

Interview with Prof. Leonard Diniso Ngcongco at the University of Botswana, June 19th, 1996

After some 28 years of continuous service to the University of Botswana and its predecessors, Prof. L.D. Ngcongco reached retirement age in August 1995, having joined the staff in 1967, and since then has been employed on two successive two-year contracts. He has seen the institution grow from humble beginnings to its present position as a centre of learning in the SADC region, and has been an active player in this process of growth.

In the following edited transcript, Prof Ngcongco (LDN) reminisces about the origins and development of the University and his role in it. The interviewer is Dr. Kofi Darkwah (KD) of the Department of History.

KD: Can I ask you to tell me how and why you got into academics in the first place?

LDN: Maybe I should answer your question by going right to the beginning. I grew up in a small Karoo town called De Aar where my father was a worker on the railway line. De Aar is one of the big railway junctions in South Africa and almost everybody who is employed there works for the railways.

Both my father and my mother were unschooled people, unlettered. My father's reading and writing were largely self taught. He was only able to read the Bible with any degree of ease, and to sign his name and documents. Most of his correspondence was done for him by us, the children. So in my own family there was no tradition of schooling.

However, I was fortunate in that as far as I can remember throughout my primary school career I was either top of the class or second. I was jumped a class from Standard Four to Standard Six, and at the end of my primary school career I earned the distinction of being one of the first ten in the whole Cape Province. The Cape education department selected the first ten, and they got bursaries from the government for high school. I was one of them.

I do not really remember anyone that I could say was a role model for me through my school career. I just happened to have a thirst for learning because learning was fairly easy for me. I was consuming most of the subjects and the teaching by teachers very easily, and enjoyed myself in the process.

Because of scarcity of means at home I did not go to any of the colleges which were called institutions, like Lovedale. I went to an urban secondary school, not really a very good high school, in Port Elizabeth. Most of the students throughout the two years that the school had been in existence were either failing or were passing very poorly.

In between junior certificate and the matriculation examination I had to break my schooling to do a little bit of paid work. Again I was able to flourish at that school. I became the first student ever to pass the matriculation examination in the first class.

Because of the first class pass my headmaster, the late Reverend G.B. Molefe, moved heaven and earth to try to get me to go to Fort Hare. My own parents were, of course, unable to do anything for me and a loan bursary was obtained for me to top up a very small bursary. I landed at Fort Hare in 1953. At Fort Hare I proceeded easily, but I must say without distinction, and took the BA degree in 1955.

I was one of those who were encouraged by my lecturers to enter the Honours class. That means an additional year beyond the general degree in South Africa, in which you

take advanced papers in one subject. I entered the Honours class together with a young man who later went to work for the BBC. There were the two of us in History and so at the end of 1956...

KD: Can you remember his name?

LDN: He was Peter Legola, who worked many, many years for the BBC. I think he took early retirement during the Thatcher years and is running some business now, a travel agency in London.

So after I had completed the Honours degree, I realised that the only practicable way for me to proceed was to take a teaching diploma in order to become a teacher in the schools. For that I obtained a loan bursary and went into the postgraduate teaching diploma course which is known in South Africa as the University Education Diploma (UED). And so at the end of 1957 I qualified as a teacher with this diploma, and started teaching at Lovedale College.

I taught thereafter in several schools until I fell foul of the South African regime which thought that I was probably rabble-rousing the students. They became suspicious of my teaching because so many of the students seemed to be surprisingly interested in history. A German man called Weich, who was appointed by the Nationalists to head Lovedale after the Nationalist government had seized Lovedale from its missionary founders, noticed that whenever he was walking around the campus all the matric class were carrying no other books but history books.

KD: Let me ask you a pointed question; were you rabble rousing the students? Were you teaching them African Nationalist history?

LDN: I wasn't really. I was teaching them the French Revolution, the 1830 revolution, the 1848 revolution. Of course South Africa was in considerable socio-political ferment and the students were interested in these things. Maybe my own interest in these movements helped the students to enjoy the classes.

KD: Perhaps unconsciously you helped to sow the seeds of...

LDN: ...maybe, maybe. One thing, Dr. Darkwah, that many people don't know is that I taught Steve Biko. Steve Biko sat in my matric class together with his brother at Lovedale.

KD: So they may have picked up some of those revolutionary ideas from your French Revolution classes?

