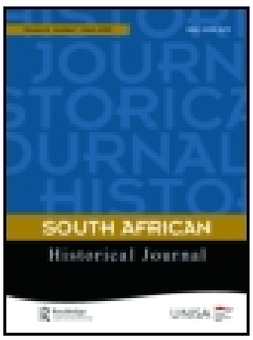


South African Historical Journal

ISSN: 0258-2473 (Print) 1726-1686 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rshj20

What Lies Below: Exploring Constructions of Collective Memory in Archival Collections

Renate Meyer

To cite this article: Renate Meyer (2008) What Lies Below: Exploring Constructions of Collective Memory in Archival Collections, South African Historical Journal, 60:2, 209-225, DOI: 10.1080/02582470802416443

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02582470802416443

Published online: 31 Mar 2009.

What Lies Below: Exploring Constructions of Collective Memory in Archival Collections

RENATE MEYER
University of Cape Town

Abstract

This article interrogates relationships within and between oral history narratives and how such constructions affect the reading/analysis of both individual and collective oral histories. Within this field, a number of issues need to be considered. Some of the most prominent include the process of recording a life story; the play between archiving a dynamic narrative within an archival system of categorisation and how a particular narrative affects the reading of other narratives within that collection. It is also of particular interest to explore how such layering remains dynamic, fuses or separates as time goes by and collections grow.

Keywords: oral history; audio-visual archive; archival collections; collective memory; interviewing; archival research; archival management

Frameworks for Audio-Visual Archival Collections

One of the differences between paper-based and audio-visual (AV) archival material is the separation between carrier and content. With paper-based archival material, the content is literally before your eyes, while with AV material there is little evidence of content at first glance. One can, at most, hold the compact disk (CD) copy or even analogue cassette, yet without a computer or CD player, one cannot access the content. This difference is an interesting one, on one level it highlights the distinction between a physical and virtual structure; on another it signifies a split between the seen and unseen (or even seen and unheard). Of course in archival terms it also highlights issues of obsolescence and migration. Maintaining access to such AV material requires a vigilance in terms of migration of content due to unstable digital formats such as CD and corruption of binary data, and technology development which sees the need to update formats and carriers as equipment becomes obsolete and commercially unavailable (for instance BETA and VHS carriers being replaced commercially by DVD and Blu-ray discs).

Yet, such necessary vigilance is only indicative of the technical aspects of AV archival material. Another layer is the underlying system of accessional and framing mechanisms. In his book, *The Order of Things,*[1] Michel Foucault outlines the possibility of tracing underlying systems of non-

1. M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1970).

South African Historical Journal 60 (2) 2008
ISSN: Print 0258-2473 /Online 1726-1686
DOI: 10.1080/02582470802416443

formal knowledge structures. He questions whether in the juncture between the applications of structures and empirical context, an underlying system exists. Although that analysis extends across a much broader terrain, it is relevant within the scope of this paper, which aims to explore constructions within audio-visual archival collections. The question then is how and what is that juncture? One is aware that meanings emerge in the collation of material – whether it highlights similarities between materials or heightens the differences. Of course emergent meanings also alter with time and juxtapositions. Yet somehow within a topographical structure of qualitative material, such as archived oral histories, there seems to be dynamic meaning that is not captured in the spoken (or transcribed) words of the content or the keywords and metadata of the archival structure.

Hence, while archival collections are created with a structured topology, it is the juncture (or interaction) between and through them that creates an underlying, possibly dynamic, construction. So while archival records comply with a formal structure of archival accessioning, how do individual and collective shifts that take place under that structure play themselves out? For instance, individual narratives and the collections they exist within are affected by additions to such collections or by subsequent publications around a certain collection theme – such as displaced lives or migration. Such a critical mass of information generation has an influence on readings and understandings of narratives. This article looks at possible ways in which this happens.

These shifts are explored through two main streams. The first is the content that (possibly) guides this classification. The second is the influence and layering through factors not intrinsic to the trace – such as the effect of time. Not only in that meaning is affected temporally but also that the generation of, for instance, publications or changes in political/social circumstances affect the reading of narratives. In keeping those two streams at the forefront, I engage with the dynamic (non-formal) constructions that are created within the structure.

Topological Structures

The classification of traces into collections falls within a number of formalised systems. There are countless archival texts,[2] including Muller, Feith and Fruin's *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*[3] and more recently IASA's *Guidelines for the Production and Preservation of Digital Audio Objects*,[4] which outline metatags and data accumulation for both paper-based and binary audio archival collections. These manuals have been developed over years,[5] it seems, through a combination of empirical and scientific knowledge. Here

2. While the list seems endless some of the better utilised include: M. Cook and M. Procter, *Manual of Archival Description* (Aldershot: Gower, 2000); V. Walch, ed., *Standards for Archival Description: A Handbook*, (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1994); R. Edmondson, *Audiovisual Archiving; Philosophy and Principles* (Paris: UNESCO, 2004); H. Harrison, ed., *Audio Visual Archives: A Practical Reader* (Paris: UNESCO, 1997); and the invaluable resources available through the Council on Library and information resources (www.clir.org); Society of American Archivists (www.archivists.org); International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (www.iasa-web.org).
3. S. Muller, J. Feith, R. Fruin, eds, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* (New York: H.W. Wilson & Co., 1968).
4. K. Bradley, *Guidelines for the Production and Preservation of Digital Audio Objects* (Johannesburg: IASA, 2004).
5. In the case of Muller, Feith and Fruin, the manual has a 75-year history.

I am reminded of Foucault's formulation, where he speaks of the interesting combination of application of the structure and the empirical context within collections. So while the theory of archival science rests in formalised accessioning and standardised tags, there is a strong element of the development of this science that rests in the *practice* of archival collections management.

