AOSIS

Taking stock of oral history archives in a village in KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa: Are preservation and publishing feasible?

CrossMark
click for updates

Author:
Acquinatta N. Zimu-Biyela[1] (iD)

Affiliation:
[1]Department of Information Science, College of Human Sciences, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:
Acquinatta Zimu-Biyela,
zimuan@unisa.ac.za

In South Africa, the way oral history archives of rural villagers are managed calls for attention as it can limit the inclusivity, visibility, accessibility and socio-economic development of rural communities, especially the younger generation. This article reports on a study that aimed to unpack some of the opportunities and challenges regarding the preservation and publishing of oral history archives faced by a village community in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province. In addition, the study aimed to determine what the community knew about the South African legislative requirements regarding the management of oral history archives. The study adopted a qualitative research approach, grounded theory design and a constructivist paradigm. The postmodernist theory helped in gaining insight into how the principle of provenance is central when trying to understand the importance of inclusivity in the management of archives in this digital era. The 21st century is haunted by many socio-economic challenges such as the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), poverty, unemployment, inequality and social exclusion and giving space to the long-neglected oral history archives and counter archives or identity archives cannot be over-emphasised. In this context, such an initiative is viewed as critical in curbing the scourges of inequality, social exclusion and unemployment, particularly among the younger generation.

Contribution: This article calls for the reimagining of the way oral history archives of a village are managed, preserved and published. In doing so, the use of a postmodernist approach and the provenance principle are viewed as critical in helping promote inclusivity and visibility of the long-neglected archives. The article argues that this approach may also help improve some of the socio-economic challenges faced by a village community when managing their oral history archives.

Keywords: oral history archives; management; preservation; publishing; socio-economic development; postmodernism era; village; KwaZulu-Natal province.

Introduction

The fluidity of orality makes the oral record concept difficult to define (Katuu 2003). Orality is viewed as involving both verbal and non-verbal elements, such as body language, gestures, singing, whistling and laughing. There are various issues within orality such as types of orality, the difference between oral tradition and oral history (Katuu 2003). Oral history has become a contested terrain that is not confined to a single definition. According to Ritchie (2015), oral history is too dynamic and creative a field to be captured by any single definition. Furthermore, Ritchie (2015) avers that in most cases, definitions are driven by factors such as context, goals of a specific project, resources and other practical considerations.

Swain (2003) asserts that to understand oral history's role in the archives, it must first be placed in its historical context. For example, in the South African context with its long history of the apartheid government, Bhebhe and Ngoepe (2021) view oral history as a tool to promote social justice and to access the long-neglected history, while Klopfer (2001) views it as a driver of inclusive national memory. Therefore, its preservation in heritage institutions is crucial, as it has been disregarded for too long. It makes sense that when South Africa became a democratic country, the National Monuments Council called for the concept of heritage to extend beyond museums, monuments and archives to oral history and living culture (Klopfer 2001).

Bradsher (1991) and Ngoepe (2019), as cited in Bhebhe (2019), agree that oral history comprises both oral testimonies and oral traditions. Furthermore, Bradsher (1991) and Bhebhe (2019) assert

that oral testimonies have to do with the recording of the life stories of living people, whereas oral traditions deal with memories transmitted over many generations. Bradsher (1991:148–149) further states that oral history includes oral tradition, folk wisdom and folk history that were handed down through generations. Katuu (2003) asserts that archivists have viewed oral tradition as a naturally occurring organic feature of a people's lifestyle, culture and modus operandi or the social administrative, legal and cultural memory of a people. In contrast, folklorists have defined oral tradition as the process of oral dissemination of indigenous tradition or knowledge, particularly oral or intangible forms, such as values, manners, rituals and materials, such as how to weave a basket or build or thatch an indigenous house (Katuu 2003).

