oppression and multiple sites and multiple ways in which diverse social groups coped,

creatively adapted, and struggled to make a better world for themselves and ultimately gained their freedom. It is designed to help problematize the dominant nationalist narratives and to raise an array of questions linked to the production of knowledge.

Part one, entitled "The Colonial System: Repressive Apparatus, Ideologies, Adaptations and Social Impacts," sets the critical historical context for the struggles for freedom and identifies the constraints under which these struggles were fought. It highlights such issues as the different ideologies of oppression and the nature of political repression, economic exploitation, and social exclusion in the European-dominated regimes. It examines the role of the courts, justice system, police, and security agencies in perpetuating state power and minority rule. One way to get at the texture of state repression, particularly in South Africa and Namibia, is to focus on what are commonly referred to as the "political trials" and how opponents of the colonial regimes used the law to challenge the legal basis of the repressive states.¹² The daily lives and lived experiences of the colonized and how they coped and adapted in a world of insecurity and poverty figure prominently here, as do the attempts to use the law to leverage legal space for political mobilization that has recently formed the basis of a documentary film by Zackie Achmat (2005).

Part two examines "Popular Resistance." The tendency in the literature to focus on the exploits of the principal nationalist movements has meant that other forms of popular resistance have often been ignored, understated, or defined as an appendage of the nationalist campaigns. This part invites exploration of the negotiations that ensued with the political divisions between citizens and subjects (Mamdani 1996).¹³ At issue are the politics of everyday life and the struggles to establish a viable public sphere in the midst of a repressive state apparatus and to protest the most grievous abuses perpetrated by the regimes in power. This part focuses on urban community struggles, workers' strikes, and the role of trade unions as they reorient the conditions for a postcolonial future. It examines the important oppositional work of cultural activists and religious institutions, as well as of students and those engaged in struggles against gender oppression. It documents that peasants were capable of constructing a culture of opposition and engaging in insurgent actions. Much of this material will be based on oral interviews with, and life histories of, men and women whose voices have often been rendered inaudible by the minority regimes.

Part three focuses on "Organized Anti-Colonial Movements and Political Groups." A vast body of literature already exists on the struggles for freedom. Much of this scholarship has been written from the perspective of the victors and has become the basis for the

dominant nationalist narratives in each of the countries. Without minimizing the critical role of the ANC, the BPP, FRELIMO, SWAPO, and ZANU, this part makes a concerted effort to broaden the angle of vision and in doing so deepens and complicates the nationalist metanarrative in two significant ways. First, it documents the history of anticolonial organizations that, though unsuccessful, may have played a critical part in the struggle for freedom. All too often, their role remains in the shadow of history. Thus, we know a great deal about the successful anticolonial campaign that FRELIMO launched in Mozambique, but relatively little about nationalist movements like MANU or UDENAMO, which preceded FRELIMO, or rival groups like COREMO (Henriksen 1983; Isaacman and Isaacman 1983; Munslow 1983; Saul 1979). A similar phenomenon occurred in Namibia, where the exploits of SWAPO loom so large (Katjavivi 1988; Leys and Saul 1994; Soggot 1986), and in Zimbabwe, where the ZANU ruling party vigorously promotes its own "patriotic history" (Ranger 2004). Second, part three examines the debates among and within liberation movements. It focuses mainly on the programmatic statements of liberation movements and how these statements affected the struggle for freedom. Competing definitions of who constituted the enemy and how notions of "we" and "they" were constructed, negotiated, and reconfigured over time, and disagreements over the appropriate methods of struggle figure prominently in this section.

