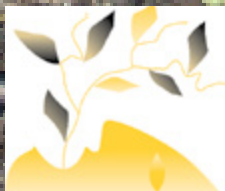


# Documenting and Revitalizing Oral Traditions



Terralingua



# Oral Traditions in Biocultural Diversity Conservation: Sustaining the Voices of the Earth



**I**t is increasingly evident that the ‘minority’ and disenfranchised peoples of the earth are the ones who speak for all humanity. They speak clearly and with dedication and conviction, because they know their lives and immediate futures - as well as the well-being of future generations - depend upon the environments in which they live and the biodiversity upon which they depend.



Technological society seems to have lost this basic reality. We must, therefore, allow the ‘Voices of the Earth’ to become our intellectual and spiritual guides, so that we too can relearn what they know and practice: that the future of humanity depends upon the maintenance of the mosaic of biological, cultural, linguistic and spiritual diversity.



Darrell Addison Posey, Founding President, International Society of Ethnobiology; recipient, United Nations Global 500 Award for “Outstanding Achievement in Service to the Environment”

## BIOCULTURAL DIVERSITY TOOLKIT

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# Introduction

Luisa Maffi

**F**or millennia, people have sat around the fire and told stories. From origin stories to stories about supernatural beings, ancestors, key events from past history, places of special significance, and the relationship between humans and the natural world, to morality tales, educational tales, humorous tales, and just plain old gossip, storytelling has had a fundamental role in human lives. It has tied people together, connected generations, established cultural identity, grounded people in place, and helped transmit cultural values, beliefs, knowledge, practices, and languages. In other words, storytelling has had a fundamental role in sustaining the biocultural diversity of life.

But the forces that are threatening biocultural diversity are also threatening storytelling. Community members, parents and children, elders and youth are spending less time together, not only in busy urban environments, but also in indigenous and local communities. More and more, throughout the world, people gather around the TV rather than around the fire, inside rather than outside. Children hear other kinds of stories—stories of globalized “modernity”—and the old traditional stories often begin to sound outlandish, or at least uninteresting and irrelevant, to them. The knowledge and values the old stories convey, the languages in which they are told, and the intimate connections between people and nature that the old stories so often portray, all begin to lose their meaning. In this way, the loss of storytelling contributes to the loss of intergenerational transmission of language, culture, and the links between people and nature.

Oral traditions, of course, are not just about stories. Traditional knowledge and wisdom, cultural and spiritual values, worldviews and lifeways are embedded in and conveyed through an extraordinary variety of forms of expressions that human societies around the world have developed and perfected, and through which they have manifested their creativity and artistry: songs, poems, epics, ritual chants, proverbs and sayings, and the list goes on. All these various genres are often grouped under the label of “oral literature”: forms of verbal art that are transmitted orally, without the medium of writing. But oral traditions more broadly also include personal narratives and oral histories, through which people record and communicate their individual and collective past and their links with past generations and ancestors, with times, places, and events of particular significance, and with all of the intangible heritage, both cultural and natural, that makes people who they are.

In today’s increasingly homogenized world, we are losing the many voices of the earth—mostly, the voices of indigenous peoples and local communities. Thousands of diverse human cultures and languages, and the oral traditions that they have nurtured, are being overpowered by just a few dominant voices that have spread their reach across the globe. Instead of achieving a vibrant unity in diversity, we are quickly sliding into a drab sameness without unity. This has profound consequences for humanity. The fewer voices that can be heard, the less likely it is that we can keep our collective options alive, and the more likely it is instead that we may encounter the same “cultural blind spots”:<sup>1</sup> cases in which the prevailing cultural models fail to provide appropriate solutions to the many challenges human societies face.

“Every society in its own way responds to the challenges of the human spirit through oral literature in its various forms”, says Prof. George Appell, an expert in indigenous oral literatures. And perhaps the greatest challenge that each culture, in its own way, has had to confront is how to respect the earth so that we can draw sustenance



*Photo © Cristina Mittermeier, 2008, Kayapo*

from it without compromising its capacity to sustain life. Indigenous and local oral traditions contain a wealth of responses to this fundamental challenge of the human spirit. This collective wisdom is vital for the survival and well-being of each human society and of all the other species with which we share the planet. There is much for everyone to learn, or re-learn, from the wisdom of oral traditions.

For indigenous peoples and local communities around the world, “natural resources management” is not just a technical notion. It is a concept imbued with deep cultural and spiritual meaning. It describes the profound interrelatedness and interdependence of people and the land, the reciprocity of the land being a part of people and people belonging to the land; and it sets out people’s ethical and moral obligations to care for the land that cares for people. This intimate mutual relationship implies active cultural and spiritual involvement with the land, and it is through such active engagement that, in indigenous views, both land and people are kept healthy. The health of the land and the health of people are often described in one and the same terms.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, from an indigenous perspective, land that is not managed according to tradition—because those traditions are lost due to rapid social, political, and economic change—is often seen as “wild”, as it is land not properly tended to; and is thought to be unhealthy. As well, people who are disconnected from the land, and from proper caring for it, are thought to be (and all too often do become) unhealthy.

As has been said about Australian Aborigines (but this is applicable to indigenous peoples elsewhere), land that is not properly cared for means “land without its songs and ceremonies”<sup>3</sup>. Thus, oral traditions have a major role in maintaining the health of the land (and of people), as it is in those traditions that the prescriptions for caring for the land are enshrined and perpetuated from one generation to the next. Indigenous peoples and local communities worldwide are seeking to hold on to or reconnect with their oral traditions, so as to maintain or reaffirm their identities, their ties with the land, and their ability to forge their own destinies. Keeping their oral traditions alive contributes to strengthening their cultural worldviews, values, beliefs, knowledge, and practices



and to ensuring that they are transmitted to the younger generations.<sup>4</sup> Gathering these traditions also enables indigenous peoples and local communities to record their historic presence on and cultural and spiritual connections with the land: with sacred natural sites, burials, places of the ancestors, cultural landscapes, sites of historical significance, and simply nature as a whole, all of which is commonly seen as sacred.

In many cases, documenting oral traditions can also assist indigenous peoples and local communities in their efforts to conserve their lands and special places, and to protect them from external development pressures that might radically alter their natural environments and their ways of life. From logging, mining, and other forms of resource extraction to urban, industrial, and infrastructure expansion, development activities have long been displacing indigenous peoples and local communities from their lands, or otherwise radically altered their ability to care for the land and protect their ways of life. Documented oral traditions can support the reaffirmation of ancestral land title and of the traditional natural resource management practices that sustained the land.

This volume of Terralingua's Biocultural Diversity Toolkit makes the case for the conservation community to give attention and support to these efforts, and to fully integrate such efforts and appropriate methodologies into conservation work. Some of these methodologies have been put forth by anthropologists and linguists who seek to ensure the preservation of the world's diverse oral traditions by rigorously recording them and interpreting them in their specific cultural contexts. Researchers from indigenous and local communities frequently follow a similar approach, conscious of the importance of creating systematic repositories of their own oral traditions for future generations. People involved in such efforts have stressed the need to create not only an audio documentation, but also a video recording of elders narrating or singing the traditions, so as to capture the visual cues that can be crucial for the interpretation of often complex, ancient meanings. Other, more informal, approaches that have been used to record oral traditions also stress the use of video, particularly in the form of "participatory video" (PV). PV is a video recording technique that puts the video camera directly in the hands of community members to plan and create their own documentation of their experiences, traditions, and practices.

The articles in this volume review some of these methodologies, and present some of the real-world situations in which recording oral traditions is crucial for the survival of both culture and nature. We believe that documenting and revitalizing local oral traditions in the local languages should be seen as one of the essential tools in biocultural diversity conservation. The cultural and spiritual values of nature that oral traditions convey are vital to worldwide efforts to make sustaining the biocultural diversity of life a primary societal goal.

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*STOLÇEE, a Saanich (WSÁNEĆ) elder, on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, Canada. Photo © Terralingua, 2011*

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# DOCUMENTING ORAL LITERATURE: THEORY, METHODS, AND ETHICAL ISSUES

George N. Appell

Oral literature is the repository of the critical knowledge and philosophy for non-literate societies and serves as a vehicle for artistic creativity of great value and beauty. This literature through narrative, poetry, song, dance, myths and fables, and texts for religious rituals provides a portrait of the meaning of life as experienced by the society at its particular time and place with their existential challenges. It encapsulates the traditional knowledge, beliefs and values about the environment and the nature of the society itself. It arises in response to the universal aesthetic impulse to provide narratives that explain the nature of life and human response to challenges. It retains knowledge to be passed on to succeeding generations. It contains the history of the society and its experiences. Thus in various forms this oral literature portrays the society's belief systems and makes sense of life. It provides a guide to human behavior and how to live one's life. With the arrival of literacy, the core of this literature and its art rapidly disappears.

