



Revisiting “Tin-Trunk” Literacy in Africa:

The Value Of Internal Sources for Knowledge Production

OLUFUNKE ADEBOYE

Department of History & Strategic Studies,
University of Lagos.

Email: oadeboye@unilag.edu.ng

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Repeated calls for a reconfiguration of African studies to address imbalances, coloniality and misrepresentations in knowledge production. [Ali Mazrui, Amina Mama, Claude Ake, Tiyaambe Zeleza, Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Thandika Mkandawire etc.]



INTRODUCTION

- 2 Slow progress made – Africa Studies still dominated by non-Africans with their Eurocentric epistemologies.



INTRODUCTION

2

Slow progress made – Africa Studies still dominated by non-Africans with their Eurocentric epistemologies.

3

Decolonization of knowledge production involves:

- Countering asymmetries (inequalities in power relations and access to resources)
- Addressing current epistemic injustice.



INTRODUCTION

4

Historiographic
hegemony of official
perspectives over
private perspectives.



INTRODUCTION

4

Historiographic
hegemony of official
perspectives over
private perspectives.

5

Need to uncover the
underside of the better-
known face of social and
political history in Africa
[Barber 2006]



INTRODUCTION

6

Advocacy for “Epistemologies of the South”, which will respond to the coloniality of knowledge by retrieving silenced, excluded and marginalized knowledges.
[Santos 2018]



INTRODUCTION

6

Advocacy for “Epistemologies of the South”, which will respond to the coloniality of knowledge by retrieving silenced, excluded and marginalized knowledges. [Santos 2018]

7

Desire for Epistemic freedom – the liberty to interpret the world with locally-developed methodologies, unencumbered by Eurocentrism. [Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018]



INTRODUCTION

- 8 Need to revisit and enhance research methods and theories that privilege non-hegemonic viewpoints, approaches and voices.



TIN-TRUNK LITERACY

- Do-it-yourself archiving developed in the colonial period by ordinary educated people clerks, teachers, catechists, traders, local healers etc.
- This is different from public writings of political and educational elites which were more visible.



TIN-TRUNK LITERACY

- Tin-trunk texts – letters, diaries, obituary notices, pamphlets and other documents kept in tin-trunks/suitcases under the beds or in a glass-fronted cabinet.



TIN-TRUNK LITERACY

- Popularized and so christened at the beginning of the twenty-first century [Barber 2006]
- These are primary sources that historians can use for the reconstruction of the African past.



SIGNIFICANCE [RESEARCH POTENTIALS]

- Personal stories they tell – autobiographical, psychological dimensions.



SIGNIFICANCE [RESEARCH POTENTIALS]

- Personal stories they tell – autobiographical, psychological dimensions.
- Intellectual ramifications – the development of the mind of the writers, and spotlight on the ideas of their age.



SIGNIFICANCE [RESEARCH POTENTIALS]

- Social history from below – the obverse of the more popular and familiar histories.



