

# **Documenting the undocumented: A conduit memoir for archival practice**

**Paper presented at the Archival Conference on guarding  
against collective amnesia: is there a role for records and  
archives?**

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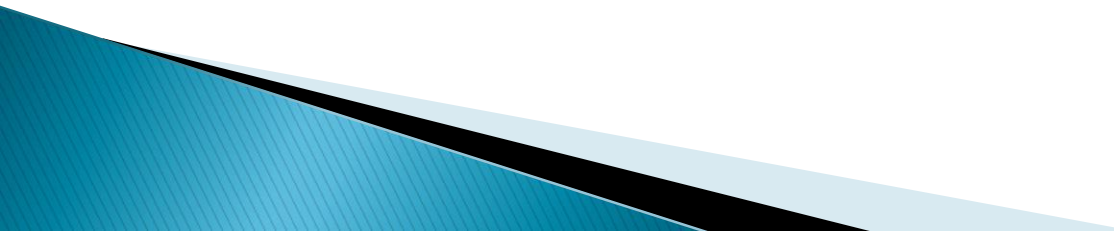


# **Introductory knowledge claim**

**There is still wealth of indigenous knowledge that is still embedded in many indigenous communities and still informs their cultural practice.**

**The status and relevance of indigenous knowledge is still rarely recognized in the face of the non-indigenous persons.**

**Although much has been said about the value of indigenous knowledge, there is little codification of such fundamental knowledge, which has been a living authority in African philosophy of life (bush philosophy), astronomy, teaching, medicine, religion and in social institutions**



# **Introductory knowledge claim cont.**

**With paucity of collective intelligence in respect of indigenous knowledge and practices, the paper advocates for a constructivist role of guarding against collective amnesia and propagates hands on suggestions on documentation and resuscitation of the diminishing African knowledge which is in abundance and thus transforming and commercializing the perceived native knowledge which was deliberately neglected and purposefully eroded through colonialism and assimilation (my assumption)**

**The blame on non-documenting these memoir could possibly be put right on the doorsteps of intellectual activists and the archivists whose purpose is to gather, store and make such information accessible for generations to come**

# What is Indigenous knowledge?

**“a degree of holism, ability to see and understand things in their interconnectedness and independence, the entirety of the intellectual and cultural heritage of a group of indigenous people that shapes their distinct identity, is preserved and developed through transmitting from generations to generations in their own distinct ways and is pertaining to and evolving in a distinct physical space”**

**Khamaganova (2005).**



# **Indigenous records and archives**

**In the past, South Africans, however unrecognizable they may have been, did create their own gallery of records or informal historical documentation in the form of rock art. The major communication and information they provided was about their way of life, their history, their heritage.**

**Today, we need to document indigenous knowledge (and not let it hang and dry) and to allow the remaining elders to pass down knowledge to young generations and build capacity within communities to share and manage their traditional knowledge (Green, Billy and Tapin, 2010)**



# **Role of indigenous knowledge to socio-economic and cultural development**

**The United Nations Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage recognizes the importance role of communities and organizations, in particular indigenous communities in promoting indigenous knowledge**

**Indigenous knowledge can be easily blended with modern knowledge system, particularly in the areas of medication/pharmaceuticals to create economic value.**

**e.g. Credo Mutwa – drought, "I see Mbeki battling a buffalo"  
& Indigenous India toothpaste , 'etu HF Verwoerdbayonet hanging over his head, Nontetho, and Mandela in1930 , Inkuliselani & Modjadji village rain crop dance, science and missionaries**

# **Role of indigenous knowledge to socio-economic and cultural development**

***Indegenous stories of Lemba (the black Jews) people in the Venda and Matangare have learnt and lived with since the ancient Rozwi dynasty need to be documented***

**Mapungubwe, the trade confluence**

**The problem though = strict cultural protocol / deliberate restrictions (use people from within)**

# Lessons for South Africa

**Harness our cultural heritage for social and economic development by establishing cultural villages and centres for the development of indigenous knowledge,**

