Advocacy of the oral history projects: processes that should occur to create public awareness in the project undertaken by Gauteng Provincial Archives

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Abstract

In March 2023, Veritas College in Springs, Ekurhuleni, undertook a fun history lesson where the Grade 4 learners were required to acknowledge and celebrate influential historical figures. Several of the children selected individuals such as Dr Chris Barnard, Dr Martin Luther King, Princess Diana, Nelson Mandela and one learner identified para-Olympic swimmer Natalie du Toit. The object of this class exercise was for learners to see that they too could have a positive impact on the world and strive to be leaders who can make their world a better place (Veritas College Facebook page, 2023). In March 2023, the United States National Archives hosted an exhibition showcasing their archives that focussed on women in baseball. These collections included video footage and oral testimonies from women who had participated in baseball and simultaneously created a National Baseball Hall of Fame (US National Archives Facebook page, 2023). These two examples are how the Gauteng Provincial Archives could take the oral history project to the people of Gauteng and inform learners of the unsung sporting heroes that were neglected under the apartheid dispensation. This paper will adopt a postmodernist approach by undertaking an investigation to see how other archives around the world market and promote their collections, particularly oral history collections, both to school-going learners and the general public. The intention of this paper is to formulate a framework that the Gauteng Provincial Archives could consider when marketing the oral history project related to unsung sporting heroes.

1. Introduction and background

According to Ketelaar (1992:15), an inclusive archive entails the "transformation of archives into archives of the people, by the people, for the people". Ketelaar (1992) added that building inclusive archives can only be possible if the archivists try to understand and listen to the indigenous people by capturing their stories. Of noteworthy is that inclusive archives, in the truest sense of the word "inclusive", denotes an archival system which does not exclude or discriminate against any segment of the society, regardless of social status, class, level of education, religion, ethnicity, gender and sexuality.

Cook (2011:181) gave a more comprehensive definition of inclusive archival system as "the one which reflects the multiple voices, and not only the voices of the powerful,

but the powerless as well". Cook (2011) further stressed that an inclusive archival system is shaped by an appraisal that respects diversity, ambiguity, tolerance, and multiple ways of understanding archives, celebrating differences rather than monoliths, multiples, rather than mainstream narratives, the personal and local, as much as the business and official. Cook (2011) described an archival system that is total or inclusive in all senses of the word.

In Canada, the concept is referred to as "total archives", and its origins is traceable to the archival lexicon during the 1970s. It was used to describe a particular way of managing archival systems. As understood in the Canadian context, it denotes that publicly funded archival institutions should acquire, preserve and make available, for public use, both government and private sector records in all media forms (Millar 1998). The foregoing shows that the essence of inclusive archive is the collection of archival records, which tell a complete, balanced, and non-discriminatory story of a people. An inclusive archive seeks to understand, appreciate, embrace and truly reflect the diversity of the society.

South Africa is described as a rainbow nation, a country with communities from different ethnic groups, cultures and heritage. It is these differences that make South Africa a unique country that is striving to be united in their diversity. These differences should be evident in the documented history of the nation, and more specifically the public archives of South Africa. Through the archives, citizens have an opportunity to reflect on the history of the nation from different perspectives and how they influence the country's past, present and future. Though South Africa has a national repository which is complemented by provincial repositories, these institutions still remain largely unknown by the South African public (Ngoepe 2019; Saurombe 2020).

2. Problem statement

Ketelaar (1992:15) argued that for archives to remain relevant it was necessary for the archives to be inclusive archives which entail the transformation of archives into archives "of the people, by the people, for the people". The Gauteng Provincial Archives embarked on a project to collect the oral narratives from sports men and women that had been side-lined by the colonial and apartheid dispensations (Ngoepe, Mbuyisa, Saurombe and Matshotshwane 2023). The challenge is now to ensure that those collections are made known to communities, and this includes local schools and teachers to incorporate this material into their tuition activities. In March 2023, Veritas College in Springs, Ekurhuleni, undertook a fun history lesson where the Grade 4 learners were required to acknowledge and celebrate influential historical figures. Several of the children selected individuals such as Dr Chris Barnard, Dr Martin Luther King, Princess Diana, Nelson Mandela and one learner identified para-Olympic swimmer Natalie du Toit. The object of this class exercise was for learners to see that they too could have a positive impact on the world and strive to be leaders who can make their world a better place (Veritas College Facebook page, 2023). Such undertaking by schools in Gauteng Province could benefit by having access to the oral history collections that have been collected by the Gauteng Provincial Archives.

