

Archives without archives: a window of opportunity to build an inclusive archive in South Africa

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Abstract

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa provides a framework for developing an archival system in the country. The Constitution requires the devolution of the state's responsibility for archives from national government to the country's nine provinces. In terms of Schedule 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa "archives other than national archives are a functional area of exclusive provincial competence". By virtue of this provision, each province is required to promulgate its own Act on archives and records services, as well as establish and maintain its own archival infrastructure. Although almost all nine provinces have enacted their own archival legislation and established archival infrastructure, some of these repositories are 'empty shells' without archival holdings. This study suggests how archives repositories in South Africa can turn the situation of 'empty archives' into a window of opportunity to build inclusive archival holdings that reflect the diversity of South Africa as a rainbow nation. This in turn will help to bridge the gap that exists in the national archives repository in South Africa, as the holdings mostly reflect the records of colonial and apartheid governments. The study suggests that as some of these repositories are situated in previously marginalised communities, the archival holdings should embrace the voices of such community, which in turn will promote the usage of archives. One way of building an inclusive archive is through embarking on a national oral history project that adopts the model of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Furthermore, the South African government should consider developing a policy on inter-repository repatriation of archives to the communities about which they were created. It is concluded that failure to address the situation of 'archives without archives' will render these repositories white elephants and empty vessels.

Key words: archives repository, provincial archives, archives, South Africa, archival legislation

1. Introduction

In the introductory lines of his classical novel, *Megokgo ya bjoko*¹, Matsepe (1968) reckons that "we long to live yet we complain about life. We long to govern yet we complain about governing. We long for progress yet we complain about progressing". These words resonate well with a cry from the archival community in South Africa. For a long time, scholars and archival activists in South Africa lamented about archives repositories that are characterized by low usage, lack of skills, infrastructure, and recognition by authorities. For example, in a dialogue with Sello Hatang, Verne Harris argues that even when presented with a powerful opportunity to transform, refigure, and re-imagine archives, the practice in South Africa is still shaped and sharpened by the Western foundation (Harris & Hatang 2000). Seventeen years later, Harris' words still ring true as the status quo remains the same. The Western way of understanding the archives continued to be given more space to develop in South Africa, while the indigenous way is not given even a sliver of attention. Where it is given attention, it is

¹ Northern Sotho language in South Africa meaning 'tears of the brain'.

common to see archivists with tape recorders undertaking oral history projects in both random and structured modes, which Harris (2014) considers profoundly problematic in relation to voice and power. Furthermore, such projects cover only elite members of society perpetuating a notion that the stories that are worth telling and recording are for those in power. This is compounded by the fact that some provincial archives conduct disparate oral history projects each year that are not guided by national agenda or collection policy. Such projects are often conceptualised to meet the immediate needs (Archival Platform 2015). As things stand, the only archives of any note in South Africa are those of the various former colonies, the Boer republics and, after 1910, the Union Government of South Africa (Conradie 2012). Just like in Australia, the public domain has not been accommodating to indigenous models of knowledge production (Christen 2011:189). As a result, users of these archives in South Africa are mainly what Conradie (2012) calls an 'old boys' club' comprising mainly male Afrikaner genealogical researchers. This is so because archival holdings in South African archives repositories do not reflect the diversity of the nation but mostly the interests of those who were previously in power (Harris 2007a). As a result, the users of such archives are mostly the beneficiaries of apartheid and colonial governments.

With the dawn of democracy, the archival scene in South Africa was supposed to transform and reflect the diversity of the country, but it is still mainly the Western-dominated global mainstream. True to the assertion of Ketelaar (1992:5), the cruel paradox in many revolutions is that what is left after the revolution resembles the past. In other words, the more things change, the more they remain the same. This has also been the case with the archival landscape in South Africa. One way of redressing this imbalance is through restructuring services at a local level closer to the people. In South Africa, opportunity to transform the archival system has been presented in the past but missed (Harris 2007b) and continued to be missed by the archival communities (Ngoepe 2011). As a result, transformation is curtailed to skin colour by hiring more and more black people in the archives arena instead of transforming archival holdings and access. The only result of this was that fewer people make use of the archives repositories, as the holdings do not reflect the diversity of South African cultures but only the interests of some, hence Harris (2014) contends that, 20 years into democracy, we (South Africans) are struggling to come to terms with the past as a result the past has reckoned with us.

