PRESERVING ENDANGERED ARCHIVES: THE ROLE OF THE ENDANGERED ARCHIVE PROGRAMME IN AFRICA

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"Of all national assets, archives are the most precious, they are the gifts of one generation to another, and the extent of our care of them marks the extent of our civilisation… (Arthur Doughty, Dominion Archivist of Canada, 1924)

Abstract

Archives and manuscript collections when well preserved play a pivotal role in the preservation of corporate memory as well as in the transmission of culture, building of national identity and in providing valuable sources of information on a variety of issues. However, in many parts of the world the preservation of archives and manuscripts and particularly those privately held remain under constant danger from the ravages of nature, fires, floods, careless handing, etc. Unless efforts are made to rescue such collections, they are likely to become inaccessible. This paper examines the contribution the Endangered Archives Programme, a UK based programme sponsored by the Arcadia Foundation, but managed by the British Library is making in the preservation of endangered archives in Africa. The paper shows that over the past 10 years, the Endangered Archives Programme has made a significant contribution in the preservation of endangered archives held privately and public archival institutions. The papers argues that the approach followed by the Endangered Archives Programmes clearly shows that collaborative effort in the preservation of endangered archives is one of the best methods not only for preserving such collections but also in increasing access to them through digitization and open access.

Introduction

The value of libraries, archives and manuscripts cannot be overstated. Doughty (1924) the Canadian National Archivist is known to have once remarked that "Of all national assets, archives are the most precious, they are the gifts of one generation to another, and the extent of our care of them marks the extent of our civilization". As early as 1632, Baldassare Bonifacio appreciated the value of records when he wrote saying::

> There is nothing more useful for instructing and teaching men, nothing more necessary for clearing up and illustrating obscure matters, nothing more necessary for conserving patrimonies and thrones, all things public and private, than a well constituted store of volumes and documents and records--as much better than navy yards, as much more efficacious than munitions factories, as it is finer to win by reason rather than by violence, by right than by wrong."
> -- Baldassare Bonifacio, "Des Archivis," 1632 (http://www.ibiblio.org/archives-archivists/msg13473.html;

Yet, despite the crucial role played by archives, many archives and manuscript collections across the globe are held under unsuitable conditions and are in dire need of preservation, conservation, restoration or migration into newer formats if at all they are to remain accessible to humanity. As Louis L'Amour in (Jubal Sackett p. 57) rightly observed "Many an ancient archive has been lost in fires, destroyed in sieges, or simply allowed to decay through lack of interest or awareness." (http://www.ibiblio.org/archives-archivists/msg13473.html;)

According to Adcock (1998) preservation includes "all managerial and financial considerations including storage and accommodation provision, staffing levels, policies, techniques, and methods involved in preserving library and archive materials and the information contained them." The National Preservation Office in the United Kingdom (2001) state that "libraries and archives contain an irreplaceable accumulation of human knowledge and experience. The written and documentary heritage which they house provides the raw material that allows us to try and understand, explain, order and enjoy

the visible and invisible world. Access to the past enables us to understand and locate ourselves in the present and gives us the opportunity to inform the future... in preserving our shared past we are preserving the collective memory for future generation".

The primary goal of preservation is to prolong the life of documentary heritage and to ensure the long term accessibility of such collections by government agencies, institutions, business organizations and the public at large (Forde, 2007, Millar and Roper, 1999, Ngulube, 2003). The importance of preserving library collections was perhaps best summed up by Cloonan (:2001:235) when he wrote saying "preservation allows for the continuity of the past with the present and the future." Similarly, it would be useless and a waste of resources if after institutions have devoted considerable sums of money in acquiring and processing the collections if these remain inaccessible to scholars and other bona fide users.

 The major challenges facing preservation efforts across the globe include poor infrastructure, lack of expertise in preservation and conservation, poor storage facilities, poor environmental control, lack of proper preservation policies and strategies and lack of funding (Ramokate, 2006). Ngulube and Tafor (2006) indicated that little has been done by countries in the East and Southern African region to deal with preservation problems faced by national archival institutions.

