The Ford Foundation's Support for Human Rights Archives

In my presentation, I will briefly describe the Ford Foundation, talk about where human rights and archival work fit into our programs, and describe three specific programs that link archives and human rights. I will not talk much about the rationale for the preservation of the archives of human rights work, since I think that this is being addressed well by other speakers. Instead, I hope to use a discussion of these programs to stimulate further consideration of some broader issues, namely the importance of an NGO infrastructure in preserving and activating historical memory; and the difficulty of sustaining this fragile infrastructure over time.

Since the late nineteenth century, foundations have been important actors on the American scene. A foundation is an organization that is established as a nonprofit corporation or a charitable trust, with a principal purpose of making grants for scientific, educational, cultural, religious, or other charitable purposes. Although foundations are heavily regulated by the US government, they are independent organizations. Thousands of foundations have been established in the United States in the past 100 years, because of the social values of voluntarism and compassion for others, as well as because tax laws make it possible for individuals, particularly the wealthy, to set aside some of their wealth for the good of others.

The Ford Foundation was established by Edsel Ford, the son of Henry Ford, in 1936, and for more than a decade worked on a small and local scale in the Detroit area, where the Ford Motor Company was based. Anticipating the increase in assets that would come with the settlement of the estate of Edsel Ford, who died in 1933, Henry Ford who died in 1947, the board of the Foundation commissioned a study by a team of consultants in 1948. Their recommendations, which were adopted by the board in 1950, outlined a broad, international scope for the programs of the Ford Foundation. In the same year, the governing board was made independent of the Ford family control, although members of the family continued to serve on the board for several decades. Rather than making grants with a local focus as it had in the past, the Foundation turned its attention to national and international issues. Its operations shifted from locally focused charity to "strategic philanthropy", the deliberate use of giving to effect social change through impact on public priorities of government and other organizations at various levels. This entails "finding maximally effective means to achieve agreed-on ends [and] carefully thought-through, articulated and criticized rationales for action.

In order to diversify its endowment, the Ford Foundation began to sell its holdings of Ford Motor Company stock in 1956, a process which took nearly 20 years. The Foundation no longer holds any stock of the company. The last member of the Ford family left the board in 1976. Thus, for nearly three decades, the Ford Foundation has been com-

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Comma, 2004-2

The human rights programs of the Ford Foundation have expanded greatly since the 1970s, spurred largely by involvement with the Helsinki movement, the humanitarian crisis of Southeast Asian refugees, and the need to deal with the problem of repressive regimes in the countries in which we worked, particularly in Latin America. Since that time, the Ford Foundation has been privileged to stand with individuals and organizations that have, at great risk to themselves, created movements to protect basic human rights and to oppose dictatorships. Human rights has become the largest field of activity of the Ford Foundation, and we are one of the largest private funders of human rights work across the world.

Compared with human rights, support for archives is a much less significant component of our work. Although the Ford Foundation has provided over $20 million for archival and historical programs in the past several years alone, that level of funding (few hundred of millions of funders support for archival work) has never been a strategic focus in the way that human rights is. Rather, the Ford Foundation has provided support for archives and historical programs in connection with other program interests. In the past five to ten years, in particular, we have contributed financial support to several programs that use archives and historical memory as tools for advancing human rights.

The transition to democratic governance in many countries has been imperiled. Many in the human rights movement have been caught up in dealing with and confronting the post-communist societies to build a democratic future. If the abuses of the past can be denied, there is a greater chance that they can be repeated. However, transitional and successor governments cannot or will not address the abuses of the past, and state and military agencies sometimes make it difficult or impossible for individuals to obtain documentation of periods of authoritarian rule. The responsibility to preserve memory has thus also fallen to human rights organizations. This paper examines two programs supported by the Ford Foundation, one from Russia and the other from Latin America, and then discusses an example from an "old democracy," an American NGO active in the area of US foreign policy that provides a useful model for the role of archival NGOs.

One of the most significant organizations in the former Soviet Union for which the Ford Foundation has provided support is the Memorial Foundation. At the height of glasnost and perestroika during the late 1980s, human rights activists began to band together in the former Soviet Union to request the construction of memorials to the victims of Stalin. The resulting network of memorial societies came to play a key role in de-Stalinization and in the growth of civil society. In fact, Memorial was one of the first organized social movements to arise outside of the formal control of the Communist Party. Memorial originally consisted of decentralized branches, and in addition to their activities in organizing, providing cultural assistance to victims of repression, and monitoring current human rights abuses, the larger branches also established Research and Information Centers to assemble documentation of human rights abuses and of the dissident movement within the FSU. If one is to create memorials to victims of the past, one must know where they are, and what happened to them. The Ford Foundation has provided about $8.5 million to Memorial since 1990, supporting its activism and its historical research, including an endowment grant for the construction of new headquarters and archives. Memorial establishes documentation and oral histories from a variety of sources. Often, the motivating force behind this was the surviving victims, whose experiences and memories did not coincide official accounts. While its work may lack a clear chain of custody when compared with government or organizational archives, they have a vital role in the documentation of the Soviet period from the point of view of those who suffered most. Memorial's research units have created a resource that serves as a corrective to official histories and collections of documents. Memorial thus provides a rare example of a human rights NGO for which historical memory, and as a consequence the archives, is central to its mission.

Ford Foundation staff in Latin America in the late 1990s followed the work of Memorial with interest. The Ford Foundation had been one of the main funders of human rights organizations in the region since the 1970s. Human rights groups in Latin America have received support from the Ford Foundation, have accumulated enormous amounts of documentation in the course of their work. Their work was different from Memorial in that they were more concerned with the legal actions of the state, but rather with changing contemporary conditions. However, after the transition to democracy, state, and especially military archives were not open to those who wanted to press claims against the state or to present their own account of the events of the recent past. Human rights organizations have come to understand that they need to be the only repositories that make such documentation available. This is similar to the work of Memorial in that in the default of accessible, open and functioning state archives, NGOs were an essential resource for documentation of past abuses.