Indeed, public archives in South Africa have been unable to transform themselves into active documenters of society and thereby fail to fulfil their mandate of collecting non-public records with enduring value of national significance and to document aspects of the nation's experience neglected by archives repositories in the past (Archival Platform 2015). This mandate positions archives to play an important role in redress, transformation, and knowledge production. As argued earlier, one way of redressing the situation is through capturing of oral history that is relevant to the ordinary people. However, documentation of history of marginalized communities is almost non-existent and in cases where it does exist, it has many inaccuracies as it is recorded from the coloniser's perspective or in a problematic way. In 2001, the Government of South Africa introduced the National Oral History Programme (NOHP) and the Oral History Association of South Africa (OHASA) was established in 2003, as well as the National Register of Oral Sources (NAROS) which was meant to fill the gaps in archival institutions that were brought about by colonisation and apartheid by offering alternative narratives (Archival Platform 2015). The programme was aimed at transforming the holdings of archival institutions. However, as Archival Platform (2015) would attest, the degree to which the intentions of bridging the gaps has been met is a matter of debate, as the products of the project are not accessible to the citizen. Some of the tapes emanating from the project are stored

in the boxes at the National Film, Video and Sound Archives (NFVSA), a subsidiary of the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (NARSSA). Eventually these tapes would be obsolete and unreadable. As a result, all the efforts of producing such records would be in vain.

In South Africa, prior to 1994, records reflected the colonial and apartheid government; hence, 1652 is stated as the beginning of South African history with the landing of Jan van Riebeeck at the Cape. The current archival records preserved in South Africa's mainstream archives largely consist of documents that were generated after the arrival of the Europeans in this part of the world. These records, which are stored in archival repositories, mostly in paper and microfilm formats, reflect very little about the indigenous communities (Ngoepe & Setumu 2016). Therefore, it is important that the lives of ordinary people should be documented. This will also help to close the gap that exists in terms of archival holdings in public archival repositories, which reflect mostly white privilege. Oral source is an important part of recreation and rethinking of the past, especially to those who had never had an opportunity in the past (Hatang 2000). This study presents how archives repositories in South Africa can utilise a window of opportunity offered by newly established 'empty archives' to build inclusive archival holdings that reflect the diversity of South Africa as a rainbow nation. This in turn will help the repositories that are currently under-utilised to attract a new set of users. In order to put things into perspective, the background to archival system in South Africa is first provided.

2. Archival system in South Africa

Even though South Africa has a rich history of archives dating back to the era of the Dutch East India Company (1652-1795), the First British Occupation (1795-1803), the Batavian Republic (1803-1806), the Second British Occupation (1803-1909) and the Union of South Africa (1910), the current archival system was conceptualised in the early 1990s during the Convention for a Democratic South Africa negotiation process just before the first democratic elections (Ngoepe 2008; 2016). South Africa has been a site of contested power for much of its long and complex history, and while a detailed review of this past is outside the scope of this background, it is within the context of colonisation, apartheid and, most recently, a democratic government, that the public archives of South Africa exist. What is of direct relation to this review is the history of archival systems and, naturally, this is inextricably bound to the governmental, societal and political factors of the time.

Historically, South Africa had a unified system of public records administration since its creation in terms of the first archival legislation in 1922, within which physical decentralisation at provincial level was accommodated (Ngoepe 2008; Ngulube 2003). Since its inception, the national archives operated under the mandate of providing custody for all central and provincial government records. It was only after the passing of the 1962 Archives Act that "the State Archives Service developed a significant records management capacity sustained by wide-ranging regulative powers." (Harris 1996:8). The archival services during this time were necessarily linked to the apartheid government, creating rifts between South African archival practice and the international community, as well as within South Africa as resistance to apartheid grew (Harris 1996:3). Until the 1980s, this service was highly centralised, with its head office in Pretoria and archives repositories in old provincial capitals (Transvaal, Orange Free State, Natal and Cape Colony).