Mazikana (1999) stated that in Africa less attention is being given by archival institutions to the preservation of archival materials. Ngulube (2003) observed that preservation management is not a central concern in developing countries and that preservation and conservation prospects are in a dismal state particularly in Africa.   Ngulube (2003) went further to identify the challenges impacting upon preservation efforts to include: lack of adequate funding for archival institutions; lack of political will in support of preservation management; lack of training and knowledge on preservation for archivists and records managers in Africa; bad climatic and environmental conditions in the continent and reactive approach to records preservation. Studies by Kemoni (1996), and Eden and Feather (1997), identified shortage of funds; lack of training in preservation management as well as inadequate storage facilities as poor environmental conditions

as some of the key problems facing preservation activities in libraries and archival institutions in developing countries. Thurston (1996) pointed out that failure to ensure sustainable preservation of archival materials in Sub-Saharan Africa is not only caused by finance issues but by the poor format of archival documents, frequent careless handling and use and exposure to harsh environmental conditions.

It has also been observed that while considerable effort has been made in the collection and preservation of government records, the same cannot be said of private collections held by families and private organizations such as religious organizations, societies etc. The International Council on Archives in its Universal Declaration on Archives (2010) stated that archives play an essential role in the preservation of collective social memory, and that there is a diversity of archives and a need to record every area of human activity. Despite this call, many archival collections especially in Africa remain endangered. For instance, very little in known concerning the state of archives in war torn Somalia, Sudan and many other African states.

The increasing use and adoption of information communication has led to the emergence of digitization projects as a means of preserving and making accessible archival collections across the globe. The section that follows defines key concepts involved in the digitization process.

Digitization

According to Eke (2011:1),   digitization is "the art the art of converting the contents of a document from hard copy into machine-readable format". Mckay (2003:1) asserted that "Digitization in an archival environment includes taking a physical object or analog item, such as an art object, a tape recording, a map, or correspondence, from a collection that is rare or unique, often extremely fragile, and taking photographs of the item, and transferring the photographs to a digital medium." The end result of digitization is the production of digital images which can be accessed electronically. Cornell University Library (2008) defines digital images as:

> Electronic snapshots taken of a scene or scanned from documents, such as photographs, manuscripts, printed texts, and artwork. The digital image is sampled and mapped as a grid of dots or picture elements (pixels). Each pixel is assigned a tonal value (black, white, shades of gray or and ones). The binary digits ("bits") for each pixel are stored in a sequence by a computer and often reduced to a mathematical representation (compressed). The bits are then interpreted and read by the computer to produce an analog version for display or printing.

The main reason for digitizing materials is to enhance access and the long term preservation of information. The advantages of digitization were stated by Fabunmi, Paris and Fabunmi (2006) cited by Eke (2011:30) when they wrote saying:

> Digitization improves access to library resources. By digitizing library collections, information will be accessible to all instead of a group of researchers. Digital projects allow users to search for collections rapidly and comprehensively from anywhere at any time. Digitization makes the invisible to be visible. Several users can access the same material the same time without hindrance. It also removes the problem of distance, as users do not have to travel to libraries that possess the hard copies of library materials before they can access and use such materials

Hamooya and Njobvu (2010:240) opine that digitizing archival collections may result in some of the following benefits: increased access to archival collections, improved services to an expanding group of users by providing enhanced access to the institution's resources , reduction in the handling and use of fragile and heavily used original materials, giving the institution opportunities for the development of its technical infrastructure and staff skills capacity and taking advantage of financial opportunities, for example the likelihood of securing funding to implement a program, or of a particular project being able to generate a significant income. The section below discusses some of the issues that require consideration prior to embarking digitization projects particularly those sponsored by organizations based outside Africa.

Digitization Projects in Africa

Increasing, Africa is witnessing an increase in digitization projects in which African libraries and archives holdings from the African region are being copied. A great deal of digitization initiatives in Africa is very often donor driven with the promise that at the end of the project, the equipment used to digitize the materials will be donated to the country holding the original archives and while the donor agency is provided with a copy of the digitized collection. A summary of some the digitization projects that have been carried out in Africa was provided by John Tsebe (2005) in a paper he presented at the 71st IFLA Conference in Oslo.