In 1999, the Ford Foundation office in Santiago brought together human rights non-governmental organizations (HRNGOs) from the Southern Cone of Latin America to raise their consciousness about the value of their holdings, the precariousness of their situation, and steps that could be taken to preserve them and make them available. The workshop resulted in increased awareness of the value of these holdings. One participant noted: "I have worked with documents my entire life, always as an activist, but I never..."
realized how important they were. She also got them to think about necessary steps to preserve their documentary resources, about how to collaborate with each other, and about how to make their documents available for the future. The workshop resulted in great excitement about these possibilities among HRCNO in the region. The Ford Foundation awarded a number of grants to help organizations process and preserve their holdings, and made more significant support to a few organizations. Most notable of these are the Vicariate of Solidarity of the Archdiocese of Santiago which was the leading human rights organization in Chile during the period of the dictatorship, and which since then has operated a documentation center to keep the memory of that period alive, and Memoria Abierta, the consortium of Argentine organizations about which Patricia Valdez has spoken.

There are important commonalities between the work of Memorial and that of the organizations in Latin America: all seek to reconstitute new national identities, based in respect for human rights, and on the memory of the realities of the abuses that had occurred under the old regimes. They understand that accessible documentary evidence that sustains memory is an important antidote to nostalgia for repressive regimes of the past. They realize that transitions to democracy are tenuous, and one cannot rely on the state to preserve the full and accurate memory of the past. By preserving this memory, they make it impossible to deny that atrocities occurred, and they make it somewhat less possible that they will occur in the future. I would argue that while state archives are a necessary resource for access to information in a democratic and open society, they are not a sufficient resource. The voices and memories preserved by non-state actors, such as those in the archives of HRCNOs, are essential as well. I have talked up until now about the case of transitional societies. What about other democracies? As Ethel Kriger reminded us in her comments in response to Gabriele Nishiguchi’s presentation on the documentation of the opposition of minority communities in the National Archives of Canada earlier in this conference, established democracies are also imperfect, and may also perpetuate human rights abuses, and state archives play a critical, even essential role in preserving memory of this. How are we to ensure that public records are as open and as accessible as possible? The National Security Archive (NSA) in the United States provides one possible model. It is an unusual case, in that its focus is on the security agency rather than on human rights, but its model of imperfect transitions to democracy to that end is of interest. The NSA was founded in 1978 by a group of journalists and scholars who had obtained declassified documents under the United States Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), and who wanted to make sure that the material that they had obtained was available to others. The Ford Foundation has supported the NSA since before its inception, when it provided a small planning grant to that project, and an excellent discussion of the role of the Ford Foundation in the establishment of the National Security Archive, and the related documents about the role of the Ford Foundation in the establishment of the National Security Archive, and the related documentary evidence about the fragility of traditional information storage media, such as paper. In recent years, archives have had to educate the public about the fragility of traditional information storage media, and about the obsolescence of some of these media. This brings me to my final point. When I entered the profession, archivists tried to educate the public about the fragility of traditional information storage media, such as paper. In recent years, archivists have had to educate the public, and especially our funders, about the fragility of electronic information storage media and about the obsolescence of some of these media. This is an issue that deserves more attention in our field.


Documentary evidence about the role of the Ford Foundation in the establishment of the National Security Archive may be found in the files of two of its grants to the Ford Foundation in the records of the Ford Foundation Archivists, and in the files of the Ford Foundation in the records of the Ford Foundation, and in the records of the Ford Foundation. For more on the Ford Foundation’s work in the establishment of the National Security Archive, see “The Archival Imperative: A call for records to be made available to the public to challenge the state and hold it accountable,” Human Rights Quarterly 21, no. 4 (1999).

The Freedom of Information Act, signed into law by President Johnson in 1967, mandates a presumption of disclosure. Government agencies are required to disclose documents upon request unless they can demonstrate that they should not be under one of nine exemptions. This is the most important of which concern national security. In any view, legislation like the FOIA is an important building block of democracy and open government. As one might imagine, the realities of the implementation of the FOIA can fall short of the stated policy. Although agencies are required to respond within 20 working days, they are not bound by law to do so. It is not unheard of for them to delay or refuse to respond to a request. In fact, there is a pending incomplete request that date is 1987.

While the NSA is the leading submitter of requests under the Freedom of Information Act, particularly in the field of US foreign policy, it also functions as a public interest law firm to help others with FOIA requests and to defend and expand access to information. It helps individuals negotiate the often-torturous process for getting information under the FOIA. In his paper on the archives of security services of formerly repressive regimes, Antonio GonzalezQuintana talks about rights to access information, ranging from the most fundamental, habeas data, the right of individuals to obtain information about themselves from state files, through other rights to the right to historical research. These rights only function properly when individuals and organizations have the capacity to make such requests, and organizations like the NSA help to give other individuals and organizations this capacity. For the information released to be truly open, it must be freely available to other inquirers in the future. Thus, once documents are released under a FOIA request, NSA indexes them and makes them broadly available in a variety of media, so that once one inquirer has gotten something declassified, others do not have to go through the same process. The NSA is constantly on the front lines, challenging government agencies to make information available. The NSA is not a human rights organization per se, although I think that one way in which it is a legitimate subject for discussion at this conference is that it has published documentation of human rights abuses conducted or supported in other countries by actions of the government of the US. In addition, it is also an illustration of what we might call an NGO memory infrastructure, Memorial and the organizations from Latin America, such as Memoria Abierta, illustrate the role that human rights NGOs have played in the creation of the FOIA. FOIA shows that even in open societies, with freedom of information legislation, NGOs have a vital role to play in keeping archives open and in holding governments accountable. In the case of the NSA, Congress required it to challenge the state and hold it accountable for access to information will remain a more elusive. Recent history has shown that people need strong states. However, they also need strong civil societies to make sure that the states do not become oppressive. For access to information to remain free and open, civil society must include human rights NGOs, whose mission include free access to information. This brings me to my final point. When I entered the profession, archivists tried to educate the public about the fragility of traditional information storage media, such as paper. In recent years, archivists have had to educate the public, and especially our funders, about the fragility of electronic information storage media and about the obsolescence of some of these media. This is an issue that deserves more attention in our field.
Préservation de la mémoire des populations du Niger : sources orales et manuscrites

Dans les milieux ruraux africains où l'utilisation de l'écriture ne remonte pas bien loin dans le passé, la principale source d'information est constituée par la tradition orale. On appelle tradition orale "l'évocation du passé, transmise et rapportée oralement, qui prend naturellement corps au sein d'une culture et est façonnée par son évolution. La tradition se propage largement de bouche à oreille parmi les membres d'une même société, mais certaines personnes peuvent avoir la charge d'en assurer la conservation, la transmission, la réécriture et la narration. Elle est l'expression organique de l'identité, des projets, des institutions et des coutumes de la culture qui l'a produite et de sa permanence à travers les générations." En Afrique, la tradition orale est rapportée par les griots, les chefs de famille ou de clan, les maîtres-artistes, les chefs traditionnels, les chroniqueurs, les conteurs et chanteurs etc.

