

Joint Report on the FIAF School on Wheels, Accra, Ghana, August 13-18, 2012

by Luca Giuliani, Thelma Ross and David Walsh

The FIAF School on Wheels, funded by the Goethe Institut, was hosted by the National Film and Television Institute of Ghana (NAFTI), an institute for training in film and television production skills.

An opening ceremony was attended by the Rector of NAFTI, Prof Linus Abraham, a representative of the Goethe Institute in Ghana, Ms Gudrun Widlok, and by an eminent Ghanaian film-maker, Mr Kwaw Ansah, the last making a passionate plea to the assembled participants to continue to fight for the importance of film archiving to be recognised after so much of Ghana's film heritage has already been consigned to oblivion. A tour of the Cinema Section of the Information Services Department later in the day supported Mr Ansah's plea. (reportedly) government information films has been neglected to a point beyond rescue. Without wishing to make any judgement, the reasons for the neglect appear to be related to both institutional and political failures.

However, a tour of NAFTI itself demonstrated that the importance of training in production at least is recognised, and that funding can be found (often from foreign sources) for specific projects. NAFTI has recently installed a reference facility serving digital versions of film and television programmes on demand to its students, and has reasonably well-equipped production and editing facilities. That said, it would appear that the Ghanaian film industry is hardly thriving, especially when compared to its near neighbour, Nigeria.

The approximately 37 participants attending the school represented educational, broadcasting, museum and government institutions, responsible for a variety of information resources including AV materials. The participants had already attended a number of workshops and many had graduate degrees in archival studies. Over the five days, Luca Giuliani conducted a detailed (and highly interactive) discussion of collection policy and curatorial responsibilities, Thelma Ross provided a densely-packed series of presentations on cataloguing, and David Walsh surveyed the technical and preservation aspects of audiovisual archiving from film to digital media. The level of participation from the audience was impressive, there being a wide variety of questions, comments and observations made during the course of the school. Thelma Ross learned that although several of the participants already understood aspects of AV handling and preservation and of archival administration, the archival courses which many had attended did not (as is common elsewhere) include cataloguing courses in the curricula. As a result, the cataloguing aspect of the SoW program was especially necessary and met with enthusiasm and many questions. In the area of preservation and digitisation however, it was clear that international standards and best practice are often beyond the resources of many of the participating institutions. Digital technology and digitisation is seen by many as a solution to the problems of

archiving physical media and providing access, without much awareness that this creates a whole new set of problems. Nonetheless, we believe that the School on Wheels was a great success, and that the participants found it extremely valuable both in enhancing their own skills and in benefiting the institutions they work for. Participants provided feedback to the experts during a free-form evaluation on Saturday, and the comments were generally positive, with many participants calling the training

Some specific comments and suggestions made by the participants are noted below (without comment):

- All aspects of the program taught utilised passive learning. It was recommended that active learning be incorporated as a method. For example, it was suggested that in the future, the attendees be broken into small groups and provided with physical objects for hands-on cataloguing. Another example was provided from a past workshop at GBC, in which the participants were allowed to compete for a grant of \$1000. The contest required them to produce a grant proposal. The Institute for African Studies won the grant and used it to purchase their current cataloguing system (Filemaker Pro using IMAF templates). An additional suggestion was to focus on one institution or institutional context to move from abstract implementation models to a more concrete framework for implementing changes.
- Since they came to the training with previous knowledge, it was easier for them to learn about and understand the material presented by the FIAF experts and to gain a feel for what has developed in the field since their last training opportunity.
- There should be an effort to organise a press launch, promoting the training program as well as the attendees and the state of things at their respective institutions.
- The issue of funding and reaching decision-makers should be addressed. Cost is such an issue for them that they found it difficult to focus on much else.
- Unlike for librarians, there are no professional associations or organisations specifically for AV professionals in Ghana. It was suggested that the participants create their own, using the Goethe Institut as a meeting place, where they can discuss and create strategies for approaching their administrators/directors and for getting funding.
- The emphasis placed on outreach by Luca Giuliani was much appreciated and sparked their interest as a place for further discussion and development.
- It would have been helpful to have handouts in advance of the training to give the participants a chance to familiarise themselves with the handout content so they could follow along during lectures easier, and bring pre-formed questions to the discussion.
- A survey could be done prior to the training in order to learn about the day-to-day activities and responsibilities of the attendees and so that some

individualised information could be formulated for the participants and their institutions.

During the course of the week, it became increasingly clear that the major issue affecting the very existence of audiovisual archiving in Ghana is the apparent indifference shown by many institutional heads and by the government, and there was little the School on Wheels could do to influence this directly. Although Luca Giuliani spent considerable time emphasising the importance of having mission statements and policies, and was able to touch on ways in which the profile of archiving could be raised, we were really addressing the wrong people on this issue, that is, the practitioners and not the chiefs. The absence of any institute director during the course, apart from a brief appearance by the head of NAFTI, was noticeable. There was, at least, a small flurry of media activity at the end of the course – two radio interviews and a TV interview – which perhaps served to spread the message a little wider).

It was strongly felt by both the experts and the participants that the only way in which the valuable work carried out in the School on Wheels will not go to waste will be by following this event with further initiatives aimed at raising the profile of heritage archiving in the country. We therefore list below a number of specific suggestions for future Schools on Wheels, followed by recommendations for urgently needed further initiatives:

Specific suggestions on staging future Schools on Wheels:

1. Wherever possible, both institutional directors as well as practitioners should be included, so that both practical issues and leadership issues can be addressed, perhaps by running separate sessions (or even separate events) for the appropriate participants. A school which only addresses the practitioners will most likely fail to have any long-term benefit unless there is already full support at a high level.
2. All possible channels and local contacts should be explored in advance – funding organisations, diplomatic contacts, etc – to make institute directors aware of the importance of the event and encourage their participation.
3. The course should include a segment on sources of funding and on creating funding applications.
4. The list of participants circulated in advance should include their job titles as well as the name of their institutions.
5. Participants should be provided with name tags (with job title included) to help experts in identifying and personalising contact with the attendees.
6. A survey should be completed in advance by participants, detailing their day-to-day responsibilities.

7. A standard evaluation form should be designed by FIAF to be collected at the end of the course (rather than leaving it to the host institutions to decide what will be evaluated and how).
8. There should be a request for the hosting and participating institutions to supply sample objects (such as film reels, tapes, documents) for in-class exercises and discussion.
9. One of the experts should be designated in advance as the FIAF spokesperson for interviews, speeches, etc.

Recommended next steps:

1. FIAF should consider setting up an African training working group to promote the importance of audiovisual archiving in the region. (This may be the role of the FIAF African Working Group, if this group is still active, or of a new group.)
2. FIAF should join forces with FIAT, IASA, and ICA in raising the awareness in Ghana, and perhaps elsewhere in Africa, of audiovisual archiving issues among government and institution heads.
3. Means of promoting audiovisual archiving might take the form of high-level meetings, or a symposium linked to the UNESCO world day for audio visual heritage.
4. Efforts should be made to involve a celebrity in such an event in order to raise the profile of the cause.
5. FIAF should investigate the setting up of a network to make available unwanted audiovisual equipment in richer countries to Africa.

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