
African Librarianship: A Relic, a Fallacy, or an Imperative?

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ABSTRACT

African librarianship has its roots in the colonial era, with colonial powers developing excellent library infrastructure with commensurate services in anticipation of their protracted stay in Africa. However, libraries were alien to African communities, which had a very strong oral tradition and used such a tradition to share information and knowledge. The “un-African” library infrastructure was challenged by some leading African scholars, who argued that there has to be a system of librarianship that delivers on African realities and imperatives. This paper interrogates the need to transform the concept of African librarianship in search of a path that addresses African imperatives; it also examines the need to separate the relic in pursuit of reconceptualization. There is little doubt that there is a need for, at the least, a hybrid—that is, incorporating the best from the colonial era with that which is African, such as the oral tradition—that would result in the transposition of concepts to create a new, relevant, effective, and efficient form of librarianship—namely, librarianship in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

There is significant evidence in the literature that validates the assertion that African librarianship has its roots in the colonial era. In nurturing and growing African librarianship, the colonial masters set in place a library and information service infrastructure that propagated Western philosophies and imperatives. As pointed out by du Plessis (2008), the colonial powers, in order to support their anticipated protracted stay in Africa, developed an excellent library infrastructure with commensurate services. Running in tandem with this colonial agenda was the “morality

agenda” and the quest to “illuminate the dark continent” through missionary work for the betterment of the African people. To aid in the illumination process, Africans were taught to read the Bible and the Koran. Bukenya (2008) posits that to support this reading culture, missionaries had to create new literature for consumption to keep the converts literate. However, libraries and reading were alien to communities that had a strong oral tradition and associated communication networks for the sharing of information and knowledge.

The push for a reading culture against the backdrop of a society nurtured on oral communication as a means of sharing information fueled the contradiction—that is, a reading culture versus an oral culture—that festered for decades. This “un-African” reading tradition was challenged by some leading African scholars, including Amadi (1981), who introduced the “barefoot librarian” as an African-bred alternative librarian. African librarianship was cultivated by the colonial masters to imitate Western models, thus neglecting African realities and imperatives. Amadi’s postulation of the barefoot librarian was to engender a system of librarianship by Africans for African realities. By the same token, not all that was not African was irrelevant. Despite this, it is advanced by African library and information science (LIS) scholars like Amadi, Aguolu (1997), Bukenya (2008), and Mchombu (1991) that African librarians should continuously engage in discourse to draw the best of both worlds for the empowerment of African citizenry.

This paper will interrogate the need to transform the concept of African librarianship in search of a path that addresses African imperatives. It will assess the need to separate the relic in pursuit of reconceptualization. Finally, the paper will examine the need to reinvent African librarianship to represent new African paradigms.

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE ARGUMENT

The need to examine the relevance of African librarianship is best summarized by the assertion of John-Okeke (2009, p. 32) that

librarianship in Africa has reached a crossroad. It either remains insensitive to the plight of the majority of Africans who are hungry, poor and generally underdeveloped, or reassess, re-orientate and proactively fight illiteracy which is the major factor militating against human development. Any information development plan or project to be undertaken must be based on Africa’s peculiar information culture that is basically oral.

This assertion alludes to librarianship in Africa being alien because it promotes information development that is not consistent with the oral tradition. Corroborating the arguments of John-Okeke, Amadi (1981) adds that libraries in Europe and the United States addressed the cultural and information needs of their respective communities. However,

in most parts of Africa this model is inappropriate, since African libraries are products of the Western model of librarianship, which, according to Newke's (1995) definition of libraries, should be repositories of knowledge or storehouses of written records of civilizations in various forms of the information package. The core collection of the library is that of printed books, and its purposes are information provision, recreational reading, and supporting research and education. Given these imperatives, the library in Africa cannot play the role of information provider and storehouse of African culture and tradition, which are based on oral tradition (Amadi, 1981).

The challenges of African librarianship are highlighted by John-Okeke (2009), who emphasizes that the problem of extremely low usage of libraries in Africa is due to the introduction and more importantly the continuation of an anachronistic colonial model of librarianship, the inappropriate training of library staff members, and the neglect of determining through research and analysis the specific needs of African users, and concomitantly the absence of sustained efforts to achieve an alternative information-provision network. The problems of African librarianship were further exposed by evidence of continued reliance upon the information and knowledge base imported from developed countries.

