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USING CHURCH RECORDS AT THE ARCHIVES OF THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF NATAL TO TRACE INDIGENOUS ANCESTRY: EXPLORING THE ETHICAL BARRIERS

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Abstract

This article attempts to look outside the boundaries of the record keeping profession to the relationship that indigenous people in South Africa have with church records and the indigenous people's expectations of church archivists and other record keepers. With a central focus on the cultural contexts of indigenous people in the country, the article examines the entanglement of colonial power relations in local recordkeeping practices. These cultural contexts include the on-going interaction between oral and literate traditions, the legacy of colonial/apartheid disempowerment and the emergent reassertion of indigenous rights and identities in South Africa. The article examines the difficult role that church archivists have in balancing the concerns and expectations that indigenous people have about the creation, existence and use of church records relating to them and their kin.

KEY TERMS:

Archives and colonialism, church records, genealogy; indigenous ancestry, indigenous communities, indigenous culture, indigenous identities and record keeping, oral and literate cultures, sacrament records

Background and introduction

Everyone's identity is special to them. An essential part of that identity lies in who their parents, grandparents and siblings are and in simple information like when and where they were born - Kristy Thinee (1998).

For many South African Christians, using church records to trace their ancestral heritage can be enormously rewarding. These sacrament records, as they are commonly known, include baptism registers, confirmation registers, marriage registers and burial registers (Genealogical Society of South Africa 2011). This article will mainly focus on baptismal records. Anglican baptismal registers are among the most complete baptismal records in the world (Genealogical Society of South Africa 2011). A researcher will often get up to two generations in a single record naming the child and his/her parents. The records generally go further than merely giving names and dates. They also give the professional and the residential details of people mentioned in the record. On the strength of such information, a researcher may have a good sense of the socio-economic context of the people involved (St. Peter's Cathedral Parish 1848).

Special mention should also be made of the writings of early missionaries, especially missionary priests. These writings, including journals and correspondence, often provide some information about indigenous people with whom the missionaries interacted, sometimes naming specific

individuals and giving details of ceremonies, conversions or events of similar nature (Hinchliff 1963)

The significance of church records, therefore, lies in the fact that they are often the earliest written records of individual indigenous people. This is because missionaries frequently visited people in remote communities that did not have any contact with civil authorities. The main limitation is that frequently only "Christian" names are recorded, even when the people in question generally were known by their indigenous names (Hinchliff 1963).

Baptismal records in the Anglican Church tend to follow a universal pattern. Knowing the pattern can help the researcher overcome the difficulties faced with problematic handwriting and/or inaccurate or damaged records which may sometimes be encountered. The pattern is usually as follows (St. Peter's Cathedral Parish 1848):

- Place and date of baptism;
- Name of child being baptised;
- Declared date of birth of the child;
- Both first and last names of the parents;
- Profession of both parents;
- Residential address; and
- Both first and last names of the god parents/witnesses, and sometimes their relation to the child.

For many indigenous people, however, using church records to trace their ancestry can be challenging due to various factors arising from their history (Ryskemp 2009). Thus, this article aims to explore the church Archivist's role as the mediator between indigenous communities and church records. From a South African perspective, this role incorporates remembering the past in order to understand the variety of barriers indigenous people in the country may face in locating and accessing records that relate directly to themselves, their kin and their communities.

Significance of church records

When there are no civil registrations of birth, marriage and death, sacrament records can serve as alternative sources for genealogical information. The amount and type of information provided by church records varies enormously by religious denomination and time period. Generally speaking, Anglican baptismal records provide relatively more detailed information and are more complete than the records of other protestant denominations (Genealogical Society of South Africa 2011). Records of other Protestant denominations vary, but most baptism records do not provide more than the mother's first name, and most marriage records provide only the names of the bride and groom and the witnesses. Some denominations, such as Baptists, do not practice infant baptism; hence there may be no birth-related records in the church registers (Ancestry24 2010).

