

The Digital Records, Archival Theory and the Sound Archives of Radio Botswana

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Abstract. *This paper tries to study the key components of archival theory to the management of sound records at Radio Botswana, through survey, interviews and literature reviews. Organisation, digitisation, preservation and access aspects are looked at. Author suggests that archival institutions and libraries have to focus on their method of acquisition, where they come from (provenance or respect des fonds), comprehensive tools of access (arrangement and description) and continuous and consistence preservation in the digital environment to avoid technology obsolescence.*

Keywords: Digital Archiving, Sound Records, Radio Archives

1. Introduction

Even though the first record produced by humans is a sound we take sound so much for granted. In fact the perception that audiovisual records are only good for entertainment is still pervasive. However, that perception is fast disappearing as more archival centers recognize the need to preserve sound archives. In the last few years there has been a proliferation of professional bodies dedicated to the proper preservation of sound archives. Among them the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA); the Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC); the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF); the International Federation of Television Archives (FIAT/IFTA); Federation of Commercial Audiovisual Libraries International (FOCAL); the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA); the South East Asia & Pacific Audiovisual Archives Association (SEAPAVAA) and the Co-coordinating Council of Audiovisual Archives Associations (CCAAA).

Sound or voice is one of the most powerful means of conveying facts and actions by both literate and illiterate communities. The use of sound to communicate is not just a monopoly of humans only. Domestic and wild animals also communicate their emotions, and maybe their facts and their acts through sound. In its annual commemoration of the “*World Day for Audiovisual Heritage*”, UNESCO (2013) has underscored the importance of sound archives by reminding us that the first moonwalk original recording that took place on 20 July 1969 cannot be located and is presumed lost. UNESCO (Ibid, 2013) also notes with extreme urgency, that

“Audiovisual documents, such as films, radio and television programs, audio and video recordings, contain the primary records of the 20th and 21st centuries. Transcending language and cultural boundaries, appealing immediately to the eye and the ear, to the literate and illiterate, audiovisual documents have transformed society by becoming a permanent complement to the traditional written record. However, they are extremely vulnerable and it is estimated that we have no more than 10 to 15 years to transfer audiovisual records to digital to prevent their loss. Much of the world’s audiovisual heritage has already been irrevocably lost through neglect, destruction, decay and the lack of resources, skills, and structures, thus impoverishing the memory of mankind. Much more will be lost if stronger and concerted international action is not taken. It was in this context, that the

General Conference in 2005 approved the commemoration of a World Day for Audiovisual Heritage as a mechanism to raise general awareness of the need for urgent measures to be taken and to acknowledge the importance of audiovisual documents as an integral part of national identity”.

In Africa in general, and in Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, song, dance, oral traditions, folklore, film, radio, television and the written record, are still the chief means of transmitting all forms of knowledge from one generation to the next. Despite this fact archival theory has not engaged sound records with the same vigor that it has done with the written and the electronic record. Using the sound of Radio Botswana as a case study this research attempted to investigate the application of key components of archival theory to the sound archives of Radio Botswana, drawing in the process strength from Heather Macneil (2007) who marshals archivists to re-examine archival theory as a way to challenge old truths. These **key components of archival theory** include;

- Acquisition
- Provenance, Respect des Fonds and Original order
- Arrangement and Description
- Access, Preservation and Digitization

These components are of course controversial. Archival theory, like all theories, has not developed without controversy. In fact, one has to add that any knowledge and information management theory that invites passive and monolithic responses condemns itself to extinction. The above components might sound like a monotonous script to postmodern scholars. In “*Archives, Records and Power...*” Terry Cook and Joan Schwartz (2002, p.171) are fatigued by what they call “*a script that has been naturalized by the routine repetition of past practice*” (Ibid, p.179). What Hugh Taylor has referred to as “*archival fundamentalism or the reluctance to explore new areas of theoretical and practical growth*”, (Ibid, p.179). Terry Cook warns that “*a profession rooted in nineteenth-century positivism.... may now be adhering to concepts, and Strategies and methodologies, those are no longer viable in a postmodern and computerized world*”. (Ibid, p.179).

