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Bridging the Digital Divide: Afrocentric Approaches in the 2021 My Body My Space Online Arts Festival for Rural Emakhazeni, Mpumalanga

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Bridging the Digital Divide: Afrocentric Approaches in the 2021 My Body My Space Online Arts Festival for Rural Emakhazeni, Mpumalanga.

Research report as a fulfilment for the Degree of, Master of Arts in Heritage studies by Coursework and Research Report

at the
University of the Witwatersrand.

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Ethics number: WSOA/2022/10/06

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Supervisor: Nontobeko Ntombela

Declaration

I, Nomfundo Linami Khathi, declare that this is my original work. It has never been submitted to any institution before. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Heritage Studies, from History of Art, in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.



Nomfundo L Khathi

13/03/2023

Date

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DEAR LORD, I AM THANKFUL FOR THE STRENGTH TO COMPLETE.

……

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Abstract

The attempt at online arts festival for a rural community seems to be executed in ways that do not consider issues of digital dissemination in historically marginalised spaces. Those organising events requiring internet access in rural communities overlook that rural areas are not very 'well' developed. The study does not reject online arts festivals for historically marginalised areas but suggests that the approach taken should take into account rural issues related to resources. The hindrances with online access for rural communities have not been adequately addressed. The theory of Afrocentrism emphasises that Africans need to make Africa the centre of their own problems and solutions, by advocating that Africans need to locate themselves historically and culturally. They need to acknowledge their context and situation so that they can provide solutions aligned with their problems. The study notices a paradigm shift in South Africa, as the MBMS festival is now being held in the rural Emakhazeni community, moving away from the 'traditionally known' urban festival locations. This shift includes moving from an in-person MBMS festival to an online format in 2021, which has been affected by data and internet coverage issues in rural Emakhazeni. While the festival is accessible online by anyone, its original intention was to serve the Emakhazeni rural community. Through a predominantly qualitative research approach, primary and secondary data were examined, exploring the 2021 MBMS online arts festival hosted on WhatsApp for rural Emakhazeni. The stakeholders in this study include the organisers of the MBMS festival, the Department of Arts and Culture, the Emakhazeni community members, and the performers of the festival. I engage d with multiple sources, to explore how these paradigm shifts could be envisioned or executed differently with an Afrocentric perspective. Although the MBMS online festival is curated in a way that appears to respond to the modern discourses on accessibility and audience development, it simultaneously forgets that rural areas are not very well developed in many parts of South Africa. Through an exploration of the 2021 MBMS festival, I unpack the way it established online accessibility and address the implications of this for the rural Emakhazeni. This research contributes to the investigation of what was silenced during the colonial and apartheid eras in South Africa, when many individuals were marginalised and denied access. Both practical steps and policy-oriented approaches are suggested by the study.

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Introduction

Inaccessibility of digital arts festivals in rural areas, from the aftermath of apartheid and absence of modern resources is investigated in this study through the case of the online 2021 MBMS Festival. This study finds out;In what ways can the Afrocentric thinking of the MBMS online arts festival designed for a rural area shift ways the MBMS festival is made accessible online?

To answer this main question, the study is framed within the theory of Afrocentrism that advocates for African people to perceive life from their perspective, to provide solutions aligned with them. I was interested to understand the extent to which the MBMS achieved this in its 2021 online festival, since disregarding the consequences of such shifts in approach may open up more inaccessibility issues. It may repeat South Africa's experiences during the apartheid system that marginalised, dominated, and exploited people of colour[1] in many ways (Adeline Piotrowski, 2019; Erna Oliver & Willem H Oliver, 2017; Leanda Heldring & James A Robinson, 2012; Stephen Ocheni & Basil C Nwankwo, 2012). People of colour, especially Black people, were side-lined so conspicuously, even in the Western conceptualisation of *arts festival*, and this is explained in chapter two.

Rural communities in South Africa have issues of online accessibility as a lingering effect of apartheid exclusion. These issues include lack of resources and very limited access to the internet (Irune Ruiz & Javier Esparcia, 2020). The Emakhazeni is an area in Mpumalanga, South Africa, with less development and infrastructure than urban areas in the province and is referred to as a rural area by the South African government (Integrated Development Plan 2018-2022). Emakhazeni has issues of access, including internet coverage (Emakhazeni Integrated Development Plan, 2017). The South African Revised White Paper[2] (2016) supports the need for infrastructure in the rural and black urban areas - they state that:

> The primary need for infrastructure is in the rural and black areas, close to where people live. The establishment of urban and peri-urban townships as dormitories, without proper facilities for recreation and leisure, is a feature of the apartheid. This deprivation cannot be continued in the new dispensation concerned with improving the quality of

[1] I use people of colour and Black people interchangeably because I acknowledge that the apartheid system unfairly treated all people of colour. However, the study is located in rural Emakhazeni, a primarily Black community, and therefore speaks to the online accessibility issues of specifically Black people in a rural area.

[2] A white paper in a statement of government policy to guide the introduction and implementation of new policies and legislation aimed at transforming the South African public service (Parliament of South Africa).

> people's lives at a local level. Such improvement must include developing facilities to educate, nurture, promote enable the enjoyment of arts, film, music, visual art, dance, theatre, and literature (Revised White paper, 2016).

There is a need for rural areas to be able to access online arts festivals because it breaks down the rural-urban divide that isolates access to primarily urban areas. The government wants festivals to be hosted in rural areas for many reasons, including social cohesion, economic development, and political reasons.

To an extent, the My Body My Space (MBMS) is a festival hosted in the rural Emakhazeni in South Africa that can be seen as a response to the White Paper by taking their festival to a historically marginalised and rural community. MBMS is a public performing arts festival that includes dance, theatre, and poetry and is organised by the Forgotten Angle Theatre Collaborative (FATC). FATC is an organisation founded by Director Peter John Sabbagha – it was established in 1995 and is regarded as one of South Africa's leading dance organisations. On the SABC 2 news channel, morning live show, Athena Mazakaris (2019), one of the organiser's of the MBMS festival took us through how the festival came about:

> it came about when we saw the lack of access from the community; lack of access to art, to art experiences, and arts education. We started running this festival when we were in Gauteng, where the first one was at the Ekurhuleni, and then moved to Mpumalanga where we saw the need for bringing such a festival to rural Mpumalanga (Mazarakis, 2019).

In 2017, during his interview with SABC 2 news channel, the director of the MBMS festival stated that their focus is to make the festival accessible to rural communities, as festivals are typically 'perceived' to be centred in urban areas (Sabbagha, 2017). The festival has been hosted in-person for free since its inception in 2015, where people would walk through and experience it. It then changed to a digital platform in 2021 to comply with COVID-19 restrictions but returned to in-person in 2022. Although constraints arose due to the pandemic, it is important to consider how hosting a festival online for rural communities in particular entails a different setup and a different audience with a different history, experiences, and realities.

Background and context to the study

During the apartheid era in South Africa, law was enacted that severely restricted where different races[3] could live and own land. Black people were mostly driven to areas where infrastructure was absent or minimal and became an issue in their assigned rural areas. In the areas outside the city, where Black people lived, there was very little development. Unlike modern urban areas, historically marginalised areas often do not have 4G/5G cellular network technology. Rural communities are persistently denied what is basic infrastructure in urban and peri-urban areas.

This lack of infrastructure that is needed to enable digital connections means that the 2021 MBMS festival being hosted for a rural area, and through a digital platform, faces impediments and has implications for what is possible. The move to host online arts festivals in rural communities is a way of facing and changing historic exclusion head-on. However, the one stand out question is; how is this shift fully addressing the issues of access in Emakhazeni? These issues cannot be overlooked because the dilemma of viewing life from largely a global perspective[4] has worked to alienate local perspectives (Kevin V Mulcahy (2017). A perspective that shifts away from a global perspective means considering issues such as lack of ICT infrastructure and economy that affect Emakhazeni.

Choosing WhatsApp as a medium for access is assumed to provide easy access from a broad perspective, and in comparison, to other online platforms. But is this assumption fair to make for rural communities, and Emakhazeni in particular? Is moving to WhatsApp or online at all easy or possible for them? This would have been better understood if the organisers shared what they found in their inquiry, but my engagement with community members gives a different picture, and this unfolds in the study. Mulcahy's (2014) observation reflects a big the problem that local perspectives are not prioritised. Perceiving life fully from the perspective of a historically

[3] In the book *Dynamics of race and gender*, Halen Afshar and Mary Maynard (1994) argue that it is important to draw the problematic nature of race when embarking on any racial discussions, as "it has long been recognized that races do not exist in any scientifically meaningful sense" Leo Panitch and Colin Leys (2009). However, people continue to act as if race is a "fixed category." These beliefs are reflected as Solomons (1989) has pointed out in both political discourse and the level of popular ideas. The study uses 'race' because of its effects from these beliefs. I do not use race to perpetuate the idea that race is fixed and has a scientifically meaningful sense.

[4] A viewpoint that posits the world as one and considers the nature of the issue globally.

marginalised community may have the power to understand and face issues in a way that is relevant to them. What gives directors the reason to describe WhatsApp as ‘easy accessibility’? To what extent is it easily accessible?

This study is important as it unpacks whether the community is enabled to continue accessing the festival. It also serves as a contribution to the body of literature on online festivals, its dynamics, advantages and disadvantages, and benefits and limitations. Understanding the scope of transformative actions to support access to disadvantaged people will help South Africans, researchers, and future developers to make informed decisions - they are rebuilding their country and addressing the lingering issues of an old but substantial system of power. To achieve this, South Africans need to realise the importance of and contribute towards redressing the consequences of the past.

‘African solutions for African problems’ is how Laurie Nathan (2013) phrases it, and Swati Dlamini Mandela (2020) supports it by stating that Africans should provide solutions aligned with their issues. Remofiloe Lobakeng (2017) seems to be sceptical about the idea that Africans need to provide solutions for themselves. Her biggest concern is that we, people advocating it “assume that African leaders and elites have the desire and willingness to fulfil this promise”(reference). I argue that it is not necessary to wait for leaders at national, provincial, or local level to bring the change. In the case of the MBMS, it can take researchers and the organisers of the festival to provide online festival access aligned with the issues of Emakhazeni. This study proposes that when dealing with historically marginalised communities, acknowledging, and addressing their past is integral, especially regarding access to what they were previously denied.

The study investigated how the MBMS festival executed the shift from in-person to a digitally hosted festival, and how the background and history of the Emakhazeni rural area was considered. The rules forbidding public gatherings and events made the shift to a digital platform the only way the festival could still be held, aiming to give people a similar festival experience to previous years. The 2021 MBMS move to online still aimed at maintaining the focus on the Emakhazeni rural community and providing access on a digital platform was expected to lead to more engagement. How did the organisers make sure that it did not exclude the very same community that the festival

was held for? The 2021 MBMS festival's WhatsApp-based access is the focus of this investigation, and to unpack any benefits and limitations.

Research Methodology

It is important that I first position myself in terms of theory in this study before engaging with the methods employed - researcher positionality influences the research process. Andrew Gary and Darwin Holmes (2020) identify positionality by locating the researcher in three areas: (1) the subject under investigation; (2) the research participants; and (3) the research context and process. I am not a member of the Emakhazeni community, and thus am a kind of outsider. The community's geographical location is in rural Mpumalanga. As a person who grew up in a rural area, I relate significantly to how technological advances exclude rural areas. The Emakhazeni is a predominantly Black community. Being a Black person and growing up Black in a rural area, I am aware of the history of Black people regarding marginalisation and access. These are undoubtably deep influences on the subject of study, and the decision to conduct this study in particular. I can definitely say that I see myself in the people of Emakhazeni.