Hence there is a development, of what Foucault might have termed a more stable grid of identities as opposed to looser, unstable collections. An example would be a collection of objects on a table – the table is the container that orders the items on it, yet it is likely that the objects have more stable collections that they belong to. For instance if one has a book, keys, a feather and a dog on the table each of those objects have a solid collection structure to which they belong. The dog has a stable collection category with other animals/domestic animals/dogs while the book is more closely related to other texts, even possibly genres of literary writing and so on. So the ordering is random in that the table contains the objects and becomes by default a collection. Yet, in classification structures, it holds little weight as there are more 'logical' categories that both the objects and container fall within.

Archival collections are part of this more stable collections order. On the one hand there is a logical structure that assists in determining archival collections (albeit an empirical/scientific fission), yet on the other, one is reminded of Pierre Nora's notion of 'the differentiated network to which separate identities belong, an unconscious organisation of collective memory that is our responsibility to bring into consciousness'[6]. These two structures or networks seem to exist simultaneously. On some levels the exploration then encompasses physical (tangible) and intangible generation of meaning. There is an accepted construction of archival collections according to a number of standardised criteria, yet there is a simultaneous construction/ accumulation of meaning that is not actually generated through what is spoken of in the oral history interviews. – which Nora describes as the 'unconscious organisation of collective memory'. He goes on to discuss this notion with regard to *lieux de memoire*, suggesting that these 'realms' are necessary, or rather are a condition, of our modern epoch where such 'sites' need to exist, as 'environments of memory' no longer do. While this article cannot deal with the repercussions of such a suggestion, I do choose to relate the notion to such occasions that occur within the oral history archive. There too, the interaction and building of meanings occurs at the fissions, junctures and interactions – the brushing together of narratives that disturb and yet create. Nora suggests that it is 'this very push and pull that produces *lieux de memoire* – moments in history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer life, not yet death …'.[7] Such a double bind is not uncommon in archives. Each narrative and interaction is caught in the moment between its own destruction and continued life, a metamorphosis that allows nothing to remain static – but is always caught in the play between.

The responsibility of the archive to remember,[8] as a type of prosthetic memory-bank, is fraught, though. For the 'memory' received relies on its trace, the form it is given: the recorded interview, the photographic image, the AV Mini DV. As mentioned earlier, this tracing already sets it in a structure. The archivist plots the descriptive and technical metadata, creates inventories,

6. P. Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, 26 (Spring 1989), 23.
7. *Ibid*., 12.
8. *Ibid*. Nora suggests that memory's 'new vocation is to record; delegating to the archive the responsibility of remembering, it sheds its signs upon depositing them there'.

accessions records, checks copyright release forms and so on. In this process, the initial 'memory' is partially stripped of its individuality through this trace and then somehow reconstituted within the archival structure. Its placement in collections, reformatting and even making multiple that which was original (with archival access copies, digitisation and so on) are all physically manifest, but of course the paradox remains: how can one plot or make tangible that which is unconscious or ephemeral? Here I am speaking of the 'unconsciousness' of the trace, as well as in the interviewee's narrative. So by looking at how an oral history interview is placed in the archive, or by the collections' structure, and more deeply at the interaction that is created in that placement, one can explore how it is affected by and shifts with the passage of time.

Using the Centre for Popular Memory as a Case Study

To explore this in more practical terms I look to the Centre for Popular Memory's audio-visual archive.

One collection category within the Centre for Popular Memory archive broadly encompasses narratives around migration and displacement with a concentration on refugee and displaced persons entering South Africa, and more specifically the Western Cape (rather than South African citizens leaving the country)[9]. Within this collection is a section called Testimonies of Passage (ToP).[10] This sector consists of 106 interviews conducted over 18 months with Nigerian and Congolese people living in Cape Town.[11] The recordings come from the larger ToP project which involved two CPM interns working for two years (2003–2004) on gathering narratives – these were then archived and compiled into a series of exhibition panels, radio programmes, academic articles and a visual/ reflective catalogue.

The collection is interesting for a number of practical reasons useful to this analysis. Firstly there is a logical grouping together as the interviews were conducted for one project (Testimonies of Passage); secondly there is an imbedded construction around the conception of group, namely that of Nigerian or Congolese refugees (place and space).

Yet, the recording of such life stories comes with particular constraints. While interviewers were trained in oral history methodology and chosen particularly for their relation to the specific communities, the factors around displacement, fear of the state and issues around gender continue to inform the process. To unpack the overlays between archival spheres, content management and development there is a need to briefly look at the context that informs the creation of its stable category.

9. This collection includes sectors on Rwandan refugees (CPM_Mr.01-17); Somalian refugees (CPM_Ms.01-05); Testimonies of Passage (ToP) (CPM_M1.01-56 and CPM_M2.01-50); Italian immigrants (CPM_ Ime.01-18); Eastern European immigrants (CPM_ Iim.01-23); Sotho ex-miners (Im.01-11) and Chinese Immigrants (Imas.01-25).
10. ToP was a comprehensive two-year project run within the Centre for Popular Memory, funded by the CPM and Mellon Foundation. The project model aimed to gather and explore forced migration from Nigeria and Congo to Cape Town, South Africa. On some levels this had a practical element in that Nigerian and Congolese immigrants at that time comprised two of the largest foreign 'communities' in Cape Town, where the CPM is based. This allowed for a thorough study of such testimonies of passage.
11. Interviews conducted by Iyonoyan Iyegun (Masande) and Theodore Kamwimbi in 2003/4 in English, French and Lingala. All interviews were transcribed and translated. Where copyright permits they are available online at www.popularmemory.org

While population movements have been a constant feature in world history over the past five centuries (and further), the last decade has seen a global surge in migrancy due to increases in political instability, famine and poverty.[12] On the local level, South Africa has a double wave of migration – the first being a long-established pattern of internal circular migration between rural and urban households due to the migrant labour system established under the former regime; the second dealing more directly with trans-national migration.