Earlier records of all denominations in South Africa tend to provide less information than more recent records (Ancestry24 2010). When neither the birth date nor the age of the child is recorded, a baptism record cannot be assumed to provide evidence of the date of birth. However, it still shows evidence of the relationship between parent(s) and child. Some church records also include lists of church members, which can prove residence, and in the case of indigenous people, they can provide key pointers regarding clan membership. In recent times, both Christian and indigenous names have been recorded. Many early schools were established

and run by churches, so records of these schools can also be found in church archives. School records might include the name of the child, his or her birth date and parents' names (Genealogical Society of South Africa 2011).

Archives and indigenous culture

The term "archives" describes both records that have been selected for permanent preservation because of their value and the physical space that houses the archival collection (Bergeron 1999). To distinguish between the meanings, this article will designate the physical space for archives as "Archives" and archival records as "archives".

According to Hanlon (1999), Archives were imposed on the indigenous cultures by colonising powers, as an introduced technology, which altered or displaced existing cultural practices. Written recordkeeping was a phenomenon that arrived with Western travelers, traders, missionaries, and bureaucrats, and like the economic, religious, social, and administrative systems they introduced, it has been adapted to suit local cultures and become integral to many aspects of African life. As a Western enterprise introduced in an alien context, it has been suggested that archival science or recordkeeping theory is not neutral (Hanlon 1999).

However, written recordkeeping is a necessity for modern governance, economic systems and cultural needs on the continent. This is because Archives play a vital role in documenting rights and entitlements and enabling interpretation of the events of the past. To understand how Archives function, struggle or succeed in indigenous environments, it is necessary to look deeper into the cultural, political and socio-economic context of indigenous communities themselves (Ketelaar 1997).

Defining indigenous communities

Developing a specific definition or identification for indigenous communities is difficult (Asia Development Bank 2008). In Africa, for example, individual indigenous communities reflect tremendous diversity in their cultures, histories and current circumstances. Country by country, the relationships between indigenous communities and dominant or mainstream groups of society vary (Kawooya 2006). From the perspective of developing a working definition of indigenous communities for use in this study, a starting point has been to understand indigenous communities on the basis of their characteristics.

According to the Asia Development Bank (2008), one of the most significant characteristics of indigenous communities is descent from population groups present in a given area, most often before modern states or territories were created and before modern borders were defined. Another important characteristic is maintenance of cultural and social identities, and social, economic, cultural, and political institutions separate from mainstream or dominant societies and cultures. Additional characteristics often ascribed to indigenous communities include (Asia Development Bank 2008):

- self-identification and identification by others as being part of a distinct indigenous cultural group, and the display of desire to preserve that cultural identity;
- a linguistic identity different from that of the dominant society;
- social, cultural, economic, and political traditions and institutions distinct from the dominant culture;
- economic systems oriented more toward traditional systems of production than mainstream systems; and

- unique ties and attachments to traditional habitats and ancestral territories and natural resources in these habitats and territories.

Indigenous communities are also described with reference to their ways of life. In many cases, indigenous people live in separated communities or cultural or ethnic groupings. Such communities and groupings often are located in areas geographically distant from urban centres and often function at the periphery of the political, social, cultural, and economic systems of the dominant or mainstream society. At the same time, however, it is not unusual to find indigenous communities on the fringes of urban areas, comprising indigenous peoples who have migrated but remain distinct from the mainstream. Indigenous peoples' communities in a given country can reflect varying degrees of acculturation and integration into the dominant or mainstream society (Kawooya 2006).

Broad facets of the current cultural contexts of most indigenous communities in Africa include the on-going exchange between oral and literate traditions, the legacy of colonial disempowerment and the reassertion of indigenous rights and identities (Hanlon 1999). In analysing the cultural context of recordkeeping at the Natal Diocesan Archives, therefore, it is imperative to look first at these broader patterns, before more detailed analysis of suitable recordkeeping strategies for individual societies can be undertaken.