With the dissolution of the apartheid government in 1994, the South African government adopted the new Constitution in 1996 and with it promulgated the National Archives and

Records Service Act (No. 43 of 1996). The basis for establishing a new archives and records management system for South Africa was provided for in Schedule 5 by the 1996 Constitution, which stated that ‘archives other than national archives are a functional area of provincial competence’. By virtue of this provision, each province should promulgate its own Act on archives and records service and should establish and maintain its own archival infrastructure. The Constitution requires the devolution of the state’s responsibility for archives from central government to the country’s nine provinces. However, provinces are not autonomous to work independent from the national archives. To ensure a coherent and compatible archives system, the National Archives and Records Service Act contains specific provisions that impact on the archival and records management services delivered by provincial archival services. For example, section 3(g) provides for the National Archives and Records Service to assist, support, set standards for and provide professional guidelines to provincial archives services. Flowing from this, the National Archives and Records Service determines the broad archives policy framework within which the provincial archives services operate. In this regard, the NARSSA is imbued with the ability to “assist, support, set standards for and provide professional guidelines to provincial archives services.” (Ngoepe & Saurombe, 2016:33). Therefore, the system comprises NARSSA, the National Advisory Council of the National Archives and the nine provincial archives structures with their advisory councils. This archival system framework is provided by South Africa’s constitution.

In the implementation of schedule five of the Constitution, South Africa is witnessing the opening of new repositories. As observed by Ngoepe and Keakopa (2011:157), each province developed its own archival system based on the national one, resulting in ten dissimilar archival and records systems. Some archives repositories are well equipped and inherited their archival infrastructure from the previous dispensation, for example, KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Archives, Free State and Western Cape Provincial Archives, while others did not inherit any or inherited dilapidated Bantustans archival buildings, for example, Limpopo Province and Eastern Cape Province inherited dilapidated buildings while Mpumalanga, Northern Cape and North West did not inherit any archival building. Some provinces have recently built archive purpose buildings, for example, Mpumalanga Provincial Archives, Limpopo Provincial Archives, Northern Cape Archives, North West Archives and Gauteng Provincial Archives. While most of the new provincial archives repositories are situated in cities, the Gauteng Provincial Archives is built in a township and is closer to the previously marginalised. The national archives and all provincial archives in South Africa are subsidiary directorates within arts and culture departments. As a result, the archival system in South Africa consists of ten distinctive, independent yet interrelated entities. The eleventh element is the NFVSA, which is a sub-directorate within NARSSA. The archival system in South Africa is not without problems.

A two-year investigation by Archival Platform (2015) yielded a comprehensive report which details a dysfunction and distress in the state’s archives and record-keeping across a wide variety of sectors, from local government records to historical archives. This has serious implications for a range of essential processes in South Africa that depend on records, such as land claims, local governance, infrastructure development and corruption prevention. The report also notes the disappearance of important historical documents and a disintegration of many existing archives (Archival Platform 2015). Harris (2007) blew the whistle on the sanitation of records by the apartheid government that started from 1978 up to 1993. This is also detailed in Volume 1 of Chapter 8 of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). For example, in 1978 the then prime minister authorised government-wide

guidelines for the routine destruction of records. The tape recordings of a meeting between Nelson Mandela and PW Botha were also destroyed in 1991 (Harris 2007c; 2007d). The South African Cabinet approved guidelines for government offices to destroy sensitive state records in 1993, on the eve of democratic elections. Other records such as the Rivonia trial (the trial that convicted Nelson Mandela and his co-accused to life imprisonment on Robben Island) and the files of Percy Yutar (state prosecutor at the Rivonia trial) ended up on the black market in the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, some of these records were later brought to South Africa through the intervention of the Oppenheimer family in 2009. The mass destruction of records has had a severe impact on the country's memory and could have contributed to shortage of archives in some archives repositories. Any attempt to reconstruct the past must involve the recovery of this memory (Harris 2007d).