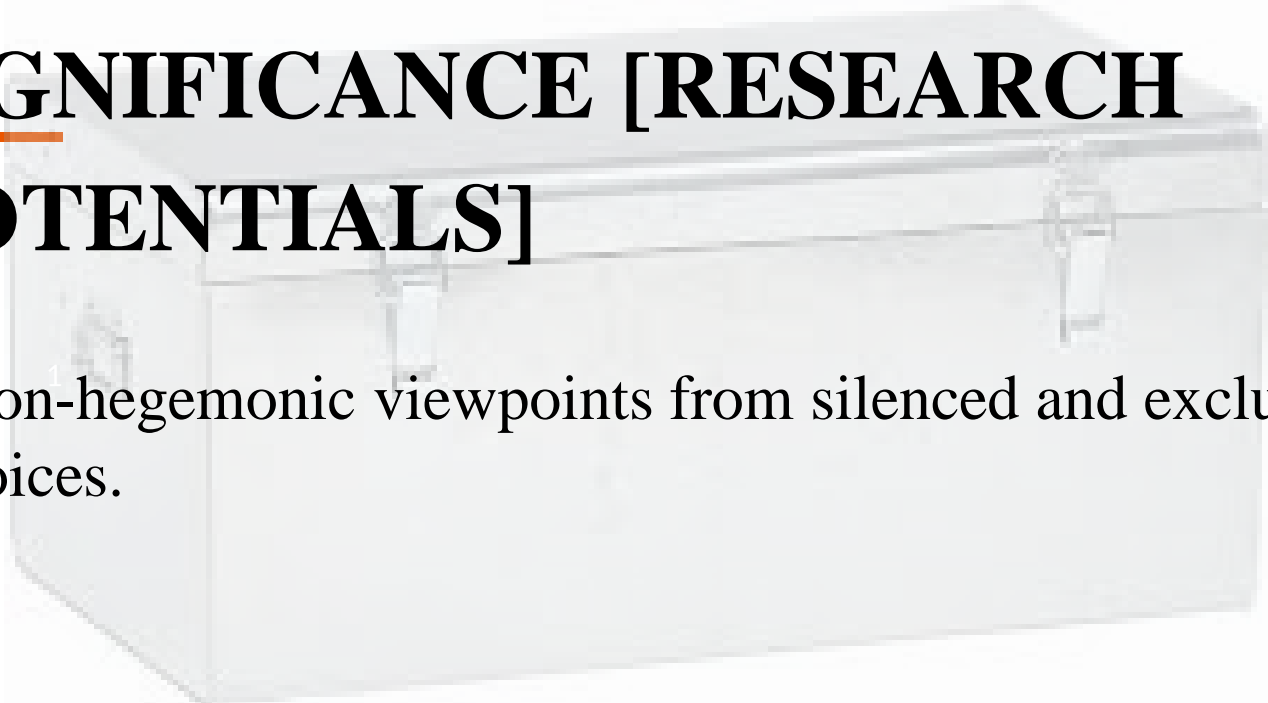
SIGNIFICANCE [RESEARCH POTENTIALS]

- Social history from below – the obverse of the more popular and familiar histories.
- Institutional economic and political histories embedded in personal texts



SIGNIFICANCE [RESEARCH POTENTIALS]

- Non-hegemonic viewpoints from silenced and excluded voices.



CASE STUDY – PRIVATE PAPERS OF AKINPELU OBISESAN [1887-1963]

Biographical details

- Born 1887 to Aperin family in Ibadan
- Primary education in Ibadan and post-primary at CMS Training Institute at Oyo.
- Railway worker till 1913. Went into full time cocoa farming, 1930.



CASE STUDY – PRIVATE PAPERS OF AKINPELU OBISESAN [1887-1963]

Biographical details

- Head of Ibadan Cooperative Cocoa Marketing Union 1934
- A key leader of the Cooperative Movement
- Traditional Chief and Customary Court Judge



CASE STUDY – PRIVATE PAPERS OF AKINPELU OBISESAN [1887-1963]

Biographical details

- Member, Western Nigeria House of Assembly, 1946
- Member, Nigerian Legislative Council, 1943-1951
- Member, Western Nigerian House of Chiefs.



CASE STUDY – PRIVATE PAPERS OF AKINPELU OBISESAN [1887-1963]

Biographical details

- The family donated his personal papers to the University of Ibadan
- Papers made available to the public in 1969 at the Manuscripts Section of the Library.