Indigenous culture and imperialism

In describing the relationship between indigenous culture and resistance to imperialism, postcolonial theorist Edward Said observes that the slow and often bitterly disputed recovery of geographical territory which is at the heart of decolonisation is preceded by the charting of cultural territory (Said 1993). According to Said (1993: 251), the main focus in cultural decolonisation is "the insistence on the right to reclaim the indigenous community's history entirely, coherently and integrally".

All indigenous communities on the continent of Africa experienced disempowerment to varying degrees after their first encounters with Western occupiers. Spain, Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Italy and Holland each assumed power over parts of the continent at different stages. In some cases, direct colonial relationships have continued to the present day (Whitaker 2005). Although constitutional independence came to most African countries between the 1960s and 1990s, imperialism extends beyond the political sphere, into economic and cultural domination of a society by outside forces. Said (1993: 252) explains:

> imperialism did not end, did not suddenly become past with political decolonisation; instead, the power relationships of development and economic dependency have carried forward imperial thought in an extraordinarily dispiriting inevitability.

In Africa, economic dependency and globalising cultural influences continue to tie constitutionally independent nations into unequal colonial relationships. Colonial domination is associated with written recordkeeping on the continent in multiple ways. As earlier noted, oral cultures were displaced by written systems (Hanlon 1999; Rosenberg 2001). Significantly, vital segments of the written documentary record of African indigenous communities were generated by non-Africans engaged in uneven power relationships. Documentary records were often not created by local communities themselves and some are still not held in African countries. Many strands of the African documentary record have been absent from the continent almost since their creation (Rosenberg 2001).

Evidence of the continent's history in the records of explorers, travelers, Christian missionaries, trading companies, imperial policy-makers, and anthropologists are held in the homelands of the record-makers (Rosenberg 2001). Records generated by colonial or apartheid administrations are intrinsically associated with political systems by which local indigenous communities were subjected to. For these communities, such records also bear the confusion of flux and change. For example, people seeking written evidence of their family tree or land rights in a country such as South Africa must look to an array of possible sources – each created, maintained and retained in different recordkeeping traditions and languages (Lalu 2007).

However, although records created by outsiders reflect the expectations and aspirations, value systems and beliefs, of their creators (Rosenberg 2001), they constitute vital parts of the evidential systems for the countries or communities to which they relate. They are also sources for the reassertion of cultural identities and rights through the renegotiation of histories. Thus, archives are entangled in the reassertion of identities, as much as they are implicated in colonial or apartheid pasts (Rosenberg 2001). The establishment of Natal Diocesan Archives, therefore, can be associated with a reaffirmation of national identity, and a desire to assert control over written records of previous and future authorities.

Theoretical perspectives

This article has adapted Gomez's (2010) Access, Capacity and Environment (ACE) framework, and structured it as a tool to understand the range of political, economical, historical, philosophical, infrastructural, cultural, organisational, and other factors that affect the way in which indigenous people use archives to trace their cultural heritage. The three pillars of this framework are (Gomez 2010):

- **Equitable access**: this embraces the physical access of the Archives as well as the suitability and affordability of the services rendered;
- **Human capacity**: this pertains to the training of both users and staff of the Archives in order to meet local needs and ensure social appropriation; and
- **Enabling environment**: these are the socio-cultural factors, political will and legal and regulatory framework which bear on the viability of the Archives.

The goal of any Archives should not only be to help users to access information, but also to make the process of finding the required information as easy as possible **(**Brothman 2001). The Diocese of Natal Archives may be viewed currently as simply a place to research, or store records of enduring value but this image may need to change over time with the evolving information needs and perceptions of its users.

In order to effectively serve their users, church Archives need to move beyond catering mostly for the elite and shift towards helping everyone who needs information, regardless of whether users know what they are looking for or not. Expanding the purposes of the church Archives and how it suits the needs of its users is an essential part of that vision. A building containing valuable records has little purpose if it serves only a select few, lacks resources and content suitable for the local environment, is too expensive for the poorer segments of the community to use and is not adapting to the everyday needs of the community it purports to serve (Gould and Gomez 2010).