3. Objectives of the paper

The objectives of this paper are threefold. The first objective is to indicate and identify the key stakeholders involved with this project, such as members of the sporting communities in Gauteng, historians and archivists, and other interested parties that may want to assist in providing additional oral material once they discover more about this project and the archives collection. The second objective is to collaborate with community representatives and to collect audiovisual recordings from individuals previously sidelined by the apartheid and colonial dispensations relating to unsung sporting heroes. The third objective is to address the important element of public relations and communication to the outside world of the collection of unsung sporting hero archives preserved by the Gauteng Provincial Archives. To achieve this last objective a comprehensive plan is needed to promote this collection to a wider audience.

4. Literature Review

The literature review has four overarching themes, being: the place of oral history in the world; the place of postmodernism in South Africa in building inclusive archives; public programming; and digitising collections and making them accessible online and by other means.

4.1 Place of oral history in the world

The archival record in most mainstream South African archives reflects the colonial legacies. Thus, the genesis of archival systems in most African nations is traceable to the colonial era and is deeply rooted in the Western ways (Ngoepe, Masego and Tsabedze 2020). Most African countries' archival systems, especially the former British colonies and protectorates, have been modelled around the work of Sir Hilary Jenkinson on primary value and secondary value (Jenkinson 1922, cited in Ngoepe and Saurombe 2016). It is, therefore, understandable that the archival systems in African nations have been largely affected by the historical events, which were mostly entrenched along inequality, oppression, marginalisation and other forms of social injustices, such as slavery, colonialism and apartheid (Callinicos & Odendaal 1996). As a result of this bias, its collection largely consists of records that were generated mostly after the arrival of the colonialists. This points to the existence of a worrying gap in the archival collection (Ngoepe 2019), not only in South Africa but elsewhere on the continent. Thus, most archival collections in African countries do not account for the pre-colonial era, and in cases where an attempt has been made, it has been haphazard. Moreover, the current archival system is reluctant to accept oral history as an authentic source of archival records.

Ngoepe (2019), for instance, argued that the Western way of understanding archives is given more preference, thereby side-lining the traditional/African way, which is mostly oral history. Traditionally, African history has been primarily based on orature, meaning there were no written records about African culture since it was passed orally from one generation to another. This is the reality that archival systems that were built on Western foundations have failed to appreciate or acknowledge (Ngoepe & Keakopa 2011). This may also explain why most archival collections in African archives do not

reflect much about African communities but were/are more preoccupied with documenting the colonialists' history. These Western-influenced archives believe that only written records are the true and authentic documentation of a people's history, and not oral based narrations, which they criticize as being subjective (Saurombe 2018). Indeed, many people consider the truth to be in the recorded form only, while forgetting that the other way of indirectly accessing the past is through oral history. Moreover, they disregard the fact that the recording of social events was never part of most African communities since they relied on memory to store their history, and this was transmitted orally from one generation to another (Ngoepe 2019). As noted by Ritchie, since 2004, the biggest development has been the spreading of oral history around the world. Oral history projects have developed in areas that have undergone social and political upheavals, where the traditional archives reflect the old regimes, particularly in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin America (Ritchie 2014).

4.2 **Place of postmodernism in South Africa in building inclusive archives**

The origin of the concept of postmodernism in relation to archival science is traceable to the 1980s and is attributed to Hugh Taylor, a Canadian. However, its full development, as a theory, is credited to the studies by Terry Cook, an archivist (Tognoli & Guimarães 2010). Cook (2011) described postmodernism as the dominant intellectual trend in this era and as having a direct influence on all disciplines, including archival science. Postmodernism challenges the archival concept that "dominated the documentary characteristics in the 20th century, such as neutrality and impartiality, by denaturalising what society assumes as natural and what has been accepted as normal and rational for years" (Cook 2011:175).

