

Qwasha!

**re-memory; oral history and a
new politics of self
representation:**

***facilitating a space for dialogue as a means
for community archiving and alternative
narrative practices.***

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ABSTRACT:

- **Keywords:** *oral history, subjectivity, ICT's, climate change; community dialogues & people centered narrative practices.*

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- Focus on: *identity, representation and the possibility of a politics of transfiguration.*

Consider the connecting threads linking subjectivity and identity in a post-colonial African context, by considering the possibilities of a living history/ “ history from below” this process in the form of memories of belonging and community.

- Imagines alternative forms of sociality, knowledge production; dissemination, record keeping as well as the challenges of constructing spaces for dialogue and solidarity in post-conflict situations.
- An exploration in ways of taking stock of local efforts and activities systematic documentation and public access.
- a tool in the many efforts to build alternative spaces for community dialogue, popular archiving exercise and a contribution to the efforts of finding ways of living together.

The project in a nutshell.

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- **Qwasha** is an isiZulu word: Qwasha. [v/i]; Imperative; Singular of: ukuQwasha (v/i.) ***Lie awake without sleep, very alert.***
 - Qwasha! Portal for community digital content is an online public archive of counter narratives, community media productions, interviews, stories and activities. This initiative is addressing the need to increase the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICT's) and related social media platforms to facilitate and amplify citizen voices and grassroots exchange, dialogue, and collaboration at local, regional, continental and global scale in all spheres of public life.
 - The hope is that by putting effort into a more organized public action archiving practice in community based development initiatives within the eThekweni Metropolitan Area (EMA), presenting and archiving community based initiatives and communication among members of one community and between other communities in EMA; this will create more opportunities for shared action to improve the lives of all.

Our point of departure in the community dialogues audio compilation series.

- The community dialogues audio compilation seeks to speak to a wide array of individuals particularly community based activists who will be attending COP17 activities and organizations across eThekweni Metropolitan Area, especially low income communities and vulnerable communities affected by environmental injustices.
- It will refer to fieldwork under way & carried out in sites in the eThekweni municipal area where ordinary people are being engaged in a dialogue to ascertain their levels of awareness and involvement in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) taking place from Nov 28 to the 10th of December 2011 in Durban.
- To encourage systematic archival practice, use and exchange of information especially within community based civil society formations and public institutions.
- To contribute to increasing knowledge production, network building, collaboration and cooperation with like-minded organisations regionally, continentally and globally.

Rational behind the Qwasha! Portal for Community Digital Content

- The proposed project idea has long been in development, through the shared collective desire to synergize and open greater space for direct public participation in the use of information, communication and technology including content packaging; as a tool in everyday problem solving activities in local development processes.
- The proposed portal aims to increase the levels of corporation, collaboration, action research and critical engagement across all participating groups and individuals.
- The ultimate purpose is to make information more accessible and receptive to general public use in systematic and simple, user friendly template.
- Due to the base of the project being initially in Ethekwini Metropolitan Area, most contributing community based organisations, non-governmental organisations and not for profit community initiatives will be located across this area.

● ***This will be achieved in the following ways:***

- **Through a quarterly e-journal & multi- media (freely downloadable) edition *QWASHA! Vol. 1: Climate change and peoples' narratives. Special edition* feature.**
- **Holding various socio-cultural gatherings with prepared presentations on selected archival themes, hosting exhibitions and public 'manifestations' and street theatre events thematic, captured and archived online.**
- **Linking A network of well functioning regional hub stations across EMA closely aligned to local depositories, cultural spaces, libraries and community resource centres.**
- **Regular and diverse publications and releases online and offline through books, theatre productions, radio segments, local artist inputs and public action.**
- **Qwasha! aims to become a social institution of learning built by each of the contributing media producers/archivists involved.**

How will it work?

- The function of the portal is to document, compile make publicly accessible information about activities and stories of people living in of each of the participating Ethekewini localities.
- The **Qwasha!** Portal will also make accessible other useful information from all corners of the globe to the public of Ethekewini Metropolitan Area, via links and collaboratory activities.
- **Software:** The point of departure of this project is the promotion and use of open-source software, for two reasons. Open-source software is software that is built and maintained by a network of volunteer programmers. It has been made available to the general public with relaxed or non-existent copyright restrictions. The decision to use open-source software will ensure financial sustainability as recurring license fees associated with proprietary software could cripple the project's budget at a later stage. The second, and more philosophical reason, is that the aims of the project - openness, sharing, and collaboration- are echoed by the open-source community.

How will it work? (continued)

- An integration of two open-source frameworks is suggested. Drupal (<http://drupal.org>) is a content-management system which can be used to develop collaborative websites. It can be configured to run the journal aspect of the project as well as the 'community space' section (where content is inputted).
- Drupal can handle many content types including video, text, blogs, podcasts, and polls with solid user management and menu handling.
- To run the archive section of the portal, we will use Omeka (<http://omeka.org>). It is an open-source collections management framework, specifically designed for museums, archives and cultural and heritage initiatives. It can accommodate documents, audio and video files, has advanced search capabilities and uses the industry standard Dublin Core metadata system. Online exhibitions can be created around digitized content and the framework comes with an easy to use content-management system.