One of the complexities within this form of migration is the legislation governing asylum seekers coming into this country. The Refugee Act of 1998 (the replacement for the Aliens Control Act) is seen to hinder rather than facilitate refugee's status. Refugees are not allowed to work, study or be self-employed until they are granted refugee status They are also not granted any form of social welfare support. In 2002 a new Immigration Act was passed, [13] and this was seen to encourage highly skilled immigrants while also protecting the rights of citizens. It is understood that one of the main failings of the act is its inability to sufficiently protect those who are most vulnerable – the so-called illegal or undocumented immigrants.

Yet how do these legislative and policy positions play themselves out on a more practical level within archival practice? As mentioned, the naming of categories of Nigerian or Congolese within the broader collection raises questions. For example, many Congolese interviewees mention that their nationality became a holding feature once they were displaced from their country of birth. Other interviewees mentioned that their status as refugees, immigrants or asylum-seekers within South Africa, is affected by the Democratic Republic of Congo's political standing in international forums, but is also personally affected by actual political and often by economic situations. So, while one interviewee might feel personally threatened within his or her country, their legal status within the country they flee to – not as a refugee but as an immigrant – has specific economic and political social rights within that country. Etienne, a Congolese refugee, explains this in the following way: 'Me, I am Congolese through and through, but I came here [South Africa] not because I want to be South African, only because I came to seek refuge.'

While the scope of this paper does not try to explain or expand on the vast and varied writings around migration and displacement, it highlights the fact that each so called collection or grouping of material comes from a highly fraught and often complex field of theory and practice, which is often submerged in conventional audio visual archiving naming systems. With these conventions, in an example as suggested below, political changes that affect geographical location and as such affect metadata, are not sufficiently reflected. For instance sectors of what is now referred to as the DRC has in the past been referred to as Congo Free State (1877–1908), Belgian Congo (1908–60), Congo-Leopoldville and Zaire (1971–97). This simple example highlights the difficulty of representing complex relations even on a geographical level. Sophie

12. For more on these topics see R. Cohen, *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); P. Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa c 1860–1910* (London: Heinemann, 1994); D. McDonald, ed., *On Borders: Perspectives on International Migration in Southern Africa* (Ontario: St Martin's Press, 2000).
13. The South African Immigration Act of 2002.

Lissonnet's comprehensive analysis of inadequate naming with regard to Australian material is a good case in point in highlighting such complexity.[14]

Oral History and the Practice of Archiving

There is further complexity with the overlay of oral history theory and practice onto/into such archival systems. Alistair Thomson's[15] article reviewing 50 years of oral history, reminds us that oral history 'provide[s] opportunities to explore aspects of human experience that are rarely recorded'.[16] These include people's personal lives, domestic situations and so on. He goes on to say that this manner of collecting offers 'rich evidence about the subjective or personal *meanings* of past events' (emphasis original).[17] While this is broadly accepted, the development of oral history as a research practice has been significantly interrogated and debated. For instance, much has been written about the positioning of power in the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. This subjective position allows the interviewer certain credibility in that s/he is informed about the research topic and subject to a certain degree, and is quite obviously asking the questions- thereby placing the interviewee in a position of response and on some levels wanting to answer to the best of their recall[18]. These subjective positions are neither static nor simple and while this paper does not delve into the complexity of these layers, it is important to mention as such positioning and fluidity affect the archiving of such material. In a way, as with the historian no longer being expected to be a transparent carrier of History, so too the oral historian (and the archivist), are acknowledged as subjective within the process of both interviewing and archiving. For Nora, this subjectivity is not an obstacle but the means to their understanding.[19]

Over the last 25 years, a variety of differing approaches have surfaced in which fears around subjectivity and bias have become assimilated, or at least explored. Alesandro Portelli's '*Death of Luigi Trastulli'*,[20] and Luisa Passerini's analysis of Italian working class memories under Mussolini's regime,[21] marked significant points of discussion around the 'entanglement of the everyday life and personal identity to explore the difficulties of remembering involvement in a discredited regime'.[22] In these and other works,[23] the meaning embedded in remembering is

14. S. Lissonnet and L. Nevile, 'The Development of a Metadata Application Profile to Facilitate the Repatriation of Cultural Resources to Quinkan Country', in L. Stillman and G. Johanson, eds, *Constructing and Sharing Memory: Community Informatics, Identity and Empowerment* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007).
15. A. Thomson, 'Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History', *The Journal of American History*, 85, 2 (September 1998), 581–95.
16. *Ibid*., 582.
17. *Ibid*. Such personal meanings and remembrances are affected by the distortion of physical deterioration, nostalgia exacerbated by old age and by the personal bias of both interviewee and interviewer.
18. For more on this inter-subjective relationship see S. Field in this publication: 'Turning up the Volume: Dialogues about Memory Create Oral Histories'.
19. Nora, 'Between Memory', 18.
20. A. Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).
21. L. Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
22. Thomson, 'Fifty Years On', 585.
23. For example, R. Samuel and P. Thompson, eds, *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990).

not viewed under the guise of quantifiable historical fact, but rather explores the generation of meaning as active and dynamic.

With this in mind, I am interested in how such an unpacking of memory affects the archiving of such traces.[24] The key question remains: how do all these intricacies play themselves out in the generation of myth[25] and meaning within the audiovisual archive? And how can concepts such as Foucault's 'juncture between the application structure and empirical context' and Nora's 'unconscious organisation of collective memory' connect to the generation of myth/meaning within oral history archives?