The proponents of postmodernism advocate for the deconstruction and reformulation of traditional archives as the best ways of reflecting the diversity of contemporary times (Cook 2011:175). In other words, the reinterpretations, deconstructions and formularisations of traditional archives is embodied in postmodern archival science (Cook 2011). Thus, postmodernism can be instrumental in building inclusive archives due to its ability to question what society traditionally assumed and accepted as normal and rational. For years, no one questioned the bias that has resulted in the creation of a systemic flaw within traditional archives, leading to the "marginalization, erasure, and oppression of historically underrepresented communities" (Zinn 1977:22; Matshotshwane 2021)). Thus, archives have failed to reflect inclusivity, due to the systemic flaw inherited from the traditional system. This is where postmodernism is deployed to reinterpret, deconstruct and formalise the archives by building an inclusive archival system.

4.3 Public programming

According to Kau, Saurombe and Ngoepe (2019), public archives repositories in South Africa have designed programmes to take archives to school learners for the purpose of creating future users and expanding the use of archival sources. Despite efforts to take archives to the people in South Africa, it would seem that the public programming methods that repositories use at schools are not effective in creating awareness and promoting public archives to attract school learners. Furthermore, this study contends

that the public archives repositories in Gauteng do not use technology, particularly social media, to market their services to school learners. The main method of taking archives to learners is through tour invitations and participation in the annual archives week, which do not yield any positive results, as learners do not visit the archives afterwards. It is recommended that public archives repositories (Kau et al, 2019), be more creative and in addition, think of collaboration between archivists and teachers from interested schools. This can be done through the inclusion of school projects that involve the use of archives. In this regard, the repositories should be able to provide learners access to archival records linked to their projects (Kau et al, 2019). As more students are digitally savvy, social media platforms should be adopted to market archives and this could spike the interest of learners and get more of them to engage with the archives (Kau et al., 2019).

Schellnack-Kelly and Saurombe (2022), examined several examples of initiatives undertaken by different archival institutions in the United States, Australia and Chile in efforts to bring archives closer to the people and for the inclusion of archival artefacts and resources to be incorporated into teaching and learning activities in schools. These scholars further contend that similar models need to be developed that can bring archives closer to the people, allow archives institutions to share their valuable collections and ensure the sustainability of South African archival institutions.

4.4 Digitising collections and making them accessible online

Creating better awareness and respect for the country's cultural diversity has been lost along the way and there is an urgent need for collaborative partnerships to address this (Saurombe and Schellnack-Kelly 2023). It is the contention of this article that under the colonial and apartheid governments the role of the public archives was regarded primarily as providing additional storage for government records rather than from the perspective of their potential contribution to nation-building. Schellnack-Kelly and Jiyane (2017) noted that although there have been initiatives to capture socio-political narratives on the armed struggle and cognisance of the projects undertaken to capture indigenous knowledge and oral histories, little effort has been made to disseminate the information available in a medium appropriate for use by the so-called millennials.

The opportunity to utilise information technology to provide better access to and active engagement with a younger audience has been woefully neglected by South African heritage institutions. Schellnack-Kelly and Jiyane (2017) further contend that wider access to the archives under South Africa's democratic dispensation is vitally important. The two reasons cited by Schellnack-Kelly and Jiyane (2017) are: Firstly, that public entities must ensure that the voices of communities marginalised by the previous dispensations are captured and made available for dissemination to all sectors of South African society. Secondly, such public entities should not preserve information purely because of their aesthetic value or from a heritage perspective. The archival repositories must ensure effective access to and dissemination of information and knowledge from a wider spectrum of information sources. This is crucial to meeting contemporary challenges effectively such as sustainable development, eradication of poverty, social cohesion and improved literacy levels.

Archival institutions in countries like Chile, India, the United States and the United Kingdom use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to showcase collections of documents, photographs and audio-visual archival materials to highlight collections that may interest the public and scholars (Schellnack-Kelly and Saurombe 2021). Saurombe (2019) noted that, as much as teachers have a critical role in teaching history, archivists as custodians of archives as records of enduring value are also necessary as they can enhance the learning process. In South Africa, there is limited information regarding the involvement of archival institutions in the endeavours of teaching history at South African schools (Saurombe and Schellnack-Kelly 2023). This is unlike counterparts in countries like Chile and Australia, with somewhat similar histories where efforts are made to align archival collections with the school curriculum.