La plus grande préoccupation de l'histoire africaine réside encore dans la mémoire de ceux qui ont été chargés par chaque société de transmettre fidèlement, génération après génération, le patrimoine historique commun. La mémoire humaine étant fragile, subjective et mortelle, il convient de préserver ces documents oraux sous la tradition, soit par la transcription, soit par l'enregistrement. Au Niger, les œuvres anciennes sont constituées des textes transcrits, des manuscrits arabes ou amharis et d'enregistrements collectés sur le terrain. Ces enregistrements sont transcrits, soit dans les langues nationales, soit dans la langue officielle, le français.

Pendant la période coloniale, l'Institut Français d'Afrique noire (IFAN) et la Société de Radiodiffusion de la France d'Outre Mer (SORAFOM) ont mené une politique active de collecte de textes oraux. Le Niger indépendant a maintenu la tradition avec la création du Musée national en 1959, du Centre Nigerien de Recherches en Sciences Humaines (CNRS) en 1964 et du Centre Régional de Recherche et de Documentation pour la Tradition Orale (CRDTO) en 1969.


Dans le cadre de cette présentation, je me limiterai à la situation des sources orales et manuscrites conservées aux Archives du Niger et à l'Institut de Recherches en Sciences Humaines (IRSH) de l'Université de Niamey.

Je présenterai ensuite les activités du projet "Archives sonores et ressources documentaires de la Tradition orale en Afrique" (ARTO) du Centre d'études linguistiques et historiques par tradition orale (CELHITO) de l'Union Africaine. Il est indispensable auparavant de présenter l'organisation administrative et territoriale du Niger.

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Archives, histoire orale et tradition orale : une étude RAMP par William W. Moss et Peter C. Marquand. P.1
L’organisation administrative et territoriale du Niger

Le Niger colonial

Situé dans la zone sérélo-saharienne, à la charnière des mondes arabo-barbérite et nigéro-africain, l’espace nigérien est un lieu de contact et de brassage des populations soudanaises et nord africaines. Les principaux groupes socio-linguistiques sont les Hausa au Nord et les Songhi et Zarma à l’Ouest. S’y ajoutent les nomades touaregs au Nord, les Peuls dispersés dans tout le pays, les arabes, les Kanouri, les Gourmantchi et les Toubou. Né de la colonisation française, le Niger a connu plusieurs statuts administratifs :

- Troisième territoire militaire de 1900 à 1904
- Territoire militaire du Niger de 1905 à 1920
- Territoire civil du Niger de 1920 à 1922
- Colonie du Niger de 1922 à 1946
- Territoire d’Outre-Mer de 1946 à 1958

L’Assemblée territoriale du Niger, par délibération du 18 décembre 1958, a adopté le statut d’État membre de la Communauté franco-africaine et proclamé la République.

Le Niger indépendant


Le loi n° 91-02 du 24 avril 1991, portant révision de la Constitution a instauré au Niger le multipartisme. La démocratisation progressive envisagée par le pouvoir en place et jugée insuffisante par la société civile a abouti au 31 juillet 1991 sur la Conférence Nationale Souveraine qui durera trois mois.

La République du Niger qui, pendant des lustres, a ignoré l’état de droit a adopté une Constitution de type démocratique qui consacrait la séparation des pouvoirs, législatif, exécutif et judiciaire.


Les sources orales conservées au dépôt central des Archives à Niamey

Les fonds conservés aux Archives nationales sont constitués de l’ensemble des documents élaborés ou reçus par les institutions coloniales françaises sur le sol nigérien de 1897 à 1960, année de l’indépendance, ainsi que des documents versés par les services centraux du Gouvernement du Niger de 1960 à nos jours.

Les Archives du Niger

L’année 1897 peut être retenue comme date de départ en ce qui concerne le sort des archives coloniales en Afrique occidentale française (AOF). Ainsi dès la séance de la Chambre des députés du 19 novembre 1897, Louis Puech, député de la Guadeloupe, a demandé l’éclusion des archives de la Compagnie des Indes, de la Compagnie maritime de l’Afrique et de la Compagnie de l’Océan Indien.


L’année 1943 a été marquée par la création de l’Institut des Archives et des Recherches (IFAN), la troisième section du Cabinet du Ministre des Affaires étrangères et du Commerce extérieur.
La Direction des Archives nationales a pris des mesures préventives pour créer un cadre favorable à leur conservation (bâtiment en béton, climatisation suffisante, filtres à air, vires athéniques, dispositif de détection et d'extinction automatique d'incendie, traitement périodique pour combattre les termites et autres insectes nuisibles aux documents). Malgré tout, les conditions de conservation sont loin d'être bonnes. En effet, il est souhaité de conserver les bandes magnétiques et les films à une température constante (environ 18° centigrades), à une hygrométrie constante (40% environ) et à l'abri de la lumière et de la poussière. En outre, il est recommandé de recopier des que possible et périodiquement, les enregistrements magnétiques originaires et de ne manipuler que les copies. Ces précautions sont presque impossibles à observer, faute de moyens matériels et financiers. De plus, la Direction ne dispose d'aucun appareil pour exploiter précieuse documentation.

Les fonds conservés à l'Institut de recherches en sciences humaines (IRSH)

Issu du centre IFAN (Institut Français d'Afrique Noire) créé en 1936 et du Centre Nigerien de Recherches en Sciences Humaines (CNRS) créé en 1960, l'Institut de Recherches en Sciences Humaines (IRSH) a été rattaché à l'Université Abdou Mounouni de Niamey par décret n° 74-108/PCMS/MENJS du 28 mai 1974, relatif à la création des Facultés et Instituts de l'Université de Niamey.