LDN: It is possible. I had to leave South Africa because the South African government banned me from teaching in any school in South Africa. They found no reason to accuse me of anything—really no tangible reasons. They just decided that they did not want me to teach in any of the schools in South Africa.

I had already been invited to teach at a number of schools abroad. One of the many colleagues with whom I was at Fort Hare was the future [Botswana] Minister of Education, Ray Molomo, who got me a headmastership in Molepolole, at Kgari Sechele Secondary School. Another colleague got me a teaching position at the secondary school in Ife [Nigeria], and a former professor of mine got me appointed to a school in Uganda—all these just before the South African government banned me.

I was still fairly conservative about travelling abroad, about leaving the country, and about leaving my aged parents. So it was really only the pressure that was applied by the South African government that uprooted me from South Africa. It made me accept a position that had been offered to me earlier—I had to inquire whether it was still open—

at Moeding College, at Otse here in Botswana. That is how I came out here to this country.

It was while teaching at Moeding College that I had a surprise invitation from the head of the History department at UBBS [University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland], the late Dr. Clement Goodfellow, inviting me to apply for a position that had just become vacant on the Roma campus. That diverted me from my plans to enter for a [part-time] law degree while teaching at Moeding.

KD: Did you know this Clement Goodfellow before? How did he get to know you?

LDN: I think perhaps my name was mentioned to him by one or two of my old teachers who were now lecturers there. The late Professor Guma, who later became the head of the Swaziland campus, had been one of my lecturers at Fort Hare. The late Professor Thelejane, was then in the department of zoology and later in the department of education. I think people like them suggested my name to Goodfellow.

KD: So you took up that invitation and then got into the university system?

LDN: Exactly. That is how I entered academia. But my only academic qualifications were a BA Honours and a teaching diploma for secondary schools—it became necessary for me to consider a Masters' degree. At this point in time I was already a fairly established family man, though not established materially. I was the father of three young children, so I could not practically consider going to [graduate] school immediately. I opted for continuing to teach at the university while studying for an MA privately with the University of South Africa.

It took me a long time. Whenever it was the long vacation I had to travel by train to Cape Town, to go and read the back numbers of the newspaper *Imvo Zabantsundu*. I must have done this for three or four successive years. This newspaper was only in the Cape Archives, and I had to go down there.

I eventually completed the MA with the University of South Africa on the study of the *Imvo Zabantsundu* newspaper, at almost the same time as the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland decided that I should go for a doctoral programme in Canada.

KD: Can you just reminisce about the early years of the History department, both here and in Roma?

LDN: I joined the department in Roma at the invitation of Goodfellow, but unfortunately did not find Goodfellow himself, as he died before I arrived. Gordon Haliburton, already a lecturer there, became head of the department. The Vice-Chancellor of the University was also a historian, the late Professor William Blake. So was his wife; she was a regular member of the department as a lecturer. He was lecturing voluntarily while heading the entire institution, being very interested in teaching. So I found Haliburton and the Blakes in the History department. I became the fourth person.

When I arrived the University had just begun discussing intensively how it was to devolve its work from Lesotho to other campuses. Botswana and Swaziland were beginning to agitate for a greater presence of the university in their countries. There was a feeling that there was a lot of investment by the other countries in Lesotho without visible returns. Whereas in Lesotho the university was hiring Basotho workers, its staff were paying taxes to the Lesotho government, et cetera.

So three or four years after I went to Roma in 1967—I had joined the university as an assistant lecturer—I came over to Botswana. In 1971 teams were sent to go and start teaching on the new campuses. I joined the team that was going to Botswana.

I was coming to start the teaching of history on the small campus here, alone. Our mission was to start years one and two [Part I of the degree]. I started year one on the old campus in what was later to become NIR. In the second year, during 1971–72, I was assisted by Mrs Hazel Hudson as a part-time lecturer. She was a BA Honours graduate from the University of Witswatersrand, who had been a school teacher before her marriage and was interested in keeping up her professional work. She was the wife of Derek Hudson who was at that time an employee of the Bank of Botswana—he became director of research at the Bank, before retiring to run a consultancy for the SADC region.

In September 1972 I left to go and start doctoral studies in Canada. I left the department then in the hands of our present Vice Chancellor [Prof. Thomas Tlou] who had then just come from Roma. He was anxious to come and base himself here to help him acquire citizenship of Botswana.