According to Bradsher (1991), in oral history, both interviewer and interviewee are joint creators of the oral history archival record, and hence they share responsibility for its validity and integrity. For Cook (2010), the issue of context is still a powerful tool in this digital era. The provenance or context of archives remains a vital means of assessing the source, authority, accuracy and value of the information that they contain for administrative, legal (including access to information), research and cultural uses. Provenance helps in understanding a record and its content in terms of who made it, where, when, how and why and what changes have taken place with the record over time and why (Cook 2010). Therefore, the purpose of the study from which this article is drawn was to understand the types of oral history archives found in a village in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province, how they are managed and to determine the possibility of their preservation and publication.

Importance of oral history and its preservation

Scholars have varied perspectives regarding the importance of oral history and oral traditions. For example, Bhebhe (2019) avers that oral history has the potential to record and inscribe the views from community members in their natural settings. It is community focused and serves as a tool for cultural development and for developing community awareness around social issues that affect their livelihoods. It has transformative potential as it restores the community subject to history. Ngoepe (2019) underscores that oral sources are an important part of recreation and rethinking of the past, especially for those who never had an opportunity to tell their stories in the past.

According to Schellnack-Kelly (2017), the knowledge and wisdom contained in the oral tradition and indigenous stories are crucial for the preservation of the fauna and flora of the African continent. The oral tradition is an effective method for transmitting knowledge from one generation to the other. Through folklore and legends, guidance is provided to human beings who learn to accept the 'great indifferences' of Mother Earth, whose purpose is neither to punish, bless nor exert cruelty (Schellnack-Kelly 2017:19). Schellnack-Kelly

(2017) further indicates that all cultures worldwide have myths, legends and fairy tales. For her, all these narratives have 'fantastical' origins of the world and life, heroes and villains, of how we as people – children, mothers, fathers, grandparents, friends and colleagues should behave with humanness (Schellnack-Kelly 2017:19). However, in South Africa, the concern is raised that awareness and respect for the country's cultural diversity have been lost along the way and hence the need for collaborative partnerships to address such gaps (Schellnack-Kelly 2017:113).

Bhebhe and Ngoepe (2021:2) argue that conventional archives do not seem to be giving sufficient space to community archives and counter archives or identity archives. The authors opine that counter archives can help in telling the narratives that conventional archives cannot tell. They can help in pushing the agenda of social justice and thus give space and access to the long-neglected history (Bhebhe & Ngoepe 2021). It is understandable why many scholars in the postmodern era have questioned the role and functioning of the archives and archivists in society and why there is a call for reimagining how oral history archives are managed and preserved (Cook 2010). It is in this context that the management, preservation and publication of oral history archives are viewed as vehicles to heighten their inclusivity, accessibility and visibility.

To help the reader connect with the line of thought of this article, it is deemed important to briefly explain what records management, including the preservation of oral records, means in this context. Ngoepe (2008:1) explains that proper records management is a process of establishing systematic controls at every stage of a record's life cycle, in accordance with established principles and accepted models of records management. Digitisation is defined as a process of codifying information or knowledge so that it can be accessed globally and on a long-term basis (Akinwale 2012). An overlap has been noted with the terms digitisation and digital preservation. Kalusopa and Zulu (2009:98) explain that digital preservation concerns preserving information materials such as digital surrogates created from converting analogue materials to digital format, and those that are 'born' digital; that is, they were not in the analogue format before. Digital preservation differs from digital archiving in that it refers to a series of adopted management activities that are undertaken to ensure continued access to digitised materials for an agreed-upon period, while digital archiving refers to the process of creating backup as opposed to strategies for long-term digital preservation (Biyela, Oyelude & Haumba 2016).

Preservation is critical to the future of archives and key to the archivist's ability to facilitate long-term continuing access. The common activities that facilitate the maintenance of documentary materials in a useable state include environmental control and monitoring, regulations for the handling and use of materials, reformatting, disaster preparedness, preservation planning and policies, security, adequate storage of archives and records and conducting preservation surveys (Ngulube & Tafor 2006). The narration above supports the views of Cook

(2010) and Katuu (2003) that in the postmodernism era, archivists need to reimagine the way they manage archives, including oral history archives.

