

## Historical Treasures in Ruins: Salvaging Archives in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Records provide the link between the past and the future. It is the repository of communities' intellectual and creative independence. The creations of the human mind are open to loss from both natural and man-made forces if delay is allowed in caring for them in the appropriate manner. When historical records are destroyed, history is wiped out forever. Archival records hold information about who we are and where we come from. Records substantiate history and give cultural context to the lives of human beings. This article depicts the relationship between national archives and national identity in a bid to showcase the need for the Nigerian government to pay special attention to protecting the national archives from destruction, rot and decay.*

### 1.0 Introduction

*"Those who control the PRESENT control the PAST,  
those who control the PAST control the FUTURE."  
George Orwell<sup>2</sup>*

Archives have been defined as 'records which have value for permanent preservation or have been selected for transfer or have been transferred to an archival establishment.'<sup>3</sup> Archives have also been defined as collections of documents or 'records' which have been selected for permanent preservation because

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<sup>2</sup>The Explorer as History and Myth: Christopher Columbus. Retrieved 17 April, 2018 from <http://www.humanities.uci.edu/mclark/HumCore2001/Core2000Archive/s99wk2Le.html>

<sup>3</sup>National Archives Act, cap. N6, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990, Section 52

of their value as evidence or as a source for historical or other research.<sup>4</sup>

The National Archives Act defines records as:

*“all papers, registers, printed matters, books, maps, plans, photographs, microfilms, cinematographic films, sound recordings, or other documentary material regardless of physical form or characteristics made or received by public or state offices ,or by business houses or companies, private bodies or individuals in pursuance of their legal obligations or in connection with the transaction of their proper business, but does not include library or museum material made or acquired solely for reference or exhibition purposes, extra copies of records kept only for convenience of reference or stocks of publications;”*<sup>5</sup>

Records are produced and made use of daily as human beings relate with one another and carry out their day to day activities. Proper accountability can never take place without records or when records are not properly managed. Archival records include a wide variety of forms such as correspondence, notes, books, plans, maps, drawings, photographs, films, microfiches, sound recordings and computerised data.<sup>6</sup>

It must be emphasised that not all records qualify as archival material. Records that are no longer in use become archival materials if they are selected for permanent preservation as a result of the importance placed on them. Information relating to political, economic, legal, social and cultural developments of bygone years can be gathered from archival materials.

Records are important components of development. Past records give research base to researchers in their bid to

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<sup>4</sup>The National Archives,2016. *Archive Principles and Practice: an introduction to archives for non-archivists*. Retrieved 17 April, 2018 from <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/archives/archive-principles-and-practice-an-introduction-to-archives-for-non-archivists.pdf>

<sup>5</sup>National Archives Act, cap. N6, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990, Section 52

<sup>6</sup>Janvier Perez de Cuellar and others,*Our Creative Diversity*. Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development.(UNESCO Paris 1995)189

generate new knowledge for development processes.<sup>7</sup> Past records are used to plan for the future and also serve as part of a nation's heritage. It should however be stated that knowledge about the past is not only retrieved from what was written down by those who lived in that era but also from what they built, wore, what they put in their houses, what they did to their gardens, all their survivals both deliberate and accidental, constitute heritage. This article however focuses on documentary heritage which consists of information that was deliberately written down.<sup>8</sup>

This article is divided into five parts, the first being this introductory. The second part discusses Archival records as cultural heritage while discussing the dangers archives have been prone to from time immemorial. The third part discusses the emergence of archives in Nigeria. The fourth part discusses the protection available both internationally and locally for archives in Nigeria. The fifth part is the recommendation and conclusion.

## **2.0 Archival records as Heritage**

Record keeping originated in early times when man saw the need to hand over knowledge from one person to another. This was done through pictures and symbols, ideographs, pictographs and later alphabets. The emergence of cities with formal governments, educational systems and highly developed and complex commercial activities warranted the need for records to comply with some benchmark.<sup>9</sup> The use of papyrus scrolls for writing gave way to vellum codex before paper book came into existence. Libraries therefore evolved to cope with urbanisation and the progress of knowledge and education.