The problem is compounded by the fact that public archives in South Africa were mandated to take on new functions such as monitoring government record-keeping, documenting neglected histories of the previously marginalised population and the preservation of digital records without adequate provision being made for the additional resources required. The implication of these problems is that transfer of records of the new democratic government to repositories has not happened. This is despite the fact that it has been more than 20 years since the dawn of democracy in South Africa. Archival legislation in South Africa requires that records of enduring value should be transferred to archives repository after a period of 20 years. As a result, some newly built archives are 'empty shells' without archives. Those that are full, still reflect only the holdings of colonial and apartheid archives, hence archives remain largely the domain of elites and only benefit a few members of the country. Furthermore, the number of visitors to archives repository is low (Archival Platform 2015; Ngoepe & Ngulube 2011). Citizens do not know about archives, they consider them irrelevant, often because they are tainted by their colonial and apartheid past, and they are difficult and sometimes impossible to access. This is so because collections during apartheid skirted huge areas of South African experience, such as the lives of black people. This situation needs to be transformed so that archives can be used by the people and, as Ketelaar (1992) reckons, "become archives of the people for the people by the people". Indeed, citizens will only use archives when they are made accessible and when they are considered relevant to them. This can be done by documenting the voices and experiences of those who were excluded in prior regimes and take archives to the people through public programmes.

3. Cracks in the holdings

In South Africa, archives have been kept in obscurity deliberately as the result of the machinations of the colonial and apartheid administrations. The collection policies were lopsided and did not reflect the demographic makeup of the country. As a result, the existing archival holdings inherited from the previous dispensation do not reflect the diversity of the country. The Constitutional devolution of archives other than national archives to the provinces has also resulted in huge inequities in provincial repositories. For example, some new provincial repositories are 'empty shells' with no archival holdings while others are not functioning whatsoever. For those functioning, the level of functionality varies, with facilities that formed part of the pre-1994 state archives (the NARSSA, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape) performing better than the newly established ones (Gauteng, Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape and North West) (Archival Platform 2015). One of the contributing factors to poor functioning of the archival institutions in South Africa is that national and provincial archives legislation was never costed despite the huge mandate placed upon the institutions (Archival Platform 2015). For example, in an informetric analysis,

Onyancha (2016:47) reports that the budget for archival services in South Africa is woeful as out of R1,13634 trillion appropriated by South Africa's National Revenue Fund in 2014/15, only R3,5 billion (accounting for only 0.31%) was allocated to the Ministry of Arts and Culture under which the information services (e.g., archives and libraries) fall. In the 2015/16 financial year, the budget for the Department of Arts and Culture was R3,9 billion, which was distributed as follows: Administration (R244,0 million), institutional governance (R424,1 million), arts and culture promotion and development (R1,1 billion) and heritage promotion and preservation (R2,2 billion) with less than 2.7% allocated to archival service. As a result, most of the budget allocated to the archives service goes into salaries and training leaving very little for implementing line function activities. The archival system in South Africa is at risk of not being able to deliver on its mandate due to a lack of resources. The severe under-sourcing of NARSSA, together with the slow development of provincial services, lack of skills and high turnover are challenges that resulted in public archives not being able to implement their mandates (Archival Platform 2015). The resources of the archives system in South Africa are inadequate to execute the mandate both in terms of level (as they are units within government departments) and capacity (lack of manpower and skills). As a result, it has proven impossible in these circumstances for archives services to retain staff after training and therefore the remaining skilled staff members are becoming fewer.

Even while presented with a window of opportunity, Archival Platform (2015) concludes that "generally public archives in South Africa have been unable to transform themselves into active documenters of society, nor to fulfil their mandated role of co-ordinating and setting standards across sectors." In one of the newly established repositories, records were collected from the previous Bantustan government unclassified with no clear provenance and lost archival bond as records were mixed from various departments. Such records have lost their 'recordness' and are therefore good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot.

