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An Annotated Bio-Bibliography of the Literature of Eswatini (Swaziland)

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research proposal has been to address the absence of an up to date and detailed bibliographic record of Eswatini (Swaziland) literary production. To this end, an international interdisciplinary team made up of researchers from the Department of African Languages and Literature, UNISWA library, and the English Department at Acadia University, Canada have collaborated to produce an exhaustive annotated bibliography of the Kingdom's prose fiction, drama, poetry, and other forms of creative

writing in English and siSwati. UNISWA students who were hired gained valuable skills in document identification and retrieval, as well as engaging with and analysing texts. Hundreds of texts discovered in libraries and archives in Eswatini (Swaziland) and South Africa were scrutinized, along with local newspapers and magazines, to produce the final result: An Annotated Bio-bibliography of the literature of Eswatini (Swaziland) housed on a digital platform.

INTRODUCTION

In Swaziland, bibliographies do exist, but they are limited to the most accessible published books and are now out of date. Further, there is no exclusive bibliography that specializes in recording the kingdom's creative expression. Literary production in Swaziland following independence was published in different print mediums such as journals, magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, and books. In turn, this literature is scattered around Swaziland and South Africa. As a result, its impact has been limited to the point where globally the country's literary image is often still influenced through writings by early settlers and travel writers, and local awareness of Swaziland literature tends to be confined to books prescribed by the education system. In each case, its relative obscurity means that its impact on "national memory and identity" (Parent, 2007) is limited.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

To date, there is only an incomplete registry of Swaziland creative literature. While the important Swaziland National Bibliography only records titles from 1977 to 2007 as an annual collection of all the published work of the kingdom, another source, the ambitious online bibliography compiled by former UNISWA librarians Paiki Muswazi and Rose Magagula (2003) is now out dated. As a result the record of Swaziland's creative output is incomplete, and the researchers consciously decided not to provide annotations of the literary texts mainly to adhere to the scope of their compilations. Furthermore, Swaziland's literary output is scattered around the country, with key locations being the UNISWA Library, the Mbabane National Library, the National Archives, and the library at Waterford Kamhlaba. Archives and libraries in South Africa also contain writings that are not found in Swaziland. To this end, this collaborative research project aims to establish an exhaustive record of Anglophone and siSwati literature from its beginnings to the present and capture it in the form of electronic database which could further enhance the visibility of the literary image of Swaziland.

OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this project is to produce an exhaustive, authoritative bibliography of the kingdom's prose fiction, drama, poetry, and other forms of creative writing in English and siSwati. More specifically all the creative writing including the writings of early explorers and settlers will be recorded alongside the literary output of Swazi nationals written in English and siSwati. For the first time, these entries will also be annotated.

The expected result of these objectives is to provide a current, timely, comprehensive, and authoritative record of all titles. In particular, it will provide information on the literary output of Swaziland and promote both local and global scholarly research and help to preserve and celebrate "national memory and identity."

LITERATURE REVIEW

Broad Literature review shows that prose fiction written in siSwati or in English by Swazi nationals is a relatively recent phenomenon, and has received little scholarly attention. Chapman's (2003) survey, *Southern African Literatures*, is altogether silent on Swaziland literature, and even the important anthology *Women Writing Africa: The Southern Region* only includes two texts. Approximately five journal articles and two book chapters make up the bulk of critical responses to the country's literary production. The primary scholarly interest has been in the country's oral literature, and even here attention has been limited to a chapter in White and Vail's (1991) *Power and the Praise Poem*, a brief consideration of the incwala in Kerr's (2004) *African Theatre: Southern Africa*, a further examination of the incwala ritual in a book chapter by Motsa (2001), called "The Missing Link in siSwati Modern Drama" which appeared in *Pre-Colonial and Post-Colonial Drama and Theatre in Africa*. Despite this neglect, Swazi writers have and continue to produce a respectable output of literature that needs to be more widely recognized. An up-to-date bibliography is vital in this regard.

Two key bibliographies on Swaziland are Jones' (1993) *A Biographical Register of Swaziland to 1902* and Booth's (2000) *Historical Dictionary of Swaziland*. These, of course, are primarily interested in the history and geography of the country. Hamilton's "Swaziland Oral History Project" is an important record of the country's orature, while Kamera's (1998) *Tinganekwane teSiswati: Siswati Folktales* includes a bibliography of oral tales. There are only two bibliographies of written literature, both of which are incomplete and outdated: the *Swaziland National Bibliography* and *Swazi Culture: An Annotated Bibliography* by former UNISWA librarians Muswazi and Magagula (2003).