Online presentation (web)

- *We propose dividing the web site into three main sections:*
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- **[Home] (Journal page)**- Moderated thematic page,
 - **[Community Space]**- Open publishing,
 - **[Archive]**- Systematic documented listing & search engine.
1. Each of these would be linked as a top-level menu item along with pages such as: About, Contact and any others we identify.
 2. The three main sections would also have drop-down menu items, to filter or select sub-sections (e.g. Latest Items, Video Content, INK Collection, etc.).
 3. The Home page would be run as a magazine-type interface with new content added regular and direct links to the other sections of the portal, as well as to social media accounts.
- **Taxonomy**
 - Taxonomy or tagging structure should also be used to allow grouping of content across sections. This means you can tag all content with, for example, the term Durban and then when clicked all these articles would be listed. This structure is organic and grows as the site grows.

Project design and content packaging

- We note that a graphic designer has been commissioned to design a logo and concept for the portal. These services will allow us to build a logo which we can use as insignia on all project related activities on letterheads, social media accounts, etc.
- **Core Team:**
- **Graphic designer**; part time technical Web tools development : Niall McNulty (McN2 Digital Heritage Consultants www.mcn2.com);Part time digitization and preservation expert: Pat Liebetrau at DISA (<http://disa.ukzn.ac.za>).
- community volunteers and a number of design agencies in Durban, including the award winning Disturbance (<http://disturbance.co.za>). Fulltime project manager/ coordinator; Molefi Mafereka Ndlovu who operates from the Centre for Civil Society at UKZN.
- Part time research assistant during field work stages of the project.

Specific Objectives of the Qwasha! Portal for Community Digital Content: Climate justice community dialogues special edition compilation.

- The objectives of the Qwasha! Portal for Community Digital Content: Climate justice community dialogues special edition compilation; is essentially to be a series 'pavement broadcasts' based on Key story themes as a compilation of audio and short video documentary stories, songs and interviews with participating Durban Sings media collective participants.
- The project will gather an archive of community media stories from various people in Durban about their experiences and views of COP17 event highlighting ordinary people's views of the subject of climate change and the associated mega conference which the UN COP 17 event has on their everyday lives in Durban area specifically.

Towards implementation: How this will be done?

- The project will be run for a period of twelve (12) months, using primarily six (6) research methods in order to realize its set objectives.
- 1. > ***Desk top/literature review and comparative analysis/monitoring.***
- 2. > ***Centralized audio& editing workshops.***
- 3. > ***Site based audio recordings and story development.***
- 4. > ***Centralized editorial sessions***
- 5. > ***Review and research assessment reports to other members of the Climate Change Discourse, Rights, and the Poor Research team.***
- 6. > ***Write up and publication of research findings in various academic journals and popular media platforms.***

The 7 focus areas

- *Initial contact interview schedule has been completed for*
- **A) Migrant communities & vulnerability (Durban CBD). Five interviews have been scheduled in conjunction with the KZN Refugee Council. (06, 07, 08 October 2011)**
- **B) Seven interviews are scheduled with Alternative civil society organizers and activist outside the organising outside the official process; our questions will focus especially on the alternative solutions and the extent people participation in these alternative initiatives (11,12, 13 October 2011).**
- **C) Seven interviews to get stories of precarious services casual workers (Durban CBD), 2 trolley pusher, 3 car guards and 2 mini bus kombi 'conductors' (08,09,10/ 11 October 2011).**
- **D) Seven interviews have been scheduled with Durban Street Traders and those involved in the informal economies. (15, 17, 18 October 2011)**
- **E) Three interviews have been scheduled The stories of fisher folk & peri- rural subsistence farmers (Durban CBD) (20 October 2011)**
- **F) We have confirmed a visit to Umlazi township, S. of Durban to do a comparative (audiovisual) 'mini/documentary (3min): on the state of environment with two Durban communities ;shooting street scenes and random interviews with local residents (Merebank & Umlazi) (22-24 October 2011).**
- **Throughout these activities, we have had our eyes wide open for manifestations of a counter culture and artists on Climate change and environmental justice. Interviews and recording of this nature will be kept through out the field research phase and aggregated as a parallel discourse.**

Concluding Remarks

- The project will gather an archive of community media stories from various people in Durban about their experiences and views of COP17 event highlighting ordinary people's views of the subject of climate change and the associated mega conference which the UN COP 17 event has on their everyday lives in Durban area specifically.
- We hope this activity will make a contribution to bringing to the forefront the voices and views of ordinary people and citizens regarding the global response to the challenge of Climate change. • On-line broadcast involving international participants and stations (IMC-Africa and other alternative media initiatives).