Background and profile of the Archives of the Diocese of Natal

South Africa still remains a divided society. The apartheid heritage has left a strong connection between race and socio-economic status. Under apartheid, from 1948 to 1994, a person's race

influenced occupation, place of residence, education, choice of partner, freedom of movement, and use of facilities and amenities (Institute of African Development 2010). This legacy will take decades to erase (Institute of African Development 2010).

Since the end of apartheid, attention has focused on other problems in the South African society. The most prominent of these issues are unemployment, lack of housing, poverty and crime. Indigenous South Africans continue to be disproportionately affected by these problems. These social issues are closely related to one another, and to some degree they are also the legacy of apartheid (Institute of African Development 2010). It is against this backdrop that indigenous ancestral research at the Archives of the Diocese of Natal should be premised.

The Natal Diocesan Archives, which is part of the administrative arm of the Anglican Diocese of Natal, was established in 1985 by an Act of the Diocese. The initial purpose of the Archives was modest: the safe keeping of the parish registers for baptisms, confirmations, marriages and funerals. In doing so it would be possible to provide information for those seeking details about births, deaths and marriages (Gardner 2009).

Records show that, in its formative years, the Archives entirely depended on volunteers and not trained staff. In fact, the whole Archives concept at the Diocese of Natal was pioneered by voluntary workers. These volunteers were all pensioners who saw their work as part of their spiritual commitment to the church (Gardner 2009). The first remunerated worker at the Archives was only employed in 1997 on a part time basis. Over the years, more part time workers and volunteers followed. It is worth noting that none of the members of staff or volunteers who worked at the Archives from its inception to as recently as 2010 came from an indigenous background. The poignancy of this reality will be discussed later in subsequent sections.

As the Archives became more widely known, those who wished to do other research came looking for information. With time, the Archives acquired more and more materials of enduring value such as legal records, financial records, letters, reports and manuscripts. This plethora of documents attracted even more enquirers.

In response to this increased interest, the mandate of the Archives was also broadened. Guided by Act 26 of the Diocese of Natal, the Archives' functions would now be to collect, arrange, describe and preserve the records of the Anglican Diocese of Natal, its related councils, committees, and officers and other material pertaining to the history and activities of the Diocese (Diocese of Natal 2007). The Archives is located on the first floor of the Holy Nativity Cathedral Centre complex in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. There are presently two full time professional staff members: the Diocesan Archivist, who joined the Archives in 2010 and his Assistant who was employed in 2012. It is also worth pointing out the following:

- mainstream users of the Archives are mostly literate White, live in city centres and have steady employment. The majority of indigenous users, on the other hand, live in peripheral areas and are mostly unemployed;

- all records currently in the Archives holdings are written either in English or in Afrikaans (few) but not in any of the indigenous languages;

- there is a serious shortage of records from the so called "black parishes";

- there are currently no diaries, letters, deeds or other documents that were created in the first person by indigenous people in the 19th or earlier centuries;

- some content on indigenous people has a pattern of errors, mainly because it was created by "others" and the content is sometimes derogatory;

- all indexes and other finding aids in the Archives are in English; and

- the Archives charges a fee for all services rendered and the schedule of fees is printed only in English.

The records are stored in four rooms. Probably the most important room is the one which stores registers from different parishes in the Diocese. The room holds sacrament registers, vestry and council minutes, financial minutes and terriers (lists of the property of a church or parish). Staff members are constantly asked for information from the registers for practical and legal purposes, such as proof of baptism before a wedding takes place, or from people interested in their family trees.

The Nuttall Room stores correspondence, books, minutes of boards and organisations and various records from past Bishops. The information from these sources is especially important for responding to claims for church land, and for use by researchers. Records cover activities that clergy and bishops were involved in during their term of office, speeches, writings by them and about them, photographs and anecdotes.
The Mkhize Room stores parish newsletters, minute books and information about lay organisations, such as the Anglican Women's Fellowship, the Diocesan Youth Council and various Diocesan Schools.