2. The Primary Objectives of the Study and Methodology

The primary objectives of this study were to assess the application of key components of archival theory to the management of sound records at Radio Botswana 1 (RB1) sound archives. Data gathering methods of this study included face to face administered structured and unstructured interview questions, the researcher’s personal observations and literature review. The study was located in Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana at the Radio Botswana Music Archives. The study interviewed all the 3 the sound archivists who work in the Radio Botswana Music Archives and 7 other program officers. The research could only get a snapshot of the sound archives of Radio Botswana due to time constraints. A more in-depth graduate work is needed to do justice to the study. However, these limitations do not in any way prejudice the validity and findings of this study. In most African governments, the media fall directly under the Office of the President. The Office of the President granted the research permit based on the topic. Consent was given based on voluntary participation.

3. Radio Botswana: A Historical Background

According to Nomsa Setswe (2012) Radio Botswana 1 (RB1) started operating in 1965, as Radio Bechuanaland. The station operated as a state broadcaster until April 1992 when the Government set up a sister radio Radio Botswana 2 (RB2) as a commercial channel (Department of Information and Broadcasting (n.d.). The establishment occurred as a result of an inherited one-kilowatt medium transmitter from an out-going colonial government in Mafikeng. At its inception the core function of Radio Botswana was to communicate key livestock management related information among veterinary field staff. On 30th September 1966, Radio Bechuanaland was renamed Radio Botswana as a state owned station, to broadcast nationally. After independence, Radio Botswana 1 acquired more transmitters and better equipment that enabled more operational times. Radio Botswana 2 (RB2) on the other hand used a 100-km watt transmitter, whose coverage was based around Gaborone. Later on the station acquired FM 103 to enable its coverage

across the country. The mandate of Radio Botswana 1 is to disseminate news and a wide range of research, recreational, cultural, religious, historical, evidential, fiscal/financial, informational and legal information within and outside the country. Radio Botswana 2 disseminates news bulletins and contemporary entertainment for the target ages of 15 to 45 years (Department of Information and Broadcasting (n.d.), p. 1).

Setswe (2012) goes on to say that Radio Botswana 1 established a music library in 1974 to manage the station's sound recordings. In 2012 Radio Botswana had 16 000 compact discs (CDs), 11 000 Long plays and 7 000 short play vinyls phonographic records and an estimated figure of 8000 audio reel tapes. 1200 audio reel tapes have been transferred to the Botswana National Archives Services for archiving. A few of the audio reel tapes deposited in Botswana National Archives had been copied onto CDs. Despite technological obsolescence, Radio Botswana Music Library is still playing long and short play vinyl records and reel tapes. The department also subscribes to new technology called Radio Mann for scheduling for on-air broadcasting in live studios. From the very beginning of the station, the music archives acquired sound records through complimentary copies of long play and short play vinyl records from South Africa. Another type of acquisition, which is the current practice, is through purchasing from music companies, and receipt of deposit recordings from local artists and organizations. Through its countrywide outreach program Radio Botswana collects recordings from local artists, many of whom have donated their songs to the station (Setswe, Ibid).

4. Provenance/ Respect des fonds

In archives the terms provenance, respect des fonds and original order form the nucleus of archival theory. Provenance refers to the agency creating the records. As the primary creator of sound records held by the archives Radio Botswana can claim the provenance of these records. However, in complex organizations, like Radio Botswana, with a lot of Directorates, locating the provenance of the organization can be complex. One does not know whether to start with Radio Botswana as the provenance or to call a directorate provenance. 30 years ago Michel Duchein (1983) recognized this problem when he wrote that

“The agencies which possess the numerous personnel and multiple powers are, in general, divided into areas called divisions, directorates, branches, sub-branches, departments, and so on, each of which exercises a definite part of the powers of the agency. It is clear that the records created by these divisions constitute organic wholes. There is, therefore, every interest in taking these divisions as the basis of internal arrangement of the, fonds of the agency...” (Duchein, p.78).