Oral literature is also the repository of the artistic expression in a society. And thus its beauty resonates across cultural boundaries. As such this literature is a response to the universal human instinct to find balance, harmony, and beauty in the world and the need to understand pain, suffering, and evil. It functions to fulfill the need for religious belief and spiritual fulfillment necessary for human existence. Through stories, tales, songs, it recounts the works of the gods and the frailty of humankind. It explains how the world and human existence came about. It serves to communicate ideas, emotions, beliefs and appreciation of existence. Oral literature defines, interprets, and elaborates on the society's vision of reality and the dangers in the world. It explains the causes of human suffering, justifies them, and suggests ways of

mediation and the healing of suffering. Oral literature deals with the human adventure and achievements against odds. It is also a form of entertainment and fosters the feelings of solidarity with others who have had similar experiences. Thus oral literature may encompass many genres of linguistic expression.

Only by knowing how other peoples in other times, other places, and other cultures have experienced and interpreted the human condition can we truly understand what it means to be human and our place in the universe. Yet, the unique oral literatures of indigenous peoples are rapidly being lost, through the death of the traditional practitioners and through the formal schooling of the younger generations. It is urgent to promote the collection of this body of rapidly disappearing literature.

## Documentation Methods and Guidelines

The following methods were developed for the Sabah Oral Literature Project, which my wife Laura Appell and I established in 1986.<sup>1</sup> The philosophy behind the project has been to encourage and train local people to collect and preserve the oral traditions of their own ethnic group. This project was also designed to provide a model for the rapid collection and preservation of the oral literature of other regions of Sabah, Borneo and other areas of the world. It was hoped that this project would demonstrate to local people how they can rapidly move to collect and preserve their oral heritages before they are lost.

Often, sources of oral literature are eager to have their narratives and other texts recorded and preserved for future generations. Outsiders working with them should honor these beautiful creations and those





*Photo © G.N. Appell, 2011*

who carry on these traditions. This work is meant to preserve these incredibly important aesthetic creations and historical data for the societies that have created them, which are undergoing increasingly rapid change, and for the world at large. Honoring these traditions also helps fight the negative stereotypes that outsiders have forced on indigenous and local communities, and that have contributed greatly to a decline in the intergenerational transmission of cultural traditions and oral literature.

The collection of oral literature also raises important theoretical questions on the development of oral literatures as such: what are the processes by which they are preserved within a community, how are they memorized, how are they passed on from generation to generation, how are creative modifications made?

To answer these questions, we have aimed to get recordings of the same text at different times from the same practitioner, with several years intervening. And we have sought practitioners from different villages to record the same texts. This gives us some idea of the variance between practitioners.

The methods we have developed have resulted in a very productive and extensive library of Sabah oral literature, which is continually being added to. This approach is now also being used in our Bhutan Oral Literature Project. These methods are recommended for the documentation of oral literature and traditional ecological knowledge. However, they always are subject to revision and modification, depending on the specific cultural and political context in which the documentation is done.

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**1. Principal Investigator.** A principal investigator (PI) is needed to guide the collection of oral literature. The PI is responsible for:

- Developing and coordinating the local field team that will do the collection and transcribing.
- Providing the team with recording and transcribing equipment.
- Compensating the team members, as well as remunerating the people who are the sources of oral literature if and as appropriate according to circumstances and local customs (e.g., customary gifts to the practitioners, or reimbursement for loss of economic productivity while doing the recordings).
- Developing with the team a list of the key forms of the local oral literature and the types of traditional ecological knowledge existing in the community.
- Gathering ethnographic data for the development of a cultural dictionary of the language. The dictionary is critical, so that the context of oral literature and the figurative language used in the texts may be properly interpreted.
- Ensuring that the recordings are properly transcribed in the agreed-upon local orthography, if one exists, or helping develop a phonemic alphabet for the language to be used in the transcriptions.
- Ensuring that all recordings are properly archived in an appropriate and mutually agreed-upon institution.
- Making the recordings available to the members of the local community, if they want to have them and if the source of any particular text gives his/her permission to do so.

**2. Local Team.** Local team members should be people who are genuinely concerned about the cultural heritage of their own community. The team should consist of at least one younger community member to do the recording, and one or two older community members who know which individuals are the most knowledgeable in the oral literature and ecological knowledge and the best way to approach them. The idea is to encourage these knowledgeable individuals to become involved in a project that is beneficial to the local community itself. This will help ensure the authenticity of the performance or information being recorded.

The goal is for team members to develop into an independent research team that can continue collecting material on its own.

**3. Recording.** In recording texts, it is important to ensure that there are no persons present (e.g., government representatives or other external authorities) who might inhibit the recitation of the full text or elicit denial of knowledge of certain texts.

Before recording, it is necessary to obtain the prior informed consent of the source, stating that he/she agrees to have the text recorded, transcribed, and (if appropriate) translated, and declaring whether there are any restrictions on the use of the text or access to the text.

**4. Transcribing.** Transcribing the recordings is the responsibility of a member of the local field team, usually the younger member, provided that he/she is knowledgeable in the language and has the necessary skills to listen to recordings and transcribe them faithfully according to the agreed-upon orthography.

**5. Archiving.** Archiving the material in reliable institutions is important, particularly when the local community whose oral traditions have been collected does not have the resources to preserve these materials in situ. With the agreement of the local community, the material should be deposited in at least two different places for safety.

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**6. Cataloguing.** The texts should be catalogued first following the indigenous or local method of classification of oral literature. Where relevant, they should also be cross-catalogued according to the social entities, i.e., social group, work group, hamlet, agricultural group, etc., to which they are specific. The performers should be catalogued according to their life stages as the local people perceive them.

**7. Translating.** Translation of the texts is one of the most time-consuming and difficult tasks. Translators should be fluent both in the traditional figurative speech in the local language and in the subtleties of the language into which the text is being translated, so as to do a translation that is both intelligible and faithful to the original meaning.

**8. Cultural Dictionary.** This is critically important for translating texts and understanding them, as the traditional forms of figurative speech used in the texts may no longer be widely understood in the community. The texts themselves will provide new entries to the dictionary and serve to check and/or elucidate the meanings of existing entries. The construction of such a dictionary depends on whether older sources are still available to explain the meaning of the traditional forms of speech and the contexts of the texts. Also, it may be necessary to enlist a biologist or ethnobiologist to help with the correct identification of the plants and animals mentioned in the texts.

## Ethical Issues and Guidelines

Many ethical issues arise in the process of documenting oral traditions, particularly when outsiders (such as a non-local PI) are involved.<sup>2</sup> Some of these issues may be unique to the collection of oral literature. The following guidelines are based on established ethical standards and on the long-term field experiences of oral literature researchers.

- Do no harm.
- Learn and abide by the local cultural norms and forms of politeness and respect.
- Establish and maintain the trust of community members.
- Respect the local rules for the allocation of goods, duties, and responsibilities.
- Avoid taking sides and adding to any local tensions or conflict.
- Ensure that the people you work with in the community have a positive experience of the collaboration.
- Be open and forthright about the objectives and goals of your documentation effort, who benefits from it, and what the intended use of the material is.
- Obtain the prior informed consent of your sources for the documentation of the material.
- Respect the limitations of use requested by your sources on the materials collected.
- Be aware of the pitfalls in collecting and publishing oral literature, such as:
  1. *Making public certain kinds of oral literature whose performance is restricted to certain practitioners can create problems. It may erode the economic status of the practitioner so that he/she loses income.*
  2. *Revealing activities in a given community that the government has been trying to repress could lead to punitive action against that community.*

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3. *Identifying individuals whose views the government sees as dangerous could lead to punitive action against those individuals.*
  4. *Identifying sources that may not want others to know what kind of cultural data they have shared could cause harm to those persons.*
  5. *Exposing secrets that sections of the community may not want others to know (e.g., revealing male initiation rites to females, or vice versa) could bring harm to those who revealed the secrets and to those who learned of them.*



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1. *The text in this section is condensed and modified from various documents issued by Prof. Appell's Sabah Oral Literature project and Firebird Foundation for Anthropological Research.*
  2. *A key reference on ethical issues surrounding the documentation of indigenous oral traditions and traditional knowledge is the Code of Ethics of the International Society of Ethnobiology, found at <http://ethnobiology.net/code-of-ethics/>.*



*Photo © G.N. Appell, 2011*

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# Some Practical Tips for the Recording of Oral Literature

Adapted from the Collection Suggestions developed by Prof. George Appell for the Firebird Foundation for Anthropological Research

## 1. Inventory of Forms of Oral Literature

Make a rough inventory of the forms of oral literature in the society as a guide for collecting purposes.

Collect various versions of the same text by different people from different communities. This will reveal to the degree to which new creative additions can be made to the text; or how important it is that the text remain in its original form; and where there are different cultural influences. Collecting the same text from the same person at different times will also reveal how much of the text is remembered and how much is created each time it is performed.

If there are ritual or other texts that are sung, you might try collecting first without singing and then with singing. It will be easier to transcribe and translate the recording without the singing.

## 2. Inventory of Domain of Traditional Knowledge, Know-how and Skills

Likewise, it would be useful to compile an inventory of the main domains of traditional knowledge, as many aspects of traditional knowledge, know-how and skills are contained in the oral traditions. Since one of the goals is to also record and transmit traditional knowledge, know-how and skills, it will help to ensure a thorough coverage over time.

## 3. Equipment

Digital recording is the preferred method, as files can be uploaded to a computer and converted to formats such as .wav, mp3, etc. There are high quality digital recorders on the market. Materials should be recorded using a stereo microphone.