Breakdown of Private Papers

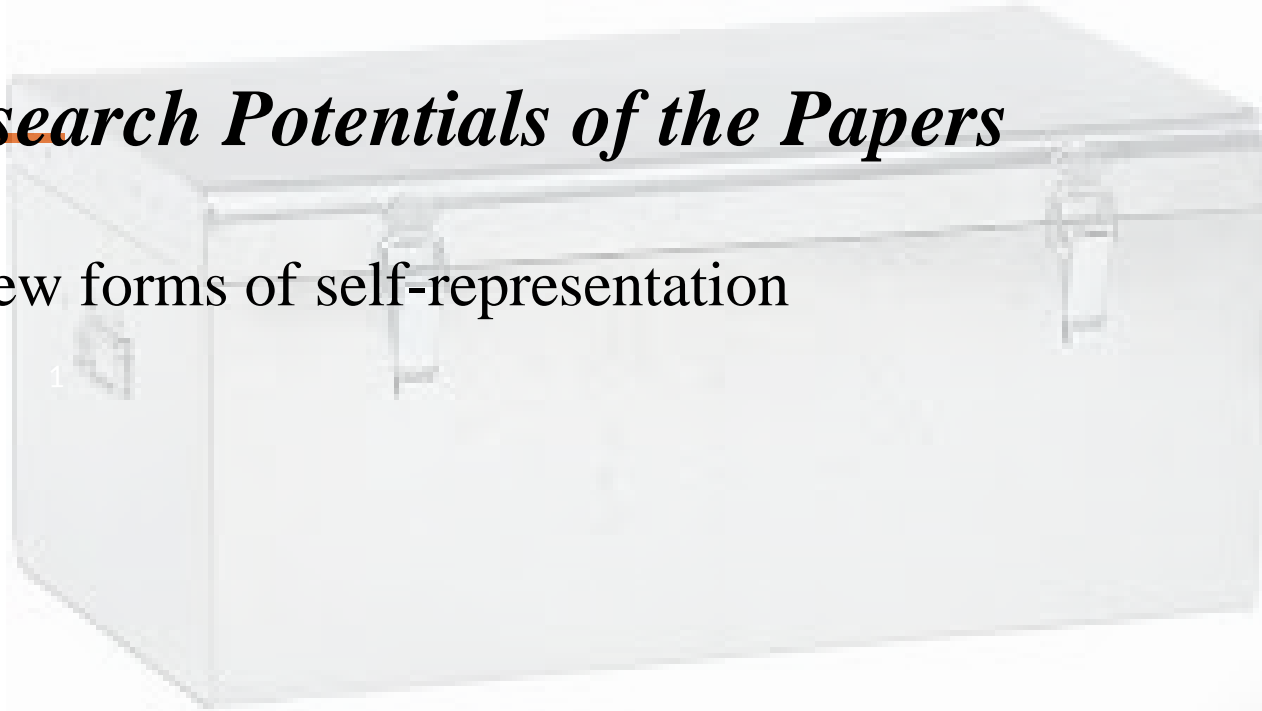
Sorted = 66 boxes

Number of Boxes	Description of Contents
28	Cooperative Movement
10	Nigerian Cocoa Marketing Union
12	Ibadan Local affairs
8	Diaries 1914-1960
4	Legislative Council Matters
3	Land Issues
1	Miscellaneous – telegrams, bills, receipts etc.

Unsorted = 17 Boxes [Cooperative matters, Legislative Council matters, etc]