KD: So how long were you away in Canada?

LDN: Between 1972 and September 1975.

KD: When you came back what changes did you observe in the department?

LDN: I saw clear growth in terms of student numbers. As for staff, when I left I had been the only full time teacher in the department assisted by one part-time person. On my return there were two full time people working. Dr. Tlou as he then was, the senior lecturer in the department, was assisted by a Zimbabwean called Erfrage Makuwatsene.

Makuwatsene soon left here to go to Dalhousie to do his doctoral. Makuwatsene had become known to Professor [Bertin] Webster, our external examiner here, who assisted him to gain admission to Dalhousie. We were beginning to develop healthy relations with Dalhousie University, with myself having gone there. Later on two of our students proceeded there—the now Dr. Sekgoma and Dr. Molefi.

So there were two full time lecturers on my return, and I became the third person. When I left we were starting second year; on my return there were students in the fourth year. Professor Tlou had also introduced a very interesting development, a development for which the history department was to become well known—the option of research essay in history rather than a written examination. So I came to join him in this work and found a very committed, interested and enthusiastic group of students, who really looked forward to the research assignment. There were few enough of them for all to be admitted into the history dissertation class.

KD: I was going to ask you about the origins and the nature of the fourth year project, the Botswana history research project. Now that you have talked about it, can I ask you..

LDN: Can I just say, Dr. Darkwah, now that we are mentioning it, that Dr. Tlou started it entirely on his own; he got the students and supervised them alone. Later when I took over the department from him, in 1976, we introduced seminars so that the students should present their essays, with other students listening, to two or three of us lecturers judging and making comments.

KD: Do you think that any noticeable change has taken place in the pattern of the seminars?

LDN: Not very much in the pattern of the seminars. What we did to experiment in the course itself was to take the entire research class and concentrate them in a particular district—so that some people would be doing studies of local government, others would be doing educational research, some the health developments, others religious activities, and some others some traditional topic like, for instance, the organisation of the *mephato*

regiments—a whole range of topics. So that in one year there would be a considerable corpus of essays concentrating on a particular district.

I was responsible for this idea, though it was not original on my part. I was merely trying to do in Botswana what I had seen the members of the history department doing at Dalhousie. They had a Benue plateau research project, with a number of Dalhousie doctoral and MA students joining Nigerian students of a particular university—forming a research team and doing various topics in the area of the Benue river plateau. So I was borrowing a leaf from that.

KD: How long did that go on for?

LDN: We did this for about three or four years. When I left to become the director of the NIR my colleagues in History decided that it was presenting too many difficulties in organising and managing. One of the problems was that a number of students had chosen the district of Kalanga people but were unable to speak the Kalanga language. They had to work largely through interpreters. Students complained that they had great difficulty in finding accommodation in and adapting to Bukalanga. Staff also felt that they were being asked to supervise students in topics far removed from their specialisms.

KD: When did you move from the department of History to NIR [the National Institute of Research at the University of Botswana]?

LDN: I arrived back towards the end of 1975, and stayed in the department until early 1980. Soon after I returned from Canada, in 1976, Dr. Tlou was asked by the Botswana government to take charge of our Permanent Mission at the United Nations. So I took the department over from him in 1976, and in the same year was also elected Dean of the Faculty of Humanities. I combined the Deanship of Humanities with the headship of the History department. At the same time I became the acting director of NIR, and combined these offices until the end of 1979.

Then, in early 1980, I relinquished the headship of the department and the deanship, and went to become full time director of the NIR.

KD: When exactly was the NIR established?

LDN: The NIR had been established around 1975 on a very small scale.¹ There were [as yet] no researchers; the first step was taken that year of appointing a documentalist—to collect as many of the records as possible that bear on research in Botswana, and to put them in order as a resource for researchers wanting to do work on Botswana. Professor Tlou was closely associated with this; he was the first acting director of the institute. When I joined it had one documentalist and some support staff—a secretary and a messenger and so on. Just before Professor Tlou left a second documentalist was appointed. The documentalists were seconded to the university from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Germany.

I took over as part time director at that point in time in 1976 and my responsibility was to take steps towards the beginning of research, to employ researchers and to identify research projects on which they would work.

KD: So would it be right to say you were effectively the founding director?

LDN: I wouldn't think that it was an unwarranted claim as far as research activity itself is concerned and identifying young people, staff development fellows, who were to be trained in these different areas. But as far as documentation is concerned, I found the documentalists there, and my contribution was to train local documentalists to replace the German ones.