Historically marginalised areas, including many rural areas, are still developing, or very poorly developed. This reality excludes them from accessing resources and events like the online arts festival, which might be seen to repeat historical harm of exclusion. The study could alert other festival organisers looking forward to joining the world of digital dissemination on what to look out for, particularly about using platforms like WhatsApp. The reliance on digital resources is increasing, thus, researching the scope and effectiveness of newly implemented digital methods is needed. Understanding issues can provide helpful information for MBMS festival and others aiming to carry out something similar.

This research is located within a subjectivist ontology, and a social constructionist epistemology. What this means is that in this study, I think of reality as being experienced differently by different people, respecting all points of view, and that people build an understanding of what is in their world together. I approached participants to understand their points of view, especially because I centre this research on the Afrocentric theory. I started learning about Afrocentrism in 2020 from Siphamandla Zondi, a Professor at the University of Pretoria. His interests lie in but are not

restricted to theory-building concerning decolonisation and transformation of the modern world and its systems.

Prof Zondi's online session *Afrocentric research paradigms*, available on the *Fabacademic* Instagram account. It motivated me to embark on this journey of incorporating Afrocentrism in thinking about internet accessibility in rural communities. I enjoyed the idea of perceiving life from your special, contextualised lens to create solutions that will speak to you and your problems. It was very personal experience of resonance, because I remember how I disliked literature in the English language in high school. The dislike for literature emerged from how I saw William Shakespeare's writings as not relatable, which made them hard to grasp. It had political components that were not from a South African political perspective. This does not mean I was adamant about rejecting outside information. I strongly feel that I would have been more receptive to it if I had learnt about South African queens and kings first, our African literature, and then moved on to a more global perspective.

This study was qualitative in nature – data was not numbers or statistics, but instead in-depth interactions with stakeholders involved in the MBMS festival. The qualitative research approach was chosen for its ability to examine how people make sense of their own concrete, real-life experiences "in their own minds and their own words*"* (Arthur Cropley, 2021:5). Michael Quinn Patton and Cochran Michael (2002) argue that it allows for the understanding of some aspects of social life to interpret data. This is necessary to my study as its theoretical framework is centred around rural Africans perceiving life from their perspective to provide solutions aligned with their problems and reality. This means I need to know their reality and experiences when it comes to access.

The phenomena under study are the ideas, experiences, and opinions of the stakeholders. The study was a case study. The data collected were interviews, information disseminated by the festival organisers, and further information gathered about data, internet, and cost in South Africa. Ethics clearance was granted by the University of the Witwatersrand [WSOA/2022/10/06], thereafter participants were approached. Because I was looking for stakeholders of the festival, I had a good idea of who I needed to talk to. I needed to talk to the organisers, performers, and members of the

Emakhazeni community. This is called purposive sampling, to approach people to become participants because they have the information, I needed to answer the research question.

Different stakeholders were approached separately. I approached the community members because they are the recipients of the of the festival. I wanted to find out their experiences with this kind of online accessibility. I approached the director of the festival because they are the ones who developed this festival, and they are the ones who decide the way in which they want it to be accessed. I wanted to ask questions around their planning and execution. I approached the performers because they could share their own experiences on how the community reacted to the festival they perform. I approached NAC officials because they are the ones funding this festival. I needed to know their motivation for this. I also wanted to find out if they monitor and evaluate if the festival reaches the people it is intended for.

An email was sent to the festival director, explaining the study's aim and how the online festival will help respond to the Afrocentric thinking. The director handed me over to another managing director who did not respond to the questions. The NAC participant was called via phone call. There were limitations for the NAC participant - I could not get more participants from the NAC as the Arts Development Officer, whom I interviewed and has been working for NAC for years and is an expert, said “we have no power to monitor and evaluate if the festival is accessible to the rural Emakhazeni. We contribute to and distribute the funds after evaluating the reports/proposals from the organisers”(reference). However, these questions were later directed to the conveners, to which they did not respond. The one MBMS festival performer I knew referred me to other performers. The community members were found through Facebook: I searched for Emakhazeni Local community and individually approached the people whose profiles included the name of Emakhazeni in Mpumalanga, with its different towns. I approached people in the areas where the MBMS festival is held. Some of the interviews with them were in person, and others were via text.

The study utilised the in-depth interview instruments of semi-structured interviews. This instrument is commonly used for its ability to allow participants to make the meaning of their reality in detail (Patton & Cochran, 2012:11). This research followed what Elizabeth Hill, Terry O’Sullivan, and Catherin O’Sullivan (2003) concede gives freedom to the interviewee and gives platform to the interviewer to ask questions, sometimes, based on the responses. And by this, the

interview gets prolonged (Hill, O'Sullivan & O'Sullivan, 2003). Eight in-depth interviews were conducted with participants ranging from National Arts Council ((NAC) the Arts Development Officer), the organiser of the MBMS festival, performers in the festival, and the community members. I customised the questions according to the respondent's role in the festival [APPENDIX 1,2, and 3]. Although sometimes the conversation digressed, it created an opportunity for new information and views. Most of the interviews lasted for about an hour depending on the participant. The in-depth interviews were audio-recorded, and I had an exercise book to jot down key points. The data was stored on a computer that only I have access to, to guarantee participant privacy and anonymity.

I have realised that some of the questions directed to the organisers of the festivals have already been engaged in their interviews with South African news broadcasting channels. The study accessed this already available information online. The study also utilised documents and websites. The interview data recorded was transcribed after the respective interviews, to capture information while the experience was still fresh, and this was continued throughout the data collection process. Once the transcriptions were completed, I used Helene O'Connor and Nancy Gibson's (2003) *Step-by-Step Guide to Qualitative Data Analysis,* which they explain is done by organising data and labelling by 'building' themes that are aligned or seem to be dominant in the data. Also ensuring "reliability and validity in the data analysis and the findings, providing possible and plausible explanations" (reference) for the finding. This is called thematic analysis.

The COVID-19 pandemic was challenging for the whole world - People had to stay home to slow the spread of the virus, and any gatherings (in South Africa specifically) were against the law. The rules and regulations for managing and controlling the spread of COVID-19 meant that live and in-person arts festivals were no longer possible, and organisers had to consider different ways to reach their audiences. Digital dissemination was a popular approach used in many fields, and some arts festivals adopted the approach for their events. The objectives revealed how accessibility to the online MBMS festival laid bare issues of the digital divide, and how the shift from the traditional, in-person 'arts festivals' (typically hosted in urban areas) was executed in a rural area. The Afrocentric perspective provides a foundation for interpreting the assumptions and consequences that the shift from in-person to online attendance had for Emakhazeni.

Introducing Afrocentric thinking (the thinking advocating African people to have solutions aligned with them) in online festival organisation and planning sought to help understand how applicable the methods used were, in the efforts to make the festival more accessible to isolated communities. It is important to acknowledge that I may not be aware of how the participants in study viewed themselves or expressed their identities. Thus, the study considers in-depth thought and critical analysis to emphasise participants' individuality.

Report outline

Chapter one discusses the concept of Afrocentrism: what it means, what it advocates for, and how it was applied in this study. Although Afrocentrism, for online festival, enables the festival to be accessed more conveniently by meeting its rural audience on their terms through online accessibility, this approach does not dismiss or attack efforts of the organisers, but grapples with the challenges that are paradoxical and builds upon the festival's existing accomplishments. The theory of Afrocentrism is carried over from an American context to a South African rural context. This means that the basis of the study's arguments are informed by life being perceived from a South African rural perspective. The chapter first provides the background and history of rural Emakhazeni, where the MBMS festival is held. Based on this background and history and engaging the Afrocentric theory. The chapter addresses how sensitive it is to continue access in the way the online MBMS festival does for the rural Emakhazeni.

Chapter two focuses on African festivals, especially in South Africa, and their dynamics. This chapter explores a brief history of festivals in Africa, how they were excluded from the Western and European conceptualisation of festivals due to historical biases and power dynamics, and how this affected African theatre, dance and music. The definition of festival is widely understood from a Western perspective, whereas, Western ideas of African civilizations were frequently seen as primitive or inferior, resulting in the marginalisation of their traditions. And this has negatively impacted Africa and makes it seem as though Africa does not have arts festival. The chapter further discusses how the West ironically has traces of African culture and performing arts in their festivals. The chapter looks at festivals held in urban and rural areas in South Africa, as both these geographical locations have different histories, which makes it possible to think they could be accessed differently and have different audiences. There is a focus on considering how the rural

communities have less access and cities have more or easier access - the study considers that there are some low-income groups in urban areas as well.

Chapter three discusses how Afrocentrism could shift how the MBMS festival is accessible online, encompassing Afrocentrism, the MBMS festival, and the rural Emakhazeni. The chapter rethinks or re-imagines the online MBMS festival for the rural Emakhazeni, delving into the challenges of MBMS festival's reach in rural Emakhazeni. Specifically, it scrutinizes the impediments that hinder the festival's virtual reach with this locale. This involves examining technological infrastructure, internet coverage availability, and device prevalence in rural Emakhazeni. And how to better align with the cultural and historical context of Emakhazeni, and potentially mitigating online accessibility challenges. The chapter begins by closely examining the MBMS festival and its online accessibility considering the issues of the place, then proceeds to speak to the emerging themes.

Chapter four is the conclusion. It provides recommendations and awareness for online festivals, thinking through the 2021 MBMS online festival. The conclusion offers both practical steps for improving online festival accessibility for a rural community, such as community engagement and hybrid approaches, as well as a broader policy-oriented suggestions, such as adopting an Afrocentric lens and addressing historical divides. These recommendations are drawn from the findings of the study and from the aim to enhance the inclusivity and impact of online arts festivals in rural areas.

Chapter 1: Situating Afrocentrism Within the Emakhazeni Rural Community

Understanding the Afrocentric theory is necessary to understanding how the study is framed - as a guide to answering the research question of: how this thinking could shift the way the 2021 MBMS online festival is made accessible for the rural Emakhazeni community?

The idea of Afrocentrism has a long, intricate history in African thought, with the likes of scholars like Molefe Kete Asante[5] and Paulin J Hountondji.[6] Asante advocated for the need for African immigrants in the Americas to relocate themselves: historically, economically, socially, politically, and philosophically. This idea spread across the globe. Hountondji has asserted the importance of an African perspective. This discussion of Afrocentrism incorporates ideas from conversations with other scholars who frame their work within this concept. As a counter, voices from scholars like the late Black American poet, music and cultural critic, Stanley Crouch (1995) and intellectual African history philosopher, Anthony Appiah (1992) are presented as academics who argue against the theory.

The intention behind bringing these writers into the discussion is to give a balanced argument of both the advantages and disadvantages of Afrocentrism, from scholarship and research. While doing this, I unpack Afrocentrism in the context of the Emakhazeni rural community to contextualise a South African rural community[7] from a larger, international perspective. The chapter introduces the Emakhazeni community where the MBMS festival is hosted. It reveals the area's background to explore the community's experiences and realities and locates them mainly in their historical context. Cited in Princewill Dimkpa (Gann and Duignan, 1975) challenge the idea of bringing up the past (historical unfavourable events) in present unsatisfactory situations.

[5] Asante is African American professor in the Department of Africology at Temple University in the United States of America, famous for writing the mandatory African American History course for Philadelphia School District.