Central to this generation then, is memory itself. As Halbwachs suggests there are as many memories as there are groups, memory is by nature multiple and yet specific; collective plural and yet individual.[26] Much has been written around these relationships between the natures of memory, hereby expanding our understanding of memory, constantly shifting between the collective and the individual, and addressing itself to various groupings and interactions.

Yet the flipside of modern memory is that it is no longer what it used to be – as Nora puts it 'modern memory is, above all, archival … the less memory is experienced from the inside the more it exists only through its external scaffolding'.[27] In some ways the massive generation of such vestiges to memory: memorials; archives ensuring the public voice of specific groups; sites of remembrance; and so on, allow us to use these as mnemonic devices thereby freeing us to externalise memory, to almost place it outside of ourselves. Yet at the same time the 'obligation to remember' lies with the individual,[28] 'the atomisation of a general memory into a private one … gives everyone the necessity to remember and protect the trappings of identity; where memory is no longer everywhere, it will not be anywhere unless one takes the responsibility to recapture it through individual means'.[29] This then extends to the archive.

The drive to record, capture and gather as much as possible is coupled with a need to store and preserve. Often, notions of the archive seem to suggest a desire to fix in time that which is fluid, to contain that which is ephemeral and box that which is unfettered. But archive material, as with *lieux*, exist in both realms at the same time – its fundamental purpose is both to 'block the work of forgetting ... immortalise death, materialise the immaterial – just as if gold was the only memory of money' and at the same time to exist 'because of its capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of its meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications'.[30]

24. Interestingly enough, developments around unpacking the nature of meanings and memory are not confined to oral history. Many other disciplines such as psychology and sociology add huge value to such discussions. Even anthropological perspectives on the exploration of the individual in the group, assisted in reassessing preconceptions of how such 'loose organisations' are structured.
25. Myth is understood in terms of the oral history definitions explored by Samuel and Thompson, *The Myths We Live By*, where myth is understood to encompass personal narratives that may be historically inaccurate, yet that does not undermine the veracity and value of the narrative as experienced/ remembered by the interviewee.
26. Nora, 'Between Memory', 9.
27. *Ibid*., 13.
28. *Ibid*., 16.
29. *Ibid*.
30. *Ibid*., 19.

Understanding the CPM, Migration/ Displaced Lives Collection

In the case of the Centre for Popular Memory's (CPM's) Migration Collection, the first difficulty arises in the placement of narratives on displacement in one broad category. While one can see the logical progression of grouping together Nigerian and Congolese narratives of displacement, the circumstances and issues experienced by individual persons in these groups are vastly different. Although I suggest narrative interpretive workings in the following section and unpack some of the nuances of this, it is key to remember that the foundation of this paper is to explore the junctures rather than the interpretations. With this in mind, while I may hint at themes, it is what underpins or holds the narratives and their interplay that I am more interested in.

Nigerian Sector

Oil-rich Nigeria has been ruled by military regimes for all but 15 years during its 44 years of independence since British colonial rule. Since 1960 the three largest ethnic groups, the Hausa/Fulani, Ibo and Yoruba, have dominated the political scene, each occupying different geographical regions of the country. Nigeria also boasts over 250 smaller groupings, all with distinct languages, traditions and practices.[31] As two Nigerians put it:

> You get this sense that you are in the centre of Nigeria … its like a melting pot; a mix of cultures … both Nigerian cultures and also the whole Nigerian/African experience versus a Eurocentric experience, so there is always that recognition that you kind of live in two worlds. (Bebe)

> The average Nigerian thinks he is smarter than everybody in the world. The education we are given back home gives us the courage … the slogan of Nigeria is 'the giant in the sun'. You don't intimidate Nigerians. (A.D.)

Nigerian identity is described by interviewees as being more communal and a national identity seems to be more pronounced than with the Congolese examples.

> Being in Nigeria we are very, very communalistic, you know. We do things collectively, together … so living with your niece, your nephews. That's what I'm saying, quite interesting. Either if good comes you share; if the worst side of life comes to you too, you share. (Rabiu)

Referring back to Foucault[32] and to Paul Carter,[33] there is however a dynamism or unfixed nature that emerges in the definitions. Nationalism, community and home, although grounded in certain theoretical and conceptual frameworks, are understood or experienced differently by individuals. This is apparent in the 52 Nigerian interviews and the 54 Congolese interviews in the same collection, which also offer varying perspectives on the notion of community or a sense of Congolese identity.

31. R. Meyer and F. Swanson, eds, *Testimonies of Passage: Congolese and Nigerian Migration and Identity in Cape Town* (Cape Town: Centre for Popular Memory, 2004).
32. Foucault, *The Order of Things*.
33. P. Carter, *Living in a New Country: History, Travellings and Language* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

Congolese Sector

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is part of the Great Lakes region and has an abundance of natural resources. Yet its political history beckons towards dictatorship and civil war. The country's borders have also shifted.[34] These geographical and political changes have a noted effect on interviewee's narrations of their country of birth. For instance, Raphael describes himself as 'a refugee even in my own country' while other interviewees mention the varied languages they speak due to their geographic movement. In Tshombe's case he was able to speak three international languages (French, Portuguese and English) and was fluent in Swahili, Lingala and Kikongo due to the areas where he received his schooling.

While not yet clearly evident, what is becoming apparent is that definitions of groupings are based on a physical location (and on political history); so for instance a person might have been born in Bas-Zaire, or what is now Zaire, yet refer to him/herself as Congolese. Not only geographical shifts but also political shifts alter the way interviewees speak of their histories.

Lillian describes this as follows:

> So you find yourself in a country you didn't plan to live in. After varsity I couldn't move in with my parents because I was in Lubumbashi, my parents in Likasi. When I was in Congo I was mistaken as Rwandan. So you can't go out … wherever you on the street you feel like you are not safe. Everybody is looking at you and saying, 'Is this a Congolese? No I don't think so … maybe she is Rwandan!' So that kind of situation made me move to Zambia. But there is a conflict between Zambia and Congo, they accused Zambia of protecting the Tutsi or rebel Tutsi by saying they were at the borders, they were keeping them to come and attack Congo. So, it would be difficult again to go back to Congo or to stay in Zambia. What should I do?