As indicated earlier, apartheid-era patterns of archival use and accessibility have proven resilient. As Ketelaar (1992:5) would attest, the cruel paradox in many revolutions is that what is left after the fight so much resembles the past. This is true to the South African situation as Archival Platform's analysis reveals a national archival system that looks like something from the past. After 20 years of democratisation and transformation, the system still reflects the 1980s State Archives Service and its Bantustan subsidiaries (Harris 2014). Archives remain the domain of elites and do very little outreach, and only a fraction of the holdings are accessible online. Hence, Katuu (2007) contends that public archives in South Africa are at a crossroad. In such a situation, archivists are deliberating whether to take 'the narrow or the wide road', not knowing which leads to destruction or redemption. Indeed, today the national archival system is in trouble as the dream of the 1990s is evaporating like dew when the summer sun rises. According to Harris (2014), this is despite the work of many courageous and dedicated archival professionals who do not get support from politicians.

Archives are supposed to reflect the society in which we live. However, in South Africa, archives reveal the historical biases of colonialism and apartheid (Callinicos & Odendaal 1996:34). Apartheid grossly distorted the acquisition of records and access to records. Indeed, archives were part of the broader system which negated the experience of black South Africans. For example, in a letter to the editor of *Sowetan Newspaper*, Ngoepe (2009) laments of the continuing eroding of black people's memory by removing their names in the recordings and thereby perpetuating the apartheid style of marginalising them (blacks). This was in response to an article that failed to identify Mbuyiswa Makhuba, but that merely referred to him as a fellow student. Ngoepe (2009) makes reference to photographs of South African soldiers in the

custody of the Cape Town Archives Repository, where white soldiers are identified by names while black soldiers are only identified as ‘unidentified black soldiers.’

Harris (2002:77) questions the exclusion of indigenous ways of knowing in the archival discourse in South Africa, as well as in African countries in general. This may be one of the factors why archives are not utilised by black South Africans. The only issue of African ways of knowing that has been integrated into the Western dominant archival discourse in South Africa is the role of oral history in indigenous cultures. However, in public archives it is often seen as of secondary importance to records and may even be seen as a factor working against the practices of good record-keeping (Archival Platform 2015). Unfortunately, oral history products are often under-utilised or tucked away in a dark archive, accessible only to researchers, as is the case with the National Film, Video and Sound Archives (NFVSA). The oral history that has been captured since early 2000s is tucked away in tapes in the boxes at the NFVSA with no one to access them or being aware of their existence. As the agency of the state, public archives mirror political and administrative changes. But this is not the case in the current archiving system. In South Africa, it was initially shaped by colonial administrative and later the apartheid government. Even records of important events that took place after 1994 such as the All Africa Games (1999), Rugby World Cup (1996) and the FIFA World Cup (2010) are fragmented and their whereabouts are unknown. Such records can also offer opportunity to transform ‘empty vessels’ into window of opportunity to build inclusive archives.

4. Transforming ‘empty vessels’ into window of opportunity

Verne Harris has written much about the need for archival transformation in South Africa in an abstract and complex way. He provides an odyssey of archival transformation discourse in South Africa from the 1800s to 2000s. Harris (2014) indicates that much good archival work was done systematically through the 1990s, but the hopes of that period have not been realised. However, he emphasises that discourse and archival legislation do not translate into delivery of services.

The dawn of democracy in South Africa heralded a time of an invigorating transformation discourse in all spheres of life, which also affected the archival arena. Unfortunately, the political developments of South Africa since the general election of 2009 have downplayed the role of archives in the democratization process as more focus is placed on corruption and lack of leadership at all government levels (Kilki 2013) as issues such as archives are now neglected. Naturally, this has an impact on public archives, which, according to many sources, are in a state of crisis due to several factors. For example, there is a dearth of archival education and consequently of trained professionals, as well as a serious lack of proper storage facilities for paper records and a strategy for managing and preserving digital records in South Africa (Ngoepe & Katuu 2017; Katuu & Ngoepe 2015; Ngoepe 2017). Furthermore, as reported by Archival Platform (2015), archives repositories in South Africa are only used by a few elite members of society while ordinary people are not aware of the existence of such institutions.