5. Research methodology and design

The research methodology that was applied for the purpose of this study is dominated by a qualitative approach. According to Yin (2015) and Mojapelo (2017), the qualitative approach gives the participants the opportunity to reflect their thoughts, interpretations and understanding by describing and explaining the situation in their environment. The aim of this article was to obtain findings in an organised manner, rather than statistical results or procedures. This ensures that the approach adopted by the study is appropriate to yield correct results. The research design is a case study, with the focus being on the Gauteng Provincial Archives, and specifically the oral history collection on *Unsung Sports Heroes*.

The research paradigm is a postmodernism approach which acknowledges that the manner in which archives are collected, arranged and arranged does reflect the metanarrative of the archival institution and the archivists involved in the collection of such material (Harris, 2007). This worldview is the perspective or a school of thought and shared beliefs that informs the meaning or interpretation of research data (Kivunja & Kuyini 2017:27). Bryman (2012:714) contends that research paradigm dictates research scientists in a discipline on what influenced the decision of what to be studied, how research should be done, and how results should be interpreted. Bryman (2012:630) further contends that research paradigms constitute how different researchers look at the world and how they believe the world can be understood, and they are at the core of understanding the choices made by researchers in conducting research. The research methodology applied in this study was also underpinned by interpretivism (Bryman 2012).

The purpose of this article is to propose a framework that the Gauteng Provincial Archives can consider promoting and encouraging the use of oral history records relating to the unsung sports heroes collection.

6. Data collection

For data gathering, the following approaches were appropriate: interviews with Gauteng archivists and online observations of webpages and social media sites of archival repositories in various countries around the world (Carr, Zhang, Ming and Siddiqui 2019:307). The researchers conducted interviews with archivists from the

Gauteng Provincial Archives and the National Film, Video and Sound Archives archivists in South Africa. The websites and social media sites of the Chilean National Archives, Australian National Archives and United States National Archives and Records Administration were viewed for their public programming undertakings, including oral history and audio-visual archives collection/s.

7. Proposed framework

A theoretical framework for oral history projects provides a conceptual and methodological foundation for conducting research, collecting narratives, and interpreting the experiences and memories of narrators. It helps guide the project's design, implementation, and analysis. The theoretical framework deemed appropriate for this paper is the Narrative Theory. This theory incorporates narrative theory to understand how individuals construct stories about their lives, experiences and identities (Puckett 2016). Furthermore, this theory enables the exploration of narrative structures and unpacking storytelling techniques used by the participants. It also complements the research paradigm of a postmodernist approach in the association of archives related to storytelling and metanarratives (Puckett 2016). This research examined how oral history narratives contributed to the formation of personal and collective identities, including cultural identities linked to sports.

Narrative analysis is a form of qualitative research in which the researcher focuses on a topic and analyses the data collected from case studies, surveys, observations or other similar methods (Puckett, 2016). In order to apply narrative analysis, researchers must understand the background, setting, social and cultural context of the research subjects (Puckett, 2016). This gives researchers a better idea of what their subjects mean in their narration. It is true in context-rich research where there are many hidden layers of meaning that can only be uncovered by an in-depth understanding of the culture or environment (Chamberlain, 2008). Researchers need to know as much about their research subjects as possible. They interview key informants and collect large amounts of text from them. They even use other sources, such as existing literature and personal recollections (Chamberlain, 2008).

8. Research findings, discussion and proposed framework

This oral history project came into being shortly after the official opening of the Gauteng Provincial Archives in 2018. The main concern of the Advisory Council at that time was the lack of archival holding linked to the formerly marginalised local Gauteng Communities (Ngoepe et al. 2023). This is a collaborative effort between the Gauteng Provincial Archives and the Department of Information Science at the University of South Africa. The project was registered as a community engagement project at UNISA under the title- *Decolonising Archives: building an Inclusive Archives at the Gauteng Provincial Archives Repository*. The project with the aid of a grant from the National Research Foundation (NRF) began in 2020 with the aim of collecting sports heritage from Gauteng communities. The repository in conjunction with UNISA and local community members was able to interview various sportsmen and women whose sporting achievements have otherwise not been documented.