In recognition of the important work carried out by Jahn (1971), Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz has launched a website dedicated to bibliographies on African literature, meant to "provide a virtual resource for international, transcultural research in African literary studies." Not only does such an initiative speak to the importance of bibliographic records of African literature, but it also provides a model for our own project.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection was done through retrieval of material from the National Archives, the University of Swaziland library, the Mbabane National Library, Manzini Library, the Waterford Kamhlaba library and from individuals' collections. The *Times of Swaziland* beginning with its earliest edition in 1897 up to the present and *The Swazi Observer* from its first issue were researched and poems, short stories and literary pieces were identified. The *Nation* magazine was researched for identifying literary pieces. Outside of Swaziland, the Killie Campbell holdings in Durban, the National English Literary Museum in Grahamstown and the National Archives of South Africa were visited in order to identify works by Swazi writers. African Studies Center in Leiden (Netherlands) was contacted for information on the writings of Swazi writers. For the biographical information, templates were created and distributed to authors, who provided relevant information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On completion of data collection the following results were achieved:

More than seventy literary texts written in siSwati were read and annotated and the genres include prose (fiction and nonfiction), poetry and drama.

Ten short-story anthologies written in Siswati were annotated as well. More than hundred stories were included in these anthologies.

Nine books which fall under the category of “early writings or colonial writings” from visitors, settlers, and short-term residents of the country were annotated.

Forty-six contemporary authors and their hundred and two literary works written in English were annotated.

This research also covered two prominent newspapers of the country, Times of Swaziland and The Swazi Observer. The periods covered are from 1887-1909 and from 1988-2015 for the Times of Swaziland and for The Swazi Observer, the period covered is from 1984 to 2015. A total of 1224 entries with 650 writers were identified.

Discovery of relatively unknown individuals who have also written poems, dramas, short stories which are published either under “The Art Corner” or “Entertainment”

While the contributions in the print media were certainly laudable, it was a bit too inclusive. So as a guiding principle, only those texts that exhibited literary qualities, such as clarity of prose style, depth of character and resonance of themes were included

Discovery of a major form of literature - periodical essay similar to Joseph Addison (1672-1719) and Richard Steele (1672-1729), in their widely read series, The Tatler, is Bheki Gama’s series of essays under the title “Gamassaulting” in Swazi Observer

Recording of “praise names for each and every clan in Swaziland” contributed by Fanyana Mabuza from 2004 to 2005.

One of the magazines covered in this research is The Nation and the years covered are from 2001 to 2009.

Each literary work has been coded as a separate entry and a total of more than 1000 entries were created consisting of short stories, poems, prose articles that are collected from the two newspapers and magazine.

For all the above mentioned records, bibliographical details were created and the annotations of the respective texts were added.

The entries were sorted year-wise so that the progression of literary output could be analysed.

The entries are printed as a compilation with author index for submission to the research board to be placed in the library and at the Research Board

An electronic version of the entries was prepared for digital online access (Fig. 1 and Fig 2)