[6] Hountondji is a Beninese (formerly known as Dahomey in the Western Africa) philosopher, academic, and politician who is regarded as a pertinent figure in African philosophical history

[7] Generally, the concept of community is understood as a group of people interacting with one another. In his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (1983) reflects on 'community' and shares how sometimes people from the same community do not even know each other but are imagined as a group of people living together. He then defines community as an imagined thing that people imagine. In the book *Ubuntu and the reconstitution of community*, in the South African context, James Ogude (2019:3) refers to community as "individuals who are related to the wider groups of which they may be part, not necessarily by descent, but because individuals are inextricably related to individuals and groups." In a black African community, ubuntu can be seen playing out in 'community' where you do not have to be born there, but because you have been there for a long time you have formed part of those people, you can identify yourself as part of them. For instance, because you live in Emakhazeni you share the place with everyone else who lives there, regardless of where you have lived before.

The argument is that there are other current issues that contribute to the side-lining and disadvantaging of the current community, such as visible corruption in the current government, which they believe to be the reason South Africa is showing slow progress - if it were not for this corruption, South Africa would be much more developed (Gann & Duignan, 1975). To an extent, I do agree that we, South Africans, cannot always blame the past, because we will miss the opportunity to see the gross incompetence and political dissonance in the current leadership. However, it should be noted that corruption was inherited from the apartheid government and is not something new. Cited in Tom Lodge (1998), Naidoo reminds us not to forget that the seeds of corruption were sown long before the post-apartheid government. This does not mean that corruption should not end.

I argue that bringing up the roots of corruption will help South Africans thoroughly understand how it thrives and reveal its impact, to help provide solutions that respond to where it comes from and enact redress. I do not naively believe that there was no corruption in the pre-colonial times. Daniel Zachariah Franks (2009,12) argues that there are "types of corruption which cannot be attributed to habits instilled during the previous administration - the nepotism arising from political solidarity" (reference). However, I believe that we need to understand how history has contributed to the situation of infrastructure and resources, which brought us to the ways that make it difficult to access festivals online from rural areas and for rural communities.

History has shaped the present, and how things are done in the present has a way of shifting how things may turn out in the future. Revisiting past events is useful to understand the present and to find ways to contribute towards a better future for generations to come. Jeffrey Haydu's (1998) idea that visiting the past helps in problem-solving, because valuable lessons can be learnt from past occurrences, is what motivates the study to look back into the past. In this regard, I engage how history has shaped Emakhazeni community in accessing digital arts festivals in the present.

1.1. Introducing the Emakhazeni area and community

Emakhazeni rural community is under the Emakhazeni local municipality in the Mpumalanga province, South Africa. Emakhazeni local municipality is made up of four towns surrounded by farming areas. The towns are Emakhazeni (previously known as Belfast), Dullstroom, Entokozweni (Machadodorp), and Emgwenya (Waterval Boven). Emakhazeni rural was

previously named Belfast, and the municipality was also named Belfast. It was one of the areas colonised and founded in the 1800s by a settler from Belfast, Ireland (Fenter Khumalo, 2022)[8]. Belfast was this settler's great-grandfather's place, a farm owned by him (the great-grandson) (Khumalo, 2022). Belfast (now Emakhazeni) was given this name because its weather was aligned with that of Belfast in Ireland (Khumalo, 2022). In the book *On Route in South Africa: Explore South Africa region by region*, Jonathan Ball Erasmus (2014) stated that Emakhazeni (Belfast) was founded in the 1800s, 1890 to be exact, and Ireland inspired the name Belfast. Belfast was founded as a municipality in 1910 but was an apartheid-established type of municipality. And then, another Black local authority was established for the Black people; Siyathuthuka, with its Black councillors and mayors. There was racial division, where in the Belfast community there were four mayors, two White mayors for predominantly White areas, and two Black mayors for predominantly Black areas (Khumalo, 2022).

The division was strongly entrenched in the whole Emakhazeni municipality, separating areas, where some were predominantly Black, and some were White dominant. A research participant who is one of the performers of the MBMS festival, Thabo (2021), shared his experience in 2017 during his performance with the MBMS festival, and it reveals the persisting racial divide between the White and Black communities of Emakhazeni. In his reflection he states:

> I like the performance I did during this particular time; it was next to the pool, next to the water, and next to the municipal building as well, I was speaking of service delivery and water, I became a voice, I voiced out what everyone else is sitting with. How do we speak of service delivery? For me, the performance became an enabler of accountability. That you can stand in front of a municipal building and perform, you can locate your performance next to a swimming pool, subsequently as well, speaking of water shortages in front of most of these people who do not have it in their houses. While some people have

[8] It is important to introduce Fenter Khumalo, a senior Emakhazeni community member. He experienced the place during apartheid and before it was named Emakhazeni. Fenter Khumalo is an elder who is 60 years of age and lives in the Emakhazeni area – he experienced most events first-hand. He was born there during the apartheid era and lives there to date. He is a source of lived history. I got in touch with him for the background and history of the place to date. He holds many accolades during his stay in the area. Khumalo is a former mayor of the Emakhazeni rural community (1995-2000), a former project coordinator at Belfast Reconstruction and Development Programme (1993-1995), former executive member at Belfast Residents Congress (1989-1993), Siyathuthuka Youth Congress President in 1986, former management at Emakhazeni arts, culture and Heritage (2010-2012), manager of office of the speaker at Emakhazeni local municipality (2012), former elections coordinator at Emakhazeni Local Government Elections (2015-2016), Provincial Secretary at Nafcon in Mpumalanga (2009), and chairperson at Nkangala district Municipality in Mpumalanga (2016). Some of the key areas of his studies are Media and Development at the University of Witwatersrand and Leadership and Management of Non-Profit Organisations at Wits graduate school.

> swimming pools, they have the luxury of water. A few kilometres from there are people struggling with water, but there's access here, and there's inaccess with them (Thabo, 2021).

In pre-colonial South Africa, the Emakhazeni area is said to have been an unoccupied piece of big land and nothing else. This is what the Black elders of the area were told (Khumalo, 2022). Diane Coetzer (2012) wrote about the beautiful landscape of Emakhazeni, nature and the farms. Insight Guides (2015) wrote about the views of hills and mountains in Emakhazeni, with hiking trails. There seems to be no record of the area from pre-colonial times: there are no details of what the area was before it was colonised and named Belfast. The only information that exists starts from its founding as Belfast. There are no archives of the place. The community sees the graves of the people who died during the Anglo-Boer war. There is also a monument for people who perished during this time. It is called Berg-en-dal in Emakhazeni. Khumalo (2022) narrates:

> There was a man we used to know back then; he was paralysed in his legs, apparently, he was made to join that war. He told us that many black people were impacted, fighting and helping the Afrikaner to fight the British people. They were there but never recorded. If you look at the monument, all the people who perished there, only Afrikaner names are there.

Emgwenya (Waterval Boven) still has ruins of buildings that were left over from Belfast. The Black people in the area migrated there slowly from places like Carolina.[9] They came in looking for jobs on the many Belfast farms in the area. Several industries started to develop there, like forestry and coal mining. Emakhazeni local municipality attests to this; see IDP (Integrated Development Plan, 2017-2022: 32). People ended up staying there and building homes and families. Though there were developments in infrastructure, they were only for the areas where White people lived. Siyathuthuka, a predominantly Black area, had no infrastructure. Machadodorp was predominantly a White area, Emthonjeni was a Black community, and Waterval Boven was a White community.

In 1995, after the abolishing of apartheid, Black mayors were elected, and they decided to develop infrastructure in the Black areas. Even though some infrastructure exists today in these Black areas, the economy is very poorly developed, therefore are not enough jobs in the area. “During the in-person MBMS festival, guest houses created job opportunities, but those jobs are relatively few, and benefit White towns because the performers do not sleep in the Black towns of Emakhazeni; the economic divide also exists” Thabo (2021), a performer of the MBMS festival,

[9] Carolina is a rural area that is 40 kilometres South of Belfast

explained. The only jobs available are for some people in the coal mines, the farming areas, and the tourism sector. Even so, these jobs are very scarce. The area is primarily low-income-dominated. Much of the youth only completed high school, and after matric there are little opportunities. Very few become successful - maybe around 10% make it to universities (Khumalo, 2022). It is the economic situation that creates a complicated life. Women are housewives with no jobs or stable income, and they struggle to make ends meet. Also, because it is a predominantly low-income area, products like data are an issue. "People typically buy R12 data, but it is usually less than R50" says a research participant of Emakhazeni community member, Zinhle (2021). These are also poverty indicators reported by IDP (2017-2022):

> It should be noted that the poverty line, in most cases, directly links to an area's unemployment rate. The community survey indicates that the population share in Emakhazeni below StatsSA lower-bound poverty line decreased marginally to 27.8%. The lower-bound poverty line was the 5th lowest among municipalities in the province. The number of people below the lower-bound poverty line increased slightly to 13 240. It has further been observed that poverty headcount intensity from 41.3% to 43.1% .

In this regard, Afrocentrism seems to be fitting. All these issues need to be seen and strategies and approaches need to be in alignment, so that they will enable fair online access for communities like Emakhazeni given the above constraints.

1.2. Afrocentrism

Afrocentrism gained popularity with Asante's book, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* (1980). However, Asante affirmed that Afrocentrism begun developing much earlier. Midas Chawane (2016) found that a book advocating it was published in 1954. There is literature suggesting that it existed among the descendant of enslaved Africans in the United States of America, through discrimination via racial segregation from 1865 to 1955, and in the fight for civil rights in 1954 to 1968. This is when social change and movements emerged strongly for Black communities in hopes to respond to discrimination. Afrocentrism is one of these, as a theory and practice, as a method to research, and as a social movement, culture, and lifestyle.

Afrocentrism is one of the critical social theories that has become a prominent subject in African studies, and in some other disciplines, especially in the humanities. Scholars, both American and African, across disciplines, emphasise the importance of Afro centralising knowledge, which is an effort to dismantle the problems of what Walter Mignolo (2007) termed epistemic coloniality. The

emphasis here is that although African people have been 'historically' represented in theory, it has been from a Eurocentric perspective that dislocates them. For example, the European idea of itself dispersed in all aspects of life in Africa, and Africa became an image of Europe - Africa's traditional lifestyles and cultures were destroyed or side-lined. Afrocentrism maintains that any analysis of African issues should be informed by African history.

This theory has multiple definitions, explanations and implementations or potential implementations in various disciplines. This study is ideologically guided by the notion of Afrocentrism, particularly on its advocacy for allowing Africans to perceive life from their perspective, to help challenge power relations driven by the standardisation of European modernity. This approach proposes that African people, especially Black people, must look at matters from an African perspective. This does not mean that other races in Africa cannot perceive life from an African perspective, as there is more than one race in Africa. Also, African people in the diaspora are still African, though they are not living in Africa. Thus, "Afrocentrism is not colour-conscious" (Asante, 1995:3). However, White and Black people's history is different, and for this study, 'Black' and 'African' is used. Afrocentrism calls upon Africans to look at matters from an African viewpoint. So that they can be collaborators and decision-makers in their own history, instead of being exploited and side-lined culturally, socially, politically, historically, and economically in a systematic way that perpetuates injustices of the past. This theory is useful in the context of studying issues of inaccessibility underscoring this study because Emakhazeni has a history of discrimination, and it is time that they become collaborators in fixing issues that affect them.

Afrocentrism is polycentric - it does not compete with Eurocentrism, nor is it the opposite of Eurocentrism. Instead, it is another perspective of viewing life. "Afrocentrism has become the most explosive and controversial subject, with Black and White scholars squaring off on its viability and non-viability" (Chawane, 2016:78). Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992) argued against scholars advocating Afrocentrism because he believes it is just a desire or an aspiration to be African, which is an illusion for him. He states that we think there were no divisions even before colonisation. For instance, ethnic groups still existed and were still practising their own cultures - separate from other cultures. Some measure of division has always existed. I argue against Appiah's claim. It tends to turn diversity into a division or a barrier to unity - Africans were and

still are diverse, but that does not equate to division. Being diverse comes with differences, and also comes with advantages and disadvantages. It is not possible to know how Africans would have made meaning from this diversity had colonialism and exposure to the Western imposed canon never occurred.