Difficult geographic and ethnic relationships such as these have a marked effect on notions of identity and naming. While it is not within the ambit to explore in the confines of this paper, the issues draw attention to the vast difficulty of trying to categorise and name within a archival system, that leave little space for the exploration or description of complex, contested naming conventions.[35] For a researcher who is unfamiliar with such complexities, a seemingly uncontested or uncomplicated relationship exists.

Themes within the Collection

As one begins to flesh out similarities and differences across categories and within interviews, patterns seem to emerge (and shift). Looking at further examples, one dominant theme within many of the interviews is the notion of belonging/home.

As Masade sets out in her chapter exploring transnational migration amongst Nigerians in Cape Town,[36] the concept of home has altered considerably in the twenty-first century. 'Home' is no longer a static location, where everything abroad is perceived as strange, other and differing.[37]

34. Meyer and Swanson, *Testimonies of Passage*, 6.
35. For more on this see Sophie Lissonnet's work on archival naming systems in Australia, in Lissonnet and Nevile, 'The Development'.
36. I. Masande, 'Where is Home? Transnational Migration and Identity amongst Nigerians in Cape Town', in S. Field, R. Meyer and F. Swanson, *Imagining the City: Memories and Cultures in Cape Town* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 94.
37. S. Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in J. Rutherford, ed., *Identity, Community, Culture and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1990), 223–37.

Prior conceptions of home as a stable, fixed location and the further a person moved from that location the further they were from home,[38] are now thrown into disarray.

One of the many reasons for this seems to be the rapid development of transportation and technology, which has opened up a more global and accessible world. In this world communication technologies allow the rapid transfer of information around the globe. We now live in a place where cultures, music, language, images and information are often available through the click of a mouse or the use of a mobile phone; where the physical location of family or friends is virtually dissolved through the ability to talk through skype or video conferencing on the web; where chat rooms, blogs and websites such as www.myspace.com or www.facebook.com allow for the immediate sharing of ideas and visual markers.

This transformation of modern society has altered senses of fixed identity or location; it offers possibilities beyond the tangible. In prior epochs these would have been out of reach on a physical and economic level. Yet in the twenty-first century the boundaries of time and space between people, societies and cultures are collapsing,[39] and thus the fixed identities and concepts of home and space are destabilised.

Bebe, a Nigerian immigrant, explains it in this way:

> I think that my world has grown bigger, so I am less Nigerian now, than I am African, and less African than I am global. You know, when people ask where are you from, you say Nigeria because you have a passport from that country but I really … I'm a global child you know.

Moise, a student from Congo expands on this notion of global possibilities in the following manner:

> The best thing for me would be to go overseas and try and carry on [with my] studies. If I can do this Masters at a big university it will be the best thing. The second thing would be to get my Masters degree here [South Africa] and get a better job. The third thing that could happen to me is I go back to Congo and live there. But I still want to improve, to enjoy, to learn, because actually going back to Congo is a huge sacrifice.

Yet, while the world is expanding on such levels of learning and career opportunities, it is also contracting in terms of a sense of localisation or regionalism. As the world gets larger it homogenises on some levels. Yet there is also a growing fear of the outsider and the need to solidify local culture. Both these issues are highlighted in the Migration/Testimonies of Passage Collection.

As displaced Nigerian and Congolese people these respondents show a particular understanding and experience of xenophobia within South Africa. Foreigners are seen as taking take jobs and opportunities from South Africans. Okafor, a Nigerian, describes it in the following manner:

Where I work its only me that has a different accent. But I can't help it, it's my mother tongue. So it's always the question 'where do you come from? Which accent is this?' I don't lie I say, 'OK I'm Nigerian'. 'Wow I hope you're not one of those people who sell drugs or you are not one of those fraudsters!' and all that stuff. After a time I got used to that.

Or as Congolese refugee, Henri puts it:

38. *Carter, Living in a New Country*, 21.
39. E. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

> I have not found work yet, it is linked to a bit of a bad environment I have found here in Cape Town, a kind of masked solidarity of the compatriots where people do not help each other … the compatriots most of them have forgotten something very important, that is 'love thy neighbour'.

This perceived banding together of insiders and outsiders is not only economically motivated, but also ties in with a global fear of the outsider. The events around 9/11 and the subsequent 'war on terror' attest to this mentality and on a local level such mistrust and xenophobia are also apparent. The flip side of such fear is a closer kinship to perceived similarities. So one interviewee describes his identity as follows:

> A white man will die a white man, a black man will die a black man, there will never be a change. I was born Congolese, I will die Congolese. I am not going to die South African. Even if I'm living in South Africa, I will not be a South African. I can walk on the road and look like a South African, but I am not. I am not and I won't be Thabo Mbeki or Bill Clinton. I will never be Jacques Chirac. I will remain what I am. I am a black. I will remain a black. It means that I will never be a South African at all. I will be a Congolese up to my death.