Part four documents "The Regional and International Perspective of the Struggle." The struggle for freedom cannot be understood in insular, local terms: it had regional and international or transnational dimensions, all of which require careful analysis. The role that Tanzania under Julius Nyerere and Zambia under Kenneth Kaunda played in mobilizing worldwide diplomatic support for freedom and providing rear bases for guerrilla armies fighting in Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia, and South West Africa is well documented, as is the important role of the OAU Liberation Committee; but we know much less about the significance of ethnic politics across regional boundaries or the political role of refugees. Similarly, it is important to explore in depth the alliances and antagonisms between liberation movements and their host patrons.¹⁴

The intersection of the cold war with struggles in southern Africa and the competing interpretations of this intersection are fundamental to our understanding of the history of the region and the cold war itself. For a variety of historical, ideological, and strategic reasons, the socialist countries and the nonaligned movement vigorously supported the struggles for majority rule. The United States and most of its NATO allies took a different stance. Most Western countries had a deep political, economic, and cultural stake in preserving existing relations of power, even while making gestures in favor of modest racial reforms. But the story is more complex than a simple cold-war rendition would

suggest. The socialist countries did not always act in unison. China and the Soviet Union often promoted different movements, and Cuba and Vietnam pursued their own national interests. Similarly, the Nordic countries broke with the West and provided important humanitarian and moral assistance to some liberation movements, while liberation-support movements and antiapartheid organizations in the West vigorously opposed the policies of their home governments. The struggles for freedom involved an array of governments, intergovernmental organizations (such as the United Nations, the Commonwealth of Nations, the World Court, political parties, multinational corporations and economic interest groups, and global organizations), and a variety of transnational activists. It is this story that we hope to help document.

Part five is organized around "South Africa's Thirty-Year War." In 1960, seventeen African nations became independent, radically altering the political landscape of the continent. Within a few years, "the winds of change" were blowing southward. To blunt the trend toward majority rule and thwart the increasingly militant nationalist movements, the South African apartheid regime forged a military alliance with Rhodesia and Portugal. This alliance marked the beginning of South Africa's undeclared war against its northern neighbors, a war that lasted until the early 1990s. In the 1970s, South African troops fought side by side with Rhodesian forces and provided critical assistance to the Portuguese in Angola and Mozambique. A decade later, with only South Africa and Namibia under white minority rule, the entire region became the target of South African commando raids. The commandos kidnapped and killed refugees who fled the apartheid regime, as well as civilians in Botswana, Swaziland, and Lesotho. Large parts of Mozambique and Angola were laid waste by rebel armies covertly trained and supplied by Pretoria. This legacy of violence extended even beyond South Africa's first democratic election, in 1994, and still profoundly shapes the region's prospects. Though much of the relevant material may have been destroyed, we believe data sufficient to document this chapter in the region's history are extant.

The intellectual architecture of the project provides a common analytical framework for the five national panels. Each committee has determined the subcategories, themes, and events that should be included within the five parts to illuminate the trajectories of historical change in their respective countries. The South African committee has, for example, focused on the urban dimensions of popular struggle, particularly the opposition to forced removals, the increasing militancy of the trade unions, the role of students' organizing, the Soweto uprisings, and the black-consciousness movements. By contrast, peasant opposition to forced cotton cultivation, compulsory labor (*chibalo*), and state-appointed chiefs figures more prominently in the documentation on Mozambique.

The national panels have begun to prioritize the sets of documents and oral-history collections to be included within each category. This structure and the capacity to search the full text and the descriptive metadata that accompany each document will allow students and scholars to access material on specific dimensions of the struggles from a regional or comparative perspective. Students interested in the role of women in Zimbabwean and Namibian revolutions' struggles, for example, will be able to browse through part two under the theme "gender" for both countries and select and save in a personalized bookshelf all the relevant documents. They will also be able to perform advanced searches, based on keywords and metadata fields. At the same time, the architecture reflects the paths toward freedom that nationalist movements in these nations pursued and the efforts that minority regimes made in response.