The research room is where researchers, writers, people wanting to do family research, those who are simply interested in what is stored and those who wish to donate various church records are welcomed. Donated records include letters and anecdotes relating to individuals in the church or events as well as anything connected with the church or church personalities.

Challenges facing indigenous ancestry research at the Natal Diocesan Archives

In looking beyond our usual professional preoccupations and in thinking about our place in South Africa as record keepers, it is important to understand that indigenous South Africans have a relationship with records that is significantly different to the majority of other South Africans. Considering this different relationship means considering what indigenous people expect of church Archivists and other record keepers that other South Africans may not (Katon 2002).

The socio-economic disadvantage of indigenous South Africans as a marginalised people has resulted in a weak community infrastructure which can affect their quest to trace their indigenous heritage both physically and economically and in terms of skills-based capabilities (Katon 2002). Barriers to researching indigenous ancestry, therefore, are not limited to physical access to Archives only. They also include a range of other issues such as lack of awareness, ownership issues, information literacy, relevant content and training. These barriers are described and illustrated in detail below, aided by specific examples from the case under review.

Lack of awareness

Generally indigenous people are mostly unaware of what records have been created about them, their families and their communities, and the reasons behind their creation. Without this knowledge, it is difficult for them to find a starting point in their search for their history (Katon

2002). This means that indigenous people must be informed about the records, the services available and their rights of access to these records as this is one of the biggest barriers to indigenous people gaining control over their historical documents and thus their history. People who live in remote areas of the Diocese of Natal are often more disadvantaged by their geographical location. This means that awareness building or marketing of the Archives concept in these communities is crucial (Katon 2002; Ryskemp 2009).

Australia's Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's (HREOC 1997:340) report notes that "most [indigenous] people do not know about the existence of records, their rights of access, how to go about the search or the availability of assistance" and that "information about the availability of access to records should be widely communicated through indigenous communities". The report further notes that an "informed indigenous population will have much greater feelings of power over its own destiny" (HREOC 1997:345). Therefore, in looking outside the boundaries of our professions as church archivists, we need to look at, and rethink our positions in relationship to indigenous people and the existing historical records.

Lack of ownership

It is important to understand that almost all the records on indigenous people found in church Archives were generated by outsiders. In apartheid South Africa, records pertaining to indigenous people were created by a whole range of agencies, including Education and Health Departments, the Native Affairs Department, police services, prison services, missionaries, anthropologists and academics. The records were created for a variety of reasons: purportedly for indigenous South Africans' own "protection and care" but in reality they provided a means of monitoring and regulating indigenous people's lives. From this imposed relationship came a paper trail documenting a cruel history of bigotry and oppression (Lalu 2007).

To appreciate and understand the value of such documentation, church Archivists must first accept that indigenous South Africans have experienced a different and discriminatory history to mainstream South African society - a history that has, for the most part, been erased or kept secret. In many cases the secrecy has been achieved through the loss, hiding or destruction of records which has often been "due to concerns their contents would embarrass [authorities]" (HREOC 1997:326).

When this researcher joined the Natal Diocesan Archives and wondered about the paucity of records created from the so called "black parishes", the answer provided was that indigenous people did not keep documented records. Yet, this is a gloss-over of the real truth. We are aware in our profession that the sources of the materials found in Archives are invariably social constructs where specific narratives can be privileged while others are deliberately marginalised and silenced. In other words, the compilation of records in the Natal Diocesan Archives since its inception in 1985 speaks directly to the politics of collecting and privileging of certain type of "knowledge" at the expense of other material (Cox 1990).

Lack of access

This article perceives access in a broader sense. In agreement with Warschauer (2003), the article regards access not in the narrow sense of merely having relevant archival records on the premises, but rather access in the much wider sense of being able to use the records for personally or socially meaningful ends (DiMaggio and Hargittai 2001).

One factor affecting indigenous access to their genealogical information is the geographical distribution of the indigenous population, approximately 70% of whom live outside major cities (Asia Development Bank 2008). For many indigenous people in South Africa, therefore, knowing where to look for records can be a frustrating barrier as well as going through the process of gaining permission to use the information. Just knowing which agency was involved in creating or storing their information can also be an obstacle as most indigenous people searching for family information now were children when these records were created (Ryskemp 2009).