For transcriptions of the recordings, there are transcription machines made for computers that will work for digital recordings. All transcription machines will slow down the narrative or rewind for several words, which will help the transcriber capture all of the recording.

## 4. Text Information

Some basic information should be noted at the beginning of each recording. It is also useful to keep a field journal entry for each recording session. This journal should include at least the same information that is put in the introduction of the recording.

## 5. Recording Information

Record at the beginning of each item of oral literature:

- a) Who is doing the recording

- 
- b) Who has come along to help with the recording session
  - c) Date
  - d) Where recorded
  - e) Who is being recorded
  - f) About what: name of story, myth, ritual text, etc.
  - g) Ethnic/linguistic group of person being recorded
  - h) From whom and where did the person learn the text, etc.
  - i) Is this text specific to a certain community, lineage, family, specialist group, individual?
  - j) Cultural context: any information about the specific cultural circumstances relevant to the performance and interpretation/meaning of the text.

## 6. Recording Releases

To obtain recording releases and/or permissions to translate, share, and photograph/videotape the recording, the following information might be placed at the beginning of the recording:

- 1) I, [name], agree to have this [name of text] recorded.
- 2) I agree to have this text translated into \_\_\_\_\_ [language of translation].
- 3) I give permission for the [name of text] to be shared with others [specify terms and conditions].
- 4) [If photographing/videotaping occurs during the recording session] I agree to being photographed/videotaped while the [name of text] is being recorded, and to the images being shared with others [specify terms and conditions].

*Note:* In obtaining releases, it should be kept in mind that in some instances the permission for sharing the text with others may be restricted to certain individuals within the community, or vice versa prohibited to them. It is essential to make sure that the person to be recorded can legitimately share the text. Further, there may be restrictions to whom the text can be shared with. It is also essential to ensure that the text can be shared with others who are not members of the ethnic group. If this is the case, the release statement should make it clear that permission to share the text with outsiders is granted.

## 7. Transcribing the Text

In transcribing a text, only use copies of the originals. Label media as to whether they are originals or copies.

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It is essential to check and cross-check the transcriptions to make sure that they were done properly and nothing was missed.

### 8. Example of Cover Page for Transcribed Text

It may be useful to have a cover page for all texts transcribed as follows:

Title:

Source:

Recorded By:

Directory Name (on computer):

File Name:

Indigenous name for the kind of oral literature, such as type of:

(story) (myth) (song) (prayer) (chant) (proverb) (word game) etc.

Date Recorded:

File No.:

Date Transcribed:

Computerized:

Proofed:

No. of Computer Pages:

Translation Status:

Ist Draft Completed:

Translator:

With Help of:

2nd Draft Completed:

Translator:

With Help of:



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# Tittilap

## Storytelling As a Means of Sharing and Shaping Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Micronesia

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Emerson Lopez Odango

As a graduate student in linguistics who engages in documentary fieldwork on the Mortlockese language in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), I am reminded over and over again that I have teachers not only in the university classroom, but also in the communities where I work. It may seem easy to point out some obvious differences between the two contexts; for example, in a university classroom, I would expect to receive handouts, read computer presentations on a projector, engage in critical thinking discussions around a table, and so forth. In the field, I wouldn't expect to encounter such things, and yet in a way, I do: the summary handouts are realized as moments when my host grandmother shows me the process of cooking *máái nééné* 'roasted breadfruit', the projector is the entire *faash* 'pandanus tree' which a friend explains to me by pointing at individual parts, and the discussions are facilitated not around a table but in a *mósóró* 'cookhouse' where discussions almost always start off with cups of coffee. What I am beginning to realize, too, is that an integral part of the epistemology of these local communities is storytelling. This not only includes what we might consider the traditional genre of a narrative – that is, a sequentially ordered account of events – but I consider “storytelling” to include other genres such as expository texts, anecdotes, jokes, procedural texts, proverbs, and so forth; these are all deftly woven into the creation, explanation, and dissemination of bodies of knowledge. This is all the more evident when I reflect on my experiences asking my host family, friends, and consultants about the traditional ecological knowledge of their local communities. It does not matter how long the list of

bird names nor how many pages in the book of local plants; my teacher at the moment will find a way to incorporate some type of text to contextualize the information in ways that are meaningful not only to him/her, but also to me as a student. The transmission of biocultural knowledge through oral storytelling is a fundamental part of how these community members shape and share knowledge, and I am continuously learning how to shape my own fieldwork methodology to their lesson plans.

While many of the languages in geographic Micronesia are well-documented in terms of the availability of published reference and pedagogical grammars, not all are, and *kapsen Mwoshulók* 'Mortlockese' in particular has very little representation in the linguistics literature.<sup>1</sup> As a student engaged in documentary fieldwork, I am guided by the recent charges by experts in the field of language documentation to take a “discourse-centered approach” (Woodbury 2003:41). No longer are individual wordlists or a set of felicitous sentences the sole goal of documentation. The objective, rather, is to create a documentary corpus of real-world uses of language, as varied as possible. The impetus for this change comes not only from the increasing emphasis on documenting linguistic diversity (cf. Woodbury 2003) and the encroaching realities of language endangerment (cf. Hale et al. 1992), but also from the recognition of connections between linguistic, biological, and



Annastasia and Diego Maipi have just finished planting *waran uush* 'root ball of a banana'. Photo Emerson Lopez Odango, 2012

cultural diversity (cf. Maffi 2005). Needless to say, this is a very exciting prospect! There is so much knowledge out there to record and understand, and we are not necessarily restricted to specific grammatical investigations. The net we need to cast has to be much larger than before. To facilitate the casting of that large net, I have often found that by shifting the conversation to topics of biocultural knowledge, I would come across something that resonates with the speaker I am working with in ways that are meaningful to him/her. Be it knowledge of medicinal uses of plants, or the phases of the moon, or the various ways of local styles of fishing, each person has his/her own specialty, and very often I am treated to unelicited stories which serve as the means of transmitting that information.

The structure of existing materials often serves as a great elicitation tool, allowing the speaker to expand on information he/she feels is relevant while following a predetermined order, such as the pages in a book. In the summer of 2010, I returned to the atoll where I had previously worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer.<sup>2</sup> Pakin Atoll is the home to a community of Mortlockese-speaking residents in Pohnpei State. For one of my elicitation tools, I used a small full-color brochure titled *Plants of Pohnpei*.<sup>3</sup> I asked my host mother, Annastasia Maipi, to look through the images in this brochure, which provides local names in Pohnpeian and descriptions/uses in English. My general request of her at the beginning of our recording session was for her to go through each plant, identifying the ones which grow on Pakin and the various medicinal, culinary, or cultural uses of the plant. As we started, there was not much I needed to do by way of asking directed questions about the plants. Annas very much took the lead, recounting not only facts about how the plant is used but also stories and memories surrounding the plant, texts which I did not specifically elicit. Towards the beginning of her discussion about *kúshel* 'turmeric' (*Curcuma longa*), she remarked, "*Loomw, imi kan itei mwongo, emi ioor eeu kkón, iir mii amata nganei kúshel llan shoo we, raa iúngútei, mii kai mmen nganei llan kkón we, upé nanganei llan arúngún kkón we, utáán ram!*" (A long time ago, I used to take part in eating *kúshel*, there was a certain type of pounded breadfruit pudding, they would grate the *kúshel* with the coconut, they would then squeeze it, then it would be put onto the pounded breadfruit pudding, and if you were to look at the coconut cream of the pudding, it's so yellow!) After this, we entered a discussion of some other uses of the *shéén* 'leaves' and *faúen* 'tuber', including my question to Annas about the use of turmeric to create a body powder, which is a part of culture of outer island Yap communities to the west, but not something that Annas had observed on Pakin or Pohnpei.

Immediately after this, completely unprompted by me, Annas returned to her earlier topic of the *kkón* ‘pounded breadfruit pudding’ that is made with *kúshel*, whereby she explicated the cultural significance of that special dish: “*Loomw, usun llan sokkon kkón we re kan féerei, usun shak ngé re kan féerei pwe mii kan ioor kapsen sokkon fansóun pwata repé mwongo sokkon kkón we. Usun aewan – re Mwoshulók re kai úró ‘naúfé’, aewan naúnaún – re kan féerei sókkón kkón mii kúshel, iwe pwúppwúlú kewe, mwomwmwongo fangan. Iwe ina uluulen.*” (‘A long time ago, for the *kkón* that people used to make, it was as if they made it to eat for a special occasion. I think that the most important reason – the Mortlockese say *naúfé*, which means just recently born – they would make the *kkón* that has *kúshel*, and then the married couple who had the child would eat it together. That was the way it was.’) I was particularly struck by her use of *loomw* ‘a long time ago’ in both instances; over the course of several years of interactions with speakers of Mortlockese, I’ve learned that *loomw* is not just used as a temporal adverb in the strictest sense, but it also functions as a discourse marker which frames the following passage as a narrative. It is the job of the listener to follow that information which is arguably foregrounded because of its prominent place in the discourse at that point in time (especially in the context of a text that is not temporally sequenced). I inferred that my host mother was sharing something from her cultural knowledge of *kúshel* because it was directly relevant to our conversation at hand about how *re Mwoshulók* ‘Mortlockese people’ use that important plant.