KD: Then you became the first full time director of the Institute.

LDN: [In 1980] I relinquished my position as head of History and Dean of the Faculty in order to go and assume full time directorship at NIR.

KD: So you introduced directions and topics and themes and areas of research?

LDN: During my time there was a committee appointed, the NIR board, with representation from the various faculties, which was supposed to guide the affairs of the institute. We also found it necessary to encourage government cooperation with the NIR.

When the institute started there was a great deal of misgiving on the part of government. The feeling of a number of senior government officials was that there were already research bodies located in the ministries—in the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture, Local Government, and so on. Therefore there was no need to invest money in setting up a research institute at the University.

At the University of course the feeling was very different. That it was very important for a university, especially a national university, to be fully aware of important directions of policy, to make sure that its work contributed towards the general process of development. Perhaps some people in government perceived the possibility of some kind of competition and rivalry. There were also key areas that government wanted to guard and protect as areas that they alone would investigate. That was fine. We could delineate areas of operation. They could deal with very serious policy issues. We could do evaluation research, and information gathering, in certain areas of government—education, rural development, etc.

There were here and there in some ministries people who saw the need for NIR. So on the NIR side we decided that the best thing was to work closely with those individuals who appeared to us to understand the role that could be played by a research institute such as ours.

We set up a committee called the Ad Hoc Research Committee, with key people from Agriculture, Local Government, Education, Culture, and so on, to advise us on the issues the institute could identify for its own research programme. All this happened during my time.

KD: Were there specific difficulties put in the way of the institute?

LDN: Not directly, other than the fact that in the earlier stages it was indicated that government did not see its way clear to funding this part of the University, because they did not consider it a priority. This is why even the [initial] documentation aspect of it was done with donor financing.

The Germans came. The Friedrich Ebert Foundation appointed the first documentalist, and they later sent another man. When we started with research proper, we invited the Free University of Amsterdam to support a project. They were already becoming involved in the Pre-Entry Science teaching programme [attached to UB Faculty of Science]. We approached them and indicated to them that funding from local sources was difficult and did they see their way to supporting us.

So a consultation committee was set up between our University and the Free University of Amsterdam, with Professor Setidisho, our Vice Chancellor, taking the lead. It was decided on what kind of project to identify for co-operation, an agricultural development research project, and the first two researchers came to us from the Free University. While they were conducting research, we identified young people in Botswana who would be attached to them as Staff Development Fellows (SDF's) to be trained. These men are now back at NIR as full researchers.

KD: Can you give us their names?

LDN: The first one that we identified was Isaac Mazonde, who responded to our advertisement. He came to us from Barclays Bank, and at NIR for a period before going to do his Master's at the University of Nairobi. He returned to do more work at NIR, and later on proceeded to the UK, where he did his doctorate at the University of Manchester. He is now a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute.

The second one was Donald Kgathi; he had graduated from UB in Economics. Donald was attached as SDF to one of these Dutch researchers. After working a spell doing field

research with a senior researcher, he was sent to IDEP institute in Dakar, to do an MA in development economics. Later on he did a postgraduate diploma at Strathclyde and ultimately took a PhD in the UK.

The third one we identified was in the health area and he is doing very well—Dr. Mbulawa Mugabe. He is a very successful, brilliant young researcher at NIR. He was the third man that we identified from the University.

Before Mbulawa we had identified someone in education to replace Neil Parsons. I had brought in Neil Parsons from the UK, after Neil had broken his spell of working for the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. We brought him to start a new programme of research into educational activity, to work on a project on the Brigades development in the country.

Neil kicked off that project. Then we decided to find someone local to work with him and eventually take over from him. That particular recruitment was not very successful. It went awry because we wanted him to do a Master's, and the mistake we made was to yield to the pressure of the donors providing the scholarship who dictated the kind of training that he should receive. He did a Master's in social development and wasn't able eventually to employ it in the area of education—as maybe someone else might have done.

Just before I left we had identified another young man in the biological area, called Sekhwela, now working on his PhD.

