

A Final Consultancy Report on the Digitizing of the Swazi Oral Clan Histories

Prepared by Dr. Nhlanhla Dlamini

31 January 2016

The Consultancy began in principle on 1 November 2015. My first assignment was to explain the project to the Swaziland National Archives Director, Mrs Kholekile Mthethwa who warmly received the idea and offered support by allowing me to use radio slots which are normally used to air programmes of the Swaziland National Archives and the newspaper column on Swazi Observer Sunday to write articles and advertise for free. She also agreed to my proposal for the National Archives to host the stakeholders' meeting and seminar for students in the institutions of higher learning in the country. Radio programmes that focused on the digitization of Swazi clan histories were recorded and broadcast from 26 November 2015 and newspaper articles that were published together with the advert for free appeared from 29 November 2016. It was planned that this would be the pattern up to about the time of the FHYA team visit end of January 2016. It became necessary to generate articles that were in line with the adverts to avoid costs which proved very high as indicated from quotations that were initially sought from the newspaper houses. A number of people called to indicate reception and show support for making available the digitized histories online. I have earlier on sent a list indicating the names of those who have requested copies of particular interviews.

On 30 November 2015 I was invited together with the Principal Archivist who represented the Director, Archives to a meeting at the Swaziland National Archives with the Private Secretary, Ministry of Information, Communication and Technology who warmly welcomed the digitization initiative and noted that it was in line with government's 2022 vision for paperless records (e-archive). He advised the National Archives to keep costs of the stakeholders' meeting minimal to avoid any impediments in preparing for the upcoming events. He also advised that royalty will handle Prof. Carolyn's visit its own

way when representatives from the cabinet get to report about the planned visit to their majesties. He also noted that the Swazi government had a programme to repatriate and digitize archival material. He noted that the Five Hundred Year Archive had already spearheaded this process without any costs on government. In appreciation he considered that it was in order to request government to bear the cost of accommodation and local transport for Prof. Carolyn and the colleagues who would visit along with her. Further, it was agreed during the meeting that Prof. Hamilton and her colleagues would on the 28th January 2016 be taken on an excursion and be treated to a farewell dinner as this is a tradition which is practiced by the Swaziland National Archives when it receives international visitors. On the same day I and Lethumusa of the Oral History Project went around to acquire quotations for the accommodation of the visiting scholars. It was finally agreed that the two visitors will be accommodated at Happy Valley Hotel as it was close proximity to the conference centre where the stakeholders' meeting will be held.

We also generated a list of about 40 stakeholders that would meet Prof. Hamilton and her team when they arrive in the last week of January 2016. The Swaziland National Archives had indicated that it would add roughly an equivalent of this number to this list, mainly to come from government. It was anticipated that in all there would about 80 people in that meeting. I approached UNESCO to sponsor the event and I received a positive response as it was considered that the data that would come with the Five Hundred Year Archive would promote research and the extension of knowledge on Swaziland's intangible cultural heritage. The Swaziland National Archives considered this event as very important. They planned for a colourful ceremony where different speeches will be made in the presence of dignitaries. From their perspective this is a reception and launch of digitized archives and it is therefore not a small matter. What one needs to appreciate is that this is a dream that has been in the pipeline for a long time and now it is realized through the reception of the exemplar. The Minister of Information, Technology and Communication whom the Archives are under sought more information from me on the project and the article as well as the advert that was published. The Prime Minister of Swaziland also

invited me to his office to explain the project. On understanding its significance, he promised to support the event by all means.