3000 BC marked the existence of some of the earliest known libraries and archives of ancient Africa in Egypt where

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<sup>7</sup>Nwosu O.C., 1995. The Role of Archival Legislations in National Development. *The Nigerian Archives*. Vol.2, No. 1, p.39

<sup>8</sup>Feather John, *Managing the Documentary Heritage: Issues for the Present and Future* in Gorman G.E and Sydney J. Shep (eds.), 2006. *Preservation Management for Libraries, Archives and Museums*, London: Facet Publishing, p.6

<sup>9</sup>Knuth R, *Libricide: The Regime sponsored destruction of Books and Libraries in the Twentieth Century*. Westport: Praeger publishers, p.21

governmental records, legal records, business records, treatises of religion, astrology, medicine, mathematics, literature and history were kept.<sup>10</sup>

By the twentieth century, libraries as repositories of records had metamorphosed into an institution that met societies needs as it preserved information that formed the basis of government, economy, property rights, national and ethnic identity. Social, political, religious systems, creeds, world views and ideologies found rationalisation and support in library materials. The philosophical basis of education, intellectual development and social progress find their roots in records held in the libraries. Advanced culture also find support in library holdings.<sup>11</sup> Library records piece together parts missing in jigsaws; they can bridge together societies that have a complicated and varied national identity.<sup>12</sup>

As far back as 1980, the humanist attitude towards books was reflected in the popular historian, Tuchman's address at the library of congress thus:

*“Books are the carriers of civilisation. Without books, history is silent, literature is dumb, science crippled, thought and speculation at a standstill. Without books, the development of civilisation would have been impossible. They are engines of change, windows on the world, and (as a poet has said) ‘light-houses erected in the sea of time.’ They are companions, teachers, magicians, bankers of the treasures of the mind. Books are humanity in print.”*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>*ibid*

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid*, p.27

<sup>12</sup>Qureshi Farzana, 2009. *An assessment of the destruction and rehabilitation of libraries during a period of armed conflict: a case study of Iraq's Libraries 2003*. A dissertation submitted to the University of Wales in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Magister in Scientia Economica (MSc) under Alternative Regulations. Department of Information Studies, University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

<sup>13</sup>Tuchman Barbara W, 1980. *The Book*. A lecture presented at the Library of Congress, Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, p.13. Adapted from Knuth R, *Libricide: The Regime sponsored destruction of Books and Libraries in the Twentieth Century*. Westport: Praeger publishers, p.5

Development in societies is encouraged by knowledge gained from past interactions. Culture being the attitude of a people to the future of their traditional values faced with the demands of modern technology which is an essential factor of development and progress.<sup>14</sup> With language making memory to be in print, knowledge becomes available in literatures which have derived value from being used to make positive impact on a generation over and above the generation before it. People also get to learn not only their own culture but the way of life of different tribes and peoples over several periods in history.<sup>15</sup> Life in modern times have become complex because human beings, while holding unto the basic aspect of their culture, have mingled with other cultures from which they adapt one or two things they find attractive. It is the little knowledge of their own culture kept by that people that is passed on to the generation coming after them as their identity. When identity is not preserved, would lead to cultural decline as was the case in the last days of the empire when Rome began to neglect its libraries.<sup>16</sup> Library records form the primary safeguard against cultural extinction.

Wartime strategies involved the targeting of libraries as a way to erase identities, to massacre a cultural memory and to offend the community on a personal level by committing a direct assault of vandalism, on libraries during a period of armed conflict.<sup>17</sup> As empires rose and fell, the destruction of libraries came to be attributed to three patterns which still found manifestation in the twentieth century. The first being the destruction in the heat of war alongside other properties of the vanquished. The second pattern evolved as a discovery of the fact that libraries were valuable and therefore became 'loot' of the victor to enhance their cultural patrimony at the expense of the humiliation suffered by the vanquished. The third pattern found meaning in religious and ideological mandates that

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<sup>14</sup>Cultural Policy for Nigeria 1988, Preamble 1.3

<sup>15</sup>Fulford Robert, 1993. The Future of Memory: Cultural Institutions in times of Radical Change. *Queen's Quarterly* 100 (4): 785-796

<sup>16</sup>Knuth R, *op.cit.* p 20

<sup>17</sup>Qureshi Farzana, *op.cit*

viewed some materials as offensive and therefore needed to be selectively destroyed as a way of cleansing.<sup>18</sup>