And then of course the documentalist. We 'stole' a librarian from the Botswana National Library Service to work with a Kenyan documentalist that I had recruited directly from Nairobi. I used to be invited regularly to a circuit of meetings dealing with information planning in Eastern and Southern Africa, and I met a young man called Francis Inganji who was looking for an opening outside of his own country. As the Germans were indicating that they were going to pull out, Francis Inganji took over as documentalist. Then we needed to identify someone local—and we found Miss Stella Bakwena, now Mrs Monageng.

I think on the staff development side that was it, Dr. Darkwah. There were of course various auxillary staff—young people at sub degree level.

KD: How did Government eventually come to accept that NIR was worthwhile, changing its lukewarm attitude to active support?

LDN: I think this is a real case of the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Once the researchers were conducting research and publishing reports on issues in which the government was interested, we began getting commissions from government. People on the Ad Hoc Committee saw a lot of value in NIR, placing a lot of importance on the monthly meetings we were having. We were even able to get the occasional Permanent Secretary to attend this meeting.

It was a forum in which they could bounce ideas, in which they could suggest what the NIR could do. There were a number of young project officers in government who were not actually determining policy but who were advisers and technocrats. There were some things which they would like to do but could not break through to the Permanent Secretaries above them, and they encouraged the NIR to put its teeth in some of these issues.

We found that suddenly we were giving satisfaction that had never been expected. Our reports brought up things people were interested in. They said, yes, let the NIR continue. For some time the Director of NIR was even being invited to sit in on, as an observer, a body of government called the Rural Development Council—an inter-ministerial consultative body which had been set to discuss rural development issues. We were invited to sit as observers to get an idea of the ferment of ideas in government, to use this in our directional strategizing at NIR.

KD: Can you remember some of the areas and projects which eventually became useful to Government?

LDN: Yes, one of the areas on which we worked was an area that started off as very controversial from the point of view of policy, but we did not take the policy aspect we were asked to work as it were, on the side, on the periphery; and this was the TGLP—the Tribal Grazing Lands Policy. This was an important policy of government, supposed to change the whole direction of rural development. But it was controversial in many ways. Some people felt that it was an attempt to transplant something developed in another society, from Kenya, where British development officers had attempted to introduce it as a radical approach to the use of the grazing pastures, in order to make agriculture more commercial and capitalistic. So that was one area in which our people at NIR were working.

That was probably the biggest one; we also had smaller assignments. We were doing evaluations of activities in the areas of education and health. We cooperated with the Ministry of Health and UNICEF in doing a situation analysis of the health of women and children.

KD: Anything on population?

LDN: I don't really remember anything on population done by us.

KD: So then by 1985 you left NIR? Who became your successor at NIR?

LDN: Ntwaetsile Morapedi acted as Director for two years before a full-time director was appointed, Ansu Datta.

KD: Just tell me how, looking back, how do you feel about your time at NIR?

LDN: It was a very challenging period. I was apprehensive about going there when Professor Setidisho asked me to go, but he persuaded me to give it a try. I was, of course, fearful of venturing into a new area, the totally new thing of institution building. I had worked in a number of institutions but I had never been responsible for setting up one.

When I got to grips with this thing, I became enthused with the challenge of making it a success. I became aware of the existence of research institutes of a similar nature attached to universities in a number of countries in Africa—where people were doing excellent work whose results we were able to see from time to time. I wanted to see something comparable in Botswana.

I did go with Professor Setidisho to East Africa to see some of the research institutes there. In Tanzania we visited institutes like the bureau of language policy under Professor Mascarenhas² and one or two others. In Kenya we visited the Institute of Development Studies and the then beginning Institute of African Studies. And then, in West Africa, I had the opportunity to meet directors of other institutes at CODESRIA, in Dakar, and exchanged ideas with them.

There was a close relationship between us in NIR and our colleagues in Lesotho at the Institute of Southern African Studies. There was a smaller unit in Swaziland, the Applied Sociology Unit. We met from time to time to share ideas. It was a very fruitful period [of my life developing] in a different direction.

I had thought I would be able to hold a limited commitment to teaching in the department [of History] alongside the position at NIR. But I was only able to do it for the first year of my five years at NIR. I would then go off on assignments abroad, and it was very difficult to make up classes. My first year at NIR was also the year in which I was still finishing up the deanship [of Humanities].

There was one thing which I regret I was not able to do at NIR, something [about which] I did not find much encouragement even in the top echelons of the University.