One of the rhetoric slogans in the transformation of archives in South Africa had been to ‘take archives to the people’ and the need to transform public archives from a domain of elite into a community resource (Harris 2002:81). In the early days of democracy, this slogan was expressed in the view that the shaping power of archives should be harnessed to promote archives as a tool for reconciliation, social cohesion, and nation building (Harris 1996:16). Due to limited funding, the euphoria around the slogan has been diminishing, as little action is taken.

However, a project by the University of South Africa on ‘taking archives to the people’ (2014-2018), in partnership with NARSSA and all nine archives repositories, is trying to resuscitate the slogan. This project has developed a strategy on public programming to be implemented by all public repositories in South Africa (Ngoepe, Ngulube, Saurombe & Chaterera 2015). The results of these projects are yet to be realised as it is in the implementation stage.

Given the high levels of illiteracy in Africa, orality is the medium in which most people express themselves. As Hatang (2000:28) argues, orality can be collected as a record. In this regard, NFVSA would be able to fulfil the mandate as a national repository and promoter of audio-visual materials by recording those who have been out of the archives. Oral history should be seen as key, but not exclusive, sources in the project of documenting history and heritage (Neuschäfer 2008; Ngoepe & Setumu 2016). Oral history is not a panacea for addressing historical distortions and exclusion of African voices but can play a pivotal role in reclaiming and preserving our heritage (Mosweu 2011). The space for the indigenous way of knowing archives is not yet closed. In almost every way, the new archives repositories have missed the opportunity to position themselves. This article provides a number of interrelated ways to redress colonial and apartheid imbalances, as well as transforming ‘empty vessels’ into windows of opportunity to build an inclusive archive that can be used by all South Africans.

‘Archives without archives’ provide a window of opportunity to transform and build a more inclusive archive in South Africa. Because all citizens need access to archives and records to understand the past, hold government to account in the present, plan for the future and address the inequities of the past, ‘archives without archives’ can fill the identified gap with oral histories of ordinary people (Hatang 2002). In this regard, rather than the usual way of conducting oral history, a national history project that takes the form of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission can be established with qualified practitioners that include archivists, oral historians, media personalities, lawyers, and auditors. This could be in the form of a commission conducting hearings in all provinces in South Africa. The target could be ordinary people rather than elite members of society. People could make submissions on any topic ranging from sport, traditional medicine, astrology, food, and way of living. It should be noted that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission extensively used oral history as a source of information, as well as the South African Democratic Trust (SADET) which compiled volumes on anti-apartheid political struggles, decade by decade, commencing with the 1960s (Field 2008:181). Once such piece of information is documented and Hatang (2000) advises that archivists should cross-refer in the finding aids that the story in the archives is not the only narrative, but also attributes to the source, which is the narrator.

Furthermore, the creation of a new, all-inclusive archival model could include the following: establishment of the municipal archives services that bring services closer to the people as municipalities are the coal face of service delivery, redefining a “public record” to include records generated by traditional authorities, a functional disposal programme that focuses on the collection of archival records generated by the democratic government since 1994 and involvement of the public in the appraisal of records. Eurocentric appraisal policy had resulted in the loss of material relating to the history of black South Africans (Archival Platform 2015:29). As Ketelaar (1992:15) indicates, transforming archives into archives of the people, by the people, for the people is only possible when we know our people, listen to them and serve them. In this regard, their stories should be captured.

Integrating community archives into the mainstream archival system is another way of building an inclusive archives in South Africa. As archival legislation makes provision for non-public

archives, community archives can be incorporated into the national archival system. There are a number of best practice community archives in South Africa even though they are operating in fragmented silos. For example, Molobje (2014) reports of the successful implementation of digital archives for the Royal Bafokeng community in the North West province of South Africa. In this project, elderly community members who could relate the memories were used as the sources for information on the history of the Bafokeng tribe. After collecting the history, the products were digitised and made available online. The digital collection consists of materials that were solicited from personal collections, such as family albums and letters. The other best practice community archives reported by Setumu (2015) and Ngoepe and Setumu (2016) are the documentation of heritage in Makgabeng, a village in the Limpopo province of South Africa. Some of the efforts of this project were scattered and their outputs were never really collated and consolidated into tangible results that could be referred to. Du Bruyn (2013:154) also reports of successful oral history projects executed in the Free State Province of South Africa. Archives repositories in South Africa should identify such projects and include them in the national register for accessibility to a wider audience. In the case where community-based organisations are unable to preserve such archives, the municipal or provincial archives can manage such archives based on the terms and conditions that are negotiated by both parties.