Our project has also begun digitally to repatriate collections of critical documents on the struggle for freedom located in repositories in North America and Western Europe. We have put together an international committee¹⁵ to oversee this task. Its mandate is to identify materials by and about the national movements and their supporters that are not available in southern Africa, as well as reports and publications produced outside of the continent or deposited in Europe or the United States in the post-independence period. In the United States, we have examined some of the holdings at Northwestern and Stanford universities and have scanned and digitized key collections, such as the entire run of *Mozambique Revolution* and *Voz de Revolugao*.¹⁶ We have worked through the Ronald Chilcote and Immanuel Wallerstein collections, which include rare pamphlets, newsletters, and ephemera from some of the smaller nationalist organizations, whose histories are not well documented.¹⁷ Aluka is digitizing key portions of the Archives of the American Committee on Africa, which played an important role in support of the liberation movements¹⁸ and has helped support "No Easy Victories," an oral-history project¹⁹ that centers on interviews with leading antiapartheid and liberation activists, many of which will be included in the digital archive.

Our project has begun to examine some collections housed in Europe. In England, several scholars are working through the material at Oxford's Rhodes House, whose library has a rich collection (of correspondence, personal papers, and official government reports and antiapartheid material) that illuminates important dimensions of the struggles, particularly in Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.²⁰ We are exploring the possibility of including material from British anti-apartheid organizations and liberation support groups and the rich collection of Rhodesian army documents deposited at the University of Bristol. Aluka has inventoried the Portuguese secret-police papers located in Lisbon in the Arquivo Historico da Torre de Tombo that provide a unique colonial perspective on the progress of the wars in Mozambique and Angola, and on the state's efforts to infiltrate

nationalist organizations.²¹ In the near future, we plan to seek ways of working collaboratively with the Nordic African Institute, the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa, the World Council of Churches Programme to Combat Racism, and other organizations. We recognize that in a second phase, it is imperative to cast our net wider, to include material from Algeria, Egypt, the OAU Liberation Committee, the former Soviet Union, China, Cuba, the former German Democratic Republic, and other countries.

Looking toward the Future: The Technical Challenges

This project is still in a formative phase. Carrying it out presents a number of daunting technical challenges. The technical challenges can be organized around four questions: (1) what should be digitized? (2) who owns the rights to the material? (3) where are the materials located? and (4) how will the material be digitized and distributed throughout Africa?

First, what specifically should Aluka digitize? We have already described the intellectual framework and the process to organize the content around regional themes and country-specific topics, with approximate targets for the number of pages to digitize for each topic. This goal created the potential for a mammoth labor problem: how would the documents be selected and assigned to a topic without being reviewed one at a time? If every document had to be examined individually, the time and expense required could overwhelm the project. The original plan presumed that the national advisory committees would recommend existing archival collections that could be digitized more or less from start to finish. The flaw in this assumption is that a traditional "collection" is the wrong unit of analysis for a theme-based selection strategy. Few collections are organized around themes that directly correspond to our framework; even if they were, most collections are too large to digitize in their entirety. For example, the Anti-Apartheid Movement Collection, held at Rhodes House, Oxford, consists of 2,100 boxes. We quickly came to realize that we needed to devise a finer-grained selection process, one that would not end up paralyzing selection of materials.

It became evident that devising an "objective" set of selection criteria was problematic, at best. In the end, the criteria boil down to phrases like "important," or "valuable for research and scholarship," or "critical to understanding a theme." But what exactly is an "important" document? There is obviously no objective reality or objective standard. Like historical research itself, the decision depends on who is asking the question, at what historical moment, and for what audience. In short, we are in the process of configuring an archive, one with all the challenges and responsibilities that that poses.

In the end, our strategy for selecting documents depends on the judgment of scholars who are deeply familiar with the collections relevant to a particular topic and can identify and prioritize materials to be scanned without wading through folders one page at a time. In some cases, we have been able to recruit scholars who have spent a lifetime working through this material.²² Often, we are drawing on the expertise of younger researchers who have recently completed their dissertations and bring a wealth of knowledge about the most appropriate evidentiary base to document a specific theme.

Finally, the selection process calls for commonsense pragmatism and flexibility. If an informed review of a collection suggests that a substantial portion of the materials is relevant, especially if the collection is small we may opt to scan the full set, understanding that the cost of weeding out less-important material is not worth the effort. In addition, in the case of periodicals and newsletters, we generally choose to scan either a complete run of the title or a complete series within the relevant period.