This study refutes Appiah's argument that some afro centrists aspire to return to pre-colonial rule. I propose this theory for its advocacy, in that seeks to reveal what Asante (2009) termed epistemic privilege. For example, in this study, the knowledge that WhatsApp is easy accessibility for festivals is from the privileged and is not a true reflection of the people in the area. Also, this theory emphasises not perceiving life from solely a Western perspective that silences other perspectives. WhatsApp serves as an example of centering a Eurocentric experience of consistent internet access. On the WhatsApp website, Jan Koum and Brian Acton, the founders of WhatsApp, claim that WhatsApp is fast and reliable on phones all over the world. However, if you are in an area with low internet coverage, WhatsApp is not guaranteed to be fast. The idea that WhatsApp is fast is based on the reality of where it originates, from the West, and this is not everyone's reality.

Some factors need to be put into place for WhatsApp to be as fast as the creators claim. This includes being in a location with good internet coverage, which is not the case for the Emakhazeni rural community. It then becomes necessary to analyse data from an African viewpoint. The motifs of locations and constituents of centredness or de-centredness become important when using the Afrocentric method. As it focuses on Africa as the cultural centre for the study of African experiences and interprets research data from an African perspective. The idea is that African people should have a sense of agency, perceive life from their lens and place themselves within their own historical framework.

In this study, the theory is concerned with first unpacking the issue of online accessibility historically in rural South Africa to locate where the issue of online access from the MBMS festival stems. Secondly, to find out how the Afrocentric view could shift how the festival is made accessible to the Emakhazeni community. Houdjondji (1995) speaks of the production of knowledge in Africa and suggests that "we should promote innovation and self-reliance as means to meet Africa's own needs" and proceeds to assert "Let Africa be Africa" (1995: 1-2. Through his articulation of the importance of an African perspective to research, Hountondji (1997) states

that indigenous knowledge of the African culture will be very effective for future researchers in Africa. The time has come to conduct a responsible identification of African methods that will constitute the framework for research projects aspiring to support indigenous people.

On *This is Africa* media and news company, Adjei-Gyamfi Yaw (2018) stated that "Afro-centricity, a feature of Pan-Africanism presents Africa with a remedy to the effects of Eurocentrism, and it is time Africans recognise the importance of viewing issues from the African perspective to reap the full benefits Afro-centricity offers". Although some scholars advocate for it, scholars like Stephen Howe (1998) argue against it. However, in the case of Howe (1998), Carl Talbot (1999) reviews Howe's work where he is against the Afrocentric idea, and he finds that Howe pays little attention to the Pan-Africanism of DuBois and the revolutionary nationalisms of Malcom X and the Black Panthers. Talbot's (1999) review shows that contextualisation seems to be ignored. Scholars should ask themselves in what context they think Afrocentrism is not working for them, or in what context does it working for them. If an issue is approached differently, it will yield different results. One cannot rely on one sole context to understand any subject matter and make conclusions based on that one context (Alzheimer Europe, 2009).

Nawa (2014) discussed issues of not centralising African work in the African context: he did this in a broad context of cultural policy. This thinking would mean that the way the arts festival is hosted online for rural communities will incorporate the rural community's struggles and centralise them to explore how the festival accessibility actually prioritises the community. Continuing to claim that WhatsApp is adequate online accessibility is easy for all does not contextualise or centre the community. Based on the history and background of the rural Emakhazeni, I believe there are three main factors impacting online accessibility in Emakhazeni. These are: geographic location, race, and gender[10]. The following subsections discuss each of these in turn.

[10] Although there are conversations or literature around gender not being a dichotomy of male and female, gender also constitutes of non-binaries. This study uses male and female humans because this is how gender was used to oppress women in the past to make men superior to women. Gender identity is a set of constructs and behaviours that affect the way people see themselves and others. It influences how society values them and how they interact. There is a wide variety of ways in which people see and experience gender.

1.2.1 Geographic location

General contributions to the issues of digital accessibility are geographic locations in which people live. This is how an individual's location puts them at an advantage or disadvantage in accessing and participating in the digital age. The Emakhazeni area has poor access to ICT infrastructure services. The remote location of the settlements makes service provision difficult, and there are high levels of unemployment and poverty (Emakhazeni Integrated Development Plan (2020-2021). Frantz Fanon (1961) argued that these are the effects of colonialism. Other Western scholars such as Gann and Duignan (1975) believe it is a result of Africa's lack of political, economic, and organisational abilities to transform the continent - which I argue is because Africans cannot undo years of colonialism overnight. For example, in South Africa, political colonialism began in 1652 and 'ended' in 1961. This was followed by apartheid that lasted until 1994. The people of South Africa had no control of its politics and economy for all these years. It has only been two decades since South Africa has had democratic governance. There is progress, but it will take years to fully redress the consequences of the past, as people were exploited and marginalised for a very long time.

The online MBMS festival is accessed on a platform that places the Emakhazeni rural at a disadvantage of being unable to fully participate digitally. This opens up issues of the digital divide[11]. A research participant from the Emakhazeni community mentioned how hard it is to engage in online social media platforms because living in the area comes with internet connectivity issues (Zinhle, 2021). Another research participant of the Emakhazeni community, Mbali (2021) said "I would like to watch the festival at a place where there are no issues of internet connection. To be honest I cannot even watch Tik Tok here because the videos just stuck". Zinhle (2021) says what she would like to see happening differently regarding access is to have "the government helping with having a good internet connection like my aunt's place in Swaziland" (Zinhle, 2021).

Reported in *Global Citizen* newspaper, Dr Moeti Kgware, a lecturer at the Durban University of Technology and Chief Education Officer at education consultancy and training organisation

[11] Uneven distribution of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in society

(MoCPD), suggests what the country can do to improve digital access from a university perspective, when students are not able to participate digitally:

> Improvement of infrastructure, infrastructure that brings coverage to places that are outliers. That is what I think the government can do; improve Wi-Fi access, improve coverage through access to the internet, and just make sure that in most places in the country, people that are living there can be able to access very good cell phone coverage and internet coverage as well. Also, data is expensive, and that needs to change (Khanyi Mlaba, 2021).

This is very relevant to the Emakhazeni context, where the area also needs to improve internet coverage. Anesh Maniraj Singh (2004) argued that steps are being taken at a macro level to develop technology centres or digital villages in townships and rural villages. But the digital divide does not only exist at a macro level. Each country has its history and problems that need individual attention and solutions.

1.2.2 Race

According to IHS Global Insight Regional explorer version 969 (2014) cited in the Emakhazeni reviewed Integrated Development Plan (2020-2021), the Emakhazeni population is 84% Black people and 14% White people. This means that the people who mostly experience issues of access in Emakhazeni are Black people, because although there is corruption in the current leadership. White areas were already developed 'post-apartheid' and Black areas remain with less infrastructure. The disadvantages that the area faced under apartheid (where they had less resources and infrastructure) are continuing today. Even though there is corruption in the current government, White areas remain developed and Black areas remain underdeveloped, and these experiences are influenced by apartheid.

Although this study is contextualised in South Africa, it also encompasses the experiences of African Americans. The challenges faced by these two different groups of Black people emanated from similar power structures. Being a Black person with little to no access to the internet is a racialised matter. There are issues of inequality contributing towards issues of digital accessibility. I use the United States of America to support this argument because if this is happening in America, where we assume that the economy is stable or more developed, what of Africa, where it is much less stable? I saw a probability that Black people in rural South Africa have less access, considering

the nature of the economy in South Africa being critical than America and considering the Emakhazeni being a rural area with a high unemployment rate and few developments happening.

According to a study by Thoma L Novak and Donna L Hoffman (1998), African Americans differ significantly from white people in accessing computers and Web usage. They revealed that 44% of white Americans had home PCs, whereas only 29% of black people had home PCs. Although cell phones can also be used to access the internet. For the White households, members of the family without cell phones can use home PCs, increasing access to the internet. Whereas for a Black person with no cell phone and no PC at home, chances of accessing the internet are slim. Therefore, Black Americans had limited access to the Internet.

1.2.3 Gender

The gendered digital divide and its effects is also a reality in the Emakhazeni community. Where employment opportunities are favourable for men, about 80% of males and only 66% females were employed in 2011 (Statistics South Africa, 2011) cited in IDP (2016-17). The recent IDP has no update on this. The unemployment rate can account for the reasons that women cannot afford data to engage with the digital world. It is easy to conclude that in the Emakhazeni community, women have 'less' resources to access the internet compared to men.

Although this is the case with rural Emakhazeni, and at face value it may look like women have less access than men, it should be noted that there are generational differences between genders. The younger generation may have more access to the internet than the older generation, because although the economy is low in this area, and people are not always able to buy data that will enable them access to the internet, the younger generation is more likely to own cell phones. This puts them at an advantage to use the internet, although with limitations and restrictions. The older generation sometimes do not prioritise owning communication devices and getting internet access as much as the younger generations because, as (Khumalo, 2022) illustrated, older women in Emakhazeni spend most of their time engaging in household responsibilities, and older men working to provide for their families.

> Though some households are poor, they still make plans so they can afford cell phones to access the internet. Within the family, some individuals might have limited money to buy general data bundles, but have money to buy social bundles, so although they may have access to WhatsApp and Facebook, they might not have access to internet browsers or other

> applications. Some may buy data only when they feel it is important for them and some may not own cell phones at all. A female research participant of the Emakhazeni community shares that:In my family, my brother who is 15years old does not own a cell phone because my parents believe it can be destructive when you are still in school. They only buy you one when you have completed matric. I completed my matric last year, and I was 23years old, so I only owned a cell phone at that age. Also, although you will have that cell phone, you will figure out for yourself where you get data from. It gets better when you get a job because you can buy data. Otherwise, most of the time you will not have data because, no one frequently buys you data at home (Zinhle, 2021).

Zinhle's household reality reveals another dynamic that shows how her family does not favour any gender when it comes to owning a cell phone that gives you access to the internet. Whether you are male or female, you will only have access when you complete matric. Generally, in many nation states and organizations that South Africa is a part of, women have less access to the Internet than males (OECD, 2018)[12]. This is supported by several studies (Tyers A and Banyan Global, 2020; USAID, 2020; UNICEF, 2019; UNESCO, 2019; Girl Effect and Vodafone Foundation, 2018). Tyers A and Banyan Global's (2020) On *The gender digital divide desk review report* for the UNICEF, they reveal the digital gender divide by stating that "unfortunately a large gender divide disfavours women in digital access and use." USAID (2020) stated in *Gender digital divide risk mitigation technical note*, that to try to mitigate gender digital divide through developing *The Gender Digital Divide Analysis Technical Resource* is to "address the constraints to women's equitable participation in economy, with a specific focus on gender digital divide and women's access to and use of information and communication technology (ICT)."

UNICEF (2019) on *Gender and Innovation Evidence briefs - Insights into the gender digital divide for girls,* state that "limited available data demonstrates that girls face similar patterns as women, including lower access and use." In the book *I'd blush if I could,* UNESCO (2019) speaks of closing digital divides in digital skills through education. Girl Effect and Vodafone Foundation (2018) *on Tujibele[13]: The mobile big sister helping with life's big problem,* report that "research

[12] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development which aims to further strengthen the evidence base in support of G20 Digital Economy Task Force discussions on the equitable participation of women in the digital economy. G20 is an intergovernmental forum comprising 19 countries and the European Union. It works to address major issues related to the global economy, such as international financial stability, climate change mitigation, and sustainable development. South Africa is part of the G20)

[13] A website where girls can share their stories and be inspired by others, discuss shared challenges and receive advice from others.

shows girls in emerging markets are less likely to have access to a mobile phone than boys." This mobile gender gap impacts access to education, opportunity and work. Although this is what literature says about internet and gender, it seems to be different for the Emakhazeni.