Another example comes from my interactions with a native speaker of *pworausen Pááféng* ‘Pááféng’ while working on a project in Chuuk.<sup>4</sup> Constantine Dungawin assisted me in identifying the local names for some of the flora and fauna of his home atoll of Pááféng. My elicitation tool was a set list of flora and fauna that are commonly found throughout Micronesia, such as the coconut



Celino Taiwelyaro is holding a poster of pelagic fish commonly found in Pohnpei. Photo Emerson Lopez Odango, 2012

(*Cocos nucifera*). Because Pááféng and Mortlockese are very closely related languages, most of my interaction with Constantine was in the medium of Mortlockese for the purposes of explaining my questions, and he would reply in Pááféng. The list, however, was essentially a set of English words and phrases that needed translation into the local language. The time constraints during those elicitation sessions meant that I could only primarily focus on eliciting the terms from that pre-determined list, but this did not deter me from asking Constantine about local names of other flora and fauna that were not on the list.<sup>5</sup> By shifting the mode of our conversation from



Celino Taiwelyaro explains one of the uses of *yat* ‘coconut spathe’ as a splint. Photo © Emerson Lopez Odango, 2012

an elicitation-translation session into a question-answer discussion, this provided the opportunity for spontaneous expository texts to arise, which Constantine allowed me to record in addition to the main work. In these stories, anecdotes, and procedurals, he mentioned names of animals which I had never heard of before while living on Pakin or in the other languages I was working on. For example, after discussing commonly-found mollusks such as *siim* (*Tridacna* clam) and *tto* (*Hippopus* clam), Constantine mentioned the name *elipwii*; upon seeing the confused look on my face, he asked, “*Een mii sileei elipwii?*” (‘Do you know what *elipwii* is?’) He went on by explaining the location it is found on the reef, a

place that is distinct from where one finds *siim* or *tto*. Another name, *lukumw*, sounded vaguely familiar to me as Pakin Mortlockese *rokwumw* ‘a type of land crab’, but apparently it was not; while *rokwumw* is small land crab, it is not small enough to fit inside the empty shells which *lukumw* call home, not unlike hermit crabs (*lúmwomw* in Mortlockese and *lumwomw* in Pááféng). I was very much acquainted with *lúmwomw* from my time on Pakin, but this was the first time I had heard of a type of crab called *lukumw*. Constantine explained, “*Iká pwe aa toowuw masawan, iwe aa itulong óón fanú, iwe lumwomw mii toongeni toolong llón, mii kan oor ekkana péén mii tékia.*” (‘When the *lukumw* leaves from inside, and it

then goes into the island, the *lumwomw* is able to go inside, there are empty shells which are large enough for it to fit inside.’) I could not help but be amazed at this impromptu lesson that Constantine was giving me on invertebrates; indeed, he emphasized the point by saying, “*Mii chómmóng iit, mii chómmóng ekan maan, kiirh mii toonganei angei mé leeset.*” (‘There are a lot of names, there are a lot of animals, those which we are able to get from the ocean.’) We continued on back and forth, him mentioning Pááféng names of mollusks which I am sure are found on Pakin but whose names I had never elicited, and me attempting to remember Mortlockese names, some of which were unfamiliar to Constantine. It was quite the cross-cultural/linguistic experience for us both!

Although the elicitation sessions I had with Annas and Constantine were paper-based with us sitting at a *sheepel* ‘table’ or on a *pwalang* ‘porch’, I did try to make opportunities to allow the speaker to share information with me in a natural environment. During my time as a teacher in Pakin Elementary School, I worked with a fellow teacher named Celino Taiwelyaro, a native speaker of *kapetali Weleya* ‘Woleaian’. Celino provided me with many opportunities to audio- and video-record him walking around Nikahlap (the main islet of Pakin Atoll where we lived and worked), explaining the names, significance, and uses of plants which he is already familiar with from his home atoll of Feshaiulape. All the visual aids and hands-on tools we needed were already around us. Rather than just explaining to me the medicinal uses of the white fruit of net (*Scaevola taccada*), Celino would pick a fruit, gently squeeze it to allow the clear liquid to drip, and explain, “*Me ka uwal, si gal googo reel tefiyal, tefiyal teling, tefiyal mat. Gare go metag telingomw, gare ebwe metag lan metomw gare...siyaa fiyei, menalong na shal.*” (‘As for the fruit of this plant, we use it for medicine, medicine for the ears, medicine for the eyes. If your ear hurts, or if your eye hurts...we’ll squeeze



*The high chief of Pakin, Pius Siten, prepares níú ‘drinking coconut’. Photo © Emerson Lopez Odango, 2012*

the fruit, and allow the liquid to go inside.’) In his explanation about the uses of *mai* ‘breadfruit’ (*Artocarpus altilis*), he first led me into the woods to standing under a towering breadfruit in order to point out specific aspects of the tree. He explained that the massive trunk is used to carve a variety of important objects such as *wa* ‘canoe’, *yanif* ‘taro pounding board’, and *waigeng* ‘coconut grater’. Because we had recently watched a movie about the *Höküle’a* voyage back to Satawan to honor Mau Pailug, Celino discussed how *mai* is used to carve *wa terag* ‘sailing canoe’. A deft strike of his knife against the trunk allowed the *bwilis* ‘sap’ to slowly ooze out, which prompted him to explain its use as an adhesive for the construction of canoes. Celino’s expository texts were created in the moment, inspirations for which were all around us in the form of the natural environment.

The mere act of asking “how do you say this in your language” is not really an act void of any context. I have grown to become more aware of the power dynamics of how my identity as a Peace Corps Volunteer or a fieldworker or a host family member affects the immediate context and my relationship with my interlocutor. I am always grateful, then, when the person with whom I am recording takes the reigns and leads me on a journey through a story, however brief or anecdotal it may be. They have defined their role as a storyteller, and I am the listener. As a final example, I am reminded of a moment sitting on the pwalang of the house of the *samwoolún Pakin* ‘high chief of Pakin’, named Pius Siten. I was showing him a poster which contained pictures of various Micronesian birds, and he listed off the names of *úúk* ‘white-tailed tropic bird’ (*Phaethon lepturus*), *asaf* ‘great frigatebird’ (*Fregata minor*), and so forth. When he came across the pictures of shorebirds such as the *liakak* ‘whimbrel’ (*Numenius phaeopus*) and *kuliing* ‘American golden plover’ (*Pluvialis dominica*), he suddenly said in a quiet voice, “*e úró, loomw, aa?*” (‘they used to say, a long time ago, hmm?’), and I knew that I would be treated to a *tittilap* ‘story’. Pius briefly told me the story of a woman from Satawan (an island of the Mortlocks chain) who had snuck up upon a man wandering *ilik* ‘ocean-side beach’. Because she startled him so, in his anger he commanded her to go away *lúkún Iaap* ‘outside of Yap’; the shorebirds around them such as the *liakak* and *kuliing* were the ones to *aúna* ‘give feathers to’ the woman, thus allowing her fly away to Satawal. Previously, I had viewed that instance of a cultural tale as a “side bonus” of the elicitation session with the chief, because my main focus was to record the names of the birds on that poster, not necessarily texts. I now see the intrinsic value of discourse-based elicitations for my fieldwork on languages of Micronesia, allowing the speakers’ texts to help shape my questions and investigations. Storytelling is not epiphenomenal

to the fieldwork, regardless if our primary focus is on morphosyntactic description or ethnobotanical elicitation. It should be one of our guides to fieldwork, especially when the people with whom we work choose to share their stories with us.

## NOTES

1. See Rehg 2004 for a discussion of the efforts of various collaborative projects from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and the East-West Center for the documentation of Micronesian languages and the training of Micronesian educators.
2. I would like to acknowledge the Arts and Sciences Student Research Award from the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa for this funding opportunity to conduct fieldwork on Pakin in the summers of 2010 and 2011.
3. This brochure is published by the Conservation Society of Pohnpei in collaboration with the New York Botanical Garden and the Japan Official Development Assistance.
4. I would also like to acknowledge the Island Research and Education Initiative for providing the opportunity to travel to Chuuk to conduct elicitations on the languages of Chuuk State (Chuukese, Mortlockese, Pááféng, Nómwonweité, and Polowatese) in 2009 and 2010.
5. The list also provided space to write-in names of other species not represented or sub-species of those already represented.

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# Amaxesha Osuku - Times of the Day in Xhosaland, South Africa

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Tony Dold & Michelle Cocks

## South Africa – the “Rainbow Nation”

With a land surface area of 1,1 million km<sup>2</sup>, representing just 1% of the earth’s total land surface, South Africa is home to almost 10% of the world’s total known bird, fish and plant species, and over 6% of the world’s mammal and reptile species. Not only do we claim to have the third-highest level of biodiversity in the world, we also call ourselves the ‘Rainbow Nation’, a title that reflects the country’s rich cultural diversity. Biocultural diversity has been defined as “the diversity of life in all its manifestations – biological, cultural, and linguistic – which are interrelated (and likely co-evolved) within a complex socio-ecological system” (Maffi 2010). An integral part of this diversity, cultural expression through language, is central to how knowledge and values pass across generations.