Second, once a body of material has been selected, how does Aluka obtain any legal permissions required in connection with digitizing and making available the materials that have been selected? Aluka is committed to respecting authors' rights and securing appropriate permission from the holders of copyrights and other intellectual-property rights. Contributors are asked to grant Aluka permission to create and make available digital versions of the selected materials for use solely for educational, scholarly, and other nonprofit cultural purposes. Formal legal documents can seem intimidating, or even raise suspicions, so we have tried to formulate agreements that are as clear and straightforward as possible. Furthermore, Aluka does not seek ownership of the selected materials, or to obtain the copyright to the selected materials, which remains with the original copyright holder(s).

In many cases, it is impossible to determine who the author of particular materials is. Even if the author is known, and especially when dealing with organizations, the author will not necessarily hold the relevant copyright and other intellectual property rights, - and even where a right's holder can be identified, it is not always possible to locate and contact that person or corporation. Many of the institutions from which Aluka is drawing material no longer exist, and many individuals will not be locatable. This problem of so-called "orphan works" has long deviled those concerned with intellectual-property law, and the problem is not unique to Aluka (see Carlson 2005).

When we are unable to identify or locate copyright holders, we shall make an informed decision about whether or not to use the materials, doing our best to respect the interests

of the parties involved. For example, we believe it is highly unlikely that anyone will object to our digitizing pamphlets distributed by a political party that has been out of existence since the 1960s; in contrast, other types of materials, such as personal correspondence, raise more difficult questions. In some cases, Aluka will be forced to exclude materials that may be of scholarly interest because of these legal issues,- and if a copyright holder that could not be identified or located subsequently surfaces, we may need to remove the works from the database if that person or corporation does not wish them to be included.

In addition to traditional intellectual-property laws, it is important to be informed about existing and emerging laws pertaining to national cultural heritage, laws that can apply to materials such as traditional songs, poetry, or art, and thus could be relevant to some of the materials we would like to include (this is especially relevant for our African cultural-heritage sites and landscape collections). Many such laws are of recent vintage, and precedents are thus limited as to how they would apply to a project such as Aluka, which will need to seek guidance from the appropriate local authorities as to how to comply with them.

The third challenge Aluka has had to confront is the question of where the material is located and whether we can arrange permission to access and use it. In some instances, the copyright holder and the repository are one and the same, so a single agreement will suffice; however, that is often not the case, and so before a single page can be digitized, we generally have to secure two separate agreements: an intellectual-property agreement with the copyright holder (as described above) and an agreement with the institution that holds the materials. Many issues associated with securing these agreements are the consequence of working with primary documents, which are generally unique materials, sometimes in fragile physical condition. Understandably, most institutions with an archival mission will not allow such objects to leave their premises, and may even be statutorily prohibited from doing so. As a result, the scanning of documents must take place on site at the archive or library. This sets the stage for new challenges, discussed in detail below. Securing institutional agreements requires addressing a multitude of details related to physical access, space, logistics, outside vendors, insurance, and the like.

Not all of the materials we are digitizing are archival documents. We are including a large amount of published primary sources, especially periodicals, newsletters, books, and official reports. These materials raise a somewhat different set of issues. Many libraries are prepared to send them off-site for scanning, assuming appropriate safeguards and insurance are provided; the biggest challenge, especially for periodicals, is often locating a complete run of the publications. This task was a major hurdle in the early years of DISA's

project, which has digitized forty anti-apartheid periodicals in their entirety, and indeed is a significant contribution of Aluka. Even determining what constitutes a complete run can be challenging, since publications produced in the uncertainty of an armed struggle are sometimes inconsistently numbered and dated.