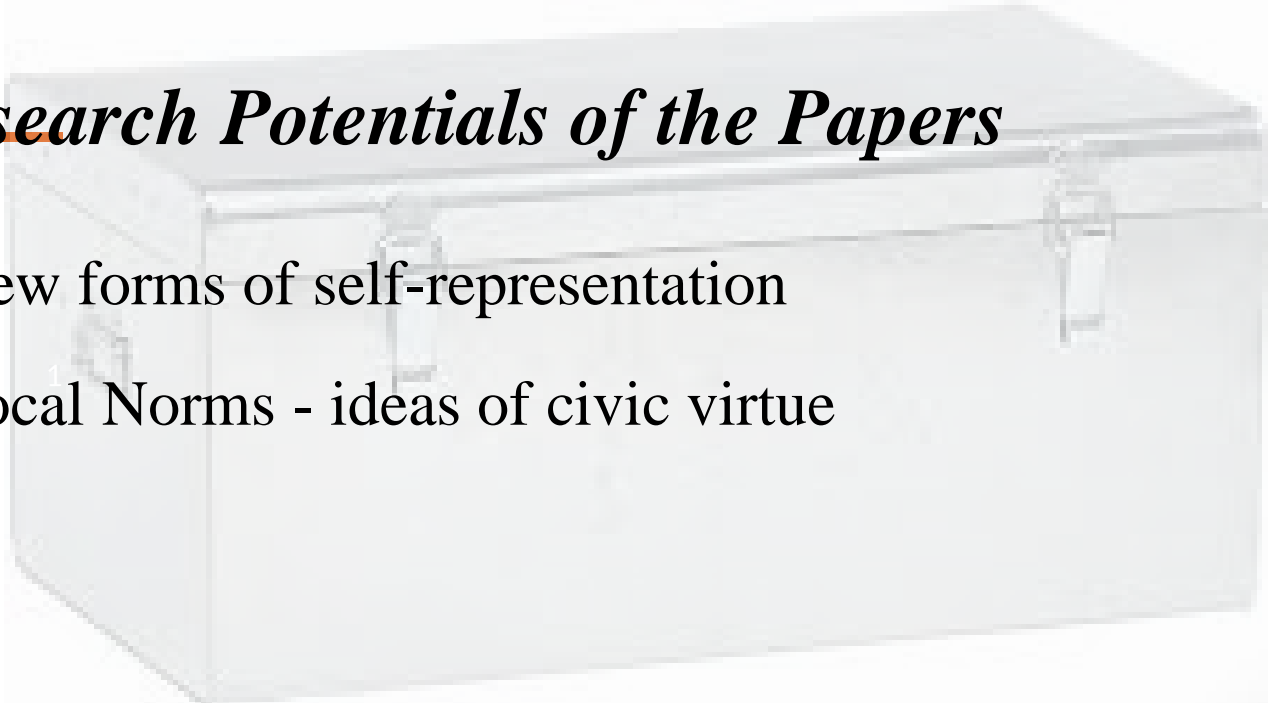
Research Potentials of the Papers

- New forms of self-representation



Research Potentials of the Papers

- New forms of self-representation
- Local Norms - ideas of civic virtue



Research Potentials of the Papers

- New forms of self-representation
- Local Norms - ideas of civic virtue
- Cultural Innovation



Research Potentials of the Papers

- New forms of self-representation
- Local Norms - ideas of civic virtue
- Cultural Innovation
- Political history of Ibadan and Western Nigeria



Some Publications Arising from the Papers

- Gavin Willians, “Garveyism, Akinpelu Obisesan and His Contemporaries : Ibadan 1920 – 22” in Terence Ranger and Olufemi Vaughan (eds.), *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth – Century Africa* (London : Macmillan, 1993), 112 – 132;



Some Publications Arising from the Papers



Toyin Falola, *Politics and Economy in Ibadan* (Lagos: Modelor, 1989);

- Ruth Watson, '*Civil Disorder is the Disease of Ibadan*': *Chieftaincy and Civic Culture in a Yoruba City* (Oxford : James Currey, 2003) ;



Some Publications Arising from the Papers

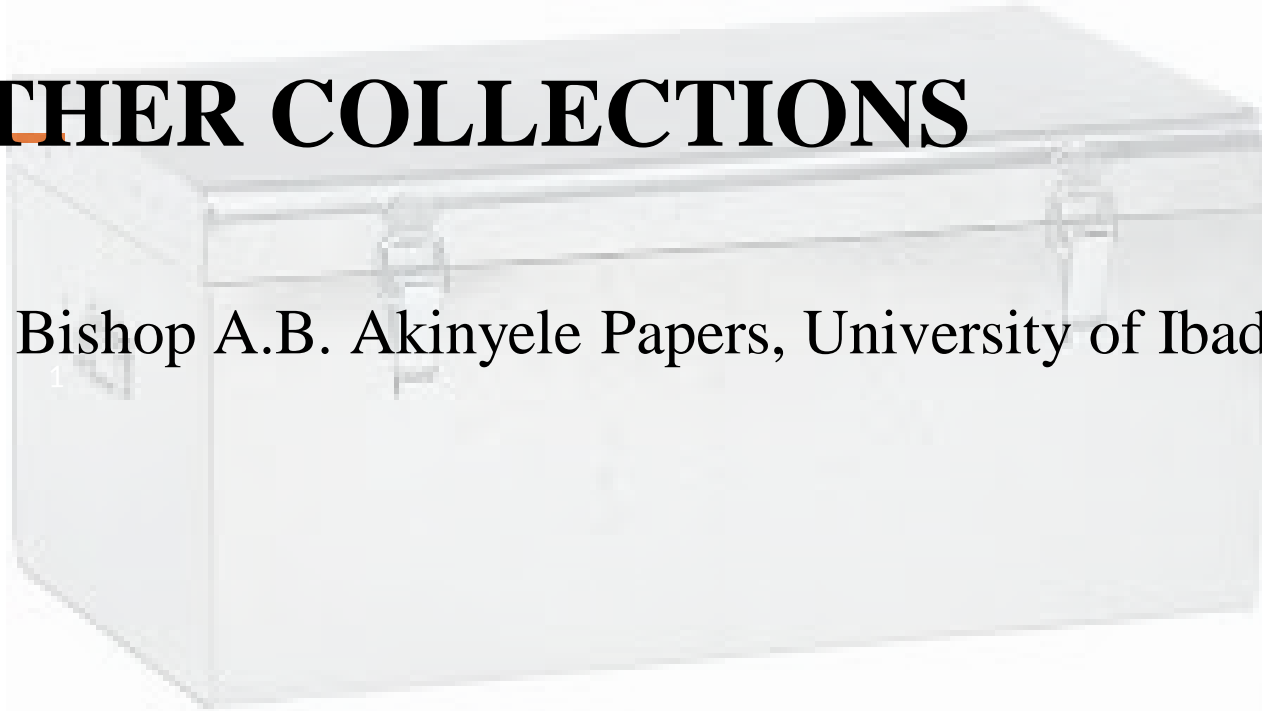
● Olufunke Adeboye, “Elite Lifestyle and Consumption in Colonial Ibadan” in Adebayo Oyeboade (ed.), *The Foundations of Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Toyin Falola* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), 281 – 304.

