

The Challenges of Archiving Audio Visual Heritages in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper attempts to show case the challenges militating against the establishment, funding and promotion of audiovisual archiving collections held by different government institutions in Northern Nigeria. The rationale of such attempt rests on the observation that although audiovisual materials constitute vital information resource in such institutions, they are often not adequately managed after their creation. The paper also identifies the major constraints and limitations of audiovisual materials found in the public sectors, media houses and the challenges in their management. This serves as an important mechanism for raising general awareness on the audiovisual materials and on the need to preserve and safeguard such materials for future generations, as a means of making them accessible to the public. The paper shows that many of the problems related to the management of such materials in the country emanate from, such as national policy on preservation and conservation, lack of trained personnel in the management of audiovisual materials, technological challenges, inadequate storage facilities and the perception by users that audiovisual materials are not as valuable as records in other formats. The paper proffer strategies for dealing with the challenges of preserving and improving the use of audiovisual materials in Nigeria.

Introduction

The preservation, management, exhibition and promotion of audio-visual cultural heritage, hopes to play a key role in documenting and interpreting Northern Nigerian Society and its history as recorded in audio-visual media. It documents Nigerian media landscape development. It complements other Nigerian Institutions that documents the arts, historical monuments and objects, the National Library of Nigeria, the National Archives of Nigeria and National Museum and also the Nigerian Media Houses, such as Radio and Television. These institutions, manage diverse collections that are recorded in specific formats. Audio-visual formats, content and carriers bring with them special management and preservation requirements. The content forms part of a broad cultural and social history subjects, better interpreted through the collection's greater exposure and accessibility.

Arewa House is accommodated within the former official residence of the Premier of the former Northern Region of Nigeria, Alhaji Sir, Ahmadu Bello Sardauna of Sokoto, (1910-1966) who was assassinated in a military coup in 1966. The history of Arewa House as a Centre for Historical Documentation and Research dates back to the year 1969, when the Northern Nigerian History Research Project was established and settled with a responsibility of writing a book on the history of Northern Nigeria.

The Six Northern States of Nigeria established the Joint Interim Common Services Agency (ICSA) to oversee their

common assets and liabilities following the dissolution of the defunct Northern Region of Nigeria. It was this body that became the catalyst of the project and developed it into a full-fledged Centre for Research and Historical Documentation (Arewa House) in 1970. With the dissolution of regional bodies in 1975, Arewa House was transferred to Ahmadu Bello University as one of its research centers.

Arewa House Collection

The Arewa House, Ahmadu Bello University Collection, consists of audio-visual productions: film and television materials as well as radio, music and other sound recordings. These are complemented by an important collection of photographs (positives and negatives), objects, costumes, books, manuscripts, logbooks, memorabilia, personal papers and other documents that provide a broad historical and cultural content of Northern Nigeria to the production and presentation of the audio-visual collection.

Contents / Types of Audiovisual Collection in Northern Nigeria

Among the recordings in the collection, include, oral histories of politically and socially active figures such as: Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto and the first Premier of defunct Northern Region of Nigeria; Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the First Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, etc.; Sheikh Ahmad Arabi Collection, Colonial Records and Conferences/Seminars Proceedings, Local and International films, Nigerian Videos, Dramas which comprises, huge Video and Images; Photographs of Political leaders of the Northern Nigeria deposited at the Arewa House, Audio tapes and Video tapes on, Bitmac, U-mac, Reels, Gramophone, VHS format, CDs and DVDs formats and Microfilm, which need to be converted into modern technology for easy retrieval and access.

Collection Policy

The collection policy defines how to collect, manage and make these cultural heritages accessible to researcher. An important point here is that Sound and vision documents not only what material lies within its responsibility and what not, but how it is to be managed, described and made accessible. Choices must be made as to which standard, services and priorities can be met with a limited amount of financial resources. These choices should be made transparent for the public to view and access. In this regard the resolutions rising from a one-day National Conference on Audiovisual Archiving in Nigeria, has it that government at all levels should pay more attention to audiovisual archiving and preservation. A communiqué from the event titled "Audiovisual Archiving in Nigeria- the Challenges and prospects" stated that this call was made by audio visual professionals in Nigeria who also have been canvassing adequate funding and that all hands should be on deck, along with

appropriate legislations and funding, for the operations of audiovisual archiving in Nigeria to thrive, in line with global practices.

The statement also urged government to urgently give speedy approval to National Policy on Preservation and Conservation, adding that government should make the National Film Video and Sound Archive a legal depository for all audio-visual materials produced in Nigeria, about Nigeria and on Nigeria. It also resolved that National Film Video and Sound Archive, should be a national Centre for the preservation of all audio-visual materials in Nigeria [1].

Goals

As an academic institution the goal of Arewa House Archives is to provide institutional continuity and sustainable documentation on Northern Nigeria. It is primarily concerned with procuring, preserving, analyzing and discussing issues of national and international interest, particularly as they affect the development of Northern Nigeria.