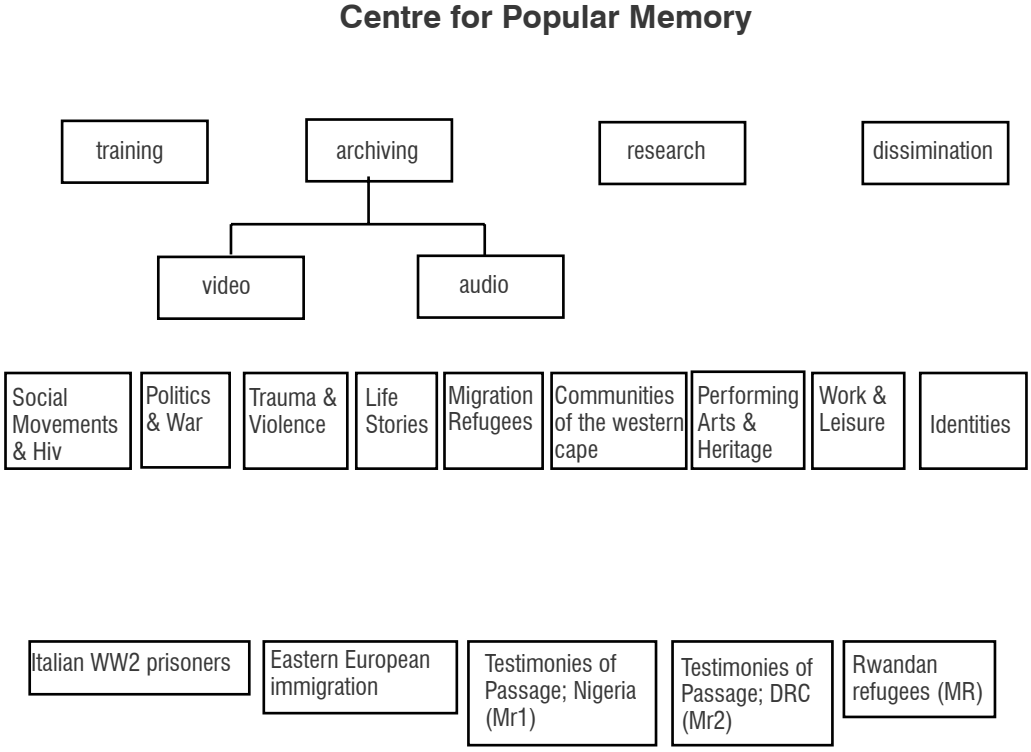
This quote eloquently highlights the fractures and intricacies around belonging and being excluded. For him, there is a strong sense of belonging to a hierarchical identity. Yet ironically it is an identity that separates him.

Sociologist Paul Carter adds an interesting spin on such fixed notions on identity in his suggestion that it becomes even more urgent to develop a framework of thinking that makes the migrant central, not ancillary, to historical process … an authentically migrant perspective would perhaps be based on an intuition that the opposition between here and there is a cultural construction, a consequence of thinking in terms of fixed entities and defining them oppositionally. It might begin by regarding movement not as an awkward interval between fixed points of departure and arrival, but as a mode of being in the world.[40]

This movement away from the binary in terms of identity construction is reminiscent of deliberation around the difficultly of fixed binaries in archival collection topologies[41]. It is not necessarily the rigid conventions or naming that are of primary interest for this discussion, but rather the ordering and accessing of such information. With that in mind, maybe it is in the unravelling on both the structural and conceptual levels that possibilities exist.

If one is to represent the Migration/Testimonies of Passage Collection in another format, for instance as a topological hierarchy, it could look something like this:

40. Carter, *Living in a New Country*.
41. For more on these topics see D. Bearman and J. Trant, 'Unifying our Cultural Memory: Could Electronic Environments Bridge the Historical Accidents that Fragment Cultural Collections?', available online in Information Landscapes for a Learning Society, Networking and the Future of Libraries (1998), www.archimuse.com/papers/ukoln98paper/index.html, accessed 26 May 2008; also T. Cook, 'Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage', paper delivered at the Australian Society of Archivists Conference, 2000; and E. Hallam Smith, 'Lost in Cyberspace: Have Archives a Future?', paper presented at the Australian society of Archivists Conference, 2000.



What an example such as this provides, is a mechanism for seeing what types of collections exist with the CPM audio archive. In this example one can see the logical unfolding – Audio Migration/Refugees, Testimonies of Passage (Mr1 and Mr2). If one takes it a step further one gets information that provides individual catalogue numbers, names and keywords of each interview. A further step will provide all the copyright and technical information regarding each interview.

Yet, while this is all valuable information, it does not address information specific to that interviewee (of course the keywords are helpful but are still standardised and therefore refer to a more generalised topic as opposed to how a particular interviewee dealt with that topic or to what degree it was discussed, and so on). Therefore, if one tried to address such layers of complexity within collections, a table such as the one below might look at certain topics in a different manner.

This table uses a small sample of interviews from Mr1. It quantifiably plots the main topics answered directly in each interview,[42] and could be represented as follows:

42. These themes were tracked by the interviewer, Iyonoyan Iyegun, through her interviews and marked on the transcripts.

	Mr1.26	Mr1.29	Mr1.28	Mr1.15
Home	14	13	15	14
Identity	17	11	15	13
Migration	17	20	18	19
Urbanisation	12	1	7	2
Time	43.19	58.11	68:01	43:13
Questions	102	123	123	123

While such a table gives us certain information about specific topics, namely home/identity/migration/urbanisation – there are countless variables that were alluded to earlier in this paper on the conditions and relations of interviewing. In practical terms, these questions include, for instance in Mr1.29, that migration is directly spoken about in 20 answers (and is the most frequently mentioned topic of the four mapped). The interview lasted just over 58 minutes and the interviewee answered 123 questions. Yet the table cannot help us determine if the information on migration would be useful in a more in depth study. For example that it was conducted by a visiting researcher exploring migration patterns within central Nigeria.

So if one goes to the interview transcript and audio, let us look at a few examples which highlight different nuances and engagements in the experience of migration.

Mr2.29 page 2, begins to map the physical journey taken from Nigeria to South Africa: 'I migrated, if I should say, or should I say I travelled from Enugu to Abuja where I worked before I left Abuja for South Africa …'. On the following page of the same interview the narrator speaks of one of the reasons for leaving Nigeria:

> … But more civilised or advanced countries, you find out that the thing is not going to school, its about developing a talent towards … so that's why I said that Nigeria is not challenging and that is exactly why most people left.