I saw that in order to sell the NIR to the Government, it was important to emphasize hard obvious development work. But development work can sometimes be conceived in very, very narrow terms—as just developing things rather than people. If you are not

building a bridge or that kind of thing, people do not think that you are involved in development. But you also have to develop people in the mind.

I didn't see Botswana as a country with the resources to be able to have one institute that would deal with development issues with a capital D, and another institute that would deal with African cultural issues. I wanted NIR quietly to sprout a wing that would encourage research into the languages of the country, in the history of the nation, music and other cultural institutions. But even in the University, people felt that that could wait a while. That is one of my regrets.³

KD: Let's get back to the History department. You returned to the department in 1985 when Michael Crowder left.

LDN: The Vice-Chancellor indicated to me that with the imminent departure of Professor Michael Crowder, who was heading the History department, and with so many young Batswana staff likely to return soon to the department, it was critical that a senior person should come and take up the leadership of the department.

KD: When you left, it was a small department. How did you find it when you got back?

LDN: It had grown a little bigger in the sense that when I left there were four of us in the department, and when I returned there was an additional position that had been created. But, Michael Crowder had also promoted the possibility of archaeology being developed in the department. He had consulted with me about it. Michael was very perceptive. He knew he was here for a short time, and knew when he wanted to return home, and was told by the Vice-Chancellor that he was going to hand over to me. He invited me from time to time to discussions, especially towards the end of his last academic year here. So that he should have my ideas, what I thought about certain things—and for me also to share ideas with other people in the department.

I was therefore aware that he had written and discussed a paper on [starting] archaeology at UB, but he had warned it would not come cheap. I think we found encouragement from the Swedes that we could be assisted to do archaeological training here. Also, at the same time as Michael Crowder was due to leave, David Kiyaga-Mulindwa's term in the department was coming to an end. That gave us this excellent opportunity.

Mulindwa was our West African specialist. We knew when we hired him that we had hired a historian whose doctoral dissertation was in the archaeological area, and who had done archaeological work in West Africa. Mulindwa was now looking forward to a position in the National Museum in Gaborone. It looked as if the Museum was on the brink of major developments and Mulindwa had been promised a position there. In the same way as Neil Parsons when he left the University was made to believe that something might materialise for him in the Botswana Society.

These plans at the Museum did not materialise and there was Mulindwa available. So Mulindwa and I together picked up encouragement from SAREC [the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation], and we put the thing to the University. It was a very good proposition from SAREC, because they were willing to put up money and to fund an archaeological programme for a considerable period.

The necessary needs assessment studies were done and proved positive. So we set up a small archaeology unit with David Kiyaga-Mulindwa as the person to start it. The project document made provision for the growth of the staff over a certain period. The kind of staff we see there now were all anticipated and planned for.

We began with Mulindwa alone, but as soon as we took him on we identified a counterpart [Alinah Segobye], who is now in the Department.

KD: In terms of research output in the Department, what would you say your contribution has been?.

LDN: We carried forward the Botswana Research Programme initiated by my colleague, Thomas Tlou, and it became the trademark of the History department at a time when

nobody else in the entire University was requiring students to do research essays. Today, there is hardly a department that does not do so.

In an indirect way we encouraged research by the recruitment of young people, sending them through their Masters programmes and eventually their PhD's. Beyond that, here and there in a sporadic kind of way, we have had other departmental research assignments. Oral research in Kweneng was done by members of the History department while I was away on study in Canada, with the encouragement of the National Museum and the Botswana Society, and the tapes, I think, are in the National Museum or the National Archives.

KD: They are in the National Archives. I have noticed also that there was a project on Batswapong.

LDN: Yes, that was a departmental project which was headed by Mulindwa.⁴ It was linked to SAREC input in the training of students; SAREC made it clear that they existed to encourage research [at all levels].

KD: Yes, I think we have talked enough about the department. Can you tell me something more about your stint as Deputy Vice-Chancellor?

LDN: That was a short one, Dr. Darkwah; when Professor Turner's term as Vice-Chancellor finished. Professor Tlou who had been Deputy Vice-Chancellor became Acting Vice-Chancellor, and there was a period of search for a Deputy Vice-Chancellor. During that search period, I was asked to come from NIR to act as Deputy Vice-Chancellor—which I did for a period of six months.

As assistant to the Vice-Chancellor, one of my responsibilities was staff development. This involved considering nominations from the various departments for staff training, discussing with the various aid agencies in the town that cooperated with the University in training abroad, such as the British Council and the United States AID office. I also occasionally acted for the Vice Chancellor, attending meetings in the Ministries, etc.