In addition to issues related to locating and accessing materials, we have had to address an important strategic question affecting our agreements with repository institutions. Aluka frequently offers to provide a copy of the digital files to the institution for its own use.²³ Some institutions, especially the larger libraries, would like to include the materials on their own public websites, which are becoming an increasingly important component of their institutional missions. The question was whether this would eventually undermine Aluka's sustainability. Our concern was that if a substantial portion of the content in the Aluka database is available through institutional websites and other digital initiatives, there might be a disincentive for institutions to subscribe to Aluka. In the end, we decided to request that partner institutions outside of Africa restrict their usage to internal purposes for a period of five years. We believe that restriction will give us enough time to demonstrate the benefits of Aluka, which, by aggregating materials and providing high-quality search engines and online tools, will offer what we believe to be a preferable form of access to the content when compared to seeking out materials on scattered institutional websites, many of which will have limited functionality compared to Aluka. This policy does not apply to repository institutions located in Africa, which are free (subject to obtaining permission from any applicable copyright holders) to make the files available on their websites to users in Africa if they so choose. We ask only that these institutions work with Aluka to implement reasonable measures, such as user registration, to prevent commercial content aggregators and institutions that are located outside of Africa from accessing the digital versions without permission.

A particular challenge has been to identify the most effective way to digitize the materials and assure their distribution in Africa, where many institutions lag behind Western counterparts in technological infrastructure. This challenge requires us to manage a distributed production process. The uniqueness of many of the materials prevents shipping all materials to a central location, where we can have full control of the production process.²⁴ We are left with three options, each with its own problems. In a few cases, as with our partner, DISA, the repository institutions have their own in-house digitization labs. This solution is often the preferred one, but heavy demands on the labs may result in long delays, or the labs may not have the capacity to take on a project of Aluka's scope. The second option is to identify a local scanning vendor to come on site and do the work. This option can be problematic, as many African cities have no such vendors.

The third possibility is for Aluka to provide equipment to the institution and help it set up its own digitization lab. For African institutions, this is frequently the only practical option. This option helps meet an important secondary objective for Aluka, to provide capacity-building to our partner institutions, primarily national archives, in southern Africa. Each national archive is being equipped with a digital-imaging lab, with staff training provided by DISA. Not unexpectedly, managing multiple remote partnerships raises considerable complexities. Because each institution has its own priorities, agendas, and internal dynamics, these relationships take time and effort to manage and, to one degree or other, are beyond our direct control. Our experience so far is that it is taking much longer than expected to get digitization underway, and that regular site visits are important. In one case, appropriate scanners were locally unavailable, and it took almost a year for them to be shipped and clear customs.

Decentralized production can become a logistical nightmare. It is critically important to provide clear guidelines, standards, and training so that the data coming from each source are compatible and can easily be loaded into a central database. The digitization process has two major components, of which the most straightforward is the scanning itself. Equally important, and more difficult, is the preparation of metadata records for each digital object—records that describe the date, title, author, type of document, and so forth.²⁵ Quality control must be carefully managed. As much as possible, we use the same equipment and software at all sites, and provide remote partners with preconfigured systems, such as data-entry templates. Flexibility is essential, since each institution operates within a unique context. It is generally not possible for Aluka's production staff to correct problems with the data after it arrives. Therefore, we are putting a great deal of effort into working with our partners to ensure that the data are prepared correctly. We have developed online software tools that allow each contributing institution to verify its own data remotely after we have loaded them. We require that materials be submitted to Aluka on a regular basis, normally every two to four weeks, so that we can provide quick feedback if problems arise. And it is essential to maintain open and regular channels of communication through email, phone calls, and periodic visits.

A major complication is that the materials are difficult to work with. Documents come in different sizes and shapes, ranging from newspapers and posters, to handwritten notes on scraps of paper. We must accommodate a range of media types, including photographs, slides, posters, books, periodicals, maps, microfilm, and so on. The condition of the materials is uneven. Many organizational materials were originally duplicated on mimeograph machines, resulting in faint, sometimes illegible text. There is often

bleed-through of text when it has been printed on both sides of overly thin paper—which makes scanning and text conversion problematic. Other complications arise when dealing with multiple languages.