**Need for the recovery of African knowledge through programs that are aimed at codifying and filing of knowledge. By this, we shall be advancing and re-affirming African heritage, and values,**

**Organized tribal dances to spur and spark interest and catch visitors imagination like it is done in the *Mmangwane* cultural group in Botswana and what has happened during the 2010 world cup,**

- ▶ **Institutions of learning as vanguards for the perceived backwards indigenous knowledge,**



# Lessons for South Africa, cont

**Documenting some observations and place with indigenous heritage to develop a better understanding of communities and for the purpose of cultural maintenance,**

**Regularly explore the success or failure of strategies to enhance, record and document indigenous knowledge,**

**Universities and other institutions need to assist in the research and integration of indigenous knowledge and incorporation in the media centres**

# Reawakening the spirit of indigenous knowledge

**The post 1994 pedagogy should bring together the ‘victim and the perpetrator’ to an open classroom story as it is assumed they are both not distant and objective pedagogues floating above the socio-cultural divide. That said, the perpetrator who holds resources such as record facilities that would harvest the indigenous knowledge from the victims needs to extend a hand in bringing to life the value of indigenous knowledge. The victim should do the same. There is a need to hear views from cultural institutions such as *kgoro* and *koma* on ways to strengthen, capture, promote and support indigenous knowledge**

NB.. Don't be afraid, worry about the vast ‘holocaust’ of un-captured indigenous knowledge that lies within the ailing and frail generation.

# Is Modernity a strangler or/and a stranglehold ?

**Moeletsi Mbeki (2011) contest that there is nothing mysterious about why Africa is the least developed continent, poor and with most unhealthy people in the world, yet with rich knowledge.**

**He does not attribute these problems only to the feeble post-independent leadership that fails to see the cause of their unfortunate situation, but also to colonial and often toxic nature of modernization that failed to recognize documenting indigenous knowledge.**

**To advance and advocate African knowledge through documentations, not only the dominant political elites is the determinant.**

# The road ahead

**As carriers of indigenous knowledge, records centres need to be vigilant, organize and capture instances and any other celebrations that capture indigenous knowledge.**

**We need a workable collaboration between governments, academic institutions and communities to combine their respective strength and expertise to achieve the goal of restoring our indigenous knowledge.**

**Our individual elders, who are often referred to as 'living national treasures' or repositories of untapped, enormous intellectual and philosophical knowledge need to be identified and engaged**

# Conclusion

***Thus, the purpose of this article is to appreciate and treasure the layers and layers of African indigenous knowledge through documenting the undocumented to avoid collective amnesia, an engagement with and by archival community, and a conduit for more archival practice.***

**Traditional knowledge of indigenous people is an important contribution to the growth of civilization and mankind**

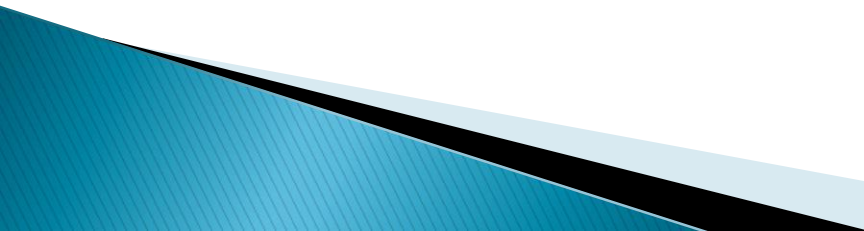
**There is a need to document indigenous knowledge as an integral and valuable part of culture and heritage in South Africa**

# conclusion

**what is still glaring is that indigenous knowledge has not been given the value and status it deserves.**

**Need to promote research and partner with communities to maximize the harvesting of indigenous knowledge by documenting the undocumented in order to guard against collective amnesia. The entire document appeals that it is not too late and that it is in our collective capabilities.**

**Acute social dislocation of native knowledge by the ravages of the ideological mill which collapsed and gradually rendered native knowledge as a minuscule, traditional, unconventional, underdeveloped, often regarded as inferior and insignificant in the modern times.**



**THANK YOU**