Being able to use the information can be an even bigger obstacle. In the Natal Diocesan Archives, there are indexes, guides, an electronic catalogue and finding aids that have been produced to assist people to access records. Yet, they are all in English and generally not designed for use by people unaccustomed to research. Besides, there is a fee attached to all services rendered. Although the Diocesan Archivist has since been mandated to waive this fee depending on the personal circumstances of the archives user, this can still constitute another barrier to many indigenous researchers, who are mostly unemployed.

Information literacy

Access to information must incorporate literacy. This is essential for the ability to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively on a day to day basis (Braaksma 2004). According to the American Library Association (1989: 17), information literacy refers to a person's ability to "recognise when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate and use effectively the needed information".

The history of exclusion from well resourced educational institutions for indigenous South Africans during the apartheid era can be another barrier when it comes to researching their history. It must be remembered that in apartheid South Africa, the decision to exclude an indigenous child from well run schools was based solely on their race. The consequences of this educational disadvantage are very evident in the low levels of literacy many indigenous South Africans manifest today. This creates a huge barrier when some indigenous people know that someone else will have to read the documents for them if they are ever to know the contents (HREOC 1997:343).

Moreover, since the dominant Western culture has defined literacy as a print-based, English language literacy, literacy education for indigenous Africans is a "contested site" (Greville 2000: 34), involving issues of cultural domination, indigenous language loss, and debate regarding the role of bilingual education (Hanlen 2002; McConaghy 2002; Nakata 2002). In Africa, colonisation and apartheid have marginalised indigenous culture, which is fundamentally a non-print culture featuring oral and art-based visual literacies (Kawooya 2006). As a consequence, indigenous literacy education sustains a tension between the need to empower indigenous communities with the English language and literacy skills required to compete in mainstream society and the need to support and uphold indigenous culture, language, and identity (Greville 2000; Nakata 2002).

As already noted, all Anglican sacrament records in South Africa were written either in English or Afrikaans but not in any of the indigenous languages. In the Natal Diocesan Archives, this not only causes embarrassment in the process of requesting for information, but can also cause great anxiety and frustration when a stranger, in this case an Archives staff member, has to locate, read and interpret the record on the archives user's behalf.

Relevant content

There can be no equity of information access for indigenous South Africans unless relevant and accessible content is available (Goldman 2002; Taglang 2004). The study has shown that accessibility barriers for indigenous South Africans involve language and literacy issues. As noted earlier, a predominant amount of documents at the Natal Diocesan Archives are in English, and there remains a relative lack of content written in indigenous languages, the primary languages of many indigenous South Africans. Further, the study has shown that the vast majority of information in the Diocesan Archives is written for an audience reading at an average or advanced literacy level, representing a major barrier for many indigenous Africans.

Information in church records pertaining to indigenous people in South Africa was usually documented by those who did not have firsthand knowledge of the facts or events. In the Natal Diocesan Archives, for example, we hardly find records that were created in the first person by indigenous people themselves in the 19th or earlier centuries. Most records are the reports of "outsiders" created after the fact, based on information from a variety of sources. In most of these accounts, indigenous people are simply the backdrop to the heroism or Christian fortitude of the European missionary (Whitaker 2005; Zulu 1972). This type of evidence is much less reliable than firsthand testimony.

Moreover, the records are sometimes written in derogatory language. For example, indigenous Africans (in the records sometimes referred to as natives, peasants or savages) are characterised by their Western authors as "lacking in morality and intelligence, being perpetually childlike, demonic, and practicing outlandish, barbaric customs" (Maxey 2008: 3). The records may contain very private and intimate information and sometimes have many errors. This is especially true when it comes to indigenous names which are often wrongly spelt. Yet the same records can also hold the key to a person's identity. It causes great distress in the Natal Diocesan Archives, therefore, when indigenous people are informed that although the information contained within the document may be disrespectful and incorrect, they cannot change it, they cannot destroy it and they cannot take it away with them. They worry about what future generations will think about them when they read these inaccurate documents, knowing that they will not be alive to explain that they are not true or to explain the situation or event from their own perspective. The interpretation of these records therefore raises yet another ethical challenge (Hinchcliff 1963; Zulu 1972).