According to the supporters of digital projects, there are several benefits that libraries and archival institutions are likely to benefit from these projects. For instance, Ryan (2010:3) argues that through the Aluka project:

> One of the more interesting aspects of Aluka's work has been the development of digital labs in Sub-Saharan Africa. Many African institutions contain rich archival resources that are largely unknown to outside scholars. These institutions are eager to use digital technologies to make their resources more widely available, but have limited resources to do so. In Africa, Aluka provides these institutions with equipment, training, and technical support for digitizing materials in their collections. Because of these labs, content does not have to be shipped off-site to overseas vendors where precious materials can be lost or taken out of circulation for lengthy periods of time. Aluka has established approximately 30 digital labs in Eastern, Western, and Southern Africa for the digitization of content.

Despite the many benefits derived from digitizing African materials, Britz and Lor (2004) in their paper on "A Moral reflection on the Digitization of Africa's Documentary Heritage" raised five questions which ought to be borne in mind when undertaking digitization programmers especially those originating from outside the continent. These questions are:

(a) Who has access to the information? For example will African scholars be able to access this information free of charge?

(b) What control will the originating community have over their information once others have digitized it?

(c) Will originating communities be identified as the original creators of their cultural heritage and will they have the right to control access and non-disclosure of certain categories of their heritage for example sacred knowledge artifacts

(d) To what extent will the global rules on intellectual property be able to protect the common heritage of Africa and prevent it from becoming exclusive private property? Will the international intellectual property regimes be able to maintain the balance between private ownership and common heritage of the people of Africa?

(e) Will the people of Africa be fairly compensated for the use of their knowledge by others and what incentives will there be for them to make their body of knowledge available to the rest of the world? (Britz and Lor, 2004:218).

Similarly, Kagan (2007) raised fundamental questions which require thorough investigation when implementing digitization projects. These are:

- How do we share knowledge without being exploited?
- How do we enter into partnerships with countries in the North in ways that address and not reinforce the digital divide?
- How do we ensure that such partnerships do not merely reformulate issues of heritage plundering and cultural asset stripping?
- How do we take into consideration issues of connectivity and context, use and power?
- How do we ensure that these digital projects do not serve to replace repatriation of actual heritage items with digital replicas thereby still ensuring ownership and control by the North and not addressing problems of cultural pillaging issues?
- Are these projects simply adding to pressures being exerted on the states from which these objects originate, and one that it is difficult for them to resist?
- Is the temptation of financial aid producing a new form of imperialism reinforcing the digital divide? (Kagan, 2007).

The above questions are meant to safeguard against the transfer of records in Africa to the West through unregulated digitization programmes. No wonder, Pickover (2009:1)

came to the conclusion that there is a need to address policy issues if at all digitization projects were to be of benefit to the local societies. The policy issues that need addressing include "purpose of digital projects, what is being digitized and why, how the digital information will be used, by whom it will be used, and how will it be made accessible" (Pickover 2009:1) Questions of this nature need to be addressed upfront. As can be seen from the above discussion, there are certainly merits in undertaking donor funded digitization programmes, but caution must be exercised to ensure that the interests of the country holding the original materials are securely protected. This section that follows below looks at the role played the Endangered Archives Programme in preserving endangered archival and manuscript collections in Africa and in ensuring that they remain accessible to local and international communities

Endangered Archives Programme

Endangered Archives Programme is a programme funded by Arcadia and managed by the British Library. The work of the Endangered Archives Programme was documented by Kominko (2015) in her work From Dust to Digital: Ten Years of the Endangered Archives Programme. The Programme's aim is "to contribute to the preservation of archival material that is in danger of destruction, neglect or physical deterioration world-wide (Price 2015). Price further reported that, this broad objective is achieved through the award of grants that "enable successful applicants to locate relevant endangered archival collections, to arrange their transfer to a suitable local archival home where possible, to create digital copies of the material and to deposit the copies with local institutions and the British Library" (Price, 2017).

The specific objectives of the endangered Archives Programme as stated in Endangered Archives Website are to:

1.   Facilitate scholarship and research by identifying and preserving important material at risk of neglect, physical deterioration, destruction, or irresponsible care

2. Copy and relocate existing archival material that would generate material to supplement existing archives, provided the focus is not on the general nature of oral history recordings.

3. Safeguard archival material relating to societies usually at an early stage of development

4. Where possible, to relocated endangered collections into established local archives i.e. archives in the country in which they are currently located. (Note EAP in principle does not support the relocation of endangered materials from their countries of origin. The only exception to this is where the material is being temporarily removed from the country of origin for the purposes of copying).