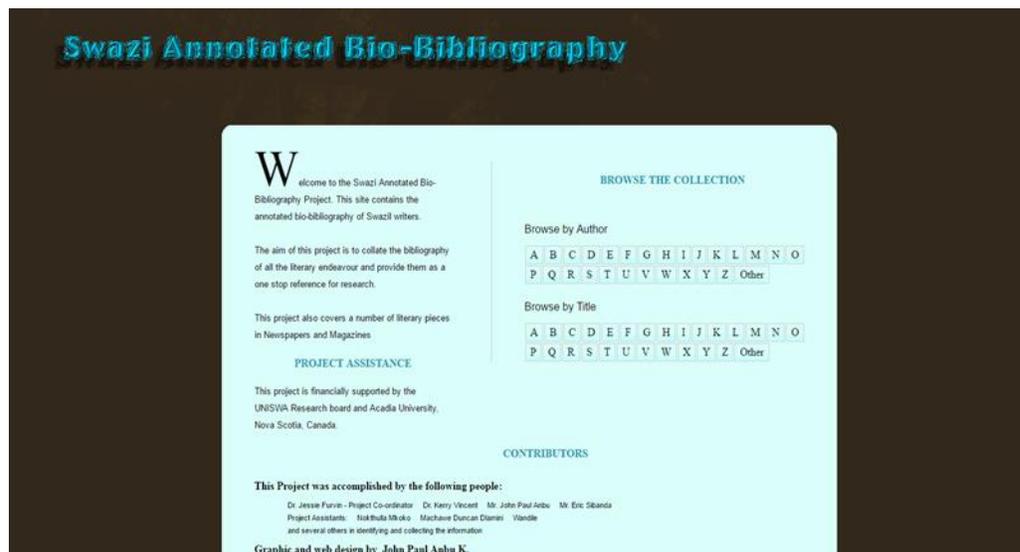


Fig.1 Swazi Annotated bio-bibliography electronic interface landing page

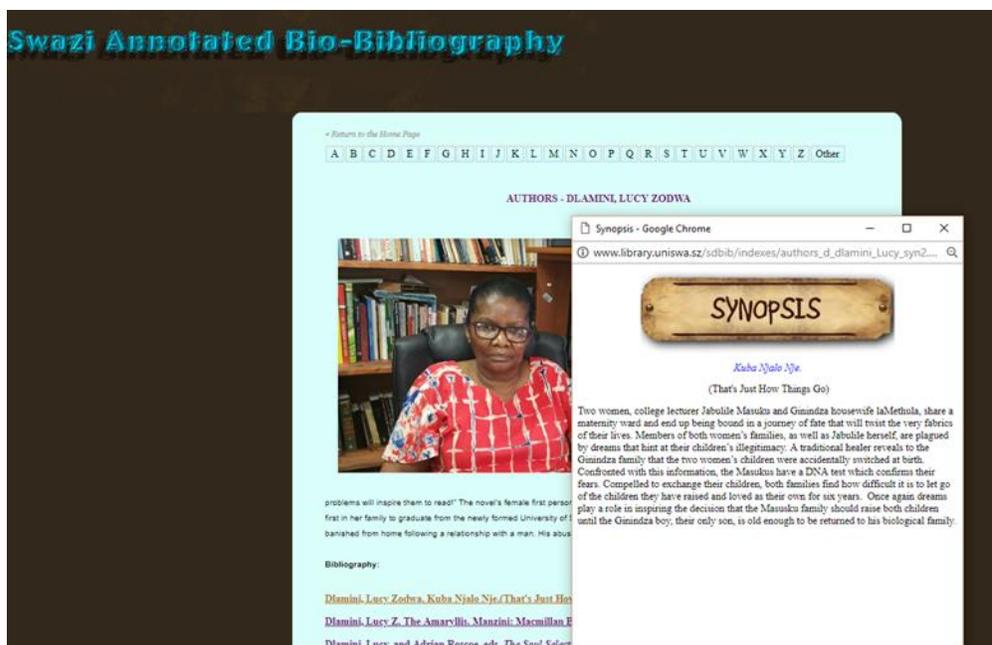


Fig. 2 Swazi Annotated bio-bibliography electronic interface annotations for texts

CONCLUSION

In his influential essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” T.S. Eliot argued that knowledge of writers of the past makes contemporary writers both part of that tradition and part of the contemporary scene. This bio-bibliography can act as a gateway to that past (it also includes titles on oral literature). In its overall exploration of contemporary national sensibilities, Swaziland literature in English and siSwati is clearly a corpus of writing which in many ways empowers local readers to know themselves and to know others. It also embodies the growth, the ascendancy and the establishment of a distinctive national literary category. Finally, it will act as an important platform for more fully exposing the literature of Swaziland to the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Literary Production

- more competitive publishing environment
- greater support (public and monetary) for fledgling and established local writers
- more exposure for local writers is needed through, for example, inclusion on the university syllabi (i.e. Courses in siSwati and/or English on the literature of Swaziland)

Archival and Records Management

- the purchase of a microfiche scanner equipment to facilitate the collection and organization of the country’s cultural production
- update holdings in Swaziana section of UNISWA library to provide and maintain a complete record of the country’s cultural production

In the current state the electronic interface is just a browsing tool. In order to make it more robust it needs to be converted into a database for searching and cross searching using author names, titles and keywords which will be the next step to the project.

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