Problem statement

During democratic governance, the archival scene in South Africa was supposed to transform and reflect the diversity of the country, but there is concern that progress is slow and that it is still mainly Western dominated (Ngoepe 2019). Harris and Hatang (2000) reiterate that despite the process of transformation, South Africa is still haunted by the continued dominance in the archival discourse of white voices and Western modes of knowledge construction. Harris (2015) emphasises that counter-narratives need to be given the space and attention they deserve. For him, counter-narratives can help in reducing the cacophony or disharmony of big voices that make it hard to hear softer voices.

Ngoepe (2019:151) is also of the view that public archives in South Africa have been unable to transform themselves into active documenters of society. They have, as a result, failed to fulfil their mandate of collecting non-public records with an enduring value of national significance and to document aspects of the nation's experience neglected by archival repositories in the past. Bhebhe (2019) considers documenting as a means to an end but not an end in itself, as the written medium has its limitations as much as the oral medium. According to Bhebhe (2019), the written medium of oral history for the dissemination of authenticity and the intrinsic value of oral traditions to as many audiences as possible is viewed as relatively weak. In addition, once documented, ownership and copyright become an issue as some may want to generate money from the documented oral stories.

For Katuu (2003), the implication in most modernist definitions of the oral record has been that for it to be preserved, it has to be turned into some material form with all the requirements applied to records, such as text connected to context. However, the issue of changing the content from oral to a physical format compromises its nature, much like the printing of an electronic mail message has severed the document from the characteristics that make it what it is. These are complex matters and raise the issues of authenticity and trustworthiness of digital and surrogate records.

Given the narration above, the study aimed to understand how the oral archives in a village in the KZN province were managed and preserved. The objectives of the study were to:

- gain insight into the management and preservation methods of oral history archives in the village;
- establish the opportunities and challenges of preserving and publishing oral history archives;
- understand the level of knowledge about the South African intellectual property (SA-IP) laws and
- make recommendations regarding the management, preservation and publishing of oral history archives in the village.

Conceptual framework

To understand the management and preservation of oral history archives in the village and their provenance, a postmodernism model was adopted in the study. According to Cook (2010), provenance is viewed as the 'cornerstone' of archival science, as 'the most important of all principles' affecting archival practice. It is the distinguishing feature that gives archivists their professional identity in contrast to librarians and researchers or documentalists. Thus, the body of records – usually called the archival fonds, or fonds d'archives – is linked to the:

> [A]dministrative body, every physical or corporate entity, [*that*] automatically and organically accumulated [*the record*] by reason of its function or its activity. It is important that archivists understand the core value of provenance especially during this digital era, which other scholars [*have*] call[*ed*] the postmodernism era. (Cook 2010:2)

In this digital era, two factors have challenged the traditional definition and implementation of provenance. The first factor is the much deeper complexity of modern administrations in government, businesses and universities, amongst others, and the different ways modern employees now do their work – how they receive, create and share information and how that information is managed and communicated within (and outside) those organisations. This was even before the emergence of the computer that had its own enormous impact. The second factor is the radically different climate of ideas in which we live which, for ease of reference, could be called postmodernism, with all the social, cultural and intellectual dimensions of postmodernity associated with the term (Cook 2010). Cook (2010) avers that archivists need to move from being passive curators guarding the documentary legacies of the past to become and to be seen as active mediators who self-consciously shape society's collective memory in every archival function. Katuu (2003) reiterates that postmodernist archivists need to increase inclusivity by accommodating counter archives with the conventional ones (Bhebhe & Ngoepe 2021). Katuu (2003) views postmodernism as the model that seeks to accommodate the diversity of human experiences to enable the discovery and recovery of long-marginalised voices. Postmodernism aims at not only revolutionising archival thinking, but also at assisting archivists to operate in a more expansive, inclusive and welcoming fashion (Katuu 2003). This study resonated well with the adopted model as it asks the question: is the preservation and publishing of oral history archives feasible in this digital era?

Literature review

Bhebhe (2019:33) describes the literature review as an evaluation of surveys, books, scholarly articles and any other sources relevant to a topic of study. The literature review helps in the provision, description, summarisation and critical evaluation of the problem studied. This demonstrates to the readers how the problem studied fits within the broader context of related studies. Therefore, the literature review is

guided by the objectives of the study, namely to understand the management and preservation methods of oral history archives in the village, to establish opportunities and challenges of preserving and publishing oral history archives, to understand the level of knowledge about the SA-IP laws and to make recommendations regarding the management and preservation of oral history archives in the village.

