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**The Africanist Archive in the Post-colonial Era of New Media:
Conservation and Creation at the African Studies Centre in the Netherlands**

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5 - 9 / 12 / 2011

Rabat Maroc / Morocco

The Africanist Archive in the Post-colonial Era of New Media: Conservation and Creation at the African Studies Centre in the Netherlands

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Abstract

An important body of knowledge about Africa is hidden in personal archives of scholars. Only a few of these archives have the privilege to become a public archive often only after the death of its celebrated creator. These 'trunk archives' contain valuable information often in condensed form of a lifetime research in a few places in postcolonial Africa. It is a serious loss for knowledge production if these archives, often of less famous scholars, disappear in shredders, or stay in trunks on the upper floor of the scholar's children. However today's libraries have no space to take care of these archives and indeed many are refused a place even before their content is understood. The African Studies centre is a unique centre where researchers have indeed been able to build up their own archives of post-colonial Africa, but what has been done to conserve these?

These observations should alarm today's scholars about the future of their own archives. Archiving research data has become easier with the advance of digital techniques, although this has as well led to the untamed gathering of data, piling up photographs, e-documents and ever increasing voice and film records, that are difficult to be analysed. The other side of this digital story is however that we can indeed store our data easily (though not always very safe). Libraries do increasingly use digitisation as a way to gain space and to store more. The difference with the former generation of researchers is also the fluidity of data itself. Communication is increasingly done in cyberspace and letters or written diaries are disappearing, instead there is a load of SMS messages, Facebook accounts and email exchanges. These do hardly end up in a 'trunk'. Libraries and researchers need new technological knowledge to be able to create an archive and subsequently conserve it. A research programme into mobile telephony and society in Africa faces these challenges that are so far unresolved. This paper is as well a call for collaboration between librarians and researchers who should create 'living' archives.