In particular, I also went out my way to meet on the 3rd of December one of the surviving interviewees, Bongani Soshangane Nxumalo at his home in Manzini extension 6 to explain the digitization project and inform him of Carolyn's visit. Nxumalo mentioned that he had bought and kept the newspaper where my first article and advert appeared. He was very supportive of the digitization initiative and looking forward to meeting Carolyn and Phil in January during their visit to Swaziland. We returned to Nxumalo on the 7th December 2015 for the purposes of recording him so that his positive sentiments could be heard on air. This had the desired impact on listeners and the exercise as a whole. Other stakeholders that were visited were the History Heads of Department in the institutions of higher learning in the country. These were to include the University of Swaziland, William Pitcher Teacher Training College and Southern African Nazarene University. This was not only because they were expected to be part of the stakeholders' meeting on the 27th of January 2016 but also because they were invited to bring along their students to the seminar on the 28th January 2016. In all, 100 students were from these institutions. I found that all the HODs were aware and interested in the article that was published on the digitization of Swazi histories. A last-minute arrangement was made with Mona Hanekim, anthropology lecturer at Waterford Kamhlaba who brought with her 36 students. The arrangement proved to be useful as around 50 students from William failed to finally make it to the seminar at the end.

Invitation letters to stakeholders and institutions of higher learning were sent out together with the programme during the first week of January 2016. The cabinet paper was prepared and submitted to parliament to obtain permission to hold the stakeholders' meeting. I and Mr. Lethumusa Simelane of the Swaziland National Archive also made arrangements to appear on Swazi TV and on radio in early January 2016 to offer information on the project and planned events.

In addition, communication seeking permission to digitize and place online the Swaziland Broadcasting and Information Services collection was delivered to the Director on the 9th December 2015. Subsequently I was invited to a meeting with the Director together with three other staff members on Wednesday 16 December 2015. The Director and his staff warmly welcomed the initiative and noted that it was a significant project with the prospects of mutual benefits for all concerned. The Director also pointed out that the original SBIS collection was destroyed when the old buildings were burnt down. He further proposed that a closed stakeholders' session should be held where specific and pertinent questions could be discussed. It was further agreed in this meeting that more publicity should be given to the project and the upcoming events. The meeting also noted that without the research assistants from Swaziland it would not be have been possible to conduct the research. It was felt that these had to be acknowledged and given space on radio to reflect on their experiences and feelings on the digitization and placing online of the material. It was also strongly felt that Professor Philip Bonner should also be present when the digitized histories get to be launched. I received a positive response from the Five Hundred Year Archive team on this request.

According to plan and as expected the FHYA team that was visited Swaziland for the purpose of explaining the initiative arrived in Swaziland on the 26th January 2016. They included Profs Philip Bonner and Carolyn Hamilton as well as Dr. Grant McNulty. They were transported from King Mswati III International Airport to their hotel rooms at the cost of their host, the Swaziland National Archives. Prof. Hamilton and Dr. McNulty were accommodated at Happy Valley Hotel while Prof. Bonner was accommodated at the Mantenga Cultural Village. On the early morning of 27th January Prof. Bonner, Dr. McNulty and Mr. Simelane appeared on the Kusile Breakfast show at Swazi TV while myself and Prof. Hamilton spoke on radio about the project and the event scheduled for the day. During a well - attended ceremony the FHYA team presented the project in the presence of some dignitaries including the Acting Prime Minister who later delivered a keynote address to launch the project. After lunch a

closed stakeholders' workshop was held in which the Director, SBIS gave permission for the SBS collected to be digitized and made available online. The Swaziland National Archives raised concerns about the possible sensitivity of some of the material and access. It was proposed that a meeting between the Archives and the FHYA team be held on the 28th January 2016 after the students' seminar. The scheduled seminar was indeed held in which Bob Forrester, myself and the FHYA team made presentations to the students. Lively discussions and debates followed. After Lunch a meeting between the Swaziland National Archives and the FHYA team took place. It was agreed during the meeting that a cabinet paper would be drafted to facilitate the process of making the digitized material available online.

I am aware that in certain respects I have gone beyond my terms of reference and added more work and time than that specified in the contract. Practical considerations on the ground and the realization of the magnitude of the project required adjustments on my part. I was very happy with the outcome and the support I got Swaziland and from colleagues in South Africa. I also wish to report that there are prospects of getting funding to work on the FHYA material from UNESCO. I hope this report is able to indicate the effort we have put together to ensure that the planned activities are executed accordingly, and events organized properly for the benefit of all those who have a stake in this initiative.