5. Only material that can be made available online should be digitised. If there are any copyright or privacy restrictions preventing this, then the Programme cannot fund the digitisation of such material.

6. The copy of the material kept at the British Library will not be the master copy but will be made available for the types of use and access specified in the Award Conditions. The responsibility for creating and keeping archival masters of collections normally rests with the country of origin.

7. Training and building local capacity through copying and digitization of endangered archives. (Endangered Archives Programme, 2017)

Application procedures for pilot projects as well as major projects are available at the British Library website located at http://eap.bl.uk/pages/grants.html.

Since its inception in 2005, several projects aimed at locating and identifying endangered archives in Africa have been funded. Below is a list of pilot and major projects have been completed within Africa with funding from EAP. Reports on each of these projects   are available at the EAP website located at: http://eap.bl.uk/database/all_projects.a4d;

Table 1: Projects Undertaken in Africa with support from EAP 2005 - 2016

COUNTRY	PROJECT NO. AND PROJECT TITLE UNDERTAKEN
Algeria	EAP141 Ibadi private libraries in the Mzab Heptapolis, Algeria
Botswana	EAP429 A survey of church archives in Botswana
Burundi	EAP684 Inventory of the National Archives of Burundi
Cameroon	EAP 051 Bamum script and archives project: saving Africa's written heritage
	EAP054 Archiving a Cameroonian photographic studio
	EAP506. A pilot project to survey the Buea Archives and other potentially endangered archives in western Cameroon
	EAP542 Cameroon Photo Press Archives. Protection, conservation, access
Chad	EAP472 A survey of the libraries of Abéché, former capital of the Sultanate of Waday (Eastern Chad)
Comoros	EAP433. Digitisation of the national sound archives of the Union of Comoros
Congo, Democratic Republic of	EAP844: Recovering the Middle Congo archives at Pointe-Noire, Republic of Congo: new steps towards the social history of the Congo
Burkina Faso	EAP462. Preservation of Kaya district colonial archives and assessment of the potential and feasibility of recovering other former district capitals' collections, Burkina Faso
Ethiopia	EAP254 Preservation of the historical literary heritage of Tigray, Ethiopia: the library of Romanat Qeddus Mika'el
	EAP286. Digitising and conserving Ethiopian manuscripts at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies
	EAP336. Preserving the lay bet andemta: the Ethiopian intellectual legacy on the verge of extinction
	EAP340. Photographic preservation of the manuscript collection in the monastic church of Ewostatewos at Däbrä Särabi (Tigray, Ethiopia)

	EAP401.Safeguarding the Ethiopian Islamic heritage
	EAP526. Digitisation of the endangered monastic archive at May Wäyni (Tigray, Ethiopia)
	EAP602. Preservation of the audio recording collection in the Sherif Harar City Museum, Ethiopia
	EAP 704 Digitisation of the monastic archives of Marawe Krestos and Däbrä Abbay (Shire region, Tigray Province, Ethiopia
Gambia	EAP231Social history of the Gambia: rescuing an endangered archive, police and court records
	EAP536. Safeguarding Gambia, Casamance and Guinea-Bissau's oral histories: the Oral History Archive at Fajara, The Gambia
Ghana	EAP 078: Ritual narratives of Bagr Secret Society
	EAP256. Preservation of endangered historical records in the Public Records and Archives Administration (PRAAD) in Tamale, Northern Ghana
	EAP474. Regional Archive at Cape Coast, Ghana: pre-colonial and colonial documents preservation project
	EAP540. Shrines of Accra: Witchcraft trial records at Nai, Korle and Sakumo We, Accra, Ghana
	EAP 541. Digitisation and preservation of historical archives in the Public Records and Archives Administration (PRAAD) in Tamale, Northern Ghana
	EAP569. Safeguarding Nzema history: documents on Nzema land in Ghanaian national and local archives
	EAP 266: History of Bolama, the first capital of Portuguese Guinea (1879-1941), as reflected in the Guinean National Historical Archives
	EAP722: Safeguarding Nzema history. Towards an archive of Chieftaincy in south-west Ghana
	EAP935: Safeguarding the British Colonial and Regional Administrative Archive in Northern Ghana