1.3. Sensitivity of rural areas/communities with digital accessibility

Shaun Pather and Carlos Rey Moreno (2019) have written about how rural South Africa needs advancement in connectivity, stating that inadequate connectivity in rural South Africa entrenches a rural digital divide. They emphasise that historically marginalised communities cannot fully participate in the digital world because of a lack of infrastructure due to the effects of apartheid spatial planning and the urban-rural divide. Lack of adequate telecommunications infrastructure is also a significant problem.

Further, Sabbagha (2017), the director of the festival, states that the place they have arrived at as a festival team is massively exciting for them as it enables their commitment to key issues around access, inclusion, and art in public spaces, including rural Emakhazeni. "Inclusion and access is not just an invitation" but an active structuring and positioning of resources that respond to the contexts of the people the festival serves" (Sabbagha, 2021). The organisers have also mentioned that the festival resorted to WhatsApp because 'easy' accessibility was at the heart of their consideration (Faye Kabali-Kagwa, 2021).

These statements seem problematic: on whose terms is it easily accessible to host the festival online? From whose perspective is it 'easily accessible?' Is digitalisation easy access for rural communities? Is that the case for the rural Emakhazeni community? What does easily accessible mean or look like in a rural South African context? Is South African history and its consequences considered? Is online access 'easy' viewed from a South African historical perspective? Was life viewed from the lenses of a rural community that does not have the resources or enough resources to adapt fully, to the online space? Some certain methods for digital solutions will work if placed in areas with people who can access them given the methods used.

It is difficult to expect an online festival, in the manner that MBMS is made accessible to be viable for them. This is why the study is interested in an approach that looks at life from the community's perspective to provide solutions aligned with the area's problems. Also, how was moving the

MBMS festival to a digital platform beneficial to the rural Emakhazeni beyond the moment of the online festival? Eddie Koch (1993: 28) argues that rural areas of South Africa have always remained poor, impoverished, underdeveloped, and less inhabited. Although he said this in 1993, not much has been done to improve this, and many rural areas still suffer from these issues. Emakhazeni continues to, judging from my experience in 2019.

Life continues to be viewed from a perspective that is not convenient to everyone and silences other issues because of not relating to them. PJ Sabbagha, in the 2017 SABC interview, spoke a lot about the intention of the festival: "[the] idea of the festival is to question social issues and things that are challenging to the people." This is pivotal, but it will be in vain if it does not reach the community or the majority of the community. It should be easily accessible to the people. How would this look if an Afrocentric approach was used to implement access to digital arts festivals for rural areas/communities? In doing so, rural communities and low-income groups in Emakhazeni will not be left out. The festivals' intended role of destination development, image-makers, animators of static attractions and catalysts for other developments will become a possibility (Humaira Irshad, 2011). Moreover, interest in African perspectives and solutions in spaces where art, culture, and technology meet are the centre of the study's attention.

Chapter 2: Arts Festivals in Africa, With Focus on South Africa

Now that Afrocentrism is understood within the rural Emakhazeni, discussing festivals in Africa, especially South Africa is a necessity, because I use a festival as the context of my argument. This chapter reviews literature around festivals in Africa to help understand *festival*[14]dynamics. The first section provides a brief history of festivals in Africa and their complexities. The second section focuses on South African festivals to give insight into their early existence to date. This section slowly introduces accessibility in South African festivals in terms of how people have been experiencing them to date. The next section analyses the geographic distribution of festivals in South Africa. This section also takes a close look at the MBMS festival hosted in a rural area with an urban influence from a Western perspective. It unpacks how the 2021 MBMS festival itself arrived in rural Emakhazeni, the dynamics of bringing it to a rural community to access, and how they arrived to the rural from the traditional urban access.

Although the study focuses on the data and internet coverage issues, it is important to also engage deeper with the kind of content that is brought to the community to access. When they have full access to the festival, it is also important to engage with what they are consuming how they are consuming it.

2.1. A brief history of African arts festivals

As much as arts festivals were occurring in the West, Africa also had festivals but may not have been using the same label. In pre-colonial Africa, traditional African social life was dominated by highly complex indigenous music that was used to establish and maintain the rhythms of work. It

[14] Festivals are generally understood to be different kinds of celebrations and events with themes. See Alessandra Falassi (1987:2) in his writing *Festival: Definition and Morphology,* defined festival and includes different kinds of "celebrations" and "events" in the definition. Folusade Arowosafe, Catherine F Arowosafe & Sunday Oladeji (2019) define festivals as "celebrations of important events that showcase the rich cultural heritage of the people in a particular community". The study draws the same meaning of festivals as events where people gather with themes, and they come in different types. Arts festivals - which the MBMS festival is. The definition of arts festivals has proven to be complex because of the criteria used to define them. This criteria is based on the kind of, among others, performing arts, dance and theatre. For instance, theatre should be a certain way for it to qualify as an arts festival. Schipper (1982:1) & Götrick (1984:13) have both defined theatre, both their definitions have a common denominator in that they present characteristics of the European dramatic genre in their descriptions. Many drama critics made use of these descriptions even though they do not include other theatre traditions (such as African theatre) to dispute the existence of theatre in Africa. And this is how indigenous cultural events, though they are artistic, most of them are not considered festivals because they do not fit into the criteria of the kind of theatre needed for festivals. Whereas the term *festival* can cover a multitude of events (Bowdin *et al.* 2006).

all started with music being the beating heart of traditional African social and cultural life. Celestine Chukwuemeka Mbaegbu (2015) identifies music as the practice for almost all occasions (among others at work, in politics, in their socioeconomic engagements, in religious worship, integral development, and in their moral life) that is part of cultural heritage in Africa.

In the pre-colonial past, in addition to listening to music, dancing would follow, making it a performance, and these were equally prevalent. A performance of this type would challenge a talented performer's rhythmic sensibilities. All members of society, regardless of age, sex, or social status, would frequently engage in dance led by acrobatic leaders who wore masks and elaborate costumes. Spirits that were often invoked by the rhythms of the singing, drumming, and dancing. The dancers themselves became the embodiment of the rhythms and spirits. Music and rhythms were constant, energising, engaging partners in sacred religious rituals and everyday routines. Where there was music or whenever music was heard, dancing usually followed. As a result, it is possible to think that this is what inspired performing arts, and no festival would be complete without it.

2.1.1. African festival dismissal in the West and Europe

Festivals are said to have a European kind of thinking; even what constitutes a festival is from a European perspective of how theatre and dance should look (Mzo Sirayi, 2003). The argument here is that this European perspective excludes African festivals because they look different. In this regard, I do not see it problematic that the concept of festival was coiled in Europe. My issue is that this definition is now commonly used in Africa and other parts of the world. It is concerning as it moulds the European definition to non-European contexts, and makes it seem as if performing arts, dance, theatre were non-existent outside of Europe.

It makes festival organisers assume that hosting festivals in Africa or rural Africa is a ‘new development’. Sabbagha (2017) claims that bringing the festival to rural Emakhazeni a new development. Arts festivals have always existed in Africa, long before pre-colonial times. European colonial invasion diminished the importance of existing cultures or tried to erase them completely. The North African societies of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia have a long history of

performing arts that has been dismissed because of not fitting in to Western 'standard' of festivals (Kamal Salhi, 2004). This is also true on the Mask festival in Burkina Faso.

In Burkina Faso, there is a festival called "The Mask Festival" or "Masquerade" in the local dialect. This is a festival was prevalent in periods as early as the 1500s (Sharovarska, 2019). The mask festival took place in different villages of Burkina Faso where people believe in obtaining direct contact with spirits and receiving divine blessings from their ancestors (Plecaku, 2019). The ceremony entails the wearing of masks and dancing in a spiritual manner, as it is believed that when they are dressed in these masks and clothes, they become possessed by the spirits of their ancestors (Plecaku, 2019). These dances and movements are intricate and complex. In 1996, Burkina Faso students created FESTIMA (Festival International des Masques et des Arts), a cultural festival that celebrates traditional masks. This festival was created to help preserve the culture of masks of Burkina Faso (Sharovarska, 2019).

FESTIMA was created in a bid to get the mask festival to fit into the Eurocentric definition of festivals. In other words, it had to adapt to the Eurocentric idea of what a festival should be seen as. The original "mask festivals" of Burkina Faso were performed in villages and not recognized from an international perspective. They had to incorporate a European lens to be seen. What can be observed from FESTIMA is that, even before the Eurocentric definition of festivals, Africans have had their own festivals that portrayed Art and the importance of their histories and cultures. There is a need to revive such festivals to let Africans tell their stories in an African way. Because African cultural dances, like any other dances, have meanings and act as a symbol for each tribe – Dance is a way to preserve identity. This acts as preserving cultural identity.

The Ekitaguro dance in western Uganda by the Banyakole people is an old dance from the Ankole land. It is for men and women and is performed to demonstrate the love the Ankole people have for their cattle (Peter Kaluse, 2012). This dance can be seen to encourage Africans, who can, to own and invest in cattle (as cattle is a profitable business venture) where cattle can be rented out to other farmers for milk production or selling the cows, which can lead to economic growth. Irongo, Nalufuka or Tamenaibuga dances performed by the Basoga people in eastern Uganda expresses peace and unity in diversity (Conan Businge, 2007). Leptak-Moreau, Jeffrey (1996) noted that the comparison to what we know about theatre in other parts of the world - African and

Caribbean theatre is still poorly understood. They state that we need even more thorough and authoritative documentation of African and Caribbean theatre.

Kole Omotoso (2004) sees language as a barrier to the lack of documentation or literature in specifically North Africa. He says it is not easy to write about these different arts because Arabs do not have a tradition of theatrical performances similar to what exists in the rest of the world - African plays are written and performed in English, French, and Portuguese. They do not exhaust the totality of theatre writing and performance in all parts of Africa.

2.1.2. Traces of African festivals in the West and Europe

America's cultural roots are traced to enslaved African ancestors as enslaved Africans, mostly from West Africa, were often forced to dance on board slave ships during the Middle Passage. Each day, some of them were brought up from the hold and encouraged to drum, sing, and dance. Enslaved ship captains believed that dancing enlivened the captives' spirits and reduced their sense of pain, suffering, and longing (Howard Dodson, 2003). Many enslaved Africans from West and central Africa were taken to Brazil. Brazil has a large number of African descendants. Brazil has been celebrated by many across the world for its rich culture, and one particular ethnic group played a very important role in that. The influence of the Yoruba religion and culture is seen in Brazilian culture.

Alcione M. Amos's (2021) writing about Lorenzo Dow Turner identifies certain practices, such as dance, that remain in the Brazilian culture of African descendants. Unfortunately, in the rural areas of Brazil, the Yoruba culture and religion found it difficult to survive because it was perceived as a threat. In the urban areas, it was able to thrive and "enslaved Africans were granted permission to perform at the public festivals, garbed in their African costumes, singing their African songs, and performing the African dances."

2.1.3. African festivals with Western and European culture

Kole Omote (2004) also brings to our attention, based on his lived experience in Akure, Nigeria, that the place consists of ever-changing theatre, where there are performances from Yoruba culture, ritual, and history. They have recently reintroduced another cryptographic culture, which is that of the Europeans, and he sees and understands why this was needed. However, in

introducing this cryptographic culture, it has clung to the Yoruba oral tradition while not discarding the new form of preservation through memory. Even in Egypt, scholars like Almed Zaki (2004) attest that theatre is in the form of written, staged and acted drama which is a comparatively modern construct in Egypt.