This problem is bound to grow worse in the 21st century where multi-national chain store companies like Wal-Mart, Coca Cola, or Apple have become dominant. So, in short, archivists now need to address the question of where provenance begins and where it ends in huge complex organizations that have huge record producing departments under them. One cannot discuss respect des fonds without reference to provenance. Duchein says that the majority of definitions of respect des fonds rest upon provenance to the point where countries of Germanic language refer to it as provenienzprinzip or principle de provenance. Mario Fenyo, archivist of America, dismissed the concept of fonds saying that no one knows what the fonds means, not even the French who invented it, Fenyo's conclusion, however, has not stopped subsequent archival scholars from recognizing the fonds as one of the most important discovery in archival science. In fact, Duchein goes as far as saying that

“With few exceptions, the principle of respect des, fonds is universally accepted as the basis of theoretical and practical archival science. Criticisms of the principle bear only.... on its applications and not on the principle itself. It is reasonable to think that it will never again be fundamentally questioned and that it constitutes a definitive fact of archival science”, (Ibid, p.66)

Heather Macneil (2007) has also celebrated this principle. In *“Archival Theory and Practice: Between Two Paradigms”*, Macneil says, *“the cardinal principle on which the medical profession is built is above all do no*

harm..... Similarly, the cardinal principle on which the archival profession is built is respect des fonds. While its proper application is frequently undermined by a seemingly endless list of realities- inadequate resources, authority, education, training- the principle, in its own way, presents an equally worthy focus of archival inspiration". (Ibid, 2007, p. 541). Writing in Enduring Paradigm, New Opportunities: The Value of the Archival Perspective in the Digital Environment, Anne Gilliland (2000) states that "the principle of respect des fonds was first codified in 1839 in regulations issued by the French minister of public instruction. The principle stated that records should be grouped according to the nature of the institution that accumulated them. In 1881, the Prussian State Archives issued more precise regulations on arrangement that defined Provenienzprinzip, or the principle of provenance. The principle of provenance has two components: records of the same provenance should not be mixed with those of a different provenance, and the archivist should maintain the original order in which the records were created and kept. The latter is referred to as the principle of original order in English and Registraturprinzip in German", (p.12).

Gilliland (2000) further explains that the French conception of *respect des fonds* did not include the same stricture to maintain original order largely because French archivists had been applying what was known as the principle of pertinence and rearranging records according to their subject content. In her view the benefits of *respect des fonds* are immense in the sense that this principle facilitates both physical and intellectual access to records made or received by an agency or its surrogates as an intellectual whole, regardless of their form, medium, or volume.

Research on the management of sound records at Radio Botswana found out that twenty years ago with limited archival education and training, without even knowing that they were doing the right thing, archivists of Radio Botswana sound archives practiced *respect des fonds*. They did this by grouping similar sound records together under the genres of Reggae, Rock and Roll, African music, etc, etc, This classification system led to the accumulation of records under this broad family names. All Bob Marley's records were kept together under Reggae. All the albums of the Beatles were together under Rock and Roll and African musician's music were archived under African jazz. This system made it easy to see similar records archived together. This classification of the analogue sound records of radio Botswana affirmed the principle of "*archives as universitatis rerum*", the indivisible and interrelated nature of archives, articulated by Luciana Duranti (1996) in her article on "*archival science*". Respondents of this research lauded this system, saying that they never had any problem retrieving any song or tape that they wanted to play.

The rules of provenance and original order observed above began to change when management decided to replace *respect des fonds* with chronological classification as the method of music classification. These graduates did not know that while closely related the treatment of books differ from records and that when it comes to records the key to retrieval lies not solely on the date but also on knowing the provenance of records. All music albums entering the archives were no longer classified according to genre and artist but rather according to the date that the album entered the archives. The new classification system led to huge problems relating to the retrieval and location of the songs when they were needed.

This move resulted in Radio Botswana music archives experiencing a situation similar to the days of Armand Camus and Pierre Daunou after the French revolution, when the duo decided to view the records as discreet individual items similar to the book and introduced a chronological classification as the defining principle in the "*arrangement and description*" of records. It took the courage of Natalis de Wailly (1841) to reinstate the fonds as the most defining principle of archival science. In "*Archival Science*," Duranti (1996) talks of the effects that these ideas had, especially in creating a real dichotomy between the theoretical and methodological concepts related to the nature, form, formation and management of archival documents.

The principle of original order is a subset of *respect des fonds*. Not only should records accumulate steadily under their families but the original order of their aggregation has to be respected as well. Looked at purely from a practical viewpoint, "*original order*" saved archivists from the laborious rearrangement of records according to the subject classification system. At the intellectual level, the principle of original order maintained the cohesion and objectivity of the records by ensuring that nothing disturbs the natural accumulation of an agency's records as it carries out its

daily business activities. Only by respecting the original order of records could one gain a perfect and proper evidence of how an institution conducted its affairs.