On the same page she then expands on how that perceived hope for improvement through migrating is played out in the country to which she migrated:

> Why I left Nigeria … to improve scale, but unfortunately here in South Africa now the chances are limited. While in South Africa, you realise South Africa is strictly for South Africans. There are no opening of doors for let me say other foreigners, so to say in South Africa. The prime aim of leaving was to see what the outside world looks like. On coming to South Africa, which is much more developed than our place, you still find out that you don't have such chances …

On page 7, this disillusionment then introduces a sense of community or kinship amongst displaced Nigerians: 'I would say we couldn't do without each other because I would say we found each other in a valley of abandonment (here in South Africa), so we are interdependent to a certain extent on each other.

And by page 10 the interviewee reintroduces the direct theme of migration, by suggesting that South Africa is really just a nodal point in a more extended journey of displacement:

> Being a Nigerian, really I want to go back home. If I don't go back home, I will migrate again to Canada. The issue of being in South Africa is just to gain permanent residence; I don't need the South African citizenship for anything. I just want to use here as a base or for an anchor point where I can do business later. Then I can achieve and I don't want to stay for long. That's all.

Of course this is just a small representation of the one interviewee's experience. It does show, though, that the topic level (migration) is only a marker – it does not point to the level of complexity in the interviewee's answer, nor does it reflect other answers which reference the interviewees experience of migration in a more nuanced way such as an allusion to the experience in relation to living in this country, while not directly dealing with migration.

A further level of complexity is added by the inclusion in the collection of Theodore Kamwimbi's interviews with Congolese immigrants to Cape Town. This means that there are now two major blocs of interviewees to speak to the topic from completely different circumstances and positions. To look at one such example I use his discussion with Congolese interviewees about their experience of 'community':

> TK: Would you say in Congo you were living in a Congolese community?
> GT: Yes, that is the difference from here and Congo, I remember in Congo everybody is like you know everybody in everywhere. We were like, you ask your neighbour for salt, I don't think we can do that here. I would say the community in Congo is too close [closer] than it is here in South Africa. Mr2.47, 6 (track counter 15:36;01)
>
> TK: So do you think there is a Congolese community here in Cape Town?
> GT: I am sure there is, but I don't know who these people are. Mr2.47, 8 (track counter 21:42;09)

A similar question posed to another interviewee, Leonard Lukusa, offered a more nuanced understanding of a sense of community in Congo and how that translated in the South African setting:

> TK: …Do you think that while living in Congo, you were living in a Congolese community with your neighbours, your kin?
> LL: Well, when we talk about community we talk about a lot of hidden meaning. Firstly the direct environment in which you live, so that the people that are in your entourage, that is the members of your own family, the people you are acquainted with, the people that are acquainted with you, perhaps the people you work with, the pupils, the students, the workers, your neighbours, people from your neighbourhood, they are all part of the community. Well, any man is called upon to live in the community; nobody can pretend to live outside the community. Mr2.34, 6 (track counter 20:22;02)
>
> TK: Would you say you are living in a Congolese community here in Cape Town?
> LL: Well, to say that I am living in a Congolese community is too much, I live with Congolese people. Mr2.34, 11 (track counter 04:07;05)

A third interviewee, Lisette Kaunda, responded to the question of community by linking community and family in a way that binds individuals together:

> TK: Would you say you lived in a Congolese community when you were in Congo? Can you describe it?

> LK: Because I would say Congolese community is like a family because we help each other. I would say that, as a community as a Congolese community, I would say that your neighbour is not just your neighbour for you he is a brother, he's just a sister, is like a mother, a father … you cannot just pass by as your neighbour as you don't know each other, you can greet, you can go and visit, it is like a family. Whoever is around you, he is your family because when ever you get into trouble it is just your neighbour who will come and assist you or come and help you. Mr2.50, 10 (track counter 04:01;02)

In the Nigerian examples on migration and Congolese examples about community, one begins to see both similarities and differences in perceptions of community. These three interviewees responded that a sense of community in Congo was prevalent and in South Africa they have not experienced such a deep sense of the same identity. A key point of engagement within the nuances of each interview is the manner in which one can plot how that sense of community is experienced individually and plays itself out in collective constructions.

Once again differing levels of information are gleaned through different methods. Engaging with the audio and transcript, gives us contextual and direct information around actual relevance of the theme to the greater narrative. Of course this engages with an interpretative approach to using audio and transcripts. Yet the exploration remains around mapping information archivally, where such constructions and developments of themes are brought to the fore – in a manner that can reflect the inherent complexity within interviews and collections as briefly explored above.

The more users understand the constructions and junctures that exist within archival collections, the better. The suggestion that interviews are reconstructions of past events, and that those representations are affected by time and place remains key. In this case, the narratives discussed above were gathered at a particular point in time, namely in 2004 in South Africa. That information tells us by association a number of things – interviewees were all removed from their home country and were speaking from a context of a foreigner within another African country that had a specific relation to them as refugees on a political level, and possibly posed a degree of threat on a personal level.

This shaping affects the type of information accessed. The fact that interviewers were respectively of Nigerian or Congolese decent was useful in terms of language/mother tongue and understanding of place and politics – yet, as mentioned, there is a specific power relation between interviewer and interviewee and in this case there was a further power relation in that many of the people interviewed were in this country illegally. Hence there was an added fear of being deported or not being eligible for the necessary status required to remain in South Africa.

Oral history interviews have the potential to explore such layerings. Not only is the content layered in the generation of spoken and implied meaning, but the possibility of exploring their complexity and nuances over a collection becomes a potent and useful research tool.