Aside destruction caused to records by man made causes are the destruction caused through the natural causes by the acidity of the paper, the chemical burning of leather, the shrinkage of overheated parchment, the disintegration of red silk, the yellow varnish of paintings which can be temporarily preserved by conservators but in the end , nature will take its toll on the evidence of collective memory and they will be lost forever. Preservation being defined as ‘all managerial, technical and financial considerations applied to retard deterioration and extend the useful life of (collection) materials to ensure their continued availability.’<sup>19</sup>

The destruction of texts depicts a compromised future because texts constitutes the living tissue of culture, a destruction of which negates societal advancement and civilisation.<sup>20</sup> The ability of books to give life to societies and libraries to act as repositories of stories that give meaning to human lives and make it possible for individuals and cultures to connect to each other over generations has made the libraries and archives to be subject of destruction by haters of memory and civilisation who have been referred to as barbarians. Oluwakuyide described the destruction of libraries during the Nigerian civil war as barbaric just like the destruction of the Medieval Roman Collections towards the end of the classical age.<sup>21</sup> Stipcevic<sup>22</sup> also referred to the destruction of Libraries in Croatia by the Serbs in an effort to enthrone their own Balkan culture and civilisation as barbaric.

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<sup>18</sup>*Ibid*, p.22

<sup>19</sup>Walker Alison, 2013. Basic preservation for library and archive collections, p.1 Retrieved 26/4/2018 from [https://www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/collectioncare/publications/booklets/basic\\_preservation.pdf](https://www.bl.uk/aboutus/stratpolprog/collectioncare/publications/booklets/basic_preservation.pdf)

<sup>20</sup>Knuth R, *op.cit.*, p.1

<sup>21</sup>Oluwakuyide Akinola, 1972. Nigerian Libraries After the War. *Wilson Library Bulletin*.46(10): 881-2, 947.

<sup>22</sup>Stipcevic Aleksandar.1993. Instead of an Introduction in Tatjana Aparac-Gazivoda, and Dragutin Katalenac (eds.) *Wounded Libraries in Croatia*.Zagreb, Croatia: Croatian Library Association, p.7.

Besterman is of the opinion that culture and civilisation is “a result of a long, painful, massive, ceaseless accumulation of records.”<sup>23</sup> Retrogression and cultural death is fostered when records are destroyed, as records foster the development of a community.

Preventive measures can considerably extend the useful life of collections and are usually much more cost-effective than interventive measures taken to remedy damage after deterioration or destruction has taken place. The largescale destruction of cultural heritage during the second world war led UNESCO to adopt the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict<sup>24</sup> and later the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.<sup>25</sup>

The 1954 Hague Convention is the first universal Convention that deals only with protecting cultural property. The convention defines cultural property for its own purpose and focuses on monuments of architecture, art history, manuscripts and books.<sup>26</sup>

The 1970 UNESCO Convention<sup>27</sup> which came into force to protect the heritage of countries from illicit exportation has defined cultural property to include records forming archival materials thus:

*“For the purposes of this Convention, the term ‘cultural property’ means property which, on religious or secular grounds, is specifically designated by each State as being of importance for archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, art or science and which belongs to the following categories:*

*...(h) rare manuscripts and incunabula, old books, documents and publications of special interest (historical, artistic, scientific, literary, etc.) singly or in collections; ...*

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<sup>23</sup>Besterman Theodore, 1946. International Library Rehabilitation and Planning. *Journal of Documentation*. 2 (1) 174-180 at 174

<sup>24</sup>Otherwise called the 1954 Hague Convention

<sup>25</sup>Otherwise called 1970 UNESCO Convention

<sup>26</sup>1954 Hague Convention, Article 1

<sup>27</sup>1970 UNESCO Convention, Article 1

(j) archives, including sound, photographic and cinematographic archives; ...

The 1995 UNIDROIT Convention, which has a real possibility of deterring illicit trade in cultural property,<sup>28</sup> adopts the categories of items listed in the 1970 convention as the categories benefitting from the protection it offers.<sup>29</sup>

The above-mentioned conventions have adequately put mechanisms on ground to ensure that archival materials/records as well as other cultural heritage materials are well protected from destruction from man-made sources such as armed conflict, pillage and plunder. Measures abound to ensure that these records are protected both in peace times and during armed conflict.<sup>30</sup>

It is noteworthy to mention here that Nigeria is a signatory to these international conventions which have not been domesticated in Nigeria.<sup>31</sup>

### 3.0 Archives in Nigeria

A discourse on Nigerian Archives won't be complete without a consideration of its history in Africa. The discourse under this section will therefore be under two headings namely: development of Archives in Africa and the development of Archives in Nigeria.