It is against this backdrop of assertions by African LIS scholars that this paper interrogates the issue of African librarianship being a relic, a fallacy, or an imperative. For the purposes of discussion here, *relic* is defined as a practice surviving from an earlier period. The history of libraries in Africa is anchored in colonialism's imperatives to serve its educational, recreational, and/or entertainment needs. Nyana (2009) argues that colonial libraries were developed in line with the Western model of libraries and librarianship. Amadi (1981) adds that colonial relics are manifested in patterns of information organization, education and information policies, and the curriculum and education systems, all of which emphasize print resources at the expense of oral traditions, which were viewed as unreliable and unscientific. There is little doubt that librarianship during the African colonial era was relevant for the needs of that specific period and the colonists and their agenda, but is it now a relic?

The second concept is that of *fallacy*, which is defined as a practice that fails to add value to the current context of the purpose for which it is intended. Librarianship in Africa is viewed on the one hand as consisting of "technical" disciplines that one should be wary of, and on the other as "pedagogical" disciplines that should be embraced. The two disciplines must converge by taking into account African realities.

The third concept is that of the *imperative*, which is interpreted as an obligation. At their formative stage, libraries in Africa were highly regarded and garnered resources similar to other essential services, such as hospitals and schools, partly because of the desire for education that gripped

the continent during the period when countries were attaining their independence, and it was hoped that libraries would significantly contribute toward achieving this cherished goal. At this stage, there was a belief that the information needs and information-seeking behavior of Africans were identical to those of library users in Europe and North America. As discussed by Mchombu (1991), it was thought that the concept and philosophy of librarianship as practiced in the Anglo-American tradition, with its organizational and bureaucratic structures, bibliographically biased foundation, and middle-class perspective, could without modification be established in Africa. Mchombu emphasizes that it was left to the African public to adapt themselves as best they could to this alien tradition because the library as institution was sacrosanct.

Given the above comments by African LIS scholars and the fact that all of the countries in Africa have attained independence, should not African librarianship develop new trends and practices that address current African imperatives? The authors of this paper are of the opinion that African libraries must contribute to the fight against illiteracy and its associated issues of poverty and disease; that libraries must reflect African values and methods of disseminating information; and, finally, that libraries must provide the content relevant to the majority of people. Libraries and librarians are the custodian of the African culture and therefore must focus on acquiring, storing, and disseminating African content as needed.

The Library as a Propaganda Machine for Enlightenment

While libraries with printed materials existed prior to colonialism on the African continent (for example, the desert libraries of Timbuktu in Mali), the oral tradition and the arts were generally the preferred mode for the transmission of knowledge and cultural values. Human memory, speech, and collective activity served as the “libraries” and centers of learning for most African communities. Along with the other major disruptions and changes that occurred during the colonial era, notions of what constituted worthy “knowledge” and “information,” and thus “libraries,” changed. As highlighted by Sturges and Neill (1998), in some cases the colonial powers brought with them their own libraries to exclusively serve their own communities; in other cases they used libraries as a tool to exert intellectual control over local populations. These collections reflected the colonial mindset of what was deemed important or appropriate for the local population to know. Indigenous knowledge and local systems of knowledge exchange were either not recognized as such or intentionally dismissed as primitive and unworthy of consideration.

These colonial libraries became propaganda tools in the campaign to enlighten the African world to mirror the European one. The notion of the library itself became inherently associated with colonial rule for most African peoples. The physical architecture of libraries, the underlying be-

liefs about information needs and information-seeking patterns, and the procedures, collections, and training of staff members were all developed to foster the image of European history and identity. The oral tradition was viewed as a “problem” to be remedied, and librarianship was regarded as strictly preserving and documenting the written word. This view of the oral tradition resulted in dismissing its social, literary, and historical relevance and thus severely limited the understanding of African knowledge and the elaborate communication system that had developed over thousands of years. Print-based vehicles for information were recognized by the colonizers as the only valid form of knowledge—and even then, it had to convey a certain worldview and be in a European language.