That the technological infrastructure in many African countries is limited complicates our goal that scholars in Africa be able to effectively access and use the materials we make available on online. The problem has multiple dimensions, largely due to lack of institutional development and chronic resource constraints. One is the problem of inadequate internet bandwidth, caused not necessarily by lack of availability, but often by government policies that make internet access inordinately expensive.²⁶ A second problem is inadequate numbers of networked personal computers on campus,- those that are available are frequently older models with out- of-date software. A third problem is a shortage of qualified technicians to manage campus networks and provide desktop support. The situation is not quite so dire in South Africa; but even there, rapidly rising internet use tends to saturate network capacity. Most of the African universities with which we have interacted recognize the importance of investing in their technical infrastructures and are making it a priority to address these problems. It thus seems likely that the gap between Africa and the developed world will steadily diminish over the next three to five years.

In the meantime, these are real constraints with cost implications that must be factored into our technology strategy, though it is not within the scope of Aluka's primary mission to solve infrastructure problems at African universities. Aluka is investing considerable effort in designing a "bandwidth-friendly" web application—for example, by minimizing screen graphics, not requiring users to download files until they are certain they want them, warning users about estimated download times, and so on. We intend to provide tools that allow users to work offline by downloading content as PDF files or to an offline image viewer. During the development phase, we are conducting rigorous testing to ensure Aluka's application works on older platforms. In the longer run, we are considering ways to store or cache content locally, as at leading African universities. Most campuses have reasonably good local area networks, and many in-country networks are adequate,- the primary bottleneck is international bandwidth. Finally, when possible, Aluka will support other initiatives that are working to improve the technical infrastructure at African universities, such as the Higher Education Partnership.²⁷

Conclusion

At present, several digitizing initiatives are underway in southern Africa, among which the Aluka Project on digitizing records related to freedom struggles in southern Africa has been the subject of intense debate among scholars, archivists, and museologists. Many contributors to this discussion have as their motivation preservation concerns, while others argue that digitization serves to enhance access and research on what are otherwise self-contained histories, often by making available transnational configurations of knowledge production. At the same time, there has been significant concern about digitizing initiatives, especially as these threaten the arenas of intellectual property and national heritage. Some argue that digitization compromises the value of national heritage by locating it in unequal exchange relations, thereby rendering national histories as mere commodities in the frenzied economic marketplace. As it relates specifically to the domain of history as a discipline, the digitization process places contested archives in a cyberspace that is highly commodified. In this regard, we share the concerns of the editors of *Refiguring the Archive* and believe that an archive should serve as a critical point of departure in discussions on digitization of archives: The archive is increasingly not a national patrimony, but today circulates, as Martin Hall notes, "in global systems of loan, exchanges and markets." Likewise, global initiatives concerning the archive, like Henry Louis Gates' project, affect the local situation. For much of the nineteenth century the treasures of the archive were forcibly relocated to imperial centers. At the turn of the millennium they continue along similar paths, from poorer centers to richer metropolises, as wealthy institutions snap up private collections, purchase microfilms and "facilitate" digital availability. Based in Western centers, those institutions thus aggregate to themselves the power to define and delimit the archive. (Hamilton 2002:17)

We would add that the debates surrounding the digitization process should be ongoing and should involve a broad spectrum of scholars, public intellectuals, and archivists. Aluka should thus be seen as a beginning of a larger discussion. As an initial step, a wide range of stakeholders and scholars from Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe were consulted in the process leading up to the formulation of a proposal for an initiative that promises to enhance research in and of the region by taking seriously the prevailing concerns about the politicization of the archives,²⁸ digitization, and national heritage. In this sense, Aluka is more than an exercise in collecting; rather, given its effort to place technology in the service of research and scholarly endeavor, it raises a further question: Toward which research agendas might a selection on the history of the freedom struggle in southern Africa be made available? Prefacing our discussions with this

question eases the task of identifying the resources that we think should be digitized and made available in electronic form.

The task of digitizing should be viewed as an opportunity to reformulate the contours of the history of the liberation struggles and to contest the ways in which existing collections organize our reading and understanding of them. The task is not merely to create another storehouse of documents, but to enlarge the field of what can be said on the topic of the history of the struggle for freedom in southern Africa. Aluka thus seeks to stimulate informed scholarly debate about the struggles for freedom and the place of the archive and history in postcolonial Africa.