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<sup>28</sup>Prot L.V, 1997. *Commentary on the UNIDROIT Convention*. Leicester: Institute of Art and Law: 87

<sup>29</sup>1995 UNIDROIT Convention, Annex

<sup>30</sup>See generally: Adewumi, A. A. 2013. War Time Pains, all Time Pains: Spoilage of Cultural Property in Mali. *Art, Antiquity and Law*, Vol. XVIII, Issue 4: 309-321; Adewumi, A. A. (2015) "Return and Restitution of Cultural Property in African States under the 1970 UNESCO and 1995 UNIDROIT Conventions." Ph.D Thesis in the Department of Jurisprudence and International Law submitted to the Faculty of Law, University of Ibadan pp. i-xxxi-225. Available at <https://ui-edu-ng.academia.edu/AfolasadeAdewumi>

<sup>31</sup>For further information on this see: Akintayo J.O, 2013. Treaty Making and the 1999 Constitution. A critical Analysis of the Treaty (Making Procedure Etc.) Act. *Global Journal of Jurisprudence and International Law*. Vol. 1, No. 1: 80-129



### 1. The development of Archives in Africa

Though ancient archives existed first in Africa in Egypt, majority of African states had their archives, the values and ideals of their society, kept in oral traditions that were passed down to the people through the elders, priests and the drummers. This informed Amadou Hampate Ba's statement to the effect that "in Africa, when an old man dies, a library burns down."<sup>32</sup>

The colonial masters created archives for keeping the records evidencing their rights and activities in the territories they occupied while they looted archival materials found in their conquered territories and sent them to their own countries without giving any consideration to the value of the records in the conquered territories.<sup>33</sup> This accounts for the large quantities of colonial materials found in the archives of France, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Spain and Portugal.<sup>34</sup> The argument for their being in the colonising countries is that they form part of the history of their decision making though at the same time forming part of the history of documentation made in the colonies.

Dakar housed the first French Archives in 1913 and each of the French territories (Senegal, Mauritania, Ivory Coast) also had their own archives.<sup>35</sup> British West Africa were not as organised as the French, hence, the late establishment of archives. Archival system was established in Ghana in 1946. Prior to 1946, government departments had their records unbound in record rooms and filing cabinets.

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<sup>32</sup>Janvier Perez de Cuellar and others, *Our Creative Diversity*. 175

<sup>33</sup>Awe Bolanle, 1996. The Concept of Archives in Africa: A Preliminary Survey. *Janus: international Council on Archives*. Proceedings of Pan-African Conference on Archival Policies and Programmes in Africa held in Abuja, Nigeria, October 31- November 5, 1994

<sup>34</sup>2 *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*. 1973. Macmillan, New York. 265 cited by Shyllon F, The Poverty of Documentary Heritage Management in Nigeria in Shyllon F, 2013. *Cultural Heritage Legislation and Management in Nigeria*. Lagos: Centre for Black African Arts and Civilization(CBAAC) 164

<sup>35</sup>Curtin P.D, 1960. The Archives of Tropical Africa: A Reconnaissance. 1 *Journal of African History*. 129,130

## 2. The development of Archives in Nigeria

Shyllon has classified the development of Archives in Nigeria under three categories: the pre-colonial era, the colonial era and the post-colonial era.<sup>36</sup>

At the precolonial period, just like majority of African states, indigenous administrations in Nigeria kept no written records. Islamic impact as a result of trade between West Africa and the Moslem lands of North Africa led to the production of Arabic manuscripts in the Northern parts of Nigeria which are the oldest manuscripts in Nigeria. Contact with Europeans, from the sixteenth century, led to the emergence of written records in Southern Nigeria. The records of this epoch and of activities relating to slave trade (1434-1807) and the exploitation of raw materials in the Nigerian Forests (1807-1849) are found in European archives.<sup>37</sup>

The colonial /consular period of Nigerian history (1849-1899) ushered in Nigerian archives of British administration some of which were salvaged from rot and decay by Kenneth Dike and kept in the record rooms provided for the purpose at the University of Ibadan. Dike saw the need for legislation to regulate the administration of archives and urged for the promulgation of one.<sup>38</sup> The national archives moved to its own building within the University of Ibadan in 1958. The Public Archives Act was enacted in 1957 and ushered in the postcolonial period.