## IsiXhosa language

IsiXhosa forms part of the Nguni language group sometimes referred to as “Cape Nguni”. The distinguishing feature of isiXhosa are the click sounds (c, q and x) which were incorporated through language contact with the Khoi and San speakers of the south western region of South Africa. IsiXhosa speakers make up 18% the South African population. Most of the speakers of this language are situated in the South African province of the Eastern Cape.

During South Africa’s apartheid period the Xhosa Language Board served as an instrument of Government control, screening out protest literature and restricting topics to “traditional” themes. In



*Ukuwa kwamanyakrini (the falling of the glossy starlings). The time when these birds leave their roosts. Photo © Tony Dold, 2012*

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The isiXhosa language portrays nature (*indalo*) in the names and descriptions of times of the day. In Xhosaland a whole day (a day and a night) is called *usuku*, consisting of *imini* (daytime) and *ubusuku* (night-time). The names of the various times of day in isiXhosa are beautifully descriptive, often drawing on vivid images of rural life and nature.

1994 isiXhosa became one of nine indigenous languages to obtain official recognition in South Africa's first post-apartheid Constitution. Following the democratic transition the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) was also created and charged with responsibility for language planning. However the development of the language in education has proven to be especially difficult. While the language is taught as a subject at all levels, it is only used as a medium of instruction in very few schools and only from grade 1 to grade 3.

Famous isiXhosa speaking South Africans include two Nobel laureates: the former Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu, and first democratically elected President, Nelson Mandela.

## Times of the Day in Xhosaland

Here we show how the isiXhosa language portrays nature (*indalo*) in the names and descriptions of times of the day. In Xhosaland a whole day (a day and a night) is called *usuku*, consisting of *imini* (daytime) and *ubusuku* (night-time). The names of the various times of day in isiXhosa are beautifully descriptive, often drawing on vivid images of rural life and nature<sup>1</sup>.

*linkuku zokuqala* (the first fowls). The first round of crowing of the roosters before most people are awake in the village.

*linkuku zesibini* (the second fowls). The second round of crowing by the roosters, about an hour later. The men will usually have left the huts at this time, when 'the night is brown' or *kusentsundu*.

*Xa kumpondo zankomo* (time of the horns of the cattle). A time when the light is just sufficient to reveal the raised horns of the cattle in the *ubuhlanthi* (byre). This is when the 'day breaks' (*ukuthi qhekre*) and the *inyakrini* (glossy starlings) begin to make a considerable noise. The chattering of these metallic blue birds with golden-yellow eyes is rendered:

*Ubusuk'oba kange silale; be sisela, be sisela; amehlo ebomvu nje; be sisele, kange silale* ("Last night we had no sleep, we were drinking, we were drinking, our eyes being red as you see them, we were drinking, we never slept")

*Ukuwa kwamanyakrini* (the falling of the glossy starlings). The time when these birds leave their roosts.





*Umsobomvu (the rosy face of the morning). The time when the sky pales or assumes a pink colour with the coming of the sun. Photo © Tony Dold, 2012*

Isifingo (the morning twilight). During this period the morning star, *ikhwezi lokuqala*, rises above the eastern horizon, and is followed some time later by the second star, *ikhwezi lesibini*. Some people believe that each star ascends before and after the second crowing of the roosters respectively.

*Umsobomvu* (the rosy face of the morning). The time when the sky pales or assumes a pink colour with the coming of the sun.

*Ukuwa kweenkuku* (the falling of the fowls). The time when these domestic birds leave or 'fall off' their roosts.

*Ukuthi chapha kwelanga* (when the sun's rays brighten the hilltops they touch lightly on the hills). The day is then said to be starting (*kusasa*).

*Ukuphuma kwelanga* (the sun comes out). The moment when the sun begins to rise visibly from under the horizon.

*Xa ilanga lishiya iintaba* (the sun leaves the mountains). The time when the sun has begun to ascend above the horizon.

*Ukunyibilika kombethe* (the dew melts). The time when the sun is just warm enough to evaporate the dew on the grass.

*Ukuphuma kweenkomo* (the cattle depart). The time when the cattle are taken out to graze. It is important that the herd is only let out to graze after the dew has evaporated to avoid an illness called *inyongo* (an excess of bile in the gall bladder) believed to be caused by eating the wet grass.



*Xa kumpondo zankomo (time of the horns of the cattle). A time when the light is just sufficient to reveal the raised horns of the cattle in the ubuhlanthi (byre). This is when the 'day breaks' (ukuthi qhekre) and the inyakrini (glossy starlings) begin to make a considerable noise. Photo © Tony Dold*

*Ukuphakama kwelanga* (the sun is lifting). The time when the sun rises higher into the sky.

*Intlazane* (milking time). From 10 to 11 in the morning, when the cows are milked.

*Ukuya kwimini emaqanda* (towards the time of the egg). Just before midday with the sun in the middle of the heavens in the same way that the yolk forms the centre of an egg. This is immediately followed by *emini emaqanda* (time of the egg). Midday.

*Ukujika kwelanga* (the sun is turning to go down) or *ukuya komhla* ('towards that time' [the end of the day]). When the sun begins its descent.

*Ukubetha kwempepho* (to be touched by a gentle cool breeze) The onset of the afternoon sea breeze, reflecting a coastal environment.

*Xa libantu bahle* (when a person is beautiful - the sun is personified as a beautiful person). Early afternoon.

*Ukuwa kwamathunzi* (the shadows fall) and *ukugcangca kwelanga* (the sun loses its strength) refer to the late afternoon.

*Liya kunina* (it [the sun] is going to its mother). Sunset.

*Ukuqala ukungcola* (to become dirty). Twilight,

which is expressed metaphorically as the “soiling” of the day.

*Urhanya lwemivundla* (twilight of the hares). Deepening twilight when the *imvundla* (scrub hare) comes out of its shelter in the long grass.

*Isidlo sangokuhlwa* (food of the evening). The time of the evening meal.

*Ukulala kweentsana* (children go to sleep). The time when children are sent to bed.

*Ukubekwa kwamacala* (to put down sides). The time spent lying on the sleeping mats before falling asleep.

*Ubusuku bukabhadakazi*, (the time of night when no-one is about. *Kwesibhadakazi* means an isolated, uninhabited place). The middle of the night.

*Ezinzulwini zobusuku* (the ‘deep’ of night). The period of complete darkness before *iinkuku zokuqala* (the first fowls).

## The future of isiXhosa

Along with the loss of biodiversity and erosion of traditional cultures, the world is currently undergoing a third extinction crisis: that of the diversity of human languages (Maffi 1999). It is estimated that half the people in the world now use one of eight global languages. Experts say that as many as 200 African languages have already disappeared and that more than a third of the endangered languages on earth are African. The loss of languages, cultural practices and indigenous ecological knowledge all reflect the breakdown in the relationship between humans and their environment.

For the past three years *Inkcubeko Nendalo*<sup>2</sup> has worked with Grade 10 learners in seven resource-poor Government schools in Grahamstown. All the learners are isiXhosa first-language speakers from

low income families living in urban “township” conditions where exposure to recreational natural areas is severely limited by their economic status. However, many learners still have limited knowledge of traditional nature-based religious activities and customs as well as reference to nature in isiXhosa such as in idioms, proverbs, songs and expressions. *Inkcubeko Nendalo* strives to build on this existing knowledge as a basis to instill an awareness and pride in Xhosa cultural heritage, including the isiXhosa language.



## NOTES

1. With reference to Kopke, D. 1982. Concepts of time among the Xhosa. *Fort Hare Papers* 7,4: 229 – 238.
2. [www.bioculturaldiversity.co.za](http://www.bioculturaldiversity.co.za)

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# Voices of the Land, Voices of the People: Documenting Tsilhqot'in Place-Based Oral Traditions

Linda Smith

A key feature of Aboriginal spirituality is to look after the land, an obligation which has been passed down as law for thousands of years.

Jens Korff

## Who We Are

I was raised by elderly Tsilhqot'in speaking parents in south-central British Columbia, Canada. My mother, originally from the Tsilhqot'in community of Xení (Nemiah), passed away in 2012 at the age of 95. She was an extremely hard worker by anyone's standards, and she really did live by her ancestral traditions and values. While studying, I often reflected on my ancestral culture and the differences in my own life. The depth of knowledge and the absolute fluency my mother had with the language was exceptionally rich. In my mind, she truly had the best education in the world. The education passed down by Tsilhqot'in ancestors is based on systematic observations of the environment. The people had access to the most efficient laboratory: intact and virtually untouched nature and specialized guides from the universe. The inherited traditions have been time-tested and re-experienced time and time again from generation to generation.

We use two names to identify ourselves, *Nenqayni* which means "people of the earth" and *Tsilhqot'in* which means "people of the river." It is often the case among Indigenous peoples that the group name they use to identify themselves with also signifies that they are a part of the land. Although Tsilhqot'in means 'people of the river', I prefer "people of the lakes" because I spent most of my childhood near lakes.