Management and preservation methods of oral history

Schellnack-Kelly and Jiyane (2017:115) posit that oral history is a valuable undertaking in the process of collecting indigenous knowledge (IK) and using it innovatively to formulate sustainable, workable solutions to address contemporary challenges. Furthermore, they argue that oral history's collection, preservation and accessibility using digitisation can help in the interpretation of forgotten narratives and the generation and spreading of interest in IK.

The literature indicates that many national archives in Africa have experienced numerous problems that have resulted in them failing to fulfil their central role of effectively managing government information. The findings of various studies have shown that some national archival institutions were not managing records throughout their life cycle, partly because of weak legislative mandates (Ngulube & Tafor 2006). Ngoepe (2008) reiterates that there is a tendency amongst organisations not to base their records management practices on existing theories or principles of records management. This study thus argues that when engaging in the management of counter archives including oral history, such errors should not be duplicated.

Opportunities and challenges of preserving oral history archives

Many studies agree that when South Africa became a democratic country, the need for the revitalisation of oral histories (that had long been neglected) culminated in too many projects that were meant to fill the gaps the conventional archives could not fill. Managed by the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (NARSSA) in collaboration with the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), these projects included the National Oral History Programme (2001), the Oral History Association of South Africa (2003) and the National Register of Oral Sources (2003) (Deacon, Mngqolo & Prosalendis 2003:13–14; Ngoepe 2019:151). There have, however, been lamentations that these projects did not seem to bear sufficient fruit, as they failed to adequately fulfil their mandate of collecting non-public records of national significance and enduring value and documenting aspects of the nation's experience neglected by archive repositories in the past (Ngoepe 2019:151).

In the few cases where the historical archival records have been collected, accessibility and visibility become an issue. For example, Mukwevho and Ngulube (2022:2) point out that the NARSSA and its subsidiary, the National Film, Video and Sound Archives (NFVSA) have a legislative mandate to arrange, describe, preserve and make public records available to members of the public. Together with the national and provincial archival services and audio-visual collections at the NFVSA, South Africa's archival heritage spreads from the diaries of Jan van Riebeeck to oral history projects with communities in and around South Africa's national game parks. However, the oral history that has been captured since the early 2000s is hidden on tapes stored in boxes at the NFVSA, with no one accessing them or the public being aware of their existence. Given these challenges, Mukwevho and Ngulube (2022:5) recommend the use of public programming strategies to increase the visibility and use of oral history. These strategies may include various advocacy methods such as the use of publications, exhibitions, tours, seminars, workshops, school visits and various social media platforms (Mukwevho & Ngulube 2022:5).

Ngoepe (2008) asserts that the management of records and archives, particularly within the context of the public sector, is governed by four important principles or theories:

> These are (1) that records must be kept together according to the agency responsible for their creation or accumulation, in the original order established at the time of their creation; (2) that records follow a life cycle; (3) that the care of records should follow a continuum; and (4) that records must be organised according to hierarchical levels in order to reflect the nature of their creation. (p. 7)

For example, according to Ngoepe (2008), the continuum theory (or model) emerged during the 1990s to help in managing electronic or digital records. The model was developed by Ian MacLean (a renowned Australian archivist and records manager) and in terms of the model, record keeping is a continuing process that does not separate the life of records in time and space (Ngoepe 2008:10). In the continuum approach, there are no strict boundaries between archives and records management responsibilities, as current records can also become archives right from creation, instead of waiting for final disposal to determine this. Ngoepe (2008:10–11) explains that the continuum model comprises four actions as reflected in Table 1.

It is apparent that the four principles tally with Cook's (2010) principle of provenance or contextual understanding of a record managed during the postmodernism era. As already highlighted, Cook (2010) argues that provenance helps in understanding a record and its content in terms of who made it, where, when, how, and why and what changes have taken

TABLE 1: The continuum model.