The postcolonial period was the period where Nigerians were in charge of affairs. Gregory Mann has stated that “*archives for the post-colonial period are as scattered, contingent and partial as the history they imperfectly capture.*”<sup>39</sup> Kaduna branch of the National Archives was built

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<sup>36</sup>Shyllon F, *op.cit*, 165

<sup>37</sup> See Dike K.O, 1954. *Report on the Preservation and Administration of Historical Records and the Establishment of a Public Record office in Nigeria*. Lagos: Government Printer: 6

<sup>38</sup>Shyllon F, *op.cit*, 168

<sup>39</sup>Daly S.F.C, 2017. Archival Research in Africa, Research Note. *African Affairs* Vol. 116, Number 463, pp. 311-320 at 314 quoting from Luise White, 2015. ‘Introduction- Suitcases, roads, and archives: Writing the history of Africa after 1960’, *History in Africa*, 42 p.266

in 1962 while the branch in Enugu was built in 1965. Benin and Sokoto Branches of the National Archives were built in 1982.<sup>40</sup>

#### **4.0 Protection available for archives in Nigeria**

At the domestic level in Nigeria, the first legislation was the Public Archives Act of 1957. This Act had no provision for private and commercial records as it only catered for public archives most likely because that was what Kenneth Dike focused on and consulted for his doctoral thesis. It allowed for exportation of historical documents once licence was obtained.<sup>41</sup>The Act did not provide for record management system and how records should be transferred to the archives. The power of the Director was limited as only the Minister had power to make regulations regarding the use of archives by the public.<sup>42</sup>

The ineffectiveness of the 1957 Act led to the drafting of the text for a bill in 1980 which was passed into law in 1992, twelve years after, as the National Archives Decree, No. 30 of 1992.

The 1992 Decree (now Act) did not make provision for a commission with members capable of making useful contributions to the work of the commission to be in charge of the preservation and management of the public records like the National Commission for Museums and Monuments Act<sup>43</sup> but provided that the Director of the National Archives shall have the function of organising and managing the National Archives.<sup>44</sup>This has made it possible for the Department to be transferred from one Ministry to another over the years leading to its head not necessarily being someone with archival knowledge needed to move the activities of the department forward.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>For detailed information on the development of archives in Nigeria see Shyllon F, *The Poverty of Documentary Heritage Management... op.cit.*;

<sup>41</sup>Public Archives Act of 1957, section 11

<sup>42</sup>Nwosu O.C. *op.cit.* p.43

<sup>43</sup>National Commission for Museums and Monuments(NCMM) Act, Cap. N19, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1999.

<sup>44</sup>National Archives Act, section 2

<sup>45</sup>Shyllon F, *op.cit.*, 174.

Under the able leadership of the Director of archives, the National Archives have been empowered to carry out the role of national development by being able to give advice on all matters relating to records and archives of all public and state offices, business houses, private bodies and individuals needing his advice.<sup>46</sup>

Though the 1992 Act<sup>47</sup> succeeded in closing the gaps observed in the earlier legislation<sup>48</sup> it however did not make provision for the technology age and as such has no solution to the problems created by the use of electronic archives.<sup>49</sup> The Act did not make it mandatory for government offices to transfer their records of over 25 years which fall under the categories declared as public archives to the National archives. The provision of the Act says these public archives may be transferred to the national archives at the discretion of the Director. The use of the word “may” is discretionary.<sup>50</sup>

The Constitution<sup>51</sup> and the National Archives Act in section 33 makes provisions for states to establish State Archives but only few states have made use of this provision.<sup>52</sup>

Events reported have it that post independent Africa, including the Nigerian government, have over the years been unable to key into the intellectual objective of an archive being the preserver of the evidence of good administration.<sup>53</sup> Many historians of Africa have concluded that the absence of post-

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<sup>46</sup>National Archives Act, section 2(2)(a)

<sup>47</sup>National Archives Act, cap. N6, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990

<sup>48</sup> Sections 35-46 which is Part III of the Act makes provisions for preservation and management of records of private bodies, individuals and companies; section 38 has prohibited the exportation of private archives; the director is empowered under section 23 of the Act to take steps necessary towards the repatriation of public records or records of historical value which had been exported from Nigeria prior to the Act.