The strong influence of colonialist thinking and behaviors resulted in a paternalistic attitude that persisted even after most countries achieved independence during the late 1950s and early '60s. The one-way North-to-South flow of information was viewed as acceptable by librarians and information workers outside of Africa, and even by information professionals within the continent itself. However, it must be acknowledged that there were leading African scholars that challenged the status quo. Despite these dissenting voices, which unfortunately were in the minority, librarianship in Africa continued to develop according to the Anglo-American paradigm. But as the twenty-first century dawned, these dissenting voices grew in number and became louder. Information professionals from both Africa and Europe began demanding a more equitable flow of information and a reversal of the straight North-to-South direction in favor of both South to North and South to South.

AFRICAN LIS IMPERATIVES

African librarianship during colonial rule served a specific purpose; during the postcolonial era, it is critical that there be a transformation in purpose to meet new imperatives and contribute to the growth and development of fledgling independent states. That said, it is important to acknowledge that there are a number of challenges and priorities that will have to be circumvented in the quest for relevant, efficient library provision. These challenges, which *inter alia* include political instability, poverty, and illiteracy, have seriously negated the development of public libraries. It is not possible to separate political contexts from the growth of public libraries because political instability has the propensity to create a juggernaut of other pressing needs, the least of which being to provide reading material while millions perish from poverty, the ravages of medical inadequacies, and so on. Of these many challenges, access to information has the distinct capacity to empower the citizenry of the continent. The end product of such empowerment is a citizenry that will contribute to economic and other development.

As mentioned or implied thus far, there are a number of critical factors

that cannot flourish in the African-based Western library model. Three of these are the preservation of indigenous knowledge, the richness of the oral tradition, and the elimination of illiteracy. These factors, among many others, demand library and information services that are distinct and will address them in a meaningful way. African insights and realities must underpin any attempt to define a new system of librarianship that is relevant and effective within the African context. Here, the Western relic needs to be discarded and new imperatives established that incorporate indigenous knowledge and the oral tradition for its dissemination.

Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous or traditional knowledge is defined by Kamba (2009) as the knowledge held by people from a particular locality that has been passed on from generation to generation. The knowledge may be implicit and embodied in specific cultural practices. It is this indigenous knowledge, passed down through oral-tradition means or cultural practices, which has rarely been recorded and is at risk of being lost to future generations.

Despite the fact that Africa has been blessed with a strong oral tradition, it is on the decline given the systematic process by colonial governments to relegate the culture to a status of inferiority and of little value. This alleged process is corroborated by Kawooya (2006), who quotes Ernest Beyaraza as stating that colonialists systematically dismissed African cultures and indigenous knowledge. Exacerbating the demise of the oral culture is the low preservation rate of the rich cultural heritage of Africa. This lack of preservation must be considered against the backdrop of an aging population and the potential loss inherent by the death of elders, who are entrusted with transferring indigenous knowledge to the next generation. Raseroka (2008, p. 245) draws an analogy from the death of these elders: "In Africa, each time an old person dies, it's a library that burns down."

Expanding on this analogy, Etebu (2009) asserts that in almost all rural communities, town criers and their activities are significant. They use wooden or metal gongs or drums to call the inhabitants and deliver their messages orally. Another method of the oral provision of information is through community meetings; most villages and towns have squares where the people meet to discuss issues and make decisions. Through this means, the leaders provide information for the community's well-being and development. Because the African rural population is mostly illiterate, it is accustomed to obtaining information in this way. In an oral culture, information is retained in memories, and elders with strong memories play a vital role in transferring such information. As emphasized by Raseroka, the death of a knowledgeable elder will result in valuable information being lost.

The dominance of Africa's oral culture is rapidly waning, with very little effort going on to collect, preserve, and organize this rich culture.

Mchombu (1991) states that the one institution most qualified to do this is the library. However, African libraries have found it difficult to reach out to their own people and enrich their environment. The traditional public library has failed to effectively connect with its potential majority audience that possesses relevant oral information and knowledge; instead, the libraries have remained aloof and isolated and been content to serve its minority elite than to develop innovative services and form alliances that could provide services to both this elite and the majority with low levels of education.