● Olufunke Adeboye, “Reading the Diary of Akinpelu Obisesan in Colonial Africa” *African Studies Review*, 51 : 2, (Sept. 2008), 75 – 98.

OTHER COLLECTIONS

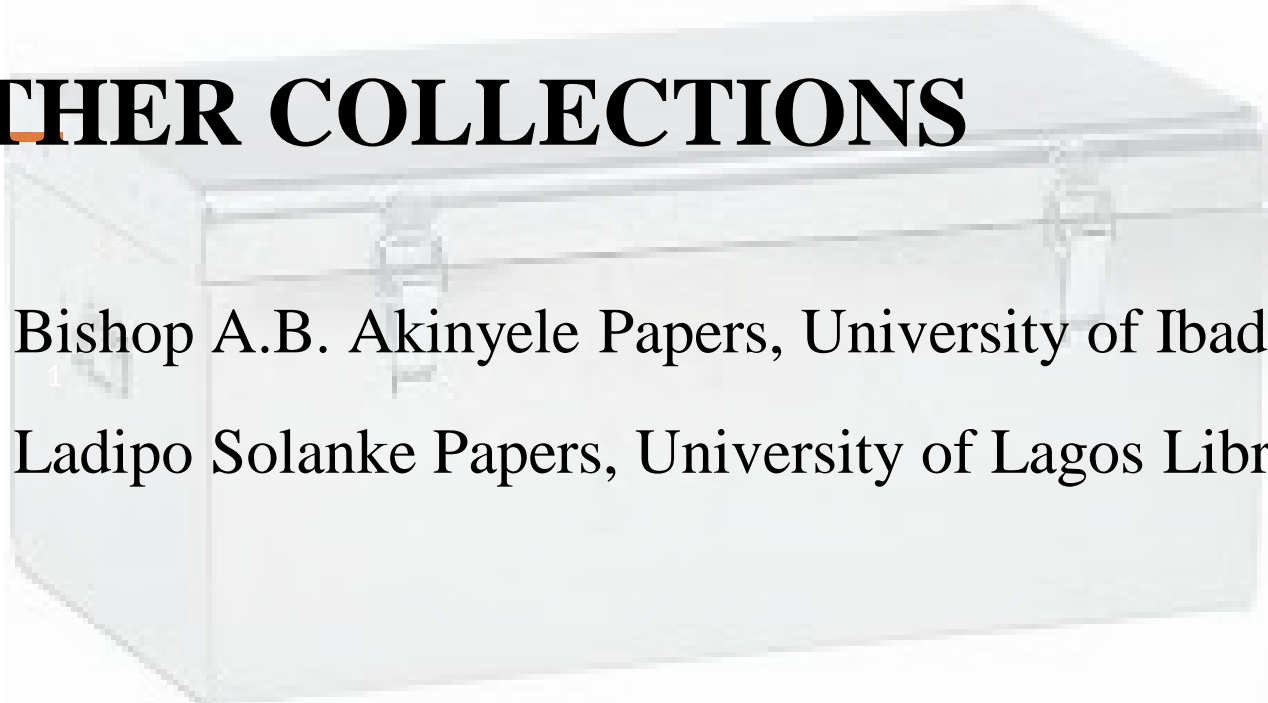


Bishop A.B. Akinyele Papers, University of Ibadan Library



OTHER COLLECTIONS

- Bishop A.B. Akinyele Papers, University of Ibadan Library
- Ladipo Solanke Papers, University of Lagos Library



OTHER COLLECTIONS

- Bishop A.B. Akinyele Papers, University of Ibadan Library
- Ladipo Solanke Papers, University of Lagos Library
- D.O. Fagunwa Papers, University of Lagos Library.



GENERAL CHALLENGES