Training of archives staff

If indigenous communities are to benefit from access to church records, Archives staff needs to have professional training in order to offer meaningful services. Currently, there are inadequate numbers of indigenous people employed in the areas where indigenous people will be searching about their own information. When this researcher joined the Natal Diocesan Archives in 2010, for example, the entire staff compliment including volunteers were all White. This has now changed but the change has been slow, gradual and sometimes subtly resisted.

It is more often the case that indigenous people would rather have another indigenous person assist them in their research. This researcher's experience at the Natal Diocesan Archives has been that often most non-indigenous South Africans are unaware or not sensitive enough to the different history indigenous people have experienced and therefore can offer little assistance with interpreting the records. In that sense they can be seen as another barrier. More often than not, "indigenous people feel ill-at-ease and self-conscious when entering White institutions which emanate an entirely alien cultural presence. So much depends upon the person at the counter"

(HREOC 1997:339), and hence "the role of indigenous-controlled family tracing … services is therefore critical" (HREOC 1997:343). It is worth pointing out that many churches in indigenous contexts would want to employ staff members from indigenous backgrounds. However, churches find it difficult to employ indigenous people because only a few of them are suitably qualified.

Conclusion and recommendations

This article has explored a variety of ethical barriers indigenous people encounter in locating and accessing records that relate directly to themselves, their kin and community in church archives. The article has shown that while the process of genealogical research is similar for all people regardless of their ethnic heritage, people researching indigenous ancestry may find themselves facing unique challenges. It is important, therefore, to be aware of these potential problems, so that as church archivists, we can approach the records with a critical eye and, when necessary, seek the guidance and expertise of people with the requisite historical, cultural, linguistic and geographic knowledge (Brothman 2001).

The article has shown that the mere collection and preservation of indigenous records in church archives is not an adequate end in itself, without the access, use, and ownership of these records by indigenous communities. So far, church Archives have simply been recording and archiving some of the indigenous histories, but have not done enough to explore the viability of incorporating the indigenous practice of history which includes the oral transmission methods and explanations of the historical narratives (Brothman 2001). This exercise could take many forms, from efforts to ensure relevance in acquisition policies to changes in descriptive and other control systems to integrate indigenous perspectives. Promotion of awareness and easier access to records are as important to indigenous people as they are to mainstream archives users. Most importantly, church Archives must build partnerships with local communities and must act as stewards rather than owners of the records they hold (Brothman 2001).

The article has also shown that the introduction of preservation courses in various training programmes which focus on the preservation of indigenous records need to be encouraged on the continent. The mainstreaming of the curricula in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS) is especially important because, as this study has shown, archiving of indigenous material is a specialised discipline in itself. Efforts should be made by LIS institutions on the continent, to work together to enable integration of this increasingly important area of study across all school curricula, whereby students, especially from indigenous backgrounds, could specialise in different aspects of preservation (Nyumba 2006).

Significantly, the article has shown that while mainstream researchers know the methods and potential of archival sources, forging connections with indigenous communities is vital for written records in church Archives to be recognised as a core component in collective memory-making. This study has laid bare the institutional frameworks which can act as barriers to local use of core sources on indigenous identity (Stillman 2001). To overcome distrust, archival practices must be adjusted so that they are transparent and understandable for indigenous communities, and indigenous people should be encouraged to use the records held.

Thus, our duty as church archivists in South Africa is unique because it requires us to remember and care about the past. This means understanding the barriers indigenous people face and accepting our role as mediators for a nation of a people who are still very untrusting of

government and its agents. The memories of the past apartheid government and church involvement in their lives may still be very raw. As mediators, church archivists can take the opportunity to develop trusting relationships for the future.

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