In accordance with the project plan, the project team has accomplished the following:

8.1 Stakeholders meeting in 2022 to review project outcomes and future plans.

The stakeholders, Gauteng Provincial Archives, National Film, Video and Sound Archives, representatives from Gauteng communities and UNISA held a project stakeholders' workshop at the Roodevalley Hotel, Pretoria, from 22 – 24 November 2022. The purpose of the 2-day workshop was to evaluate the project and plan for 2023 - 2024. To date, the project has yielded the following outcomes:

•   50 accounts from individuals from different sporting codes from formerly

        marginalised Gauteng communities

•   An Open Educational Resource in the UNISA Institutional Repository

•   Several research outputs

•   Papers presented at both national and international conferences.

8.2. A Workshop with Gauteng Provincial Archivists on the preservation of audio-visual materials in 2023

A two-day workshop was held at the National Film, Video and Sound Archives on 18 and 19 May 2023. The same stakeholders attended this workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss how to preserve and make accessible the oral testimonies that the Gauteng Provincial Archives have collected. During this workshop, it transpired that all the oral history recordings are on a laptop and have not been backed up or plans in place to have the collection digitised and made available for the general public to access via their webpage. It is hoped that the Gauteng Province will safeguard these recordings and carry out awareness campaigns to ensure schools and interested persons become aware of these collections. Therefore, the project team further envisages seeking a grant to help the provincial repository implement a digitisation strategy to preserve this collection and others for posterity.

8.3 Proposed framework

The proposed framework should be as follows:

| Project Objectives | → | Data Collection | → | Community Involvement | → | Public Engagement |
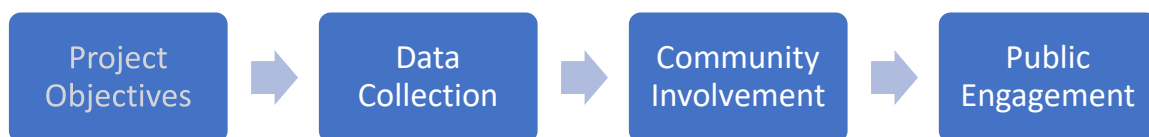
Following the progress of the progress of the project to date, taking into consideration the experiences of the team and completed research outputs the authors recommend that:

- Project objectives: These should be clearly defined and for the most part were identified during the stakeholders engagement in November 2022.
- Data Collection: The Gauteng Provincial Archives should continue collecting oral narratives from sporting heroes in the province and continue to expand this collection. Members of the public could be encouraged to record their own oral history interviews relating to sporting accolades and provide these to the Gauteng Provincial Archives.
- Community engagement: The Gauteng Provincial Archives needs to make contact with communities such as teachers, schools, sports federations and regular South Africans who may be interested in accessing these collections and utilising them in teaching endeavours. Alternatively, by making these collections more widely available, more individuals may come forward to share their sporting experiences.
- Public engagement is necessary to ensure the sustainability of this collection of oral testimonies. Scholars, teachers and interested communities need to be informed of these collections. Investigations should be undertaken to ensure social media is used to disseminate the information relating to these collections. It is only through public participation that the archives will thrive.

Investigating the possibilities of digitising the collections would also go a long way to ensuring the project has been a success and can continue as an ongoing project for many years.

9. Recommendations and conclusion

As stated by Ngoepe et al. (2023), the recorded oral history is hoped to assist the Gauteng Archives Repository in attracting new users in addition to the traditional users found in other archives repositories. Oral history should be viewed as one of the most important, but not exclusive, sources in documenting the history and heritage of formerly marginalised communities. This oral history project aimed to collaborate with communities and the Gauteng Provincial Archives to create a history of community sport activities from 1960 to 2010. This was the first step in building a community archive; in other words, the project's success may lead to additional initiatives to create an inclusive archive (Ngoepe et al. 2023).

For this project to reap its successes, it is important for the Gauteng Provincial Archives to develop a sustainability plan to ensure that the oral history project's outcomes continue to benefit the communities in Gauteng. The Gauteng Provincial Archives can effectively advocate for their oral history projects, raise public awareness and foster community engagement by following these processes. Creating awareness and involving the public in the project will enhance its success and ensure that the stories and memories collected are valued and preserved for future generations.

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