Process	Records management process	Archives management actions
Identification and acquisition	Creation or receipt	Selection and acquisition
Intellectual control	Classification within a logical system	Arrangement and description
Access	Maintenance and use	Reference and use
Physical control	Disposal by destruction or transfer as archives	Preservation

Source: Adapted from Ngoepe, M.S., 2008, 'An exploration of records management trends in the South African public sector: A case study of the Department of Provincial and Local Government', MInf Dissertation, Department of Information Science, University of South Africa

place with the record over time and why. These principles can be extended to the management of counter archives, including oral history archives of the postmodernism era.

Legislative requirements

According to Ngulube and Tafor (2006), the protection of the national documentary heritage is a responsibility of the state because public records are public property. The authors argue that archival legislation comprises three generations, that is, first, second and third (Ngulube & Tafor 2006). Furthermore, the authors recommend that in this postmodernism era, archivists need to be encouraged to use the third-generation legislation as it takes cognisance of the electronic environment, convergent technologies, the web environment, web portals and gateways, government online initiatives, e-transactions, e-business, knowledge management and information management. Because of the inherent value of oral traditions and IK and their propensity to exploitation and marginalisation, their management and preservation cannot be done in a vacuum. Rather, their management and preservation should be anchored on a legislative framework that will provide the overarching frame (Zimu-Biyela 2016). For instance, the National Archives of South Africa Act 1996, as amended, mandates the NARSSA to establish archival standards in South Africa (National Archives of South Africa Act, 1996). In 2010, the DAC promulgated the National Policy on Digitisation of Heritage Resources (Biyela et al. 2016) and the South African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) Policy underlines the importance of putting IK on databases and protecting it using the South African Intellectual Property Law Amendment Bill of 2008 (Department of Science and Technology 2008). Kerr (2006:146) states that the survival of oral traditions and IK depends on their preservation. This underscores the importance of educating communities and archivists that copyright and other relevant laws must not be ignored.

Both empirical and theoretical evidence seem to confirm the recurring challenges facing the management and preservation of public archives including oral history archives. This study, therefore, resonates well with the evidence as its findings regarding the management and preservation of oral history archives in the village under study will help contribute to the existing knowledge. In addition, the study aims to make recommendations on how the identified challenges can be mitigated.

Research methodology

A qualitative approach and the grounded theory method were adopted for the study. Qualitative research was used as it assists with the in-depth understanding of a problem studied in its natural setting. It also helped the researcher to purposively find cases that were relevant to the study (Creswell & Creswell 2018). Grounded theory was mainly used for theory gathering and data analysis purposes (Silverman 2010). Semi-structured interviews were used in collecting data from six participants. Snowball and purposive

sampling procedures were used to select the participants. The researcher was referred to these participants as they were known to be rich sources of oral traditions in the village. Participants comprised two females and four males. The females were each over the age of 80, and the males were between 30 and 70 years old. Table 2 reflects the biographical information of the participants including their education level and the types of oral tradition they were specialists in.

As indicated in Table 2, one female participant had a rich knowledge of the history of the village, while the other was the embodiment of knowledge on bead weaving. The four male participants were the embodiments of African poets (*izimbongi* or praise singers), African art and African music such as *isicathamiya*. Data gathered were analysed thematically. Data analysis was guided by the basic principles of grounded theory such as the identifying of themes and the constant comparison of themes and data coding until the saturation stage is reached (Gray 2009:495; Neuman 2003:439). For data collection, the language of the participants, isiZulu, was used. It is acknowledged that some of the statements may have been misinterpreted during data analysis. Given this, the study findings cannot claim to be completely unbiased.

Findings and discussion

Findings are reported and discussed in line with the objectives of the study.

Methods used to manage and preserve oral traditions

Results revealed that memory was predominantly used to manage and preserve knowledge. In addition, when the participants were asked how they acquired knowledge, it transpired that it was acquired from grandparents, parents and other community members through word of mouth and apprenticeship. The same methods were being used to transfer knowledge to the younger generation. However, findings also indicated that there were two unique cases: one participant who specialised in African art (painting and sculpting) indicated that his art skills were further articulated at the Durban Art College. Furthermore, some of his artwork was preserved in one of the museums in Durban (KwaMuhle), KZN province. The poet or praise singer (*imbongi*), who was between 30 and 40 years old, indicated that he used a cellphone to audio-record some of his poems and an exercise book to document them from tacit to explicit knowledge. It is

TABLE 2: Biographical information of participants.