I am deeply appreciative that my ancestors have practiced outstanding management systems in caring for our lands. I am also most grateful that they have handed down to us their pristine lands along with their powerful language and their traditions. Pristine land, mountains, vegetation, water, traditional food, ancient stories, knowledge on ways of life, and generally any details about culture are all precious to Tsilhqot'in, and even more highly valued because they were handed down since the beginning of time by Tsilhqot'in ancestors.

In my lifetime, these places I learned to love have been permanently altered by clearcut logging. My mother and I wept for weeks after seeing this intentional slaughter of our forest; we saw this as a massacre.



*Helena Myers (Yunešit'in) harvesting cambium from a lodgepole pine. Photo © Linda Smith, 2011.*

In fact, all the lands cherished by the Yunešit'in band of the Tsilhqot'in have been destroyed. The only pristine area left on the Yunešit'in side of the river is Nabaš, and Teztan Biny (Fish Lake) is part of that.

We experience a spiritual longing to be out on the land. My worldview, the holistic way I view the world, and the cumulative grief I have inherited, and experienced during my extensive research, make it very challenging for me to remain positive in the present time with all that is happening. Our past is embedded within the clearcuts; the broken landscapes hold our most cherished memories. But, it is the disfigured land we see first, it is the emotional pain we experience first, and this anguish overshadows what was there before. Now, we must build upon these layers, and create new visions on the land. But, it is impossible to obliterate the horror on the landscapes and see past this, to the purity and the cultural wealth that was there before. How can a Tsilhqot'in create new life and new memories upon what was butchered, and bring new life upon what appears to be dying?

In my mind, everything is connected. We are Nenqayni and Tsilhqot'in have been connected to their lands for many generations, and Tsilhqot'in elders would say this connection has been there since time began. The land is what makes us complete; it is an extension of our body and our soul; it is what gives us joy; it is what gives us security; it protects us; it feeds us; it comforts us; it heals us; it is Our Mother. We love our land and its life forms. Like an infant away from its mother, most Tsilhqot'in feel lost elsewhere and we miss our landscapes.

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The soul of Tsilhqot'in, that I know, is spiritually connected to our ancestral lands. Our people are always drawn to familiar places or yearn to be on the landscapes in all seasons, constantly weaving their thoughts and physical selves from present fixed places to remote ancestral places. Without our land we have no culture. Our rootedness to familiar land is cultivated through personal memories and the strong bonds to strange places are instilled through stories.

This pull from afar, this incessant yearning, this need to be on the land is all encompassing. Our very being enforces this attachment to places. We are compelled from within our souls, from within our bodies and our mind to be in specific places during each of the seasons. Our flesh, our heart, our stomach, and our brain make it known where we belong. An aged grandmother's inconsolable sorrow at the realization that she can no longer ride in the mountains again, and a dying grandfather's tearful farewell to the landscape that he revered throughout his life, are examples of this great spiritual bond.

This is not necessarily just an Indigenous experience as there are others who have such memories and attractions and need to frequent their own choice sites. Our sensory organs are embedded in special places drawing us back to a time long ago. A wind today may bring memories of another windy place of the past and the smell of blueberries, whether in jam or in a special tea, will bring us back to our youth to a favorite remote meadow of our childhood.

There are some who spontaneously feel a deep connection to a new landscape and feel like they have finally come home. This bond cannot be undone or erased. It is strange that even senility cannot blot out the yearning to return home or to return to certain places on the land. The old continue to have visual experiences about familiar places and about previous activities and have a need to get out on the land.

From our perception, our bond with our land existed since the beginning of time. It is the ancient connection to ancestors and the sense of oneness with nature that Tsilhqot'in currently search for, long for, and seek out when they go out on the land. Tsilhqot'in ancestors have walked on the many trails which connect to the landscapes within and beyond their territory. They have fished at numerous lakes, hunted practically every land mammal, gathered food and medicine, and made sacred the areas of their hearths. Even though few of us had the privilege of physically living with our ancestors, and few of us have the ability to see their present spirits upon the land, we are certain during our many travels that the old ones continue to exist in these places. We know this from our oral literature. They have a presence on the landscapes today and will exist into the future. We know this from personal experiences through our senses. Our ancestors continue to walk in places, which to some of us are new landscapes within our traditional territory. They revisit old places. They exist through the seasons.

After the many years of cultural deprivation, the mourning experienced by being separated from our territorial places is constant and this can only be remedied by continuing to go back upon the land. Sometimes, our destination is specific to the seasons. Like a longing for comfort food which is initially introduced because of a family tradition, we must partake again and "feast" upon the land – a wholeheartedly soulful feast. Our reconnection to our ancestors, our need to be in the places where they frequented, to re-experience the energy there, is to fulfill one's spiritual hunger. It is to regain what was lost, to continue to be part of the ancestral life way, to be healed by nature's power, to be inspired by the old and the new. The activity is as important as the destination. For some, the journey is more significant in terms of connecting to the land, the path, and the energy. Greeting with the gaze, the species, the vegetation, and the landscapes, is a profound experience. It is a visionary feast which temporarily massages and satisfies the soul.



*Horses near Little Fish Lake, Chilcotin Plateau, British Columbia, Canada. Photo © Luisa Maffi, 2011*

The modern culture restricts our time, our travels, our traditional activities, our learning... Time now being spent upon our traditional land seems to be mostly confined to hunting, fishing, and gathering whereas our great-grandparents were out there twelve months of the year and remained part of the whole. During our busy lives and modern schedules today, we must find the time to find balance by going out upon the land to nourish our souls. The sense we feel of being upon the land and the continued involvement in a traditional cycle in tune with the seasons, nurtures all the aspects which make us who we are. To hunt, fish, or gather in another country does not fulfil us in the same way. Places are not only distantly separated, but they are foreign in their vegetation. A walk in a beautiful park in another province or country is an awesome experience, but a walk or a traditional practice carried out on our own land is much more profound and it is vital to our being as a human species in order to continue to be Nenqayni.

The land speaks eloquently; it fills the void that we feel; it feeds our totality; it permeates us with the feeling that we are one. We share the same air as our ancestors. We cannot belong anywhere else. This fact cannot be undone or changed. We live because of the land and this is our birthright. To have to live elsewhere will bring us suffering beyond endurance and we will be beyond healing. We cannot exist as foreigners upon meaningless land.

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The land is a sacred entity which renews itself on a daily basis; it nurtures all that exists; and even the air is purified continuously. Upon it a multitude of species exist which regenerate time and time again. How can we not give thanks to the earth? How can we destroy a part of it? How can we disrespect that which we cannot reduplicate in its entirety? We depend on the land, the life upon it, and the seasons. The respect for and the preservation of all life is our way – it is the essential foundation of Tsilhqot'in traditions.

To carry on our spiritual, mental, and physical heritage on our land is an essential requirement for life. Our land is as crucial to us as food is to all life. It balances us, it fills our spiritual void; it makes us who we are. If our land is harmed beyond repair, then we are harmed beyond repair. We cannot belong anywhere else. We will always be Nenqayni and we will always be Tsilhqot'in. Our very being cries out to be at one with our ancestral lands.

This heritage is necessary for survival and was transferred down the generations. The ancestral spirits are in the lands that they have given us, and the ancestors are also within the generations - in the genes and in the souls. They are just a thought away. The ancestors, their inheritance, and their descendants are spiritually intertwined. And in turn, it is a sacred and fundamental duty to preserve and to pass on their inheritance in their purity and totality.

There are so many discussions Tsilhqot'in need to engage in, and the vast amount of Tsilhqot'in knowledge to document and understand, and throughout all this, Tsilhqot'in are grieving the many losses of their people, their culture, their language, their heritage, their land. There is simply not enough time to adequately prepare documents towards protecting our land and heritage. It would take hundreds of volumes to describe our relationship to our land, to explain Tsilhqot'in culture, and to make clear the impacts to our connection and our rights to our land. We want to document what existed before the trauma; see what we had before European contact; and to look back not just for guidance, but for our own sustenance and healing.

## The Ancient Philosophy

Tsilhqot'in ancestors have handed down numerous laws, protocols, restrictions, and rules based on the need to preserve, sustain, and show respect for all species, resources, and the lands. One ancient Tsilhqot'in philosophy is to leave no footprint. Tsilhqot'in ancestors have left few clues and tools, yet, have successfully maneuvered themselves through major climatic periods, shifting geographies, unpredictable food resources, catastrophes, and have maintained their ways of life to this day despite steady colonizing efforts.

The Tsilhqot'in people packed only utilitarian materials which did not preserve well in soils, and have left numerous sites seemingly untouched, thus, many significant sites have escaped archaeological excavation. McGhee (1996)<sup>1</sup> noted the Dene value of carrying only necessary items when traveling:

*...The Dene peoples of the northwestern Canadian forests, involve pride in being able to live with a minimum of material items. An axe, a knife, and a kettle are enough for ideal Dene to make a comfortable living from the forest they know so well. Even the knife can be replaced by a sharp flake knocked from stone and discarded after use, and a temporary kettle can be quickly fashioned from birch bark. Home is a temporary brush shelter...*



One makes a living by applying knowledge and skill rather than by using manufactured tools. Not surprisingly, the Dene leave little behind for archaeologists to interpret: a patch of ashes, a heap of decaying brush, and a scatter of animal bones that are soon dissolved by the acid soil beneath the spruce forest. Dene history is not very amenable to archaeological analysis, and indeed is very poorly known.