This lack of resolve to collect, preserve, and organize the rich oral culture contributes to the information shortage and compounds the positioning of Africa as a peripheral contributor to global knowledge flows. This disproportionate representation of Africa's knowledge output in the international arena is evidence of the loss of its historical oral culture (Kawooya, 2006). The lack of access to indigenous knowledge and culture has contributed to Africa being called the "Dark Continent."

Lor (2000) reports on African libraries assuming a more diverse developmental role in such areas as collecting, preserving, and organizing indigenous knowledge; contributing to the development and appreciation of indigenous languages; and encouraging the growth of indigenous writing and the production and distribution of books, especially those with indigenous themes and written in indigenous languages. Assuming that libraries accept these responsibilities and are successful, there will be a tremendous growth of relevant information and knowledge to educate and entertain local communities, and to help these communities resolve their particular issues. According to Lor, these new roles and responsibilities will have to be developed in order to foster a new model of librarianship for Africa.

The Oral Tradition

Closely associated with indigenous knowledge is the oral tradition of Africa, which is culturally rich and varied. It is this tradition that has helped sustain African culture, even though LIS training has not taken this cultural capital seriously because of the prevalence of written culture. *Oral tradition* denotes the ultimate primacy of speech as the genesis of all human knowledge.

Ocholla (2000) makes the point that the oral tradition has not been fully exploited to render public libraries relevant and vibrant for the socially excluded or marginalized communities in Africa. Amadi (1981) and Ebiwolate (2010) add that librarians' repackaging of information into formats that are relevant to the African context can help to revitalize education and training. Such repackaging will boost the development of collecting culturally relevant materials. Oral sources of information are considered powerful tools that help to illuminate the dynamism of human

memory, which has enabled traditional societies in Africa to maintain their respective identities.

Again, the failure of African librarianship to develop these gifts of knowledge is a serious indictment. It has failed Africa and Africans by not capturing and disseminating their cultural heritage not only for sharing with the rest of the world but also for providing Africans with resources for their own growth and development. Many regard the African oral tradition as the primary source of information for researchers and scholars, which should be a boon to librarianship rather than a bane.

Illiteracy

It is against this backdrop of a rich oral tradition that one must consider illiteracy. John-Okeke (2009) makes a significant observation when stating that the issue of nonutilization of information is not about *availability* but rather *inaccessibility*. Obstacles to the accessibility to information in the developing countries include illiteracy and the lack of awareness of the need for information. Nurudeen Akorede Alokun, cited in John-Okeke (p. 26), makes the link between illiteracy and poverty by highlighting that the poorest people in the world are in countries that have large numbers of illiterate people, and that people with the most serious health problems are in countries that have large illiterate populations.

Given the significance of literacy for the development of countries, it is assumed that the eradication of illiteracy is a priority for governments. The high level of illiteracy in Africa and the fact that not much is known about its cultural heritage has greatly contributed to its designation as the Dark Continent. But more than tarnishing the image of the continent, illiteracy is a principal cause of the current state of poverty in Africa. As shown by Zapata (1994), there is a synergy between illiteracy and poverty and underdevelopment. This synergy is driven by the absence of materials necessary to eradicate illiteracy—a vicious circle indeed. The absence of materials to eradicate illiteracy spreads it wider, and further illiteracy breeds greater poverty.

Zapata posits that illiteracy is associated with a country's socioeconomic situation and development level. Access to information (including the most fundamental access, the ability to read) is imperative for the eradication of illiteracy, which in itself is essential for improving the socioeconomic condition of the country. This is supported by Kargbo (2004, n.p.), who points out that literacy is an indispensable means of “unlocking and protecting other human rights by providing the scaffolding that is required to secure good health, liberty, security, economic well-being and participation in social and political activity.” Restricted access, or in some instances a complete lack of access, to information and knowledge hinders the economies and development of African countries; such a situation creates a groundswell of inequalities bred by illiteracy. These inequalities

foster a process by which illiteracy is, at the same time, both cause and consequence of poverty: “They are excluded because they cannot read and can’t learn to read because they are excluded” (Rivera, 1990, p. 3). Corroborating the position of Zapata, both Aguolu (1997) and Calanag (2003) emphasize that information is widely recognized as a catalyst for both national and personal development, but that many people, especially in the developing countries, are still unaware of the need for information and fail to exploit it, even when information materials are available at no cost. They go on to point out that availability does not imply accessibility—the high levels of illiteracy disenfranchise the majority of the populace of Africa. The continent will continue on its trajectory of darkness unless it is reversed by improving peoples’ capacity to read.

