



How Broadcasting taught me about my Heritage

The message of Heritage Month, celebrated annually to mark our nation's diverse culture and heritage, reminded me again this year of the importance of broadcasting in celebrating what has been inherited from and bequeathed to us by our forebears. There is no doubt that broadcasting media has played and continues to play a vital role in preserving, recognising and honouring our cultural identity.

South Africa is particularly rich in terms of its intangible cultural heritage or known colloquially as its living heritage. These are the customs, practices, traditions and knowledge passed down over the centuries and which contribute to giving my and other generations a sense of identity and continuity.

Broadcasting media has given and continues to give me access to our rich source of living heritage, by 'taking' me to the most remote areas of our country where traditional practices and celebrations are more likely to be preserved. For example, of particular interest to my age group are the TV programmes that showcase wedding ceremonies from different cultures. The traditional Zulu wedding, which places great emphasis on music and dance, was a particular highlight, with the bride and groom sides of the family competing against each other as part of the celebration. But, as I have also learnt though TV and radio, singing and dancing play a much wider role in Zulu culture, for example to celebrate when a boy or girl reaches teenager stage (umhlonyane) or a girl enters into womanhood (umemulo).

Oral tradition is a crucial part of our living heritage with information having been passed on from generation to generation through storytelling. When I was a child, my grandfather would not only entertain us, but also educate us, through retelling tales that had been passed down to him from his grandfather. I still recall the magic of those evenings spent with him as, we, grandchildren listened with rapt attention to his many wonderful stories of long-ago. These tales not only gave us a glimpse of how our forebears lived but they were filled with good moral lessons and wisdom developed over the generations. Unfortunately, it is a tradition that is dying out in this modern era as people increasingly move to the cities and no longer live as one extended family. Luckily, broadcasting has kept the oral tradition alive.

South Africa's tangible cultural heritage, the buildings, monuments and museums dedicated to important historical events, is just as important to celebrate. Particularly in this month of September, radio and TV focus on showcasing our country's heritage sites and, as a young person, it has given me insight into the history that has defined me today. Broadcasters have given me 'a window' to the Thulamela Ruins in the Kruger National Park, an amazing example of early African culture, the Cradle of

Humankind where I learnt about the development of the earliest humans and, closer to home in Johannesburg, Constitution Hill, which taught me the story of South Africa's journey to democracy.

By educating me and making me understand more about the various cultures making up our South African heritage, broadcasting has also taught me that cultural rights are inseparable from human rights. This means that no-one should be denied the right to enjoy his or her own culture, to practice his or her chosen religion and to communicate in the language of his or her choice. It is with this greater understanding of our diversity that I, together with my peers, rally around government's call on all South Africans to use Heritage Day to foster social cohesion, nation building and a shared national identity.



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