Type of oral tradition	Female	Male	Age range	Education level
History of the village	F	-	80 and above	No formal education
Bead-weaving	F	-	80 and above	No formal education
Folklores (African art)	-	M	40–50	Diploma
Traditional music (*isicathamiya*)	-	M	40–50	Grade 10
African poets (*izimbogi*)	-	M (2)	30–70	Grade 12
Total	**2 (F)**	**4 (M)**	-	-

Source: Zimu-Biyela, A.N., 2016, 'The management and preservation of indigenous knowledge in Dlangubo Village in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa', PhD thesis, Department of Information Science, University of South Africa

notable that participants who used innovative methods of managing and preserving oral traditions were below the age of 50 years. It is apparent that the socialisation mode of knowledge transmission and memory (in situ preservation) was predominantly used in the village studied. Ex situ preservation methods were used but at a limited rate. This confirms the views of scholars that in many heritage institutions such as libraries, museums and archives, the cacophony of big voices is still dominating and making it hard to hear softer voices (Bhebhe 2019; Bhebhe & Ngoepe 2021; Harris 2015; Schellnack-Kelly & Jiyane 2017). It also emphasises the need for the intensification of digitisation projects of oral traditions (Kerr 2006) that will take into consideration the management of archives, including oral archives of the postmodernism era (Cook 2010; Katuu 2003), and the use of relevant theories such as the continuum theory (Ngoepe 2008).

Opportunities and challenges of preserving oral history archives

When the participants were asked about the opportunities and challenges of preserving oral history, it transpired that preservation was important for various reasons, including posterity and cultural, educational and commercial purposes. However, a concern that was raised by one female participant was that the more she was aging, the more her memory was failing her. She further indicated that she knew the son of X who had written down some good history and who could be helpful for people such as researchers. The second female participant who embodied knowledge on bead-weaving and crop farming was concerned that while the end-products of her knowledge were important for commercial benefit, strong social cohesion in the village was gradually disintegrating as community members were not supportive of each other. For example, even when informed that the crop yields and beaded products were on the market, the members would prefer to buy externally. The participant who embodied African art echoed the same sentiment, namely that there was no market in the village as community members were not supportive of each other. As a result, his artefacts are preserved in one of the museums in Durban. He noted that it is expensive to travel to Durban as he was unemployed. Further illustrating the disintegration of social cohesion in the village was the participant who led the traditional music group (*isicathamiya*) reiterating that the group was dissolving because everyone wants to be a leader.

Given the highlighted challenges, the need for an external facilitator who could help in strengthening social cohesion amongst the social structures in the village was a common theme in the responses of the participants.

One participant, who was an oral poet between 60 and 70 years of age, indicated that his poems were of educational value to the youth and he recited them mostly during initiation ceremonies. Similarly, the poet who was between 30 and 40 years old specified that his poems were of educational and commercial value as he was invited to recite them during special functions at the local schools. He further indicated that he was reluctant to share documented poems as he had lost some in a poetry competition that was organised by the Department of Correctional Services in partnership with the Department of Sports, Arts and Recreation. This was concerning to him as he had been told that his poems had won the competition. However, he could not fight the matter as he was still serving an imprisonment sentence. Despite that, he was still keen to use innovative methods to preserve and publish his poems for educational and commercial purposes.

The above findings and discussion confirm the views of Bhebhe and Ngoepe (2021), Cook (2010) and Katuu (2003) that the management of archives during the postmodernist era needs to be inclusive and accommodating. Space needs to be given to the long-neglected counter archives.