However, the performing arts that appear, those who have helped the Egyptian theatre to develop its own unique style, are from 5000 years ago. John Conteh-Morgan (2004) also argues that African theatre in the urban area, although rooted in indigenous performance styles, borrows massively, unlike its counterpart, from the Western dramatic forms. Moreover, local and national celebrations in Egypt still bear witness to the age, diversity and strength of performing arts, displaying their origins in folk or historical or long-forgotten religious traditions and incorporating new elements from local sources and abroad to make a vibrant synthesis typical of a very Egyptian approach. There is multicultural coexistence taking place, where African cultures are blended with cultures from abroad while keeping their traditions. One example is the Umswenko subculture in South Africa.

Umswenko is a word for style or ‘swag’ when referring to clothing and fashion. Zulu men from South African rural areas who came to the city of Johannesburg to work as migrant labourers have what is called Umswenko. These men dress up in lavish and expensive suits inspired by colonial sartorial sophistication, posing and performing for judges to win prizes. This supports John Conteh-Morgan's (2004) argument that urban areas in Africa mimic the West. Achille Mbembe (2004) in *Aesthetics of Superfluity*, concedes that the city of Johannesburg mimics a European metropolis. It is important that I mention that this is a result of colonial modernity, and some people have found freedom in that oppression. They have been living like this for years, and this has become part of who they are. It creates politics of culture, where some people want to go back to their roots and reject the radicalising society. This does not necessarily mean to go back to the pre-colonial time because as Europe grew as a global power, a lot of other innovations were happening in other parts of the world. Africa was also modernising, and it is problematic that every time we think of modernity, it is tied to European hegemony. Consider how Shaka Zulu reformed and modernised the Zulu army. Some people may want reinvention in the African way. Some may have found a way of life by incorporating African modernism into traditionalism. With the

Swenkas, there is a contrast in their lives where their Swenking references coloniality and modernism. But they also use their traditions - they get traditional umuthi to get lucky to win contests. This shows how the two can exist simultaneously.

John Peffer (2009) also reveals the idea of simultaneous in her writing Art and the end of apartheid. Omoto's (2004) explanation attests to this, showing how various rituals in Africa are linked to birth, the coming of age, marriage and death, and are carried out through traditional practices and religious, Christian practices. It is not unusual to have a child among the Yoruba baptised in a Christian church and then given another ceremony of traditional Yoruba naming. This also happens with marriages, which include a third ritual, the "legal" one, in front of a magistrate. The dramas and performances linked to these rituals have become aspects of the cultures of many African countries.

2.2. Arts festivals in South Africa

Mzo Sirayi (2003) reveals that pre-colonial South Africa practised its first-fruit festival called ulibo in isiXhosa and ulcushwama in isiZulu, also known as umkhosi wokweshwama. Sirayi (ibid) claims that these festivals were destroyed by colonial forces. When Christianity was introduced, there was a decline in cultural performances because they were said to be linked to heathenism. There is evidence, however, that the first fruit festival is still practised in the Zulu culture. The image below was taken at the Marhambeni village in Umzimkhulu, KwaZulu-Natal. They were celebrating the traditional Umkhosi Wokweshwama, the festival of the first fruit (eNCA, 2017). This festival was also hosted on the 5th of March 2022.



Figure 2.1 Siphelele Nketo, Image illustrating the celebration of Umkhosi Wokweshwama festival. Photo image by Siphelele

There is evidence that the idea of performance, dance, and theatre is not unfamiliar in South African rural communities, such as the Soyikwa Institute of African Theatre and its rural theatre projects. See Credo Mutwa's work on African theatre, where he illustrates concepts such as "ishashalazi" and "umlinganiso" to demonstrate that Black people in South Africa and Africa at large have their own historical practices of performance-making. The annual Umkhosi Wokweshwama festival is held in-person and free of charge to everyone. The community members wear their traditional attire and come to celebrate, like in the image above. Many indigenous festivals, which are mostly held in rural areas, are under-researched, and there is less documentation around them in South Africa. A lot of the focus is on art festivals in South Africa that adopt a European heritage kind of arts festival. There is thus an abundance of literature for the festivals held urban areas. Using search terms such as performing arts, dance, music, and cultural events has led me to realise that these were African festivals but may not have been called festivals. But because this notion was given a name or the concept of 'festival' is now commonly used, it is as if festivals in Africa did not exist.

With this kind of festival thinking, there is a certain criteria that fits into the European standards of an arts festival: festivals in the rural areas are not well researched and thus are not common knowledge as much as the ones in the urban areas. These arts festivals are not considered art

festivals - there was pre-colonial South African dance, theatre, and role plays among others. The form or structure in which these are performed needs to present characteristics of the European dramatic to be regarded as part of the festival genre. There are many definitions of theatre (Schipper, 1982:1 & Götrick, 1984:13). Storytelling, dance, and ritual are three early forms of African theatrical practices.

The Umemelo is one of the most exciting Zulu performing arts, cultural ceremony but is not considered an arts festival. Mzo Sirayi (2003) pointed out another difference in African theatre: performances are often held in open spaces as opposed to European drama, which is usually seen in the print before it is seen on the stage. There is another distinction in the interests between indigenous/traditional arts festivals in South Africa and the Western conception festivals. The Western thinking interest and focus seem to be to commercialise arts festivals and to attract global or international audiences.

Sirayi is interested in theatre, dance, and performing arts in South Africa, how these are different from the European arts, and how this difference rejects African arts. His interest is restricted to performing arts. I am also interested in how they differ in terms of the audience consuming these performances. Art festivals in South Africa are 'traditionally known' to be hosted in cities or urban areas. The MBMS festival itself started in Johannesburg and moved to rural Emakhazeni in 2015. Johannesburg is a city that is very much like a European metropolis. In 1973, the first British festival in South Africa was founded and debuted in 1974 as a memorial to the British immigrants in South Africa. This festival has grown to become what is now called the National Arts Festival (NAF), now one of the biggest festivals in Africa. It is held annually in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. Festivals grew and spread across towns and urban areas in South Africa, maintaining a European framework determining how they are accessed, mostly through live viewings. NAF has been an in-person festival since its inception, and the audience buys tickets to access the festival.

While indigenous festivals or cultural events such as umhlonyane, umemulo, and umkhosi womhlanga are free of charge, and the aim is not necessarily to attract a global audience. The focus is on the local. Like the MBMS festival, the NAF also transitioned to an online platform in response to the pandemic, and full online access cost R750 (NAF, 2022). The way that people

access the festival is a capitalistic rationalisation.[15] What is common with arts festivals in the European lens is the excitement of attracting a global audience. The MBMS organisers are also happy about global attraction. This raises questions of intent: even though the MBMS festival incorporates indigenous performances, the target audience is from the European landscape. It mimics the Dickens Festijn, a festival in the Netherlands that takes pride in how many visitors they have each year (https://dickensfestijn.nl/english/).

The NAF's transition to an online platform was announced on their official website. They stated that they 'successfully attracted a global audience' of over 83 000 visitors, breaking new ground for the South African arts sector. There is a noticeable paradigm shift from the indigenous/traditional way of hosting festivals, to arts festivals from a European kind of setting. The other shift is now bringing the festivals with a European landscape from the urban to the rural areas, which the MBMS festival achieved by moving from Johannesburg to rural Emakhazeni.

2.2.1. Urban and Rural festival discourse in South Africa

In her paper *A model for transitioning arts festivals,* Cina Van Zyl (2012) points out that there is very little research conducted on South African festivals, especially in rural areas. Festivals have experienced significant growth in South Africa over the last decade in size, attendance, diversity, and popularity (Van Zyl, 2012). Although there has been phenomenal growth in the sector, more events development, promotion, and research have been directed at 'big' events in the urban areas. These events have a lot of western influence, and they are often hosted by provinces with international renown such as the Western Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. Indeed, there is a significant lack of research and interest in African big or small events, especially those that take place in rural areas of the country (Van Zyl, 2011; Christian, M. Rogerson, 2015). Some of the reasons for this include poor infrastructure development in the rural areas, which reduces travelling interest to remote places (Rogerson & Devin Harmer, 2015).

The Rural Arts Development (RAD) Foundation maintains that they believe in M.A.G.I.C (Music and Arts Growing Inspired Children). They emphasise that they "introduce" the Arts to rural communities, providing a platform for integration and unity in diversity through classes,

[15] See European art festival prices on their website (https://www.europeanartfestivals.com/index_en.html).

workshops, carnivals, and festivals. This idea of "introducing" is questionable. It presumes that festivals are something new to rural communities. This suggests that there is still a pervasive interpretation of pre-colonial times in Africa as still or static, as if Africa only began to exist because of colonial incursion. In this regard, indigenous festivals in rural South Africa are not fully recognised. The culture of festivals in South Africa, and Africa, is one of the oldest cultural activities (see Ogunba, 1978:5). The perception that time in Africa has been "sliced" by colonial arrival needs to be corrected.

2.2.2 Arts festival with a European landscape in a rural area

During an interview with one the research participants, Thabo (2021), he maintained that most of their performers were from Johannesburg. Thabo raised that "artistic works were coming from outside, and there were a few renditions from the local community." Art in South Africa has a predominantly European epistemology, and our festivals in urban South Africa perpetuate this. The MBMS festival brought that mindset to rural Emakhazeni. The way the digital landscape is experienced is still a very class-based interaction, and it emphasises the interests and the orientation of the festival. It seems to cater more for interests that are not part of rural community development, given the high unemployment rate and issues around ICT infrastructure in Emakhazeni.

There seems to be an interest to attract an audience to the online MBMS platform. This interest does not focus on the local people because those who are accessing it digitally are mostly not the locals. It restricts access to the few who can taste it. This is quite similar to 'fine' art syndrome, the fine arts epistemology, 'high art', that centres a Western epistemology of 'high art'. It is like everyday people cannot engage with everyday art, vulgar art, 'low art,' which is often what indigenous and rural is perceived as.

Organisers need to be careful when they say they are digital. The digital means the continuation of the 'high art' syndrome within the arts, which is also connected to apartheid legacy, or a blinded view of modern circumstances that marginalise the previously disadvantaged. The high art syndrome looks down upon everything else – other art does not get to be recognised. A kind of privilege investment. Transforming to digital in a way that excludes the rural whom the arts was for is pushing the 'high art' so that those who consider art to be an enclave of the few can have

access, and we remove this art from the everyday. Do rural communities have the resources to go digital? Are there resources to access these new ways?

> "What I have engaged or seen is that in the area where the MBMS is happening, people are still struggling with access to access. Things like data are very secondary, and for me, the ubuntu element and the African ways of listening as part of the festival are not happening, the historical responsibility of the festival is not coming forth" – Thabo (2021).

The 2021 MBMS festival wanted everyone from the world to have access to it, and this is based on the approach they have used to provide access to the festival. The works are often also imported from elsewhere, extracted from elsewhere and brought to the rural, leading to culture shock (Thabo, 2021). This disempowers and isolates the community from the function of art, from the function of engagement with arts education. The education comes from elsewhere and comes to the rural, which is not bad, but is it not important to learn about art from their lens? How is this dealt with? Does this not perpetuate the idea that festivals need to have European thinking to be considered festivals?

The MBMS seems to be coming with almost the same thinking. The issue of the festival going digital in this manner removes the rural community, which is opportunistic for the festival organisers, and implicates itself in the course of coloniality in terms of the arts in South Africa. The move to go digital shows that the interest of the festival is everyone else but the local community.