One of the things that was part of the Deputy Vice Chancellor's schedule was the admission of students into the University. I mention this because I had to intervene at times when certain individuals were almost at the point of exclusion. I risked my neck to take certain decisions. Since then I have had the pleasure of seeing some of those people complete their degrees. They now hold critical positions in this country, such as magistrates in the districts.

My acquaintance with the University Council did not begin then. I think it was in my second year of employment that I was chosen on the academic side to be an alternate to somebody who was a regular member of the Council. So sometimes I found myself travelling to Swaziland from the Roma campus with very senior people to attend meetings. On and off I have been on Council now for pretty close to two decades.

KD: Your brief stint as Deputy Vice-Chancellor, what year was it?

LDN: This was the latter part of 1984 until I returned to NIR early in 1985. Later in that year I came back to the History department.

KD: Outside the University you are actively involved in extension and community activities. For example, you serve on the board of a Bible College. Have these community activities been related in any way to your tenure in the University, or have these been in a personal capacity?

LDN: I would say largely personal. Personal in the sense that I did not have to be sent by the institution. But some perhaps because of the kind of work I was doing in the institution. I served for three to four years as a member of the board of the National Archives, together with the Vice-Chancellor, the late Kgosi Bathoen and others, and for a longer spell on the board of the National Library Service. I got there first during the NIR years, because we were in the forefront of documentation and information development. I served for something like six years on the board of the National Library Service, and it used to take me on the East African circuit.

My membership of the governing board of Kolagano College, a theological college training by extension, was via the [Anglican] Church. The board of the College has members from various churches that are participating in the project. It is a project of the Botswana Christian Council—and the Bishop of my Church nominated me to serve on it.

When I was Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, I had helped a great deal to set up what is now the department of Theology and Religious Studies. We worked very hard with the Reverend Gabriel Setiloane to set it up, but he was unfortunately "P.I.'ed" (declared *persona non grata*) from the country. Setiloane came from working in Europe with the World Council of Churches. At that time the Botswana government just would not hear about spending money on religious training at the University. They felt that it was too costly and did not want to support [non-'developmental'] subjects like that.

In the same sort of way as we did later in Museum Studies [within the History department], we got people from overseas to come and offer support in the training of priests. Myself as Dean of Humanities, and Mbulelo Mzamane of the English Department were representatives on a committee that was working hand in hand so that students from the Bible College could come into the department at UB that Setiloane wanted to set up. My involvement in these things was to a very large extent personal, but it was also by virtue of being Dean.

KD: I would like you to tell me a little about your tenure as Dean.

LDN: It was in 1976 when I became Dean, up until 1980 when I moved to NIR. When Thomas Tlou left for the United States [to be Botswana's representative at the United Nations], he left both the position of Chairman of the History department and the Deanship of the Humanities open, and I was appointed to one and elected to the other.

Apart from the establishment of Theology and Religious Studies, another milestone along the road of Deanship was the founding of the department of Library and Information Studies. It was started off by inviting a well-known Ghanaian scholar, the late Professor Samuel Kotei. We had looked for someone of standing. I can't remember now who gave us Kotei's name, but he was willing to come. He was on sabbatical or some such arrangement from his own university and said he would be available for a spell of about six months.⁵ Mercifully, he was able to secure extension beyond six months. I don't know for how much longer, but he stayed on to our satisfaction and I am sure to the great regret of the people from his former institution.

I battled to have Library Studies. The question was should it be located in the Faculty of Humanities. It was quite a fight with the Faculty of Education. I also tried unsuccessfully to fight for a department of Psychology as well, but that was a fight ahead of its time [not yet won].

I was able to get a consultant to advise us on the question of French studies; he came, this man. He was a man from Britain who spent about six weeks with us visiting schools and making various enquiries. He left a report which showed how we could start in a small sort of way. It did not materialise during my time, but I did the groundwork. I am even forgetting that I visited France.

KD: In connection with?

LDN: In connection with this and other issues. I then was in regular contact with the office of the French cultural department based in Zambia and also another office, called CREDU, in Nairobi.⁶

I was particularly keen to push the growth of the department of English. I felt that English needed to be firmly established as the base of the Faculty. My argument was that English in Humanities was like Maths in Science, and Economics in the Social Science Faculty. I didn't think those Faculties could function creditably without considerable strength in those areas.