L'IRSH effectue des travaux de recherches en sciences humaines et sociales, en particulier sur le Niger et l'Afrique. Il contribue notamment à la formation des chercheurs et étudiants en sciences humaines, en collaboration avec les autres institutions de l'université de Niamey et participe à l'effort national de sauvegarde et de revitalisation du patrimoine culturel nigérien. L'IRSH est composé de départements scientifiques, de services techniques et dispose d'un service administratif et financier.

Les départements scientifiques qui existent en ce moment sont:
- le département d'Art et d'Archéologie ;
- le département d'Histoire et des Traditions populaires ;
- le département des Langues Nationales et de Linguistique ;
- le département de Sociologie et du Développement ;
- le département de Géographie et de l'Aministement de l'Espace ;
- le département des Manuscrits anciens et ajami.

Les services techniques sont au nombre de deux : le service de la documentation et le service de l'audiovisuel. L'IRSH dispose de deux bases de recherche dans les départements d'Agadez et de Maradi.

Dans le cadre de cette étude, nous nous sommes intéressés aux activités du département des manuscrits anciens et ajami et du service de l'audiovisuel.

Le département des manuscrits anciens et ajami

Les manuscrits arabes sont, soit des traités originaires composés par les intellectuels, soit des copies d’ouvrages destinées à l’enseignement. Certains ovangas ont été écrites dans la langue maternelle des auteurs (Hawas, Filliude, Tarachit, etc.) La deuxième catégorie concerne les apains qui sont le système de transcription des langues africaines par l’adoption de l’alphabet arabe. Cette catégorie de manuscrits nous informe sur la pratique maitresse de l’arabe par les lettrés africains.

Les documents sont enregistrés et catalogués. La notice bibliographique contient les éléments suivants : la pièce, le nom de l’auteur, le titre, le domaine, la date d’édition, le nom du copiste, la date d’établissement de la copie, le nom du lieu et de la date de transcription, le support, la nature du support, la nature de l’encre utilisée, la description du type de graphique (soudanais, maghrébin), le format du document (longueur et largeur), l’espace occupé par l’écriture, les commentaires en arabe, le nombre de feuillets, le nombre de lignes, les précisions sur la reliure et la couverture, la provenance du document, la nature du support, la nature du matériau, la date de l’ouvrage, la nature du nombre de bandes, la nature de l’encre et le nombre de bandes. Les lettrés mettent en selle et dessinent des lettres de caractères métalliques, la nature de l’encre et le nombre de bandes. Les lettrés mettent en selle et dessinent des lettres de caractères métalliques.

Les conditions de conservation de ces documents sont de précaution ; le local est ruiné et la climatisation défaillante. Cependant, grâce au projet suisse Archives Sonores et Ressources Documentaires de la Tradition Orale (ARTO) géré par le CELITO, les bandes sont actuellement reprises sur CD-ROM.

Le service dispose également de deux agrafes pour la prise de son, d’un revex pour la lecture et le ripage sur les CD-ROM et d’une mini-cassette pour le ripage des bandes sur les cassettes.

Le projet Archives sonores et ressources documentaires de la tradition orale (ARTO) du CELITO

Historique du CELITO

La Conférence générale de l’UNESCO, réunie en sa 31ème session en 1964 à Paris, a inclus dans son programme prioritaire, le projet d’histoire générale de l’Afrique. Pour le mettre en œuvre, elle a décidé de lui consacrer, à partir de la période décennale de 1965 à 1975, une série d’activités dans le cadre de l’étude des cultures africaines. Un comité interministériel d’experts a été réuni à Abidjan du 3 au 5 septembre 1966, pour examiner les problèmes scientifiques que pose la réalisation du projet d’histoire générale de l’Afrique. Le comité avait pour mandat de proposer les régions d’Afrique, les périodes et les thèmes sur lesquels devraient se concentrer les recherches et d’indiquer les travaux de recherche et de collection des sources à poursuivre dans les régions ou les périodes pour lesquelles la documentation est moins abondante. Il a donné ainsi la priorité à toutes les activités concernant la collecte, la sauvegarde et la publication des sources historiques sous toutes les formes.

Conformément aux recommandations de la réunion de Abidjan, l’UNESCO a organisé en 1967 deux réunions techniques, à l’Auberge de la cuisine en septembre 1967 pour les traditions orales, dans le cadre des programmes régionaux établis en accord avec les États participants et approuvés par l’UNESCO. Du 29 juillet au 2 août 1967, s’est tenue à Ougadougou, la réunion des experts sur la coordination et la planification de la collecte de la tradition orale. En décembre 1971, le centre de Niamey a été reconnu par l’UNESCO, à la préparation de la réunion des ouvrages d’Afrique (Tanzanie) à l’ouvrage de laquelle a été formé le plan définitif pour l’étude systématique de la tradition orale des langues africaines.
comme véhicules de culture. C’est durant cette réunion qu’a été soulignée l’urgence d’établir un centre régional de tradition orale pour chaque grande région en Afrique (Afrique occidentale, Afrique centrale, Afrique orientale, Afrique australe).

Le CERDOTOLA a été intégré à l’organigramme de l’OUA en 1974 sous le nom de Centre d’études linguistiques et historiques par tradition orale (CELHTIO). Le centre est chargé d’affermir l’identité africaine par des recherches linguistiques et historiques, de promouvoir l’utilisation des langues africaines dans les systèmes éducatifs et de communication socioprofessionnelle, de contribuer à la diffusion des sciences et techniques en langues africaines et de répertorier, classifier et analyser les grands textes oraux africains.

**Le projet ARTO**

Après les différents programmes de collecte et d’analyse des traditions orales et le plan décentralisé pour l’étude systématique de la tradition orale et des langues africaines, le CELHTIO a mis en chantier un nouveau projet dénommé ARTO (Archives sonores et ressources documentaires de la tradition orale). Ce projet est chargé de la collecte, de l’archivage et de la diffusion des archives sonores. Il est effectué par le CELHTIO, l’encadrement du CD-ROM des bandes magnétiques.


- Le centre régional de recherche et de documentation sur les traditions orales et pour le développement des langues africaines (CERDOTOLA) au Cameroun. Il conserve les CD-ROM du Cameroun, de la République centrafricaine et du Burundi.