*Suwh-ts'eghedudinh* is a Tsilhqot'in word with no easy translation into English. As Tsilhqot'in one's connectedness comes through the ancient stories, influencing one's interactions with others in the community, respect for ancestors, and sustainable interaction with environment. The most powerful of these stories is the "the Bear Who Married a Woman" and the concept of *niminh* is central to its theme. Told by one Tsilhqot'in elder, the story is full of the richness of ancient words, terms from the bear's language, and vivid illustrations of ancient ways. This period, set out originally by mammals and fish to ensure that people continue to prosper and maintain respect for all life forms, is preserved in the term *suwh-ts'eghedudinh*.

The Tsilhqot'in term *suwh-ts'eghedudinh* 'preserving oneself; self-care' takes into account the concepts of care, specifically, care of the physical self, others, the handling of food resources, and keeping resources and lands pure. This observation of self-care follows two of Ernesto Alvarado's<sup>2</sup> principles of three commandments in life which are essential to living a spiritual life (Freke 1999). Alvarado, Gavilán Mexican-Apache, is a shaman and has a doctorate in Psychology. The first law, he says, is "to take care of Mother Earth" [and its inhabitants]. The second which is the prerequisite for physical health is "to take care of our bodies". In a roundabout way the Tsilhqot'in principles of *suwh-ts'eghedudinh* set out guidelines to preserve and protect all life.

*Suwh-ts'eghedudinh* is an umbrella term which includes the principles of *niminh*. *Niminh* itself includes eight related themes: (1) ancient Tsilhqot'in stories, (2) categories of *niminh*, (3) preserving one's wellbeing



Jeffan Smith and fish weir made by Christine Lulua, Jididžay  
Photo © Linda Smith 2009.

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and those of others by observing *niminh* restrictions, (4) *niminh* proscriptions for subsistence resources (hunting, fishing, and trapping resources and the related gear), (5) respect for wild animals (6) respect for domestic animals, (7) preventative care of plant food, and (8) participating in *niminh* ceremonies. These are the things which keep Tsilhqot'in spiritually grounded and connected to their ancestors.

To note additional Tsilhqot'in guidelines for natural resources, one must not be wasteful, but take only what one needs to survive and to take only what will be used, and leave the rest for the future. My grandfather, Samuel William (Xeni Gwet'in band, born in the late 1800s), by adhering to ancient customs showed the importance of offering a prayer request and offering a gift prior to harvesting a resource. When one takes, one must always give something back. Chief Sil Canim (elected leader of Yunešit'in and Xeni bands), born in the 1800s, stressed that branches are not to be broken needlessly, because trees must be respected and allowed to live and enjoy their surroundings unless there's a dire need to use them. Plants are believed to be living spiritual beings along with the earth and all its life forms.

Success, in Tsilhqot'in culture, implicates having wealth, youthfulness, and good health, besides being surrounded by family, and having the necessary food and household possessions. The ancient guidelines to continual survival and good health is given in the overall Tsilhqot'in term, *suwh-ts'eghedudinh lit.* 'preserving oneself'; 'taking care of oneself'; 'safeguarding oneself', and this entails many observances. During my mother's youth "wealth" meant simply owning a horse – having ready access to her environment. Nancy Turner (2005: 24-25)<sup>3</sup> defined wealth in *The Earth's Blanket: Traditional Teachings for Sustainable Living*:

*...Wealth – real wealth – is found among people who have a sound sense of their place in the world, who link their own actions and thoughts with those of others, and who are strong, vigorous and cooperative actors in their communities and ecosystems. Rich are those people who balance the benefits they receive in life with the responsibilities they assume for themselves, their families and communities and their environment. Wealth dwells in people who know about, appreciate and respect the other life forms around them and who understand the importance of habitats for people and all living things.*

When life is held sacred and the Tsilhqot'in cultural principles are observed, the individual and collective rewards are youthfulness, good health, continuity, and balance.

## Project Background

The area of the Tsilhqot'in territory known as Nabas (Anvil Mountain, Fish Lake, Little Fish Lake, Wasp Lake, Onion Lake, Red Mountain, Wolf Track Lake) lies within the Yunesit'in and Xeni Gwet'in traditional caretaking area. The whole area of Nabas with its old graves, cremation sites, gathering places for fishing and hunting, historical cabins, and archaeological sites is threatened by a proposed gold-copper mining development, and it is an area already chosen by the provincial government as possible sites for new mining, and oil and gas explorations. Among other impacts, the residual impacts from the proposed mine project could include the reduction of bear, deer, moose and grizzly habitat.

For generations, Tsilhqot'in have walked gently upon the earth. The tradition has been, for thousands of years, to be exceptional stewards of the land and to leave pristine lands to future occupants. The

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loss of Nabas would create not only a loss of land, but a vast loss of Tsilhqot'in cultural heritage. The essential elements of Tsilhqot'in culture will be destroyed by the proposed changes of Nabas and its destruction. Intense and widespread harvesting of resources, like clear-cutting and mining, with serious land alterations, takes away not only cultural and historical evidence, but also denies Tsilhqot'in the right to use and plan future uses for these areas and structures. The destructive impact of the proposed mine will also likely cause serious mental health concerns and physical deterioration of health among Tsilhqot'in.

Fish Lake and all other Tsilhqot'in cultural sites are highly sacred sites due to the nature of the reverence that was held for life, survival, and the earth in general, so that one could say confidently that all the cultural sites are places of reverence or even places of worship. To demolish such places in the Tsilhqot'in territory is the same as tearing down a village of cathedrals. Our nation wishes to preserve this territory in its present semi-pristine state, with a view to utilizing the land for a community settlement, ceremonies, school cultural camps, gatherings and the like. To accomplish this we began with recordings of present elder knowledge about the area.

We initially focused our project interview questions on what the elders know about Nabas: for example, who used the area (pre-historically, historically, contemporary); what people did; what personal stories of life at Nabas they remember; why it should be left in its pristine state; peripheral sites and activities; and the spirituality of the place. We included information about the trails to and from the site, gravesites, cremations sites, travel stories, visitors and their stories, and ceremonies. From a Tsilhqot'in perspective, historic memories are of a spiritual nature, as they bring together ancestral knowledge to the land, birth and death ceremonies, and so forth, and the documentation process allows for personal reconnections with highly spiritual relatives. The people who lived in Nabas were spiritual people who knew their traditions and were spiritually in tune with their environment.

Our future generations will want to know more about these landscapes to give them a sense of how large the areas are that hold the presence of past activities, and about areas that have been consecrated by the presence of their grandparents. This in itself will help future Tsilhqot'in to bond with this very beautiful and spiritual place and will inspire many who will pass through these places.

## NOTES

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# Using Participatory Video to Document the Cultural and Spiritual Values of Sacred Natural Sites in Zanzibar

Robert Wild and Lorna Slade

**S**teeped in history and the aroma of spices, the islands of Zanzibar — a semi-autonomous region off the coast of Tanzania, East Africa — are a well-known and attractive tourist destination. Less well-known and appreciated is Zanzibar’s rich heritage of traditional cultures, today mostly represented by African people of Swahili origin. A key aspect of this heritage is Zanzibar’s wealth of sacred natural sites, such as sacred groves—patches of mature biodiversity-rich forests in an otherwise increasingly degraded forest landscape.

Cared for by custodian families or communities, these sites provide a vital link to Zanzibari cultural and spiritual traditions, and thus help promote social cohesion and well-being. Often the origins of the sites are lost in the mists of time, and many of the people associated with the sites are spread around several villages. Many of the forests were the sites of origin of certain lineages. Traditionally, custodians would go to the groves to make offerings of food and drink and make prayers and supplication to their ancestors.

Strict taboos on harvesting trees and other plants exist. This has meant that, even though the

groves are small, in many cases these sites are the only areas where forest remains. They represent sanctuaries for both plant and animal species. They contain mature indigenous trees, many of which quite rare in the area, and are particularly rich in bird and mammal life. In many cases, the groves are associated with a cave and a natural spring or well. These provide healing waters, as well as dry season water source for people and livestock. The groves are also an important source of medicinal plants, and are used for healing.

However, rapid urbanization has meant that forests are under severe pressure for fuel wood and building material. Significant pressures also come from Zanzibar’s tourism industry, with both small-scale and larger beach-based tourism establishments encroaching on the sacred sites. Intergenerational social changes, new immigrant populations, and exposure to cosmopolitan values through tourism have led to declining social respect for the sites. Several of them have been damaged, and many are at risk.



*Msellem, Ame and Hakiba (L to R) work out the camera. Photo © Mwambao Network, 2012*

## Documenting Oral Traditions About Sacred Natural Sites

In a context of increasing interest in biodiversity conservation and ecological restoration, sacred natural sites represent nodes of biological and cultural resilience with great adaptation and restoration potential. Because of the strong cultural and spiritual values associated with sacred natural sites, one essential aspect of their conservation is the documentation and revitalization of the oral traditions

related to these sites and to their role and significance in traditional societies.

