**Facing the future. Inventing a temporal historiography. Dealing with an uncertain past in order to work in an uncertain future**

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**Project Summary**

"The future is certain. Only the past is unpredictable." USSR

graffiti 1980s.

Conventionally the past is fixed and the future changeable. But these commonsense attitudes are subject to interesting questions which the Soviet graffiti summarizes. Contentiously in therapy the past is changed (our understanding is changed) and this can change present and future affliction. How can archives and museums allow for such future reconfigurations of the past?

The project workshops explored the background and potential understanding of controversial episodes in colonial and post-colonial history, including the Bamileke uprising in Cameroon and other delicate cases and also considering the relevance of such cases for others in UK and Europe. The topics discussed have relevance to and hence potential impacts on a variety of different professions outside academe: archivists and museum curators working on collections which are/were controversial and are subject to highly variable readings/ interpretations which are themselves controversial. Bedouin history in the Negev is controversial in contemporary Israel, as is, in very different ways, the status of models (statuary) among native groups in Canada. Who can speak to or for the past? Who should be speaking to or for the future? How do pasts speak to futures? How do futures speak to pasts? Changing the questions has important repercussions. Our responsibilities to the future mirror those to the past and the structures for our present archiving activities need be doubly inflected towards future uses of the then past. Such inflections are all the more important when dealing with volatile digital materials whose long term survival is far less certain than analogue or paper based records. Only clay tablets have a proven track record for longevity in the seriously long term (more than a thousand years). So we end up returning to the central importance of an attitude of hope: we hope our successors will solve the curatorial problems and find what we bestow to them both useful and inspirational.  
  
Example of a modern, [digitally encoded clay tablet](http://users.ox.ac.uk/~wolf2728/Clay/index.html) made as little experiment in the hope it might be readable in six thousand years time.

**Outputs:** These will appear as a special issue of the journal ‘History and Anthropology’, setting up a Cameroon-based online (open) journal '[Vestiges: Traces of Record/Vestiges:  Traces de Reference](http://www.vestiges-journal.info/)' (bilingual English French).

**Collaborative Partners**

National Archives, Cameroon  
Solomon Muna Centre, Yaoundé  
University of Yaoundé 1  
University of Maroua  
University of Ngaoundere  
University of Buea  
Association of Friends of Archives in Cameroon (AFAC)  
LABEX, Les Passées dans le Présent (U Paris X)

**Subject Key Words**

History     Plural/multiple futures   
Neglected archives    Divination/Prediction  
Plural/multiple pasts    Futurology  
Plural/multiple presents