Guinea	EAP 187: Syliphone - an early African recording label
	EAP327: Guinea's Syliphone archives
	EAP430: History of Bolama, the first capital of Portuguese Guinea (1879-1941), as reflected in the Guinean National Historical Archives - major project
	EAP608: Guinea's Syliphone archives - II
Ivory Coast	EAP 915: Pilot project for endangered Arabic manuscript in Ivory Coast
Kenya	EAP466: The manuscripts of the Riyadh Mosque of Lamu, Kenya
	EAP847: Protecting the Archive of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa
	EAP923: Digital preservation of historical botanical collections at East African Herbarium (EA) Library, National Museums of Kenya
Lesotho	EAP279: A rescue programme for the Matsieng Royal Archives, Lesotho
	EAP845: Endangered ethnohistories: preserving and digitising the DF Ellenberger ethnohistorical archive
Liberia	EAP 139 Rescuing Liberian history - preserving the photographs of William VS Tubman, Liberia's longest serving President
	EAP206. Rescuing Liberian history: a pilot study to preserve and enable access to Liberia's Presidential and National Archives
	EAP 207 Rescuing Liberian history: preserving the personal papers of William V. S. Tubman, Liberia's longest serving President
Libya	EAP265
Madagascar	EAP 856: Safeguarding the political history of precolonial Madagascar: the archives of Prime Minister Rainilaiarivony (1864-1895)
	EAP 938: The diplomatic connections of Madagascar between 1861 and 1897
Malawi	EAP 427: Identify, relocate and digitise Native Administration records (1891-1964)
	EAP607. Identify, relocate and digitise Native Administration records (1891-1964) Malawi - major project

	EAP714: Safeguarding the country's ecclesiastical archives: survey of Church archives in Malawi EAP793: Safeguarding the country's ecclesiastical archives: digitisation and relocation of Church archives in Malawi EAP797: Preserving Malawi's endangered historical District Notebooks, 1891-1964 EAP 920: Preserving Malawi's Endangered Historical District Books EAP 942: Preserving Nyasaland African Congress historical records
Mali	EAP269 Preliminary survey of Arabic manuscripts in Djenné, Mali, with a view to a major project of preservation, digitisation and cataloguing. EAP 449 Social history and cultural heritage of Mali: preserving the archives of professional photographers EAP 488 Major project to digitise and preserve the manuscripts of Djenné, Mali EAP820:Documenting Slavery and Emancipation in Kita, Western Mali. EAP764: Preserving the memory of the colonial past in Dogon country. A survey of historical collections of the endangered archives of Bandiagara
Mauritius	EAP 863: Preserving a unique archive of Diaspora and disease in the Indian Ocean from 1868 to 1930: a test case from Mauritius
Nigeria	EAP050. Making Professor Ade Obayemi's life work available to the world EAP052. Rescuing Eastern Nigerian history: preserving the holdings of Enugu and Calabar regional archives EAP087. Northern Nigeria: pre-colonial documents preservation scheme EAP387. Safeguarding Fulfulde ajami manuscripts of Nigerian Jihad poetry by Usman dan Fodio (1754-1817) and contemporaries EAP532. Recovering the endangered archives of the Benue Valley, central Nigeria EAP535. Northern Nigeria: Precolonial documents preservation scheme - major project

Senegal	EAP334.Digital preservation of Wolof Ajami manuscripts of Senegal
Sierra Leone	EAP284. Before the war, after the war: preserving history in Sierra Leone
	EAP 443. Nineteenth century documents of the Sierra Leone Public Archives
	EAP 626: Tracking the past - the preservation of the railway archives of Sierra Leone
	EAP 782: Preserving nineteenth-century records in the Sierra Leone Public Archives
Sudan	EAP 156. Endangered archives of Sudanese trade unions (1899-2005)
	EAP 218 The endangered archives of Sudanese trade unions (1899-2005) - major project
Tanzania	EAP 099 Collecting and Preserving the records of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania in Moshi, Tanzania
	EAP402: PEACH' - preserving East African co-operative heritage
Uganda	EAP 617: Preservation of rare medical records at Albert Cook Library, College of Health Sciences, Makerere University
	EAP656: History in progress Uganda, Part 1: the Ham Mukasa archive
Zambia	EAP 121Preserving the archives of the United National Independence Party of Zambia
Zimbabwe	EAP056Locating, listing and protecting the archives of Independent (or African Instituted) Churches in Zimbabwe

Source: Endangered Archives Programme, (2017.

