

# **Voice, text, film; producing multimedia texts in South Africa – a case study of ‘The Medicine Bag’**

**Elizabeth Louw**

**African Literature, School of Literature and Language Studies**

**University of the Witwatersrand**

**A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the  
Witwatersrand, Johannesburg in fulfilment of the requirements for a Masters by  
Coursework.**

**Johannesburg, February 2006**

**‘... it [the text] is a moving mosaic (text, image, sound), an unpredictable sequence  
of bifurcations, a nonhierachical, unpredetermined crossroad where each reader  
can invent his own course along a network of communication nodes’.<sup>1</sup>**

---

<sup>1</sup> Debray (145)

**Declaration**

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Masters by Coursework in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

---

Elizabeth Louw

15 February 2006

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Isabel Hofmeyr for her stimulating guidance and friendly support.

Without support and participation from the Schwarz family, especially Letitia and her mother Marie Petersen, this project would not have happened.

The documentary and aspects of this study were made possible with financial assistance from The Rock Art Research Unit at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, the National Film and Video Foundation and the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund.

**In memoriam**

**Hans Schwartz**

WITSEITD

## ABSTRACT

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

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

## **INDEX**

**CHAPTER ONE: The Medicine Bag – A case study of translating and structuring oral accounts into a documentary film, 9**

**CHAPTER TWO: Researching the documentary video - Following the trail of a portable story, 20**

**CHAPTER THREE: Production – Recording the audio-visual narrative, 46**

**CHAPTER FOUR: Postproduction – Analysing the process, 96**

**CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion, 110**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY: Interview details and cited sources, 117**

## **THE SCHWARTZ FAMILY TREE**

**A list of the descendants of // Ahab April Schwartz who participated or featured in  
The Medicine Bag documentary production process:**

### **//Ahab's Children**

**1. Hans Schwartz**

**2. Susanna 'Oussietjie' Springbok (nee Schwartz)**

**Her daughter: Marie Springbok**

**3. Abraham 'Attie' Schwartz (Deceased)**

**His wife: Katriena Hendriena 'Tina' Schwartz (nee Louw)**

**Their children: Abraham Schwartz**

**Elizabeth 'Elsa' Smith (nee Schwartz)**

**4. Marie Petersen (nee Schwartz)**

**Her children: Letitia Timas Petersen**

**Junior 'Boeta' Petersen**

**Lynette Petersen**