Another way of addressing the inequities created by provincialisation of archives wherein some archives inherited infrastructure while others did not is perhaps through securing a conditional grant from the treasury in order to develop infrastructure and build capacity. Libraries in South Africa were able to obtain such grants. Budget allocations need to be reassessed as well to align them with the archival mandate. This will also inform the costing of archival legislation in South Africa, as the mandate of these institutions is unfunded. Furthermore, the South African government through NARSSA should consider negotiating for repatriation of archives that left the shores of South Africa. In the case of repatriation of archives, as well as where this is not possible, surrogates should be sought and an international register of records outside the country should be compiled. However, inter-repository repatriation within South Africa could be arranged. For example, records of a certain province in the custody of another province's archives repository can be repatriated to the relevant province.

The other way is through participatory archives. This concept is in the process of evolving and it incorporates many models of archival practice (Theimer 2015:261). The concept involves an archive implementing a decentralised curation, radical user orientation and contextualisation of records and archival process. The critical element of participatory archives is sharing of authority and curation between archivist and users who self-identify as stakeholders in the archives content. This model worked for indigenous communities in Australia. A participatory archive acknowledges all parties to a transaction as immediate parties with negotiated rights and responsibilities in relation to ownership, access, and privacy (Theimer 2015:261). This may be useful in communities who may be reluctant or unable to relinquish control of their records to a traditional archive.

Furthermore, as Ngoepe and Ngulube (2014) would attest, archives repositories can form partnership with indigenous churches for the purpose of making church archives accessible. Church archives, which include registries of births, deaths and marriages, across the country can help citizens in the daunting task to locate, amidst myriad offices, any helpful information on their background and the cultures of their people (Hocking 2016).

Lastly, archives repositories should identify important events hosted in the democratic South Africa and collect records relating to such events. Three events that come to mind are the Rugby World Cup (1995), the All Africa Games (1999) and the FIFA World Cup (2010). Records of such events can be collected from government offices and individual to build and supplement the archives in the country.

5. Conclusion

It is clear that public archivists in South Africa failed to heed the call of integrating indigenous models into mainstream archival practices. This resulted in blatant failure to decolonise the archives. However, opportunity still exists that the situation can be rectified sooner rather than later. Undoubtedly, ‘archives without archives’ have heralded the dawn chorus for opportunity to decolonise archives in South Africa. Indeed, these are ‘empty vessels’ upon which ordinary citizens could pour their own stories, thereby bridging the gaps created by colonial and apartheid archives. It is therefore time that archivists in South Africa put on 3D archival glasses to align their blurred vision, as the new archival era is dawning. This is an opportunity not to be missed to transform archival holdings in South Africa. Such repositories could utilise an opportunity to build inclusive archives and the saying ‘first will be last and the last will be first’ would be relevant to them as they would be leading those repositories which inherited archival infrastructure. As a result, the Afrikaans saying ‘*agteros kom ook in die kraal*²’ would ring true to the public repositories in South Africa that are left behind.

It is important that public repositories be transformed into social space for storytelling rather than be equated to stillness in the graveyards. This might lead to radical archival transformation that is needed in South Africa. It is concluded that failure to address the situation of ‘archives without archives’ will render some of these repositories white elephants. The rhetoric slogan of taking archives to the people would then be changed into ‘taking archives away from the people’. And the archival community would continue to complain without any positive results as Matsepe (1968) reckons.

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² Afrikaans idiom meaning the ox that walks behind also get into the kraal. Afrikaans is a language descended from Dutch and spoken mainly in South Africa and Namibia.

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