<sup>49</sup>Janvier Perez de Cuellar and others, *Our Creative Diversity.op.cit.* 190

<sup>50</sup>National Archives Act, section 10

<sup>51</sup>Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as altered by the First, Second and Third Alteration Acts, 2010, Part II (Concurrent Legislative List), Item 5

<sup>52</sup>Rivers, Sokoto, Kano, Lagos and Delta states have established state archives.

<sup>53</sup>Sowoolu S.O, 1970. A Memorandum on the Organisation and Management of Archives in Nigeria. Vol. 2, Mimeograph. Ibadan: National Archives of Nigeria: 10

colonial state archives is evidence of bad administration.<sup>54</sup> On the suspicion of fraud in public offices in Nigeria, records evidencing the proof of such suspicions are destroyed by arson. A good example is showcased on the front page of the Guardian Newspaper of 13<sup>th</sup> April 1993 where the then Military head of state with his top officers were captured smiling on their visit to the burnt remains of the twenty-six storey Independence Building built to memorialize Nigeria's independence on October 1, 1960.<sup>55</sup> Achille Mbembe has stated that the destruction of state records engraves '*the memory of the archive and its contents in a double register*', producing a form of knowledge by the act of obliteration while its absence 'haunts the state in the form of a spectre.'<sup>56</sup> Also, the Biafran administrators, after the civil war of 1967-1970, destroyed many documents that they thought could incriminate them. The remaining documents evidencing the state of Biafra were however intentionally destroyed in the early 1970s as a mark of reconciliation and reintegration depicting the idea that Biafra never existed.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, the Nigerian government over the years have paid little or no attention to the importance of the Archival institution to nation building and the development of the archives, as such the Archives had been in a very deplorable state of decay due to neglect and underfunding. At the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the National Archives on December 2, 2014, Michael Omolewa commented that on one of his recent visits to the archives, the facilities had either disappeared, were in ruins or in a deplorable state. So much so that the newspapers he was examining for information were worn out and were flying in pieces. He ended up abandoning the research so as not to cause total destruction of the newspapers. He further stated that the archives should be the primary responsibility of the government

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<sup>54</sup>Daly S.F.C, 2017. Archival Research in Africa, Research Note. *African Affairs* Vol. 116, Number 463, pp. 311-320 at 312

<sup>55</sup>Guardian Newspaper of 13<sup>th</sup> April 1993; see also Shyllon F, *op.cit*:181

<sup>56</sup>Mbembe A, 2002. The power of the archive and its limits, in Hamilton Carolyn, Harris Verne, Taylor Jane, Pickover Michele, Reid Graeme and Saleh Razia (eds.), *Refiguring the archive*. Dordrecht: Springer, pp.19-28

<sup>57</sup>Onyegbula G. A, 2005. *The Memoirs of the Nigerian-Biafran bureaucrat: An account of life in Biafra and within Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum, p.ix

and should be strengthened through adequate and constant funding, capacity building, rewards and incentives for staff. He equally noted that digitization of the records which is capital intensive is the way forward for preservation and documentary security.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, the legislation has fallen short of the yardstick stipulated by Ketelaar<sup>59</sup> in his statement below:

*“Comprehensive [archives] legislation...recognizes the fundamental nature of the relationship of government records as instruments of accountability by the government to the people, evidence of public and private rights and obligations, and information source on matters involving the continuous administration and management of government; preserves the patrimony of the state as evidenced in its records; and provides exclusive authority to carry out archives and records management functions on a government-wide basis.”*

UNESCO’s observation of the deplorable state of documentary heritage across the world led to the initiative of establishing the Memory of the World Programme in 1992 in a bid to protect libraries and archives under threat in order to preserve the memory of the world and to facilitate democratization of access to them.<sup>60</sup> The mission of the Memory of the World Programme is to facilitate (through direct participation, advice and training) the preservation, by the most appropriate techniques, of the