Le CELHTIO introduit les bordereaux dans le catalogue des Archives sonores de la tradition orale. Il y a lieu de préciser que le CELHTIO conserve les CD-ROM du Niger, du Sénégal, de la Guinée, du Mali, du Burkina Faso et du Bénin. Le projet est actuellement hébergé sur le site web du CELHTIO. Une base de données a été constituée et mise à la disposition des chercheurs. Il faut préciser qu’un grand nombre de textes, de la propriété intellectuelle, sont accessibles sur le site. L’intégralité de l’information numérique est gravée sur CD-ROM et conservée sur l’audiothèque du CELHTIO.

Ce projet original a été consacré à l’exploration et l’archivage sonore africain. La mise en œuvre a été effectuée grâce au soutien matériel de la Coopération suisse au développement à travers son mandataire, intermédiaires consultants S.A. (Berlin). Le modèle d’expert ayant été mis au point, il reste à renforcer ce qui existe et à l’étendre à d’autres pays africains.


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2. Le site se trouve à Yankhadi au Cameroun.
3. Le site se trouve à Tamatave à Madagascar.
Human Rights, Oral History and Indigenous Peoples’ Memory: The South African National Oral History Project and a Griqua People’s Story

The oral word is a powerful political tool, hence oral literature has been increasingly used and manipulated as part of political rhetoric. … without permission our daily lives.

The topic of this paper was prompted by an oral history initiative of the National Archives of South Africa that began about three years ago. This initiative of preserving twentieth century memories related to human rights issues is of concern, however, to not only a nation-building vision for contemporary South Africa but, in respect of the experience of the past by some communities, also linked to deliberations of the United Nations Working Group of Indigenous Populations (WGIP) and in other forums about the right of humans to dignity.

Background to the NOHP

The origins of the Department of Arts and Culture sponsored National Oral History Project go back to the close of the twentieth century when the South African Cabinet mandated the Ministry with a specific task. It had to facilitate a process that would conceptualise and spearhead a national oral history programme, linked to the dissemination and management of historical information and knowledge critical to the restoration and maintenance of human dignity ravaged by colonialism and apartheid. A panel of experts was subsequently appointed to advise the Minister and his National Archives of South Africa (NASA) on the drafting of a comprehensive plan for what became known as the South African National Oral History Programme (NOHP) of which a traditional people’s memory of the Beeswater relocation of the Western Cape Griqua under apartheid became an exciting project.

The rationale for the establishment and development of the NOHP were stated as follows:

- In South Africa, as a result of colonialism and apartheid there are gaps in the public knowledge, which are caused by deliberate omission of African knowledge, stories and philosophies from the mainstream of South Africa’s body of knowledge;
- Such omission concerned various aspects of African and other disadvantaged experiences in politics, society, culture, gender issues, religion and the economy... inadequately represented;
- The retrieval and dissemination of oral history and oral tradition are vital to fill the gaps in the education system; and
- ...oral history will provide alternative narratives, fresh information and new insights into the study of history.

Against the backdrop of the above rationale the Panel of Experts of the envisaged programme deliberated at length about a definition that could be applied to the notion of preserving in any of the country’s national archive depots the memory of South African

2 A subsidiary of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, established in 1992, which in turn reports to the Commission on Human Rights, under the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
society in terms of oral tradition and history. Ultimately, there was consensus that for the purpose of the programme oral history was defined as the recording of oral memories by various means, including both oral traditions (history handed down from generation to generation) and oral testimonies (history which occurred during the informant’s lifetime). In the conceptualization of this working definition due attention was initially not however given to the use of song and poetry by Africans as powerful tools of oral tradition and history as it manifests itself in the oral arts or imbongi. Traditionally, the latter act as special functionaries “die tot taak hebbe die geschiedenis zorgvuldig in hun hoof op te berg en hy bepalde geheugenle de reciteer” who are duty bound to store conscientiously the history in their heads and to recite it at specific occasions.3

Regarding the NOHIP process of prioritization, target groups identified in this initiative were particularly those regarded as previously disadvantaged in terms of the new South African government’s legislative terminology, which would include African traditional communities. One such a community almost forgotten in South Africa, but which has gained relative prominence in United Nations sponsored forums since the mid-nineties, is the Griqua People of the Le Fleur chiefship.

Griqua traditional African identity in Indigenous World discourse

Interest in preserving Griqua memory as part of an African or Khoisan society gained prominence after 1994 as a result of former President Mandela’s interest in their plight and their claim to represent the first indigenous people of the country. This interest of the nation’s new political principal in the Griqua People after the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) had run its full course with the exclusion of the Griqua people also coincided with their sudden presence at and participation in debates of the United Nations WGP in Geneva from 1996 onwards. There, they came to realize that the lack of Griqua identity in post-apartheid South Africa should rather be addressed within the context of the human rights issue in post-colonial Africa. Given the concept of indigenous peoples as developed over the past two decades through international discourse in policies, law and anthropological theory, like the San of the Kalahari and the Nama of particularly the Richtersveld, learned to define themselves as an indigenous people in terms of the criteria of:

1. first come a people who are the descendants of those inhabiting an area at the time of the arrival of other groups;
2. non-dominance: a people placed under a state structure with social and cultural characteristics alien to theirs, do not control the national government, and constitute a numerical minority;
3. cultural difference: a people that have or have had, a traditional adaptation using resources and territories in ways that differ from the social and economic adaptation of the present majority; and
4. self-identification: a people who perceive themselves different from the majority, and define themselves as indigenous.4

The extent to which the Griqua People and other Khoisan groups in southern Africa truly meet these criteria has indeed become a source of discontent and perhaps even more prevalent in South Africa with the passing of legislation pertaining to the promotion of traditional leadership and the establishment of a Commission for the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities. Within the

context of the above scenario and the central theme of this International Conference meeting here in Africa, a question relevant to this meeting and its parent body would be: What is CITRA’s position on this contested concept within the modern nation-states conceptual framework of the UN?