Chapter 3: Digital Accessibility

This chapter takes a close look at how the MBMS festival is accessed online. There are many factors that speak to accessing the MBMS festival online, for example, the language of communication with the audience, the marketing of the festival, the performances, and so forth. The chapter then unpacks the issue of data and internet connectivity and demonstrates how these barriers open up issues of the digital divide.

The MBMS organisers not responding to the study's questions raises questions around what they thought about online accessibility[16] in the first place. The study sought to understand and describe what rural Emakhazeni online attendance entailed. It seems that they have a way of monitoring and evaluating their online attendance because they know that they attracted a global audience. However, my question about the Emakhazeni attendance, particularly, was not responded to. Is the community left behind in this online accessibility and the organisers are aware of it? Or maybe were not aware? If their monitoring system can capture the global audience, can it not also capture the local audience?

There are possible solutions that the 2021 MBMS festival can consider should they return online, or any other festivals considering the move can consider for themselves, including how to give access to people in rural communities. Although the MBMS festival went online as a response to COVID-19 restrictions, the 2021 MBMS is still an online festival for the rural community. Though this is an issue that the whole world experienced, we still need to address how it could have been tackled better, for cases where the festival continues to be online. However, the focus is the MBMS festival being accessed online for the rural communities, especially because there are arts festivals adapting online. There is a possibility of an increase in online festivals, and there is a need for literature around this, should more festivals consider moving online. Of course, there would be relative challenges due to time and space.

[16] Cambridge dictionary meanings of accessibility are a) when you are able to enter or reach place or building , or being able to easily use or be somewhere, b) the quality or characteristic of something that makes it possible to approach, enter, or use it, c) the fact of a person being willing to see people and of being friendly and easy to talk to. For this study, accessibility means being able to use internet with no issues that may cause you to miss the opportunity to engage with whatever that you need to engage with. Accessibility is the Emakhazeni rural being able to access the full online festival.

3.1. Barrier in access

The 2021 MBMS festival transitioned to the WhatsApp online platform as a quick response to the Covid-19 pandemic because of how the pandemic regulations made it hard for physical interaction. This study acknowledges and applauds the organisers for finding what they believe was a strategy that will make the festival accessible. It is great to see that the organisers were able to adapt to the changing times, as people who can evolve with time are of great significance in society. Cited by Ano Shumba (2021), Sabbagha (2017) claims that the digital world is a space that "currently excludes many due to unaffordable data costs." So, moving to WhatsApp for them is trying to avoid this issue.

However, during an interview, an Emakhazeni community member (Mbali, 2021) mentioned, "I did not watch the festival because I use the WhatsApp data bundle; it does not work if you leave WhatsApp and use google. The festival can only be watched if you buy separate data" – Zinhle (2021) said, "I watched the festival but not the entire festival because data runs out quickly if you are watching videos on the internet". Fenter Khumalo had no idea that there was an MBMS festival in their area.

3.1.1. Telecommunications with their WhatsApp data deal limitations

According to Steyn (2018), on the Telkom network service, once the social bundle data has been depleted, the data session will automatically be consumed from normal data allocations, allowance, or available Airtime. Should the customer's normal data be depleted, the customer will be charged at the applicable out-of-bundle data rate. The MTN official website also states that WhatsApp bundle inclusive data cannot be used for WhatsApp calls and Video calling. According to iBusiness (2021), you cannot use WhatsApp Data Bundles for any outside usage – you won't be able to access the internet with WhatsApp Data. Vodacom's WhatsApp Ticket also allows you to send and receive text messages, videos, and audio files via the WhatsApp messaging app.

The WhatsApp online festival has links that require internet browsers to access the full festival. In contrast, telecommunications disable you from doing anything outside of WhatsApp usage, while rural communities and low-income groups rely on these WhatsApp bundles to access WhatsApp

(Kgothatso Madisa, 2018). This does not imply that there are no limitations in the physical festival, and from a person who experienced both the physical/live festival and the digital one, the study is fully aware of this. For this study, the focus is on digital limitations which the MBMS festival adopted in 2021 as its way of accessibility. Moreover, this way of access creates accessibility issues for rural communities, and when some people have access to the internet and others do not, it creates a digital divide[17].

Mbali (2021) said she normally buys around R12 data a week, which she uses for WhatsApp and, sometimes Facebook. So, it was not enough for her to watch the full festival. Further, Andrea Chothia (2017) reports that, "1GB of data costs around R160, and in many poor townships and rural areas, people can only afford to buy a few rands worth of data at a time – often as little as R10, which is not even enough for 20 Megabytes (MB) of data" Chothia, 2017). Resorting to WhatsApp lessens digital inclusion because rural communities are facing issues of accessibility. Less attention is given to the limitations of using WhatsApp outside of WhatsApp usage – with links that require internet browsers to be accessed, which means more data and airtime. Festivals are traditionally known to be held in an urban setup - it should be accounted for that now they are being moved from higher concentration to lower concentration, which is rural areas.

3.2. Rethinking the MBMS online festival accessibility through the Afrocentric thinking

3.2.1. Digital Archiving for public schools

As Afrocentrism guides this study, which proposes that Africans need to relate life with their context. The study found out from the research participants of the Emakhazeni community; Fenter (2022), Mbali and Zinhle (2021) that the rural Emakhazeni children and youth learn up to grade 12. It also found out from the Emakhazeni local municipality Integrated Development Plan (2017-2022) that the internet coverage in Emakhazeni is not good, which makes it hard to watch the festival without issues of connectivity and the interviewees from the community confirmed. However, there is a way that the festival can still be fully accessed for learners who go to school while keeping it digital but also considering and prioritising the issues of Emakhazeni.

[17] The term "digital divide" was introduced in the mid-1990s and defined as the gap separating those who have access to new forms of information technology from those who do not (Chalita Srinuan and Erik Bohlin, 2011: 1)

Schools are the spaces where the children and youth of Emakhazeni spend most of their time. The MBMS festival organisers could see this as an opportunity (in the future, if they return online because of COVID-19, or if they consider returning online without COVID-19 where there are no boundaries (it applies to both)), to seek partnership with the Department of Education to allow the festival to be played to the students during Arts and Culture subjects in schools rural whether as part of Arts and Culture subject curriculum or otherwise - as this the population that is meant to contribute a greater part of the audience. Because if the festival uses technology for access, this is the group that uses technology the most in rural areas. This is also applicable to online festivals for rural communities or festivals considering moving online for rural communities. The Department of Education will also benefit as the principles for their basic education system on their official website are aligned with what the MBMS festival goals are, which are community building and social cohesion among others. This applies to other festivals funded by the government because the government also emphasises these goals when they fund festivals (White Paper, 2016). The basic education principles also speak in response to the Afrocentric perspective of prioritising local contexts and using the information in ways that are aligned with you. See principles below:

> The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 gives expression to the knowledge, skills and values worth learning in South African schools. Their curriculum aims to ensure that children acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives. In this regard, the curriculum promotes knowledge in local contexts. They equip learners, irrespective of their socio-economic background, race, gender, physical ability or intellectual ability, with the knowledge, skills and values necessary for self-fulfilment and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country. Social transformation: ensuring that the educational imbalances of the past are redressed and that equal educational opportunities are provided for all sections of the population; Active and critical learning: encouraging an active and critical approach to learning, rather than rote and uncritical learning of given truths Inclusivity, environmental and social justice are important: infusing the principles and practices of social and environmental justice and human rights as defined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12 is sensitive to issues of diversity such as poverty, inequality, race, gender, language, age, disability, and other factors; Valuing indigenous knowledge systems: acknowledging the rich history and heritage of this country as important contributors to nurturing the values contained in the Constitution (Department of Education, 2021).

These principles are friendly to the Emakhazeni rural issues of unemployment and marginalised areas The organisers can send a proposal to the Department of Education to take these video performances or footage to schools. So that people who were not able to engage with the work could do so. The disadvantage of this method is that it excludes people of Emakhazeni who have completed matric, people who have dropped out of school, and old people. But when it comes to children and youth, the MBMS festival would have achieved the aim of the festival being online and easily accessible considering what is currently going on in rural Emakhazeni, and they would have served a good course.

3.2.2. Television broadcasting collaboration

The study found, from Mbali (2021) and Fenter (2022) (in a digressed conversation during the interview), that although most of the Emakhazeni families do not own DSTVs, they have television and watch SABC channels. The organisers of the festival can make use of this opportunity and collaborate with television broadcasting channels. They can compile a proposal and pitch it to the Commissioning Editors of the channel in their proposal for the festival being aired. They must include which channel they are targeting and which time slot. However, it is said that including a time slot on the proposal does not guarantee anyone the exact time slot (Gumede, 2022)[18]. Depending on their content and target audience, managers and Commissioning Editors decide the slot if they approve their proposal for production. I may have raised the issue of the economy and internet coverage only, but it should also be noted that people in rural areas, especially older people, are usually culturally conservative. They sometimes do not want their cultures to be diluted, some may resist turning on the channel to watch the festival, and this may be passed on to the children and youth of those families. This is something to also consider.

3.2.3. Government, Organisers, and Telecommunication company partnership

The study found, from Mbali and Zinhle (2021), that most people in the community rely on WhatsApp data bundles that have limitations to use WhatsApp. These limitations are causing a digital divide where many members of the community cannot fully access the festival because of

[18] University of the Witwatersrand PhD candidate in Film & Television and Assistant Studio manager at the university of Johannesburg.

the unemployment rate. However, a good number of partnerships have been created as part of a central government strategy to support the delivery of programmes at the local level.

Many studies have been carried out on this subject, which demonstrates that a partnership is a valuable instrument or "organisational" model to overcome weaknesses of the policy and governance framework of the ICT infrastructure. The organisers can consider forming a partnership with the Department of Arts and Culture or Emakhazeni local municipality with telecommunications. They can have data dedicated to the Emakhazeni community for the MBMS festival only. The study is aware that NAC contributed towards making the festival possible. They are already involved in funding the festival. So maybe it is wise to reach out to the local municipality, send a proposal, to get help with funds so that they can reach out to telecommunications.

The NAC annual report states that the 2021 MBMS festival is free. However, see 3.2 on how there are barriers preventing the festival from being free. This left questions of "was the festival initially planned to be accessed for free online, and they ran out of funding?" "When they say 'free access', what kind of access are they referring to? Do they mean the festival is made free to be accessed publicly, it is not a private festival?" "Was the money for funding the free festival misused?"

Nonetheless, there are partnerships that are possible to create with telecommunications; see the university of the Witwatersrand data access for students, where students are provided with data to access services required for their online learning requirements. This was available via students' preferred service providers from: CellC, MTN, Telkom, and Vodacom. When this is successful for the MBMS festival, they can announce to the community that there is free data to watch the festival from their phones. They can do these announcements by driving around the area with speakers and microphones and announcing what the community needs to do to activate this. For instance, tell them to dial *140*290# to be able to access the MBMS festival.

They can also have posters to market the free festival and give step-by-step guidelines on how to access the festival for free in the comfort of their home. For the physical festival, the organisers were working with the Department of transport to bring buses and taxis to transport kids, youth and adults into the place to watch the festival. This can also happen with the online festival where there is a partnership between the organisers, the telecommunication companies and the local

municipality can subsidise. However, partnerships can face obstacles: they are said to be difficult to set up and maintain, they require political will and resources, and results are not likely to come overnight (www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/forum/partnerships).

The good thing about this partnership is that it maintains WhatsApp as the platform which the MBMS festival was using to create access to the Emakhazeni community. However, the downfall of this method is that it does not cover the issue of internet coverage. This means that it only fixes one issue.