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<sup>58</sup>Omolewa Michael, 2015. Indispensability of the archives for development. Retrieved 20/4/2018 from <https://guardian.ng/features/focus/indispensability-of-the-archives-for-development/>

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<sup>59</sup>Ketelaar E., Archival and Records Management Legislation and Regulations: a RAMP Study with Guidelines, UNESCO, Paris, 1985 (PGI-85/WS/10)

<sup>60</sup>UNESCO General Conference (1993) Records of the General Conference, 27th Session, Paris, 25 October to 16 November 1993. Volume 1: Resolutions. Retrieved 24/4/2018 from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0009/000956/095621E.pdf>; Memory of the World. Retrieved 31/5/2018 from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/memory-of-the-world/about-the-programme/>

world's documentary heritage; assist universal access to documentary heritage in a way that guarantees property rights, pays attention to cultural sensitivities and conforms with legislative and other limitations on accessibility of archives; and to increase awareness worldwide of the existence and significance of documentary heritage through the World registers, the media and publications.

Nigeria has a Memory of the World National Committee created in 2007.<sup>61</sup> However, The ‘Maṣāliḥ al-Insān al-Muta‘alliqat bi al-Adyānwa al-Abdān, The human being interests linked to the religions and the body is the documentary heritage submitted in 2016 by Mali and Nigeria and recommended for inclusion in the Memory of the World Register in 2017. Aside this, Nigeria has no other document on the Memory of the World Register.<sup>62</sup> This state of affairs is not encouraging at all, knowing fully well that the country’s archives stands to gain a lot by including documentary heritage in the register.

### 5.0 Reflections, Recommendations and conclusion

As far back as 1988 when the Cultural Policy for Nigeria was drafted, the archives’ was referred to as a nation’s most important source of information for the study of her political, social, economic and other developments.<sup>63</sup> This depicts that the status of archives being part of a nation’s heritage is not alien to Nigeria. It is however noteworthy that the cultural policy falls under chapter 2 of the Constitution<sup>64</sup> which deals with Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy and therefore has provisions that aren’t justiciable.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Nigeria - Memory of the World National Committee. Retrieved 31/5/2018 from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/memory-of-the-world/about-the-programme/national-memory-of-the-world-committees/africa/nigeria/>

<sup>62</sup>Memory of the World. Retrieved 31/5/2018 from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/memory-of-the-world/register/access-by-region-and-country/ng/>

<sup>63</sup>Cultural Policy for Nigeria 1988, part II, Item 5.7.1

<sup>64</sup>Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as altered by the First, Second and Third Alteration Acts, 2010, Chapter 2

<sup>65</sup>CFRN, Section 6(6)(c)

Nigerians have to elevate the archives to the pride of place where it belongs by taking the following steps:

- a. Taking serious steps to digitize all paper records that have almost fallen apart.
- b. Knowledge about the archives has to be imbued into the upcoming generation through career guidance carried out by the professionals engaging in public enlightenment of the value of archives to national development.
- c. The national assembly should enact an archival legislation that establishes the archives institution or a national commission, just like that in charge of museums, with people learned in archival studies at the helm of affairs.
- d. Legislative support is needed for electronic records to survive as future archives. Archive legislation in Nigeria needs to provide adequately for electronic records and outline how to deal with electronic records creation, accessibility and disposal.
- e. The Memory of the World national committee should endeavour to recommend all historical archival records of Nigeria's existence for listing on the Memory of the World Register.
- f. Legislation allows an archival service to operate with authority when dealing with other agencies of government whose records may eventually end up as archival records. Archives need legislation to be able to set mandatory standards for business and government agencies on keeping of records that will eventually end up in the archives. Therefore, section 12 of the National Archives Act needs to be amended to reflect a mandatory requirement for the public records of over 25 years to be transferred to the Archives.

### **Conclusion**

The problem of preservation of written and printed record is a major problem and digitization has provided a solution to losing documentary heritage. There is the need to move towards digitization of analogue documents which will end up being more economical than trying to preserve the originals of



written and printed documents. When digitized, the contents of the documents should be accessible from the archives so as not to bring about a situation where the archives will lose its patronage from the public. The problem at this point will be access to electricity which is a very fundamental problem in Nigeria. This would however be overcome in relation to archival documents that finally find their way to the Memory of the World register when Nigeria decides to make use of the opportunity made available by UNESCO in this regard.