Preserving the memory of an indigenous world in human rights context

Since the early 1980s the UN WGP, consisting of five experts and hundreds of indigenous representatives with observer status through their national consultative status, meets every July in Geneva to exchange information and ideas about developments pertaining to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms of traditional societies/indigenous peoples throughout the world. These deliberations, highlighting as they do human rights infringements of the dignity of indigenous populations/traditional societies, contributed in no small way to the UN General Assembly declaring December 1994 to December 2004 to be the International Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples. Up to now the main achievement of the Decade was the establishment in 2002 of a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Apart from the detailed record in the memory bank holdings of the UN Commission on Human Rights (which include people’s narratives of human rights infringements) much information on related issues in Africa and elsewhere can also be accessed through sources of the Copenhagen-based International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs.5

A related network system has catered for a much broader audience over the past 20 years, is the Swiss-based Human Rights Information and Documentation System International (HURIDOC), which represents a global network of organizations concerned with more effective ways of using information for the cause of human rights.6 HURIDOC’s website is neither, however, a documentation centre per se nor an archive and does therefore not collect information; rather it functions as a decentralized network through which organizations can handle and exchange information to their own requirements. It facilitates human rights documentation work by:

1. developing tools and techniques for human rights monitoring and information handling (such as formats for the recording and exchange of information on documents and on human rights violations);
2. organizing training courses and workshops on human rights information handling in co-operation with organisations involved in the network; and
3. providing advice and support on the establishment and maintenance of documentation centres and information systems.7

Since the majority of delegates here represent heritage institutions of member states of the UN, it might be interesting to get an informed opinion on the scope of archival holdings of governmental sources in Africa itself and elsewhere on the UN WGP memory since 1982 on human rights infringements.

3. According to this scripture of oral traditions in Africa's spoken world (Ungewitter University Press, 1967), it has the ability to store and recite history accurately, understanding, and recite it at specific occasions.
5. See website http://www.ighri.de/indigenous
7. The yearbooks can also be accessed at http://www.huridocs.org/huridocs.org. This is an online platform that allows for the exchange of information related to human rights, especially in Africa. A paper by IAPA is also accessible at http://www.huridocs.org/maurer.htm.
Preserving memory and the oral history discourse

Should an Archive have any oral history collections in whatever medium, they would essentially contain recordings of the spoken word and stories of others; the end product of a dialogue in a field situation in which the narrator had the information the interviewer lacked. They represent sources of a different kind from those with which the traditional archivist and Western-trained scholar of history are familiar. The personal details, names, dates, and emotions of both interviewers and interviewees, expressed in dialogue, resonate through audible voices.

Apart from the above-mentioned imbongi, any society always has what the social anthropologist Trouwborst, who also worked in Jan van Rensburg’s research area of Central Africa, calls ‘de echte vertellers die meer en meer verhalen kunnen vertellen dan andere mensen.’ (The true storytellers who can tell a story better than others). From his research experience in Bararandi, the concept of imigrant (stories) is an encompassing notion that makes no distinction between the idea of history as past event and a true fictional story. Stories of past events particularly that involve royalty are unequally accepted as truth. The concept of imigrant contains a mixture of mythical elements with real historical elements and suggests a tenacity in African thought that, according to Trouwborst,

"...in Afrika een echte verhaal zonder een historische gebroederschap geen steel, eenmaal klinkende feiten heet kenmerken. Mens had een cycloon diep de inplanting, dat... Sauwe gebroederschappen vinden we al zelden een cyclus, dus een vaak voorgekomen..."

Like with all other representations of tradition and history, the end product of the oral history dialogue is at most ‘fragments of the past that happened, fragments of a past that possibly happened, and fragments of a past desired.’ How sensitively, patiently and skillfully the interviewer addressed effectively to this truth-seeking dilemma is a challenge for the researcher in the archives to assess.

This third session of the Round Table is a dialogue about finding ways of preserving a more Africanised account of traditional societies, and for recording the African historical experience, internal to black experience, in narrative form; though doing this on a backdrop of resistance from, and scepticism of, Western historians. For the post-emancipation period David Cronin et al. (1981) and various other writers have addressed the issue of the relationship between Western narrative history and the oral forms and mannerisms in which Africans can represent history, instead of trying to erase discursively an African historical construction of social memory.

A Grikia People’s Story and the NOHP

The rest of this paper is devoted to a non-governmental perspective on the progress of the Beeswater Grikia relocation oral history project. It is a project about the displacement of a Grikia community near Namaqualand in the Cape region in the mid-1900s and early 1980s. In real life they are the people about whom the sophisticated storyteller

10 Sean Field, "Oral histories: the art of the possible" in Knuckles, African Oral Literature, p. 249
11 Trouwborst, Oral traditions, p. 11 (there seems to be in Africa a strong tendency set to attribute to historical events any singularly unique characteristics. There exists a cyclical notion of time, that certain events will occur again in accordance with a fixed cycle.)
12 Ibid
14 David B Chapple, "Oral traditions and popular history and cultural memory in Selection" in Knuckles, African Oral Literature, p. 265; see also Trouwborst, "Orale tradition", p. 13
15 See Wiwiram, David’s Story (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2000), p. 99

of the New York Times Book Review fame, Zeil Wiwiram (whose parents lived at Beeswater), who in her novel David’s Story fictitiously about a landscape scene of 1922.

On the crest of the hill, the new Grikia trekkers saw before them the promised land of Beeswater rolling down from the hills in the west, bounded on by the Swart rivier in the east, and in the distant south by the plain of Van Rensburg’s white rocks. Here ... they descended into the plain where the Grikia way of life once roamed.

The Beeswater Grikia Displacement or Relocation Oral History Project is fundamentally a community project with none of the participants, except for the facilitator/project leader H.C. Jeffreys, having had any formal training in history as discipline. Potential interviewers and their informants were directly affected in one way or another by the relocation of their families from Beeswater to the Crags in the Tafelbergkaap or the Griekoskamp in Vredendal near Namaqualand from the 1960s to the early eighties. A complicating sensitive factor the facilitator had to reckon with was the legacy of deep divisions between the Khoikhoi-Plattelandse Bay based AAS Le Fleur clan and the Kaaiplaas Crags based EMS Le Fleur clan of the Grikia.

