

ABSTRACT

This paper considers the interaction between the process of producing a documentary video film 'The Medicine Bag' and an indigenous knowledge system from the Northern Cape where herbalists or traditional healers are known as ! aixa (Qaiga). These healers use indigenous plants and other raw materials, sounds, rubbing or massaging techniques, incisions and other methods to heal or to harm members of the community. The Schwartz family, Namas who hail from this region, have for many years passed the knowledge and the skills for healing on from generation to generation. For as long as the family can remember, members of each generation, specially gifted and interested in acquiring these skills, have been selected and trained to recognise and harvest medical plants, prepare medicines and apply the various skills required to heal the sick. The raw herbs, potions and medicines have been kept in a medicine bag, made from a tanned springbuck hide.

Research for a documentary video to record oral accounts and practices attached to the medicine bag, revealed various themes related to the interaction between oral accounts and the process of recording and transcribing these narratives. These themes included the absence of a fixed storyline or a single 'correct' text as is often assumed when one engages with written literature; shifts in meaning that occur when the physical forms of the accounts change as each recording or re-editing acquires a 'performative aura' and issues such as the importation of cultural authority and resources on the participants, their active participation in the process of memory and archive creation as well as the impact of the process on the filmmaker/researcher that included an enriched understanding of the scope and possibilities of working with oral texts

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