Concerned that their sacred groves, both rich in nature and culturally valued, are suffering damage and neglect, in 2012 Zanzibar villager leaders, traditional elders, and young people teamed up with local and international organizations to document the oral history of the groves and plan for their better care. Using a technique called participatory video (PV), the members of Jambiani and Paje villages on the south-east coast of the

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main island of Zanzibar (Unguja) formed two film crews, each to record different aspects of five of their groves.

The training was given by Mwambao Coastal Community Network, a Tanzanian organization based in Zanzibar that supports grassroots natural resources initiatives on the coast of Tanzania. Mwambao has been training communities in video making on topics as diverse as coastal defenses, dynamite fishing, and now sacred groves. PV is being used to help build the network, with the aim of facilitating exchange between communities on sustainable natural resource management and thereby building community resilience to the environmental challenges being faced in Zanzibar.

“There was quite a ‘buzz’ in the training workshop,” said Mwambao National Coordinator, Hajj Hajj. “The teams were very keen to learn about the equipment and keen to get going to make their own films.”

The work is part of a wider program to support sacred groves on Zanzibar. The Zanzibar Zoological Society (ZAZOSO), which took part in the video training, is working with communities to record the cultural values and ecology of the groves and assist community members to plan conservation activities. This work is in collaboration with the Sacred Natural Sites Initiative (SNSI), an initiative of the IUCN Specialist Group on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas (CSVPA). For the making of the sacred groves videos, SNSI partnered with Mwambao and Terralingua.

The aim of the project was to support the conservation of the biocultural values of the sites by documenting key management issues important to custodian communities and recording related oral histories and traditions as told by custodians. Ali Mtumwa Hassan, the village custodian for all Jambiani sacred sites, commented: “There are 32 ancestral sacred sites, several of which are forest groves in our village of Jambiani, and 38 sacred sites in the sea.”

“The village of Paje has forest groves, caves and open areas which are sacred,” said Mzee (elder) Ame Haji. “The custodians are in the family, a father finds his son to take over. The custodians guide the worshippers to the site, he opens the way, the women cook offerings and clean the path and the children follow.”

Despite the very long history of the sacred groves, things are different now, lamented Hassan Ali Haji of Shotele sacred cave: “Things have changed a lot, and the protection of the sites is a challenge. Young people don’t respect the traditions, many of the big trees have been cut. Tourists come and dive in [the water at the bottom of] our caves and we don’t benefit in any way, and a road has been cut, which makes it easy to reach the caves.”

Hoping that participatory video will increase interest in and knowledge of the groves, Mzee Ame Haji commented: “We have made these films to record the traditions of our villages. We have interviewed those from Paje and Jambiani and we would like to inform neighboring villages and all of Zanzibar, so that we can save our ancestral sites and sacred groves.”

## The Participatory Video Process

The videos were planned and filmed by the participants themselves. Village elders and custodians were interviewed and opinions and recommendations sought. The exercise included visits to a number of sacred sites and culminated in burning the films to DVD and an evening village showing. The films have subsequently been subtitled in English and uploaded to the web.

PV proved a very useful tool in exploring the sacred sites in the villages of Jambiani and Paje. The exercise revealed and adequately documented the precarious situation and numerous challenges faced by remaining sacred natural sites in the two villages. Much forest has been cut for firewood and



*Planning a storyboard. Photo © Mwambao Network, 2012*

other uses and tourism investment in the area has resulted in destruction of several sites. Villagers provided recommendations for actions needed to conserve remaining areas, including formal demarcation by government and official inclusion of sacred groves in existing community-managed forest areas.

As a means of recording oral history of the sacred sites, PV provided an opportunity to document the many stories and traditions about the sites and about the villages themselves. During the filming the team became aware of just how much of this information is being held by elders, many of whom are now very old, and that there

is an apparent reluctance by young people to respect the existing traditions and sites. There were limitations in villagers themselves carrying out the research in that not as much information was collected from individuals as could have been on each occasion. This may have been due to familiarity with the person and lack of importance given to detail. On the other hand, free access was given to sites and custodians spoke freely.

Some of the advantages of the PV process were that it examined the problem in a very appropriate visual and practical way with minimum written input, it imparted training both in video production and problem analysis, and finally it

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We have made these films to record the traditions of our villages. We have interviewed those from Paje and Jambiani and we would like to inform neighbouring villages and all of Zanzibar so that we can save our ancestral sacred sites and sacred groves —Mzee Ame Haji

produced a tangible product that can be used both by the villagers themselves but also by NGOs in awareness raising and for advocacy.

Some limitations of the approach include the editing. Computer proficiency is required, which means that in practice the final edit is carried out by the facilitators. This does remove some of the ‘voice’ from the participants, but a thorough paper edit with the participants minimizes this problem. Participants are shown the edited film regularly throughout the process and therefore have the opportunity to suggest changes.

## Recommendations from the Community

Recommendations coming directly from the filming process are as follows:

1. Participants would like the film used to educate both the village and the whole of Zanzibar so that they can research and conserve their sacred sites.
2. Custodians need help with the protection of sites (e.g., walls) so that custodians and others can benefit from (controlled) tourism, for example.
3. People need education so that the cutting of trees and the desecration of these sites is not allowed and the sites remain intact.
4. Villagers would like their sacred sites formally demarcated by government.
5. Villagers would like their sacred sites officially incorporated into community managed (forest) areas.
6. The community needs assistance to conserve their sacred areas.

Further consultation with stakeholders and supporting NGOs could usefully take the process

through to the next stage, which would involve putting together a future plan of action for the conservation of sacred groves and might involve formation of a local custodians group.

## Use of the Films and Ethical Considerations

The films produced were the result of the 12-day participatory video process that took place in the village. The film clips were planned, executed, and sequenced by the villagers themselves according to their own storyboard. The editing was a joint process whereby participants undertook the ‘paper edit’ and the facilitators used this as guidance for the computer editing but with constant feedback at all stages. The participants have the copyright to the films as they have been produced. They are powerful statements from the villages of Paje and Jambiani in their own words, and as such should not be manipulated in any way or re-edited without full informed consent of the community.

The films have been subtitled in English and prefaced with some introductory and end frames. The films can easily be used for training and awareness raising purposes. Wherever possible, the villagers themselves should be invited to present their films and to be available for any questions that might arise from the target audience. This would result in the most meaningful exchange.

*Adapted from the SNSI news post “Custodians of Zanzibar’s Sacred Groves learn Participatory Film-making”, posted June 4, 2012 at <http://sacrednaturalsites.org/?s=zanzibar> and the Mwambao Coastal Community Network report “Participatory Video on Sacred Forest Groves, Jambiani and Paje, Zanzibar: Summary Report on PV Training”, Shangani, Zanzibar, May 2012. The SNSI website is at <http://sacrednaturalsites.org>, and the videos can be viewed at:*

*Guardianship of the Sacred Groves: <http://sacrednaturalsites.org/items/video-guardians-of-the-sacred-groves/>*

*Challenges of Sacred Groves: <http://sacrednaturalsites.org/items/video-challenges-of-sacred-groves/>*



# What is Participatory Video?

Participatory video (PV) is a simple and ethical film-making process which trains and empowers participants to debate, plan and film their own community experiences and practices. The method leaves behind

- a historical record,
- a visual presentation on DVD, and
- a more knowledgeable group of community members.

PV presents communities, scientists and policymakers the opportunity of sharing local knowledge, visions and innovations.

The PV process involves 10 – 12 participants, 2 - 3 facilitators, video cameras and tripods, laptops and TV. It takes place over 12 days, and results in producing 1 or 2 community films on DVD.

PV activities include: learning camera skills; problem analysis; selecting issues; storyboard planning; filming and editing skills; interview skills; group debate; community film showing; filming ethics

As a technique, participatory video (PV) is distinct from other types of film-making in several ways:

- Trainees many of whom have never handled film-making equipment are trained in the basic techniques;
- Trainees decide the content of the film and work together to design the storyboard;
- Generally the trainers do not accompany the trainees when filming but review and discuss material on return;
- Editing is time-restricted (2-3 days) and carried out with trainees/community members. Apart from subtitling, no subsequent editing is carried out by the trainers after leaving the community, so the film remains as reviewed by trainees/village communities. The aim is not to produce perfect cinematography but to create a community product and communicate community issues to wider stakeholders;
- The copyright is held by the trainees/village communities;
- Copies of the DVDs are left with trainees/village communities for their use at the end of the training.

Sources: Mwambao Website <http://mwambao.or.tz/index.htm>; and Mwambao Coastal Community Network report "Participatory Video on Sacred Forest Groves, Jambiani and Paje, Zanzibar: Summary Report on PV Training", Shangani, Zanzibar, May 2012.

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# *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*

*The General Assembly,*

*Affirming [...] that all peoples contribute to the diversity and richness of civilizations and cultures, which constitute the common heritage of humankind [...],*

*Recognizing that respect for indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment [...],*

*Recognizing that the situation of indigenous peoples varies from region to region and from country to country and that the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical and cultural backgrounds should be taken into consideration,*

*Solemnly proclaims the following United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a standard of achievement to be pursued in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect [...]:*

## *Article 13*

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.
2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected [...].

United Nations General Assembly, Resolution A/Res/61/295, 2 October 2007