Conceptualising the Project

Most of the time devoted to a series of workshops, facilitated by the project leader himself, from August 2002 (when still at the University of the Western Cape) was used to conceptualise and plan implementation of the Beeswater Griekoskam Woensdag Mogendal Gekiesiedaptopen [Beeswater Griekia Relocation Oral History Project]. The first Workshop for the EMS Le Fleur faction of the Grikia was held in the Kranphas Griekia National Conference Community Hall on the weekend of 31st August 2002 after an introduction with the Chief, Volks President Anthony Le Fleur of Griekoskamp. Fifty-three Grikia attended this workshop, conducted in Afrikaans. Essentially, the methodology followed was in accord with that which I applied to the Roeland Street Pienaar Oral History Project workshops with NASA staff in Cape Town, ironcally, initially the less sophisticated workshops with Grikia participants acquainted them somewhat easier than the civil service-minded Archives participants with an ‘oral history’ paradigm shift, which the two separate projects necessitated. For both interested groups the paradigm shift was explained at elementary level within the context of the guidelines of the Project as formulated in the Memorandum of Agreement with the Department of Arts and Culture. Considerable time was set aside to discuss the concept Beeswater Grikia community, which led to the following definition:

These groups of people who had to trek in 1964 and the early 1970s away from the Beeswater conditions resulting from an oppressive settlement policy and were due to specific circumstances in accordance with the great plan of God relocated under command of their leader in the Kaynase district to grow there into a better social position than that which they had left behind.

The first workshop for the AAS Le Fleur faction of the Grikia was held in the Vredendal GNC Church and Community Hall on the weekend of 6 September 2002. As in the case of the Crags Grikia, this could only happen after extensive consultation with Paramount Chief AAS Le Fleur II’s Hoofman Cecil Le Fleur, Chairman of the Hoofmans Band who is, unlike his Paramount Chief, based at Vredendal near the West Coast with the Project’s target community. The seat of their Paramount is in Kranphas near Platteberg Bay.
Thirty-eight Griqua, aligned to Paramount Chief AAS Le Fleur II, attended the workshop, conducted also in Afrikaans. Essentially, the methodology followed was in accord with that applied to the other Project workshops. For the AAS Le Fleur II Griqua the Bezwater Griekswa herverings-gemeenskap constituted.

In accordance with this definition, the workshop groups discussed in similar fashion the methodological issues and practices addressed in the other oral history projects facilitated by Project Leader Bredekamp. After a follow-up workshop they were by the end of the first quarter more familiar with a workable structure for an oral history questionnaire and with ways and means of conducting interviews.

Implementation of the Project

In two subsequent workshops at The Crags for the seven-member project team of that community in the first half of 2003, the focus was on progress and problems encountered in the implementation of the project. By July 2003 consensus was reached with the team about a revised time schedule and a date for the conclusion of the project. In early October the facilitator received from Chief AC Le Fleur a package containing:

- a historical paper, prepared by Edna de Waal, on the Bezwater Hervestigings Gemeenskap, entitled “So het ons loop uit Bezwater gelyk”;
- five audio tape cassettes containing 20 interviews;
- twenty transcriptions of all the interviews on 65 single-spaced typed pages;
- a set of photos of all 20 interviewees
- a schedule of all adults and children, dead or alive, who were relocated; and
- a copy of the Tredted.

A video on the Project is being edited for the end of November 2003.

The Project Team, aligned to the clan of Paramount Chief AAS Le Fleur II only, started to gain momentum after a follow-up visit by me as project leader in early August 2003. Nonetheless, scores of potential informants still living in Vredendal had by then already been identified and with the assistance of Hoofman Le Fleur the implementation process was fast-tracked and should be concluded by end of November 2003.

Conclusion

A word of thanks to especially Ms Mandy Gildeer of NASA for the opportunity granted to facilitate this Project. The firm leadership and assistance of Anthony C. Le Fleur is also highly appreciated and, equally, the goodwill and willingness of Cecil A. Le Fleur in respect of his clan’s cooperation in this unique oral history project. I remain confidently convinced that despite the setbacks of the past and present this project will come to fruition before the end of this calendar year [2003].

Henry C. Jatti
Bredekamp

Archives and the African Renaissance: Recovering the Right to Human Dignity: The South Africa – Mali Project for Preserving the Medieval Manuscripts in Timbuktu

The respected British historian, Sir Hugh Trevor-Roper, wrote in the 1960s, when Africa was emerging from its colonial shackles,

"Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little; there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa."

Trevor-Roper claimed that history was "essentially a form of movement and purposeful movement too", working from this premise he elaborated his quixotically racist, argument that to ignore movement would be to "tamper crudely with the unmeaning gymnastics of barbarous atlas in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe..."

This is perhaps an extreme quotation, but it illustrates my thesis that colonialism sought specifically to devalue, to disinvest and to deny African culture, African history and African indigenous knowledge.

Closer to home mid 20th Century southern Africa, the white government of the then Rhodesia (the Republic of Zimbabwe since 1980) went to elaborate efforts to fabricate a mythological explanation involving Indians, Arabs, King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, for the ruined city of Great Zimbabwe, rather than accept the plain truth that it was the product of the indigenous people of Zimbabwe. In South Africa, from the 1940s to the 1990s, the apartheid government, and one of its leading universities, suppressed all efforts to research and publicize the truth about the ruined civilization of Mapungubwe in what is now Limpopo Province.

The converse is true: Africans have recorded their thoughts and emotions in verse, rock art and writing for many centuries, long before the impact of colonialism. Colonizers were often frightened and awe by the rich cultures that confronted them and this led to the denial or disinvestment of indigenous learning and self-expression during the colonial era.

Thus the ancient city of Timbuktu in Mali became a place of myth – defined in the Concise Oxford Dictionary as "a very remote place". Yet Timbuktu was the centre of an ancient culture, of great architecture and a flourishing school of religion, scholarship, trade and learning. Situated on the northern bank of the Niger River, Timbuktu was a great centre of the Trans-Saharan trade with camel caravans bringing salt from the north taking gold from the south.

The famous medieval writer Leo Africanus wrote in the 1500s:

"In Timbuktu there are numerous judges, scholars and priests, all well paid by the king. Many manuscript books coming from libraries are sold. Such sales are more profitable than any other goods."

The famous Timbuktu mosques are now World Heritage sites. The Sankore Mosque was once home to a university as old and distinguished as Oxford and in this environment thousands generations of great scholars: theologians, jurists, teachers, scientific observers and historians.