Under-utilization, poor patronage.

1



GENERAL CHALLENGES

- Under-utilization, poor patronage.
- Many tin-trunks yet to be recovered. Inaccessible.



GENERAL CHALLENGES

- Under-utilization, poor patronage.
- Many tin-trunks yet to be recovered. Inaccessible.
- Maintenance



GENERAL CHALLENGES

- Under-utilization, poor patronage.
- Many tin-trunks yet to be recovered. Inaccessible.
- Maintenance
- Interpretation



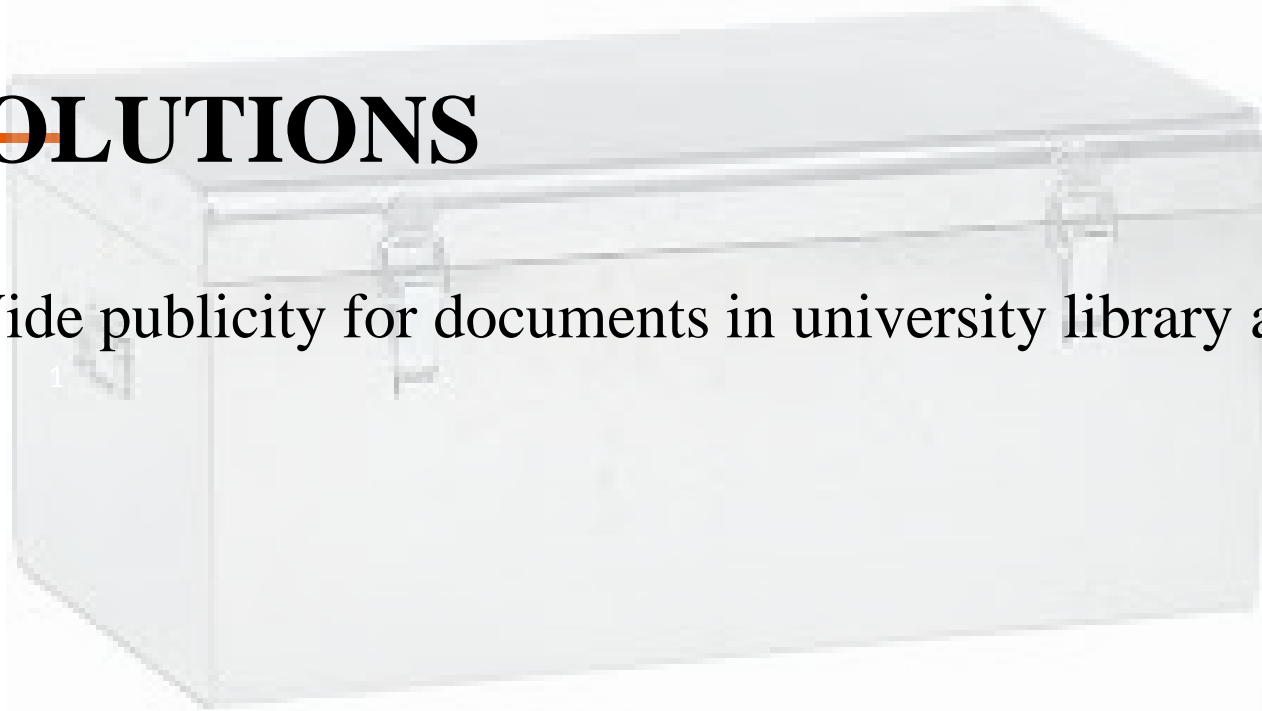
GENERAL CHALLENGES

- Under-utilization, poor patronage.
- Many tin-trunks yet to be recovered. Inaccessible.
- Maintenance
- Interpretation
- Subjectivity, selectivity