NOTES

1. The authors thank Barnaby Gibson, Jim Johnson, and William Minter for their thoughtful criticisms of an earlier draft of this article.
2. For a longer list of related digital projects, see www.africanactivist.msu.edu
3. The selection of the countries to include in the first phase implies, not that Angola, Tanzania, and Zambia are less consequential, but that we have limited resources available and could not include all the principal countries or critical institutions, such as the Organization of African Unity Liberation Committee.
4. Each of the national panels is directed by cochairs: P. T. Mgadla and Thomas Tlou direct the Botswana committee; the Namibia committee is chaired by Ellen Namhila and Jeremy Silvester; Arlindo Chilundo and Joel das Neves Tembe chair the Mozambican panel; Premesh Lalu and Michelle Pickover chair the South African committee; the Zimbabwe panel is chaired by Ngwabi Bhebe, Gerald Mazarire, and Ivan Murambiwa.
5. During the preliminary phase of the project, each national panel has sufficient funds to digitize between 60,000 and 70,000 pages of material. Because the evidentiary base in South Africa is appreciably larger than in other parts of the region, the allocation for the South African committee is somewhat larger.
6. Digitization is of course a highly contested issue. Mark Poster (2003) has asked that we not reduce the terms of that contestation to the question of "good" and "bad."

7. For a discussion of these issues in a southern African context, see James and van de Vijver 2000.
8. Verne Harris convened a seminar program for archivists and scholars under the heading "Reading the Trace: Memory, Information and Archives." The debate has not been limited to academic institutions. The question of the archive has intersected with critical issues of land restitution, and has been taken up specifically by institutions such as the District Six Museum in Cape Town. In the latter instance, the land-claims process has created the conditions of reconstituting archives in relation to the politics of memory. See, for example, Hamilton 2002; Rassool and Prosalendis 2001.
9. *Refiguring the Archive* in part elaborates and engages Jacques Derrida's **Archive Fever**. Resonant in the collection of essays is Derrida's wager: "The archive has always been a pledge, and like every pledge, a token of the future. To put it more trivially: what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way. Archivable meaning is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives. It begins with the printer" (1996:19).
10. We are especially aware that documentary gaps in the official archive are, as Patricia Hayes has argued, always also a symptom (Hayes et al. 1998).
11. The Regional Advisory Committee is comprised of all the co-chairs of the national panels, plus Gail Gerhart, Heather Edwards, William Minter, Terrence Ranger, and Christopher Saunders. It is chaired by Allen Isaacman. It provides overall direction to the project, reviews the work of the national panels, and makes sure that the regional and comparative focus of Aluka remains intact.
12. We realize that the discussion of law in colonial Africa generally, and in apartheid South Africa specifically, has tended to overemphasize the political trial. While it is necessary to focus on the treason trial in South Africa, or on the Delmas Treason Trial, it may also be necessary to track the effects of the law in other institutions. We are thinking especially of the inquest into the killing of Steve Biko, in 1977, and the widespread use of the institution of the Commission of Inquiry. For an appreciation of the importance of Commissions of Inquiry in the history of the region, see Ashforth 1990 and Manicom 1992.
13. Mahmood Mamdani's (1996) concept of a bifurcated state in southern Africa is extremely important to counter the problem of South African exceptionalism.
14. Consider the decision of the Tanzanian government to support the leadership of FRELIMO against internal dissidents after the assassination of Eduardo Mondlane, in 1969, or the critical logistic assistance FRELIMO offered ZANU and the ANC after it assumed state power. Conversely, because of its ties to the

apartheid regime, the Malawian government severely restricted the activities of liberation movements and political exiles operating in its territory.