Major observations on the Role of Endangered Archives Programme in Africa

A few decades back, African archives and library institutions were not very receptive in allowing donor funded digitization projects which included aspects placing of their digitized collections on open access arguing that open access denies the researchers the opportunity to consult original source material held by the local archival institutions. Until now, most archival institutions only provided information relating to collection

descriptions and inventories rather than placing the actual documents. Issues of copyright have also remained problematic among African archivists. However, an examination of the completed EAP funded projects and the collections that are already available on the British Library Website clearly demonstrates that there is a wind of change blowing in African archival institutions. The collaboration between participation of national archival institutions as well as private institutions with the British Library in ensuring that all collections digitized are placed on open access demonstrates that there are many benefits to be derived from such collaboration. It must also be stated that not all digital images deposited with the British Library are freely accessible since "material that has either data protection or certain copyright issues may only be viewed by visiting the British Library reading rooms in person" (EAP, 2016). This has greatly improved the perception that placing archives collections on open access prevents scholars from visiting archival institution to consult original source material. Contrary to this view, it has been observed that the placing of archives materials on open access has resulted in more researchers seeking to view the original materials after seeing them in open access libraries and repositories.

Secondly, the findings indicate that so far that the Endangered Archives programme has supported more than 50 pilot and major project in the East, Central, Southern and West Africa as shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2; EAP Funded Projects per country in Africa

COUNTRY	No. of Completed Projects
Algeria	1
Botswana	1
Burundi	1
Cameroon	4
Chad	1
Comoros	1
Democratic Republic of Congo	1
Burkina Faso	1
Ethiopia	8
Gambia	2
Ghana	9

Guinea	4
Ivory Coast	1
Kenya	3
Lesotho	2
Liberia	3
Libya	1
Madagascar	2
Malawi	7
Mali	5
Mauritius	1
Nigeria	6
Senegal	1
Sierra Leone	4
Sudan	2
Tanzania	2
Uganda	2
Zambia	1
Zimbabwe	1

Bearing that sponsor of this project – The Arcadia Foundation a non profit organization, its contribution to preservation of endeared archives in Africa is commendable. No other Foundation has supported directly or indirectly the preservation of archives and manuscripts as has been done under the endangered Archives Programme. Further, as can be seen from the Table 1 above, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali, Malawi are leading in the number of completed projects. Table 2 above also indicates that so far EAP has not funded projects in the following countries within the East and Southern Africa; Mozambique, Angola, Swaziland, Rwanda, Seychelles and South Africa. There is every likelihood that some applications from these countries might have been unsuccessful, but this does not necessary imply the unwillingness of programme to fund projects from these countries.

Thirdly, the findings indicate that, while the Endangered Archives Programme does not discriminate between applications emanating from the African region and those originating from the West, an examination of the completed projects available in the British Library website suggests a higher percentage of the completed projects were undertaken by scholars based outside Africa.

Fourthly the findings indicate that apart from projects carried out in Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Sierra Leone a high number of the projects funded by EAP relate to endangered collections held in non public archives institutions in Africa.

Conclusions

The preservation of Africa's archives heritage has for many years received little support from national governments. Archival institutions have focused on the collection and preservation of public archives and very little is known concerning the nature the quantities and conditions in which privately held archives and manuscripts are held. No registers of privately held collections are maintained. Africa is in danger of losing its valuable collections though the ravages of nature, political instability and through other agents of deterioration. The Endangered Archives Programmes through its grants has demonstrated that donor funding channelled and managed appropriately can make a significant contribution to an aspect that has often been neglected by successive governments in the region and that is the preservation of our endangered archival collections. The involvement of EAP projects in Africa has also demonstrated that collaboration with other stakeholders is the way forward in preserving documentary heritage. This is in line with ICA Code of Ethics that was adopted by the General Assembly in its XIIIth session in Beijing (China) on 6 September 1996 which recommends that "Archivists should promote the preservation and use of the world's documentary heritage, through working co-operatively with the members of their own and other professions" (ICA , 2016).

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