SOLUTIONS

- Wide publicity for documents in university library archives



SOLUTIONS

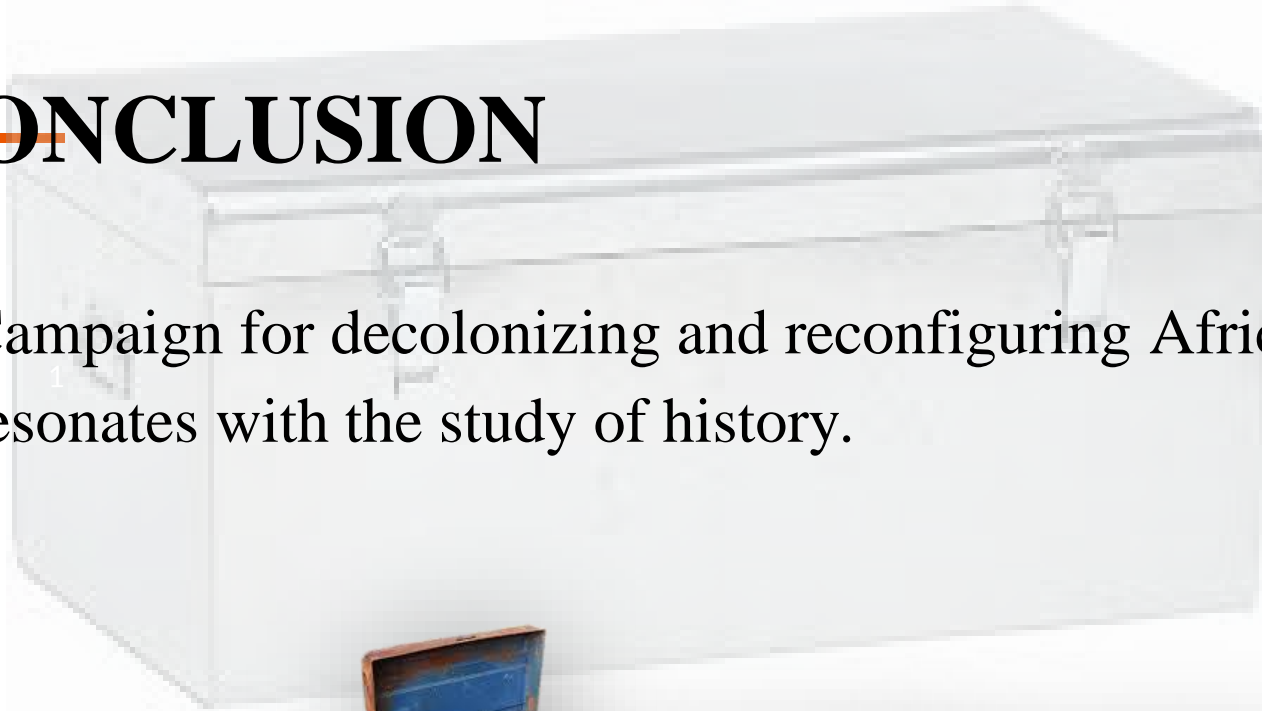
- Wide publicity for documents in university library archives
- Digitization – Endangered Archives grants.
 - ❑ Soliciting documents through community associations.



CONCLUSION



Campaign for decolonizing and reconfiguring African studies resonates with the study of history.



CONCLUSION

- Campaign for decolonizing and reconfiguring African studies resonates with the study of history.
- New perspectives from tin-trunk sources challenge previous understanding and refashions our knowledge of the African past.



CONCLUSION

- The histories so generated challenge previous hegemonic discourse both locally and globally.



CONCLUSION

- The histories so generated challenges previous hegemonic discourse both locally and globally.
- By presenting views of those below, knowledge produced is made more inclusive.





Thank you.