The goal also describes Arewa House Archives Audio visual collection to cover the most important issues relating to collecting, selecting, cataloguing, preserving and providing access to these audio-visual materials. It also provides the context within which audio visual operates and gives a global overview of the collection's content with the intention to include all sound and images located in the various departments and centres of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria-Nigeria.

Rational behind this effort are the tenacity and ingenuity of Nigerians for sustaining efforts that gave rise to the country's creative industry such as the entertainment industry and allied businesses, which served not only to document Nigeria's culture but also to boost economic activities. As the creative industry such as Radio and Television stations, have grown from little beginnings to eventually media giants, there is the need for governments, practitioners and investors to synergies and build solid structures to prevent the successes recorded from eroding.

The Center planning to collaborates with some Media Houses, in order to recover, preserve, conserve and digitize audiovisual materials in the Northern part of Nigeria, such as Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria Kaduna, States Radio and some Private Radio Stations, National and States Television station in Nigeria, National Archives, Museum and History and Cultures Bureaus in Northern Nigeria.

The Challenges:

Viewed against the background of the foregoing data, there is no doubt that the research activities of the pioneers in the field of Audio Visual materials had yielded good result in terms of the recovery of huge volumes of documentary material that were hitherto virtually inaccessible to most scholars. Nevertheless, a number of problems have also developed even as the researchers were making progress in the field. In fact some of the problems were anticipated by the researchers themselves even before they assumed serious dimensions.



Figure 1. Shows sample of AV deposited in a ground floor.

For instance, Abdullahi Smith had drawn attention in the Second Interim Report of the NHRS to the problems of recording the work that had been done and of housing and cataloguing the material accumulated by the Research Fellows and associated scholars in the service of the scheme. Specifically, he noted the task of organising the steadily growing mass of research material so that it may remain permanently available to workers in this field. He then tied up any future success to a special financial provision to be made for the manuscripts' permanent organisation [2].



Figure 2. Shows sample of VHS materials recovered by Arewa House.

However, one of the indicators that the above problems have not yet been properly addressed, not to say resolved, over the years, is that most of the Audio Visual Archives in the public repositories are not catalogued, the significance of the failure to catalogue these materials is that as long as they continue to be in this state, they will remain inaccessible to researchers and therefore, any damage that sets in cannot be easily detected.

Another problem associated with the manuscripts in most of the public repositories is the nature of the formats in which they are stored. As professor Smith had noted with respect to the NHRS, but certainly not limited to it, the manuscript collections as at 1967 were virtually all of microfilm material. For the NHRS alone, the materials amount to some 23,000 frames of film [2].



Figure 3. Shows VHS Cassettes.

Two problems come to mind immediately in respect of the microfilms as medium of storage. These are the issues of printing and cataloguing in order to make them accessible. Printing is presently made difficult because of the obsolescence of the microfilm machines and the deteriorated condition of the films themselves as a result of aging process. It is sad to note at this juncture that more than 1000 titles of research materials on Microfilms in the Kenneth Dike Library of the University of Ibadan are completely damaged and irretrievable and had to be buried because they were already becoming health hazard to the workers and users of the Library [3] and [4]. The condition of the huge volume of microfilm in the NHRS is not even known because they have not yet been evaluated by experts.

Against this backdrop, it would seem that the best medium for keeping the audiovisual materials is in their original state, subject of course to the application of modern scientific techniques of conservation and preservation. Digitisation, which is now in vogue, cannot be a solution for now because of its fickleness and cost of periodic migration. Arewa House lost 25 CDs of digitised records of the Premiers Office Records simply because they were kept for two years without being transferred to new format.

Finally, the study sought to determine the challenges facing the preservation of audiovisual materials in Northern Nigeria. The constant change in technology was seen as a major challenge to the preservation and conservation and digitization of audiovisual collections. Moreover, the study discovered that some of the materials were fragile and needed to be handled with care. The fact that video machines do not function, huge materials of consist of CDs, VHS format, Cassettes are dump in unfitted stores without care at the Ahamdu Bello University, Zaria.



Figure 4. Shows difference type of cartridges recovered in one of store in a University in Zaria.

Also, the study discovered that there was lack of experience in dealing with microfilms and that there was insufficient equipment in many repositories in northern Nigeria, especially, those required to access information contained in videocassettes. Inadequate training in the preservation, conservation and digitization of audiovisual materials was also reported as being challenges in Northern Nigeria.

Conclusion

“Discover, remember and share” is apt and drives home the message for the people to document their experiences, and the efforts of creative industries have ensured that Nigeria escapes from the dangers of the single story, which has prevailed for a long time that the development of media content as part of offshoots of the documenting experience has created opportunities of employment for young people. The place of history cannot be underestimated and to urge practitioners to help develop a body of work that would direct future generations.

References

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