I tried to persuade the people in English, to persuade its Head, that maybe they ought not to develop such a strict and rigid division between Language and Literature. That

their language people needed the opportunity to develop their own little corners of literature. I felt that in a small college we would never be able to sustain the dichotomy. As it turned out [with the expansion of UB], things have worked out differently.

It was also a very hard battle arguing for the growth of History. It was only going to happen if we expanded our intake of students, and my own department felt that I had to teach the first year students to ensure this. Fortunately the numbers did not wane [but waxed greater]. Otherwise, I really cannot claim to have done anything special. The planners from the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning had plotted a declining future, arguing that the need for historians was easily satisfied. Fortunately, we have been kept aloft by the thirst for learning on the part of students and by colleagues in the department really selling the subject to the country.

Beyond that, Darkwah, there was the time when the University moved into the course unit system, We were the pioneers; we tended to pioneer everything at the time in Humanities. The very first discussions happened when Tlou was still Dean. Tlou had himself been a product of the system [in America]. Then we in History acquired Fred Morton, an American, who was conversant with the system and immediately after him came Mulindwa, also trained in the system. So the History Department was considered the engine of the whole system. with Morton being called the 'secret weapon' and Mulindwa being the tutor of the Faculty. These guys were the pillars, but were strengthened by the arrival of a man in African languages from the United States and another one who is now at the Botswana Book Centre.

We pushed the course unit system too far, and realised we were expecting things from it which could not be done. Some people felt that it was a rag-bag of contents, a kaleidoscope without focus. At the undergraduate level, it needed a much better administrative infrastructure for record keeping than we had in order to make a success of it. In the end, we felt that maybe we should go back [closer] to the subject system. Before I left the Deanship, it fell to me to argue the need to return to the subject system. [Ever since then] Thabo Mokoena from the Faculty of Science keeps reminding me from time to time how I single-handedly destroyed the course unit system.

KD: Why did it become necessary to move from the subject system to the course unit system?

LDN: It was because people felt that we were running an antiquated system that was too rigid that did not give students sufficient options, and was said to be wasteful. Sometimes a student would have passed three courses and failed one course but the regulations were such that the student might have to repeat the whole year. People said this would not happen in a course unit system. The course unit system was offered as a panacea to the problems we were having with our regulations.

KD: It is now late and we should bring this discussion to an end. Can you say briefly a few words about the graduate programme in the History department, which went into abeyance and had to be resuscitated.

LDN: [In the former University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland] We wrote a graduate programme into the books of the University for all the Faculties. In Lesotho, it resulted in one person graduating [with an MA in History] whom you probably know—Mr. Mosebi Damane.

Here in Botswana we were not able to find any students to enrol at the University on a full-time basis. We registered two individuals as part-time students. But they found the load just too much, and the Department said let us try to encourage the students as much as possible but we must not lower the course standards.

We enlisted the support of the Institute of Adult Education—both these fellows were in Francistown. Our idea was that we would bring them to the University two or three times a year for a week during the school vacations. They would be given reading material and would then operate as distance learners, and the tutors would sometimes go

and meet them at weekends. We hoped that these contacts would amount to something like a minimum of four to five a year. But the students were just not ready to take this kind of load. The whole thing fell through.

KD: Right! Thank you very much; I know that I have taken a lot more of your time than I had planned to, but I have now got a clear picture of how things shaped up.

Notes and References

1. The NIR was established in June 1975. The acronym NIR originally stood for 'The National Institute for Research in Development and African Studies'. Its current title 'The National Institute of Development Research and Documentation' dates back to the 1982–83 session.
2. The correct name for the bureau of which Prof. A.C. Mascarenhas was director was 'Bureau of Resource Assessment and Land Use Planning'.
3. Prof. Ngcongco wanted the Institute to research on not just economic and social developmental issues but also African Studies and Botswana's cultures in general.
4. See David Kiyaga-Mulindwa, *Tswapong Historical Project*, Gaborone [University of Botswana, Department of History], 1980. 3 vols., mimeograph.
5. Before he went to the University of Botswana the late Professor S.I.A. Kotei was the head of the Department of Library and Information Studies at the University of Ghana, Legon.
6. CREDU is acronym for Centre de Recherche, d'Echanges et de Documentation Universitaire.