South African intellectual property laws

A further important question the participants had to respond to regarded their level of knowledge of the SA-IP laws. With one exception, findings indicated that most of the participants did not know anything about the laws. The exception was the oral poet who had the above-mentioned experience of losing some of his poems in a competition. He even used the adage 'once bitten, twice shy' in terms of being involved in similar competitions. The participant indicated that while he was aware that the law protects someone's knowledge, he needed to get in-depth knowledge about this as he was keen to preserve and publish his poems.

The study argues that it is not only the communities who need to be educated about the laws protecting their oral knowledge, but the archivists as well. The latter need to be educated about third-generation legislative requirements of managing records including oral records of the postmodernism era.

Conclusions and recommendations

The theory of provenance underpinned by the continuum approach to managing electronic resources was adopted to gain insight into the context in which oral history records of the studied village were created, managed, preserved, published and shared. In addition, the postmodernism model helped in understanding the role played by the local (KZN province) postmodernist archivists in increasing inclusivity by accommodating oral history counter archives with the conventional archives. As the findings of the study inferred, the local postmodernist archivists played a limited role in helping the village community manage their local archives. For example, and as mentioned, the participant who embodied African art indicated that some of his artefacts were preserved in one of the museums in Durban and he was the one who identified the museum in this regard. However, it was expensive for an unemployed individual like him to travel to Durban as the city was far from the village. It is unclear whether the local heritage institutions, including the archives, had embraced this identified opportunity and

reached out to help in the management, preservation and publishing of the identified archives. The findings of the study also indicated that one of the 'younger' poets was creating oral poems for educational purposes and was using his cell phone to record and an exercise book to document and preserve them. It is thus understandable that he was eager to be educated about the SA-IP laws to protect his intellectual property. This, as already pointed out, was crucial for him as he had the experience of losing some of his poems. In addition, the participant was adamant that his poems were important for both educational and commercial benefits and hence the need for them to be published. The oral history archives that were preserved in the minds of the two elderly women participants were at risk of disintegrating and getting lost for various reasons, such as loss of memory and death, underscoring the need for preservation and possible publishing. The popular traditional music known as *isicathamiya* was also at risk of disintegration because of the lack of social cohesion in the village.

It can be concluded that the findings of the study confirm the views of archival scholars that in this postmodernism era, oral history archives were not managed, preserved and published sufficiently to increase accessibility and visibility. The need for public archives and archivists to take stock and reimagine the way they manage, preserve and publish archives in line with the NARSSA regulatory framework and public programming strategies is a critical one. The study reiterates the need for using postmodernist archival management strategies that aim to increase inclusivity, accessibility and visibility in a regulated manner.

Finally, the findings of the study indicated that oral traditions are important for educational, cultural and commercial purposes. It is, therefore, important that rural communities are educated about the IP laws protecting their archives, including oral history archives. Both archive users and archivists need to be educated regarding the opportunities and challenges of managing and publishing electronic archival records, including social media records that are managed in volatile and fluid contextual spaces. To put it differently, electronic records are exposed to risks of being copyrighted, manipulated and lost unless stringent digital rights management is implemented. Archivists and archive users thus need to be educated about third-generation legislative laws for managing and publishing archives in the postmodern era.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

Author's contributions

A.N.Z-B. is the sole author of this article.

Ethical considerations

The study was cleared as a low-risk study by the Department of Information Science, University of South Africa.

Funding information

Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available as they contain information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

References

Akinwale, A.A., 2012, 'Digitisation of indigenous knowledge for natural resources management in Africa', paper presented at the 20th Anniversary Summit of the African Educational Research Network at North Carolina State University, Raleigh, 19th May.

Bhebhe, S., 2019, 'Memorialising minority groups in post-independence Zimbabwe and South Africa: A critical analysis of oral history programmes', PhD thesis, Department of Information Science, University of South Africa.

Bhebhe, S. & Ngoepe, M., 2021, 'Building counter-archives: Oral history programmes of Sinomlando Centre and Memory Work in Africa and the South African History Archives', *Information Development* 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666921999754

Biyela, N., Oyelude, A. & Haumba, E., 2016, 'Digital preservation of indigenous knowledge (IK) by cultural heritage institutions: A comparative study of Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda', in *The proceedings of the digital transformation and the changing role of libraries and information centres in the sustainable development of Africa at the 22nd Standing Conference of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa Library and Information Associations*, Swaziland Library and Information Association, Mbabane.