3.2.4. Government involvement in internet coverage issues in rural Emakhazeni

In the National Integrated ICT policy white paper (2016), they have a National Digital and Future Skills Strategy for South Africa. The former Minister of Communications and digital technologies, Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams (2020), published the National Digital and Future Skills Strategy South Africa in terms of chapter 12 of the National Integrated ICT Policy white paper (2016) and there were no amendments for this chapter in 2021 and 2022. Strategy element one of this paper states that "the government will be providing access to the necessary infrastructure and enabling digital skills, and making sure this is operational, secure and sustainable." In the case of the MBMS digital arts festival, having ICT infrastructure is an enabler to watching the online MBMS festival without issues of connectivity.

There are different types of infrastructure, and ICT (Information Communication Technology) is one of them. Internet connectivity is a component of the ICT infrastructure, which enables access to internet browsers and using the internet with good connectivity. However, it is not stated in the policy document that this access should be free. Nevertheless, the government created opportunities to fund festivals in the rural areas to promote this development because they believed that "if these developments were not in the rural areas, they would be a feature of the apartheid" (Revised White paper, 2016).

If these festivals are not easily accessed, it is possible to believe that they embody the feature of the apartheid. Consequently, there is a governmentality theory, by Michel Foucault, a philosophy of history, which he also refers to as the Government sphere, formulated in the 20th century, seen as the government going beyond the exercise of sovereign (law) power to foster the population's

prosperity/success). This means that the government to exercise its power outside existing policies to help bring change to what is impactful to rural South Africa. South Africa is also part of the United Nations, and United Nations policy (2021) has four strategies of framework agreed to close the digital divide: affordability, access, skills and awareness.

Governments can expand access by providing targeted subsidies or tax rebates. Colombia has put in place the "Subsidy Programme for low-income households", which subsidises fixed internet access. Similarly, internet hubs in community centres and public libraries can provide free access to computers and an internet connection. The lack of efficient and affordable ICT infrastructure, especially in rural areas, remains a challenge. An enabling ICT regulatory environment is necessary to promote competition and equitable access for all. At present, 160 countries are seeking to expand connectivity in rural areas through National Broadband Plans (Broadband Commission, 2019). Not affording enough data to participate in digital activities hinders access. Government officials who are funding digital arts festivals need to also a plan on how they will subsidise internet access for rural communities and low-income groups. This is what the rural Emakhazeni needs because the lack of digital access can be seen as a leading barrier to digital inclusion. A growing number of countries are developing national digital skills strategies that mainstream digital skills within national curricula, promote school connectivity, and support life-long digital learning. UNESCO's Digital Literacy Global Framework can support the monitoring, assessment and further development of digital literacy and proficiency levels across all age groups.

3.2.6. Stations of projectors or screens/billboards in communal spaces

There are communal spaces that people share in the Emakhazeni rural, spaces where people often go to get drinks and socialise, to buy groceries, and so on. In these spaces, the MBM festival can negotiate with the owners to make the festival accessible by having different media showing festival content, and people can watch while socialising. When this happens, there should also be an introduction to the festival, explaining what the festival is about. The organisers should share why it is important for people to watch the festival. They can even have snacks for the people to attract a larger audience and make it more enjoyable and give it a cinema feel. A register can be used to monitor and evaluate attendance. If this is costly, they can have fundraising activities or look for funding.

Conclusion

In the beginning, the study emphasised that it does not reject online arts festivals in and for rural areas but suggests that the way this is done should consider issues around resources in the historically marginalised areas. Because while there are potential benefits to digitalisation, without a critical approach, it will reproduce old inequalities or even produce new ones, if not regulated and governed in a fair, equitable, and transformative manner. As per the status quo, South Africa remains one of the most unequal nation states in the world (Rachel Adams, 2020). Internet connectivity remains a precious commodity for many South Africans, but even more so in rural areas where accessibility is still an issue (Andrea Chothia, 2017).

The study wanted to find how the Afrocentric thinking could shift the way the 2021 MBMS online festival is made accessible for the rural Emakhazeni community? Exploring how to best implement digital arts festivals in a rural setup through an Afrocentric lens has shown enormous possibilities on how it could shift ways the festival is made accessible. An Afrocentric perspective to using methods to improve access to rural online arts festivals have emerged. To give a different perspective to the community can experience such a festival without internet connectivity issues or WhatsApp limitations. The methods have both advantages and disadvantages, but the approaches can be used simultaneously. For instance, digital archiving for schools can be incorporated with another method, for the community members who do not atten school, giving access to anyone in the community. It is paramount that any proposed solution is aligned with the material realities of access in rural Emakhazeni.

Exploring possible solutions that are aligned with the issues in Emakhazeni was not an easy task. It also requires arts festival directors to work with the community to understand what can work for them. Engaging the community offers an opportunity to openly discuss issues affecting the community, respecting their context and perspectives. The physical MBMS festival found ways in which outsiders can engage with a community that they are not a part of (Sipho, 2022). The MBMS conducted baseline research for the in-person MBMS festival, to understand the situation in Emakhazeni, because Sipho emphasises that they could not just come into the place with the mentality of “okay, this is the information that you guys need” (Sipho, 2022). Community engagement has long been a central important theme (Brian W. Head, 2008; S Watson, E Waterton,

2010; DT Lardier Jr, VR Barrios, P Garcia-Reid, 2018). Engaging with the community is a necessity, as this informs what the community may consider as easy accessibility and what corresponds to their resources.

Arts festivals contribute to local and regional development, by engaging people in acts of creation, invention and sustaining of place identity and community capacity building, as well as attracting tourists (Chris Gibson & John Connell, 2012). COVID-19 restrictions made it very hard for in-person communication and interaction, a huge obstacle to community engagement. The 2021 online MBMS could have considered doing research to find ways that would continue the engagement that they had with the community, given the constraints. Although community members are not obliged to participate, the opportunity should be made available to all. In this light, the community ought to be given the opportunity to engage in matters that affect them and take ownership of their community. They should be involved in decisions. I argue that community engagement needs to go beyond simply engaging with the community in terms of discussing what works for them. Participation and collaboration must be considered. Where the community members are actively included in online access festival production.

Community participation and engagement is where social cohesion begins, and bonds are formed – this supports the main goal of making the festival accessible online. Thabo (2021) an MBMS festival participant said, “We came in and left.” He highlighted that he would have loved to learn things from the community, their local culture, and their everyday lives and expression. Thabo stated that he felt like they brought everything from their schooling, or like most of the things were brought from Johannesburg into Emakhazeni, and then they left. The festival became a platform for showcasing their work. There seem to have been no exchange with the community. Thabo’s personal experience allows us researchers to view the participant-audience relationship, to question what a participant-audience relationship looks like through Afrocentric thinking. Also, if this was an issue for the MBMS in-person festival, what was the extent for the online one? Lack of community participation and collaboration leads to less social cohesion, and the festival will simply be seen as a visiting course, without engagement with life pre- and post-festival. If the local community only accesses the festival online and observes that the experts are only those from anywhere else outside the community, there is potentially an alienating effect that can push the community away.

"When I was performing, and I took off my clothes, one of the community members was like yeyi yeyi yeyi - they were protesting to that, it became a light bulb moment that the festival does not prepare local communities" – Thabo (2021). Although this is his personal experience for Thabo, it still allows researchers to question how local communities can be empowered to take ownership of this festival, avoiding that the festival falls into the trap of becoming a tourist attraction. Replacing local estrangement with local participation and collaboration can be useful. The performances shocked the community. The community acting this way was a demonstration that there is little to no preparing of the community. Letting them know that regardless of the literacy divide (My Body My Space),[19] racial divide, or economic divide, our wish is to come together, and embrace different forms or aesthetic expressions. They should be allowed to decide if this is how they would like to see things happening.

"The travelling from the township to the Estate also became a revelation. For instance, when the children from the township saw a swimming pool at the Estate and they all dived in. They were all pulled out of the pool because part of the festival or part of their contract with this festival is not to swim" (Thabo, 2021). They were not informed of these rules, or they were not properly explained. So, does the festival not work or engage with the community? The cohesion, in this instance, is put into question. How does art enable communities and find social cohesion as a realised experience, and how does art enable the bridging of historical divides, economic divides, racial divides, and historical divides? The arts have an active role to play in that. The festival can bring together historically divided and marginalised people, and bridge the gap between race relations, the socio-historical divide, and the digital divide. The festival can play a role in transforming apartheid's legacy instead of perpetuating these divides.

The 2021 MBMS festival embodies cultural co-existence in the performing arts, bringing art from urban, European-influenced performances into a rural space, serving as a vehicle for social change in rural Emakhazeni. While incorporating indigenous art, it allows for African, traditional and European performing arts to co-exist, without only focusing on a western-centred desire to attract a global audience.

[19] The name of the festival is very removed in the black community; it creates a literacy divide. What does "My Body My Space" mean to them? Are these their values? Was the community engaged in this concept? Addressing these can help connect the community to the aims of the festival. Isolating the community through the language used can disconnect the community even more and lead to feelings of being disempowered.

Online festival organisers/directors must remember the people that the festival was initially created for. They need to remind themselves that they are coming to a place that has its own realities and way of life. They should strive for accessibility with no hindrances, or if there are hindrances, they can find ways to change and adapt for the community.

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Appendices: Appendix one: Organisers of the festival

Interview questions

1. What were some of the challenges you faced at the 2021 MBMS online festival? And what were your successes?
2. Did you monitor and evaluate the Emakhazeni community's online attendance? If so, what tool(s) did you use? What were the advantages and disadvantages of utilising this tool? And did it help? Did this tool monitor all the towns within the Emakhazeni local municipality? What was the attendance looking like?
3. Would you recommend online festivals to any festival that desires to move online in the future (for a rural community)? Either by choice or otherwise?
4. The Emakhazeni local municipality Integrated Development Plan (IDP, 2018-2019) has declared Emakhazeni as a rural area with some low-income groups. The online MBMS festival had links that take you outside of WhatsApp to access the full festival. On the other hand, telecommunications or Network service providers don't allow out of WhatsApp data usage if you're on a WhatsApp data bundle. I am checking if you guys were aware of this? Did it affect you anyhow? Or is there anything that you think can be done in the future to cater for rural or low income groups?
5. The Emakhazeni local municipality Integrated Development Plan (2017-2022) indicates that there are issues around ICT infrastructure in the area. This makes network connectivity bad and causes struggles to focus on something that may need concentration for more than 3minutes. It may cause the person to stop watching. I have also experienced bad network connectivity in the Emakhazeni area – I have seen it happening. Is there anything that you think might help to navigate this in the future? Or any other solutions that may make the online experience better?
6. Did the festival engage with the community first to hear responses around online access?
7. Now that you are no longer online, is there anything that you look back and think you could have done differently for the online access?

Appendix Two: Emakhazeni Members

Interview questions

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you been living at Emakhazeni?
3. Could you please provide me with the history and background of the place, as much as you can remember since the day you started living here
4. What is employment in the Emakhazeni community?
5. What is the relationship between children and youth with school? It could be personal or based on what you have seen in the place.
6. What network service do you use for your phone?
7. How much do you spend on data? And how much do people around you spend on data (daily, weekly or monthly)
8. What type of data bundle do you use for WhatsApp? In terms of data bundle deals and WhatsApp bundle
9. How is the internet coverage connectivity of the place?
10. Have you heard of the 2021 MBMS online festival? If yes, have you watched it? And how was your experience accessing it?
11. If you have watched it, is there anything that you think could have been done differently in terms of its online access?

Appendix Three: National Arts Council official

Interview questions

1. Are you aware of the My Body My Space online festival for rural Emakhazeni?
2. What motivated you to support and fund an online festival for a rural community?
3. Do you follow up if the community members are having full access to the MBMS online festival? if yes, how?
4. If not, is there a reason why there is no follow-up?