Matare (1998) states that this is illustrated by the fact that 80 percent of Africans are still illiterate and have no access to the information necessary for the overall development of both individuals and the continent in general. This high illiteracy level is the major cause of Africa’s underdevelopment. Matare’s view is affirmed by Mchombu (1991), who says that Botswana’s overall percentage of users for types of library services does not exceed 5 percent, and that in Tanzania, with a population of more than 23 million, only about 2 percent of the population uses libraries. Although Mchombu’s assertion was made in 1991, more than twenty years later Bukenya (2008) claims that the provision of public libraries has declined to worrisome levels in some African countries, due mainly to the alien and elitist nature of the public library; the failure of the library to identify community needs and therefore offer relevant services; the inappropriateness of information materials; and the poorly trained or inadequate staff members.

It is axiomatic that literacy is a significant contributor to development; however, context is an even more important factor. Krolak (2005) is critical of the idolization of reading and writing as the ultimate goal of literacy. In developed countries, the path to improving the quality of life is the ability to read and write well. However, in the African context, this path is the capacity to improve farming, health, and so on. Krolak challenges the conventional wisdom on “literacy,” suggesting that alternative or new literacies like those concerning farming, health, and poverty alleviation be pursued with greater vigor. In recommending farming literacy, for example, Ebiwolate (2010) says that libraries must provide lessons and programs on farming seasons, pond management, agricultural marketing, market prices, and and so on. These lessons and programs keep the users up-to-date, save time and money, and more importantly help generate new ideas. These are examples of literacies that will aid in improving the lives of the poorest of the poor.

Clearly, African librarianship has not delivered on its “promise” to make information accessible to the majority of the citizens of the continent,

including the above literacies proposed by Krolak. Libraries' perpetuation of the Western model has alienated the populace, confirming that African librarianship is a fallacy and relic that needs to be changed.

LIBRARY SERVICES FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

As much as there is severe criticism by leading African LIS scholars of the failure of the Eurocentric African librarianship to deliver relevant and accessible information to the majority of the populace of Africa, there are exemplars of excellence that straddle the border between the Eurocentric purpose of public libraries and African needs. Librarians initiating and developing these exemplars make the conscious decision to straddle both of these worlds in order to fast-track Africa toward the global information age, promoting information as the critical resource for the development of nations. It is further acknowledged that the public library is the foundation for fostering knowledge; it can be an innovative institution with resources to inform the citizenry, and as a result becomes central to the progress of any society. However, as articulated by Abolaji (2009), 80 percent of the African population lives in rural areas, and more than 70 percent of these are illiterate. Therefore, for libraries to be effective, it is crucial that they cater to rural dwellers. Kamba (2009, n.p.) quotes Julius Nyerere as stating that "while other countries in the world aim to reach the moon, we must aim for the time being at any rate to reach the villages by providing them with necessary information." It is this information, presented in an appropriate and effective manner, that could eliminate ignorance and provide guidance on how to achieve economic, educational, social, political, and cultural objectives toward the development of the entire community. And as posited by Oyeronke (2012), this appropriate and effective manner is centered around library services that are well structured and planned and that include the packaging and repackaging of information. The repackaging of information would include, *inter alia*, translating material into indigenous languages, converting printed information into an audio-visual format, and preserving oral content and making it available to the people of the continent.