Perhaps the greatest of them all was Ahmed Baba. He had a famous library in Timbuktu and when he was captured by a Moroccan army in 1593, his library was taken
to Morocco with him. Ahmed Baba longed for his home and penned this exquisite poetic verse:

O cancel the sun, turn off to my city,
Murmuring names there and great all my dear ones,
With pointed elbows from an exile who longs
For his homeland and neighbors, companions, and friends

The Ahmed Baba Research Institute in Timbuktu (known variously by the synonyms of CEDRAB or IHERI-AB) now collects and preserves the precious manuscripts kept for generations in mosques, places of learning and family homes. The medieval Arabic manuscripts in Timbuktu are, without any doubt, among the most important cultural treasures in Africa. They form part of a rich and diverse cultural heritage that includes the historic mosques and architecture and cultural traditions of the city. As it contains several World Heritage sites, Timbuktu is recognised as a city of global cultural significance.

Background to the project

In November 2001 South African President Thabo Mbeki visited Timbuktu and paused at the Ahmed Baba Centre. He marvelled at the treasure trove of manuscripts and drew inspiration from the scholarship and the dedication of the scholars at the centre. Realising the profound importance of this centre for the concept of the African Renaissance, President Mbeki pledged the support of South Africa for the struggle to conserve the manuscripts and to rebuild and extend the library.

The centre's collection is a record of lively and extensive literary activity. It is a real evidence of African scholarship of Africans in reading and writing, and at extremely high levels of sophistication as well, and centuries before colonialism. The contents of the manuscripts range from handwritten copies of the Koran, to religious commentaries, family genealogies and histories, commercial records, geographical, climatic, mathematical, scientific and even astronomical information. Given the shortage of paper in Timbuktu, the core contents of a manuscript may be verses from the Koran, but the marginal notes may contain the information of cultural, scientific and cultural value.

The purpose of this paper is to describe an African archival and manuscript project that gives the lie to the mythologies of colonialism and apartheid. Africa has a history, a proud and a learned history and it is a privilege to be working on a joint project between South Africa and Mali to preserve and celebrate that history.

The institutions in South Africa that are working together on the project are the National Archives of South Africa (and its parent ministry, the Department of Arts and Culture), the National Library of South Africa, the Library of Parliament; the Development Bank of South Africa and the Presidency itself.

In August 2002, the Minister in the South African Presidency, Minister Essop Pahad, and the Malian Minister of Foreign Affairs, signed an agreement expressing the two countries’ commitment to undertake a government-to-government project aimed at conserving the manuscripts at the Ahmed Baba Institute and at rebuilding the library and archival infrastructure of the Institute.

Also during 2002 preparatory work for the establishment of a Trust Fund was undertaken and a detailed plan of operation was prepared. Financial support is now being sought for the implementation of this plan.

Mission

- To collaborate with the Government of Mali and with other stakeholders and role-players in preserving, cataloguing and appropriately and securely locating the documentary heritage at the Ahmed Baba Institute (IHERI-AB) in Timbuktu.

Objectives

- To assist with the conservation of the historic manuscripts of Timbuktu through the provision of training, technical support and the mutual development of conservation facilities.
- To provide training opportunities for Malian conservators and heritage professionals at appropriate South African institutions and facilities.
- To upgrade and develop the infrastructure at IHERI-AB so that the manuscripts can be preserved in secure and environmentally sound conditions.
- To assist with the identification, collection and cataloguing of the manuscripts at IHERI-AB.
- To promote knowledge of the Malian heritage in general, and the Timbuktu manuscripts in particular, in South Africa and internationally.
- To involve civil society (especially those elements with business interests in Mali and West Africa) in the project.

Outputs

Output 1: Provision of technical training in South Africa for Malian conservators.
Output 2: Cataloguing and other fieldwork and implementation of training in Mali.
Output 3: Design and construction of new building for the Institute.
Output 4: Promotion of public understanding of the Heritage of the manuscripts in South Africa, across Africa and globally.

Activities

Output 1: Provision of technical training (6 - 8 weeks)
1. Arrange travel, accommodation and logistics
2. Orientation and English - familiarisation course
3. Training programme National Archives
4. Tour of other institutions
5. Return to Mali

Course repeated twice (2 groups: 2 at a time)

Output 2: Cataloguing and other fieldwork and implementation of training in Mali
1. Arrange travel, accommodation and logistics
2. Undertake preliminary planning in Bamako
3. Fieldwork and practical application of training at Ahmed Baba Institute
4. Development of cataloguing system in consultation with Malian and international experts

Output 3: Design and construction of new building
1. Preliminary investigations and needs analysis
2. Concept designs and costing
3. Approval by stakeholders and governments
4. Fund raising
5. Follow procurement and tender processes
6. Select architect and technical teams
7. Construct building

Output 4: Promotion of public understanding
1. Public launch of project: Africa Day 2001, South Africa
2. Awareness and fund raising campaigns – on-going 2003
3. International conference – Cape Town 2004
4. Publication of catalogues and scholarly texts 2004/2005
5. Production of film and TV documentaries 2004/2005

Institutional arrangements
The South African side of the project is directed by an Interministerial Committee supported by a technical implementation team and a project manager. The lead department is the Department of Arts and Culture.

The funding for activities in Mali, e.g. design and construction, infrastructure, fieldwork, provision of equipment and materials, is derived from a Trust Fund which is administered by the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA). The DBSA is a regional development finance institution and is legally established in terms of the DBSA Act (Act No. 15 of 1997) and its sole shareholder is the Government of South Africa through the South African National Treasury. While maintaining its own financial sustainability through prudent banking practices, its financial and technical involvement in infrastructure programmes and projects ensures the sustainable application of resources to foster development impact and improve the lives of people.

The Ahmed Baba Institute is a part of the Malian Ministry of Education. Mali is represented on the technical team by an official from its Embassy in Pretoria, and by representatives of the Ministry of Education in Bamako.

Resource mobilisation strategy
The project is designed to achieve its objectives transparently, timeously and cost-effectively. To this end sponsorship and support via the Trust Fund is being sought from South African civil society and the business community as well as from foreign donors, in consultation with the initiative of the Presidency. The Presidency is also using its influence to mobilise support from multi-lateral organisations within Africa and internationally.

Given the increasing involvement of South African businesses and mining enterprises in Mali, they are being particularly targeted as potential supporters of the project.

The Muslim community in South Africa, through its community organisations and media, has expressed great interest in the project and provided both material and moral support.

The Department of Arts and Culture is responsible for costs of training in South Africa and for the administrative costs of the South African technical teams.
Annex A


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Example of deteriorated manuscript

Example of illuminated manuscript

Illustrations are courtesy of Alexio Most, National Archives of South Africa, Pretoria