15. The committee, chaired by William Minter, includes Thomas Tlou, Ellen Namhila, and Terrence Ranger, who oversees the collection of documentation in Great Britain.
16. We have been able to identify a handful of repositories throughout the world that have the complete sets of these publications produced during the war by FRELIMO.
17. The Chilcote collection, housed at the University of Southern California, has one of the largest deposits of primary material on the liberation struggles in the former Portuguese colonies. The Wallerstein collection includes a vast quantity of material from throughout the region.
18. We are grateful to Richard Knight, Director of the African Activist Archives Project, who has chosen the most important documents from the Archives of the American Committee on Africa to be used in this project.
19. The No Easy Victories Project included a collection of interviews with a variety of activists, including black and white Americans and African exiles, involved in Africa solidarity work in the United States over the period 1950-2000. Selected interviews will be included in the Aluka archive, and a book manuscript is being edited by Charles Cobb, Jr., Gail Hovery, and William Minter.
20. The Aluka Project has benefited from holdings that the knowledge and expertise of Genevieve Klein and Hugh Macmillan have brought to our attention.
21. Although much of the secret-police material was destroyed at the time of the 1974 coup in Portugal, the archive has more than 13,000 pages of documents on the Mozambican liberation struggles, and an even larger collection on Angola.
22. The list includes scholars who have published widely on southern Africa.
23. The history of JSTOR provides an interesting contrast on this point; its agreements with journal publishers did not provide it with a copy of the digital files for its own use (Schonfeld 2003).
24. Once again, the comparison with JSTOR is instructive. Because JSTOR was working solely with published journals, of which many copies exist, the journals could all be scanned by the same vendor, and could have the bindings removed—which significantly lowers production costs (Schonfeld 2003).
25. As much as possible we conform to common industry metadata standards, generally the Dublin Core standard.
26. A report by the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (2004) compares bandwidth costs at Makerere University, which at the time was paying more than \$20,000 a month, to the United States, where the same bandwidth would have

cost about \$450 per month (thanks in part to the Higher Education Partnership, the situation is now much improved). The same report notes that in 2003 the University of Ibadan in Nigeria had an internet downlink of only 128 kbps (see www.foundation-partnership.org/pubs/bandwidth).

27. The Partnership for Higher Education in Africa is an initiative of the Carnegie Corporation, The Ford Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation. The partnership currently supports universities in six sub-Saharan African countries: Ghana, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda. See www.foundation-partnership.org.
28. Historians of postcolonial 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. The archive, we might say, is a network of knowledge and power that is fraught with political difficulty, caught between a public sphere struggling to come into its own and nation-states bounded by discourses of development, national identity, and political legitimacy. The politicization of the archive and its social meaning is derived not simply from the conditions of political conflict that it aspires to communicate as an institution, but by the demands that historians and the discipline of history more generally make on an archive. The inversion is of profound consequence in particular in South Africa, where the creation of a post-apartheid archive converges with the need for rewriting national history. Historians of Africa, who seek out the continent's post-colonial or post-apartheid futures, understand that the archive cannot merely be approached as a storehouse of historical raw materials: in post-colonial Africa, the archive is the site where the political of history is rendered meaningful and effective.

The image of a historian mining the archive at the beginning of writing therefore requires serious revision. What is equally critical is the form that the recomposition of the archive takes and the quality of historical narration it supports, against the power of inherited orthodoxies, when the historian is unexpectedly unmasked as the new archivist. The modalities of collecting that serve as the foundation of an archive of cadastral prose—of official documents relating to institutions of power—with its obligations to the state, or one that privileges a sense of history as hagiography, no longer adequately serve to answer the demands made on the archive by the public sphere. The question that emerges in the aftermath of the decentering of the archive as state institution is how the archive might work as a public institution—as a space, not of authority, but of democratic debate. By this statement, we do not merely mean to ask how the archive can be made more

accessible, or how we might expand its purview to include the perspectives of those who are marked by a prior exclusion: we seek to understand how the reconfiguring of the archive is the point at which a postcolonial history might surpass the limitations of official histories. The question of digitization has to come to terms with the discussion of the archive that has emerged in histories of the struggles against colonialism (Guha 1988; Lalu 2000; Stoler 2002).

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