Abolaji (2009) shares the results of a pilot project that emulated the above drivers and examined the role of the library in rural areas. The project showed that the information needs of rural dwellers are many and diverse, including interest in improving knowledge about farming (as proposed by Krolak above), cultural matters, public affairs, and entertainment; it also indicated that the library can assist even rural dwellers within a country in which the majority of the population is illiterate to realize their aspirations quickly. Moreover, the project showed that illiterate individuals in rural areas can also make effective use of a sophisticated institution like the library when it is tailored to provide their specific information

needs. For example, the project gave the people an opportunity to express their information needs, and it was eventually found that most were willing to utilize such information that they requested more productively than any other type of information given to them.

Kitengesa Community Library: An Exemplar of African Rural Library Services
Pursuing the principle espoused by Oyeronke (2012) that the value of information lies solely in its ability to affect a behavior, decision, or outcome, Wishart (2012, n.p.) provides an exemplar of what he considers an excellent and “relevant African library”—Kitengesa Community Library in Uganda, which provides a service that satisfies the needs of the community. After a needs analysis was undertaken, the library was modeled around providing information in an accessible and transferable format. Initially, the library was established as an information-service provider to the community, serving residents of the community and teachers and students, offering the latter a safe space in which to read and study after school hours (Dent and Yannotta, 2005). In time other members of the community began taking advantage of the library’s resources, which provides a meeting space for small business cooperatives and adult literacy classes. Local women frequent the library to meet with microcredit groups and discuss health issues, as well as to exchange best practices on safe organic farming and new agricultural techniques. The Kitengesa Community Library, along with three others, initiated a project to sponsor reading camps for teenagers to read and discuss healthcare books on HIV/AIDS (see the below list).

There are a number of other activities the Kitengesa Community Library (2013) provides that move beyond its main goal of promoting reading and writing literacies. These activities include:

- Children’s days: Since 2005, the librarians have been inviting classes from neighboring primary schools to spend a Saturday morning reading, listening to stories, drawing, painting, writing, and playing games. In addition, children from the school regularly visit the library for scheduled classes to read and to have stories read to them.
- Deaf children: There is a school for the deaf in Kitengesa, but although the children have always come to the library’s public functions, they have not used it. In June 2012 the library began providing English lessons and Ugandan sign language. It now has a flourishing sign language club, and there are individuals involved that know sign language well enough to serve as interpreters as required.
- Games night: Everyone is invited to the library on Saturday evenings to participate in its indoor games. Further, participants have access to a music library and CD player and speakers, which are used to play local Kiganda music during these sessions.

- Family literacy project: In 2009 the library developed its family literacy project, which serves the information needs of illiterate members. It provides essential information in a meaningful way, ensuring that it can be understood.
- Health reading camp: Librarians, students, teachers, and nurses read healthcare books about HIV/AIDS and other matters, then discuss what was read. Both before and after a book is read, the library conducts simple pre- and posttesting about the subject matter.

The Kitengesa Community Library is a vibrant model of a community center that serves the diverse needs of its members. Wishart (2012) quotes Valeda Dent, who says that this “relevant African library” has become a model for similar projects being established in other rural communities.

THE ARGUMENT

Mchombu (1991) makes the bold statement that we must face the fact that unless the real problems facing African librarianship are accurately identified, there is the danger that whatever prescription is suggested, it will cure only the symptoms instead of the disease. It is argued that appropriate solutions can be found if there are critical reexaminations of the current conventional concepts and assumptions and if there is enough creativity involved so as not to limit the search for solutions in inherited models of traditional librarianship leading to the same unworkable methods. Mchombu argues that having identified the disease, even the symptoms are not yet cured. This is a clear demonstration of the betrayal of African librarianship in adapting to African social, economic, and cultural realities.

As indicated above, African librarianship has found it very difficult to draw inspiration from its own people and in turn enrich its own environment. Instead, it has remained aloof and isolated and been content to serve the minority elite rather than develop innovative services and form alliances, which would have provided valuable services for both the minority and the illiterate majority.

There are three principles that serve as the foundation of librarianship: collection, organization, and the dissemination of information. One of the most significant elements underscoring these principles is *context*. The context will, in many instances, determine the method of development and uniqueness of the service to address relevant imperatives. Further, it is the context that will provide the mission and vision of a service that can guide Africa out of its cultural crisis caused by decades of colonialism. The overall expectations of libraries and librarians within a new African paradigm are twofold: first, providing access to information in a format that is relevant and effective in combating ignorance, poverty, and disease; and second, collecting, organizing, preserving, and disseminating African indigenous knowledge and sharing it via global information infrastructures.