While this principle was found to be true for the analogue records of radio Botswana analog records it fell by the wayside when it came to the music that was archived digitally. Here, retrieval of any song posed no problem as long as the song's name or artist was known. This finding is in line with Heather Macneil's assertion that in "paper based systems, where records are physically ordered in labeled files, usually in accordance with a classification scheme, the physical and contextual aspects of the records are intimately connected; original order has tended, for that reason, to be associated with physical arrangement. That association is no longer valid for most electronic records" (2007, p, 526).

5. Arrangement and Description

The findings of this study showed that it was difficult to locate analogue records because of the system of chronological arrangement. There is a need to pay attention to the principle of respect des fonds. In the digital environment it did not matter whether records were arranged by the author or by the name of the creator because they would still be retrieved anywhere. A study by Setswe tried to find out if Radio Botswana staff was aware of any method used to arrange and describe their music archives. Their responses are presented in Figure I below

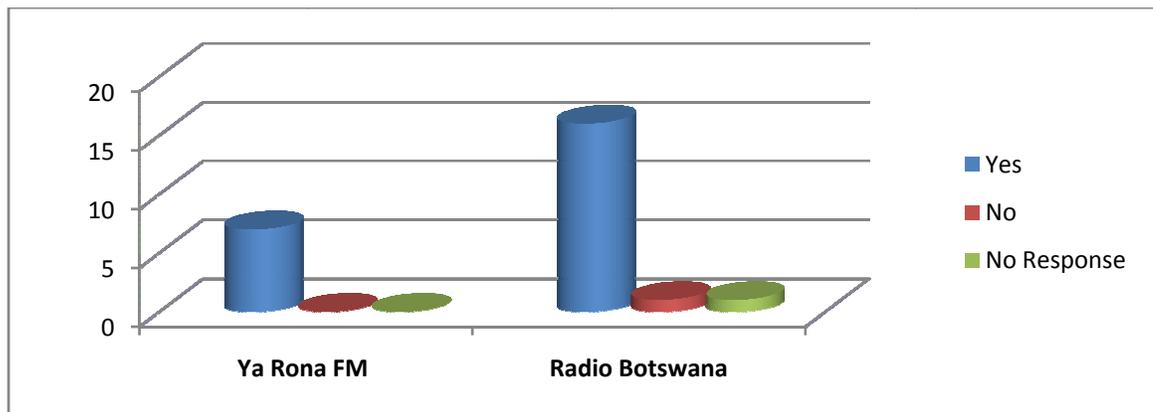


Figure 1. Awareness on Methods Used to Arrange and Describe Records for Access

Setswe's study had 13 respondents. 1 respondent said that he/she was not sure how Radio Botswana arranges its records. 2 said it does so chronologically. 1 said arrangement is by locality. 1 said by date. 2 said by allocating a unique number to CDs and LPs. 4 said according to artists name. 1 said by CDS/ISIS, while 1 respondent said they use manual labeling system. Showed that 2 said that it is chronological. 1 said by locality, 1 said by date, 2 said by way of allocating access numbers or CDs and LPs, 4 said by the artist's name. 1 said by CDS/ISIS software and 1 said via a manual system. These responses also represented in Table 1 below. But they all go on to show how confused radio Botswana staff is about the method of arrangement adopted by their station. There is no consistency.

6. Digitization, Preservation and Access

Radio Botswana keeps both analog and digital music records (Ibid, 2012). The types of records that Radio Botswana maintains include open reel audio compact cassettes, long and short play vinyl phonographic records, audio reel tapes, compact discs (CD's), replicated CDs, recordable and rewritable CDs, audio cassettes, reel tapes and online downloads. 16 (22%) respondents indicated that Radio Botswana maintains recordable and rewritable CDs, followed by 14 (19%) respondents who indicated maintenance of reel tapes. 13 (18%) and 3 (4%) respondents further indicated microgroove disk/phonographic (LPs), while 12 (16%) respondents indicated audio cassettes. 6 (8%) of the respondents furthermore indicated replicated CDs. The least percentage of respondents, 1 (1%) indicated that Radio Botswana maintains online downloads. Figure 4.1 below shows the type of records held by Radio Botswana.