From within the oral history archive this can be represented in a number of ways. An incredibly simple starting point is including information on the way the interviews were gathered, the purpose and outline of circumstances within the collections' description. This is not theoretically unusual within an oral history archive – yet I would argue, needs to be more rigorously implemented within the interview gathering and archival phases, as all too often such valuable information does not come to the fore when users are seeking out recordings within the AV archive.

Secondly, as mentioned earlier, political situation can have specific effect on the engagement with interviews, as geographical references with regard to ethnic prejudice and sense of

community are highlighted in such, possibly non-spoken, information. Although a thorough researcher would have knowledge of the impact that these may have on interviews, I believe it is also the responsibility of the archive and archivist to maintain such information, that might well influence the reading and hearing of interviews, within the archival structure.

These inclusions in available archival information may seem like additions in terms of subjectivity and collections management procedure. But they are coupled with archivists and users having an understanding of the nuances of meaning, layered within collections and interviews over time and affected by both institutional and political memory. If such acknowledgement comes from a rigorous position of reading oral history archival interviews from the praxis of understanding the constructions of the archive (not just the interview dynamics and oral history process) it can only provide a more meaningful and layered approach with a more nuanced and complex outcome.

In Conclusion

It is not the need for an alternative form of archival organisation that is discussed in this article, but rather an acknowledgement and exploration of that juncture between archival structure and empirical context – and an unpacking of how such an unconscious organisation can be brought to the fore with archival structure in mind. While the researcher can reorganise and 'mine' information across collections and even archives, the point is how the fluidity within collections can be acknowledged from within the archive (internally) as well as placed upon (externally) the archival narrative by the researcher.

Notions such as community, home and the play between individual and collective remembering within oral history archival sources will continue to alter as time passes. Generational shifts as well as changes in both physical and virtual socio-political boundaries continue to effect and alter the reading of archival collections. As mentioned previously, Pierre Nora's concept of a 'differentiated network' and Paul Carter's idea of something 'not being an awkward interval between two points', mark possibilities of such a network of archival information.

Such a relationship, using the examples from above, need not question or alter the naming categories of archival registers, but rather encourages an examination of the underpinning of information management. In such networks the archival user has access to topological information, yet this does not hierarchically overlay searches for information thematically, organically, or even randomly. The rigid archival system then, is not compromised, but the underlying (non formal) structure accommodates exploration of material, which can highlight constructions of categories and across multiple formats and collections. It also allows dynamic interplay between the narratives, user and collections. So, while audio-visual archival material has both physical and virtual attributes, archival classification does not prevent an infinite number of possibilities existing for 'reading' the material while it is still contained in a structured framework.

This interplay then relies on the active engagement of the researcher or archival user but also the archivist or archival structure. This includes a responsibility to conceptually plot ways through the memory traces of people's stories. In doing so, the audio-visual archive opens up ways for researchers to both make use of the archive in conceptually more complex ways and to do justice to the fluidity and collective constructions of meaning in and around oral history narratives in such archives.

References

Bearman, D. and Trant, J., 'Unifying our Cultural Memory: Could Electronic Environments Bridge the Historical Accidents that Fragment Cultural Collections?', available online in *Information Landscapes for a Learning Society, Networking and the Future of Libraries* (1998), www.archimuse.com/papers/ukoln98paper/index.html, accessed 26 May 2008.

Bradley, K., *Guidelines for the Production and Preservation of Digital Audio Objects* (Johannesburg: IASA, 2004).

Carter, P., *Living in A New Country*: *History, Travelling and Language* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

Cohen, R., *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Cook, M. and Procter, M., *Manual of Archival Description* (Aldershot: Gower, 2000).

Cook, T., 'Beyond the Screen: The Records Continuum and Archival Cultural Heritage'. Paper delivered at the Australian Society of Archivists Conference, 2000.

Edmondson, R., *Audiovisual Archiving: Philosophy and Principles* (Paris: UNESCO, 2004).

Foucault, M., *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1970).

Hall, S., 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in J. Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture and Difference* (London: Routledge, 1990).

Hallam Smith, E., 'Lost in Cyberspace: Have Archives a Future?' Paper presented at the Australian society of Archivists Conference, 2000.

Harries, P., *Work, Culture and Identity: Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa c 1860–1910* (London: Heinemann, 1994).

Harrison, H., ed., *Audio Visual Archives: a Practical Reader* (Paris: UNESCO, 1997).

Lissonnet, S. and Nevile, L., 'The Development of a Metadata Application Profile to Facilitate the Repatriation of Cultural Resources to Quinkan Country', in L. Stillman and G. Johanson, eds, *Constructing and Sharing Memory: Community Informatics, Identity and Empowerment* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007) 146–56.

Masande, I., 'Where is Home? Transnational Migration and Identity amongst Nigerians in Cape Town', in S. Field, R. Meyer and F. Swanson, *Imagining the City: Memories and Cultures in Cape Town* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), 93–111.

McDonald, D., ed., *On Borders: Perspectives on International Migration in Southern Africa* (Ontario: St Martin's Press, 2000).

Meyer, R. and Swanson, F., eds, *Testimonies of Passage: Congolese and Nigerian Migration and Identity in Cape Town* (Cape Town: Centre for Popular History, 2004).

Muller, S., Feith, J., Fruin, R., eds, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives* (New York: H.W Wilson, 1968).

Nora, P., 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, 26 (Spring 1989), 7–24.

Passerini, L., *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

Portelli, A., *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

Said, E., *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

Samuel, R. and Thompson, P., eds, *The Myths We Live By* (London: Routledge, 1990).

Thomson, A., 'Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History', *The Journal of American History*, 85, 2 (September 1998), 581–95.

Walch, V., ed., *Standards for Archival Description: A Handbook* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1994).