This revised mission and vision will have a set of core values demanding that librarians be committed to the development of libraries in order to satisfy the information needs of society. Mchombu (1991) views the anatomy of poverty as the key determinant of the objectives and philosophy of librarianship in Africa. He claims that the library profession does not operate in a vacuum, hence public libraries in Africa should play a vital role in socioeconomic development; it is essential that they provide basic needs and promote self-actualization. Therefore, information management in Africa should be geared toward user-centric information services.

Does African librarianship imply a platform or conduit for the exchange of information among countries through regional and continental networks? Since African countries have similar cultural backgrounds and national development challenges, the knowledge and information products of one country are likely to be closely matched by the information needs of other countries. However, the lack of exchange of information among countries has been identified as a major shortcoming in African librarianship: it has failed to promote the free exchange of information among African countries. Such a failure contributes to the interpretation that African librarianship's existence continues to mimic colonial imperatives.

The road ahead for African librarianship, therefore, has already been signposted. It involves reforming African librarianship into "development librarianship" that will be capable of making a major contribution toward the development of Africa. But perhaps of equal significance is for African librarianship to develop its own identity rather than mimicking Western librarianship. The substance and methods of African librarianship not only will be a mix of both indigenous and modern knowledge resources responding to Africa's information needs but also will be based on the reality of African culture.

Librarianship in Africa (note the transposition of words to develop a new concept, *librarianship in Africa*) is at a crossroads now and has to seriously consider its options of transition with meaning. Such librarianship must make the shift from being insensitive to the plight of the majority of Africans, who are hungry, poor, and generally underdeveloped, to reassessing, reorientating, and proactively combating illiteracy (and not simply by teaching how to read and write), including seeking alternative literacies relevant to the African context. Any information-development plan or project to be implemented must be based on Africa's particular information culture, which is essentially oral. However, Africa must also embrace technology, which is the new tool for modern society. There should be a viable balance between the universal information culture and the local information culture. The new African paradigm will be less rigid than a strictly book-oriented information service and will be more deeply rooted in indigenous information systems, serving the actual information needs of both literates and illiterates.

CONCLUSION

Librarianship in Africa must recognize, in total, the dynamics and complexities of African society; it must serve the information needs of a largely illiterate society, and the ways and means by which this information is provided should maximize its relevance to the daily lives of people. At the same time, this librarianship must foster the dissemination of modern information and demand from its new breed of librarians a revised, relevant library service based on African socioeconomic and political realities. Further, this needs to be developed in a manner that ensures that libraries and their collections are not serving an elitist minority only, but also the majority of the populace.

African librarianship up to the present has been characterized by mimicking Western library practices, which has exacerbated the disconnect between practice and the actual needs of the continent; it has disassociated itself with the principle of *empowerment*. However, *librarianship in Africa* must be governed by the principle of the *empowerment of the citizens of the continent*. Essential to this drive for empowerment is *context*, which must be relevant to the Africa continent. Africa can make use of such a sophisticated institution as the library if it is restructured to deliver the populace's information needs; the library must be relevant to the poorest of the poor and provide support to better their lives.

There is sufficient evidence to show that during the colonial era, African librarianship served a specific purpose, and it flourished within that confine. During the new challenges of the postindependence period, the library remained a colonial-era relic. Additionally, the fallacy associated with the relic devalued librarianship into a meaningless entity; it lost all purpose of its role and responsibilities in contributing to the social-inclusion philosophy associated with libraries. Librarianship's failure to collect, organize, and disseminate the wealth of indigenous knowledge and address the continent's high levels of illiteracy is indicative of a practice that lost its terms of reference. African librarianship should be no more; it cannot be African librarianship if it is devoid of the Africanism that should be its foundation.

Librarianship devoid of the negative connotation associated with African librarianship needs to be reborn. The African renaissance began with discarding institutions of indoctrination, and, therefore, it is time for ushering in new imperatives that will drive a new philosophy for librarianship in Africa in the twenty-first century.

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