Radio Botswana		
Methods	N = 13: No response = 5	Percentage
Not sure	1	8%
Arranged by giving record number to records and artists chronologically	2	15%
Arranged by locality	1	8%
Arranged according to Date	1	8%
Allocate Access number for CD's and LPs	2	15%
Arranged according to artists name	4	30%
Arranged on CDS/ISIS	1	8%
Arrange using manual labeling system	1	8%
Total	13	100

Table 1. Methods Used to Arrange Radio Botswana Sound Archives. Adopted from Nomsa Setswe's Study (2012)

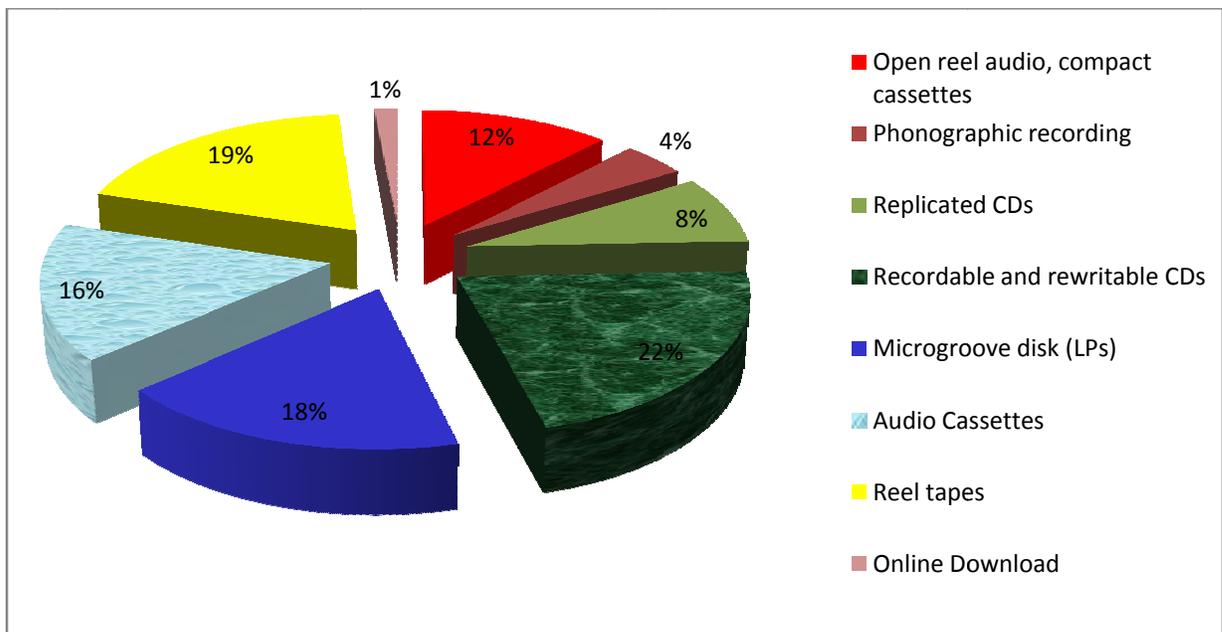


Figure 2. Types of Materials Maintained by Radio Botswana

Most archival repositories exist to provide access either to internal or external stakeholders and Radio Botswana sound archives is no different. This research found out that it is easier for the staff to provide access to sound in the digital form than in an analogue form for the simple reason that searching for the record in the digital environment takes split seconds while doing the same for analogue records might take forever. However, when asked about the sound quality and stability of the medium 2 out of 3 permanent archivists trusted the analogue records more. However, when asked whether they want to remain with analogue or digital records all the 3 archivists were eager to have their records digitized despite the fragility of the digital medium.

7. Conclusion

More detailed and sustained studies on Sound records and archival theory at the graduate level are needed. However, preliminary findings of this study show that the basic tenets of archival theory are applicable to sound recording in both analogue and digital formats. Regardless of whether records are sound or paper archival institutions still have to deal with their method of acquisition, where they come from (provenance or respect des fonds), comprehensive tools

of access (arrangement and description) and continuous and consistence preservation in the digital environment to avoid technology obsolescence.

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