Bradsher, J.G., 1991, *Managing archives and archival institutions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.

Cook, T., 2010, 'Rethinking provenance in the digital age', paper presented at the Round Table of the International Council on Archives (CITRA), Oslo, 16th September.

Creswell, J.W. & Creswell, J.D., 2018, *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches,* 3rd edn., Sage, Los Angeles, CA.

Deacon, H., Mngqolo, S. & Prosandelis, S., 2003, *Protecting our cultural capital: A research plan for the heritage sector*, HSRC Publishers, Cape Town.

Department of Science and Technology (DST), 2008, *Indigenous knowledge systems: A policy framework*, viewed 09 March 2014, from http://www.dst.gov.za.

Gray, D.E., 2009, *Doing research in the real world*, 2nd edn., Sage, Los Angeles, CA.

Harris, V., 2015, 'Hauntology, archivy and banditry: An engagement with Derrida and Zapiro', *Critical Arts* 29(S1), 13–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/02560046.2015.1102239

Harris, V. & Hatang, S., 2000, 'Archives, identity and place: A dialogue on what it (might) mean(s) to be an African archivist', *ESARBICA Journal* 19, 55.

Kalusopa, T. & Zulu, S., 2009, 'Digital heritage material preservation in Botswana: Problems and prospects', *Collection Building* 28, 98–107. https://doi.org/10.1108/01604950910971125

Katuu, S., 2003, 'Engaging orality within the archival discourse: Its contents and discontents', *Comma – International Journal on Archives* 1, 83–102.

Kerr, D., 2006, '"Folklore", cultural property and modernisation in sub-Saharan Africa', *Critical Arts* 20(1), 144–157. https://doi.org/10.1080/02560040608557783

Klopfer, L., 2001, 'Oral history and archives in the new South Africa: Methodological issues' *Archivaria* 52(February), 100–125.

Mukwevho, J. & Ngulube, P., 2022, 'A framework for enhancing the visibility and accessibility of public archives in South Africa', *Archives and Records, The Journal of the Archives and Records Association* 42(3), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/23257962.2022.2031933

National Archives and Records Service Act, No. 46 of 1996, 1996, viewed 10 February 2022, from https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/act43of1996.pdf.

Neuman, W.L., 2003, *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*, Allyn & Bacon, Boston, MA.

Ngoepe, M., 2019, 'Archives without archives: A window of opportunity to build inclusive archives in South Africa', *Journal of the South African Society of Archivists* 52, 149–166.

Ngoepe, M.S., 2008, 'An exploration of records management trends in the South African public sector: A case study of the Department of Provincial and Local Government', MInf Dissertation, Department of Information Science, University of South Africa.

Ngulube, P. & Tafor, V.F., 2006, 'The management of public records and archives in the member countries of ESARBICA', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 27(1), 57–83. https://doi.org/10.1080/00039810600691288

Ritchie, D.A., 2015, *Doing oral history,* 3rd edn., Oxford University Press, New York, NY.

Schellnack-Kelly, I., 2017, 'The role of storytelling in preserving Africa's spirit by preserving the continent's fauna and flora', *Mousaion* 35(2), 17–27. https://doi.org/10.25159/0027-2639/1544

Schellnack-Kelly, I. & Jiyane, V., 2017, 'Tackling environmental issues in the digital age through oral histories and oral traditions from the iSimangaliso Wetland', *Historia* 62(2), 112–129. https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-8392/2017/v62n2a6

Silverman, D., 2010, *Doing qualitative research: A practical handbook*, 3rd edn., Sage, Los Angeles, CA.

Swain, E.D., 2003, 'Oral history in the archives: Its documentary role in the twenty-first century', *The American Archivist* 66(Spring/Summer), 139–158. https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.66.1.9284q6r604858h40

Zimu-Biyela, A.N., 2016, 'The management and preservation of indigenous knowledge in Dlangubo Village in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa', PhD thesis, Department of Information Science, University of South Africa.