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The Challenge of Multiple Identities. Multiethnicity in Genealogy, Local History and Regional Memory—Challenges and Opportunities for Libraries and Other Memory Institutions

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Multiethnicity in Makerere University Library services: the effect and implication to the country

Monica Naluwoza

Archivist/ Academic Librarian

Africana Section/ Special Collections, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda

monicalatina2010@gmail.com

Racheal Nabbosa

Academic Librarian

Africana Section/ Special Collections, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda

nabbora2000@gmail.com



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Abstract:

The study provides an investigation into the diversification of multiethnicity at Makerere University. A project proposal about the genealogy and local history collections at Makerere University Library was handled and two case studies including Buganda kingdom as a cultural institution and Uganda martyrs shrine Namugongo as a religious institution in Uganda were visited. The purpose of the research therefore, was to investigate and evaluate Makerere University Library services geared towards developing multiethnicity in Uganda. This was done in order to overcome cross-border barriers and challenges in multiple identities of genealogy, local history and regional memory. Makerere University Library being the oldest library in the country serves a diverse number of users and offers a various collections to its populace. This was achieved by exploring the competencies and the services of different cultural communities. To achieve this goal, the study focused on: a) analyzing stakeholders' attitudes towards multiethnicity in view to establish cultural competences; and b) understanding multiethnicity within the African context and how that will shape the delivery of LIS services in future.

Keywords: Multiethnicity, Genealogy, Local History and Regional Memory.

1.0 Introduction

Ethnicity as defined by J. Yinger, (1976) is a segment of a bigger society where members have a common origin and share culture and therefore carry out shared activities. These people are said to have ethnic attachments. According to J. M. Yinger, (1985) “Ethnic attachments are variously seen as ways to preserve a precious cultural heritage; to soften class lines; to protect or to win economic and political advantages for disadvantaged groups; to furnish a more intimate and flavourful connection with large, impersonal societies; and to retard the shift of overwhelming power to the state” (Yinger, 1985).

Multiethnicity therefore refers to a society that has people from different ethnic backgrounds such as origin, culture, politics and religion. According to research carried out by Jim...nez (2004) respondents believed multiple identities provided freedom to fit in different ethnic groups which they saw as a social advantage as opposed to identifying with only one background.

“Cultural Diversity” or “Multiethnicity” refers to the harmonious co-existence and interaction of different cultures, where “culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature; lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs”. Cultural diversity or multiculturalism is the foundation of our collective strength in our local communities and in our global society (IFLA/UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto, 2012)

IFLA/UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto urges that cultural diversity is the common heritage of humankind and should be cherished and preserved for the benefit of all. Multiethnicity is a source for the exchange, innovation, creativity, and peaceful coexistence among people where respect for the diversity of cultures, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation, in a climate of mutual trust and understanding are among the best guarantees of international peace and security. For that matter, libraries of all types should reflect, support and promote cultural and linguistic diversity at the international, national, and local levels, and thus work for cross-cultural dialogue and active citizenship. Therefore multiethnicity is a positive factor in some communities.

As libraries serve diverse interests and communities, they function as learning, cultural, and information centres. In addressing cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity, library services are driven by their commitment to the principles of fundamental freedoms and equity of access to information and knowledge for all, in the respect of cultural identity and values.

Therefore, this research investigated the provision of the various library information services provided by Makerere University library to the different multiethnic communities in the country.

1.1 Background

Makerere University was founded in 1922 and is the oldest University in Eastern Africa. Through an Act of Uganda’s legislature, Makerere University Library (MakLib) became the first Legal Deposit Unit in Uganda in 1958. In 1972, MakLib further became a National Reference Library in addition to its primary role of serving Makerere University. MakLib has

a vast number of collections including monographs, archives, electronic journals, electronic books, newspapers, etc

One of the core values of MakLib is “customer responsiveness or users-centered institutional operations”. Therefore, this research proposal embarked on assessing the Maklib multiethnicity services to the community and the country at large.

The major objective was to investigate and evaluate Makerere University Library services geared towards developing multiethnicity in Uganda. The specific objectives were;

- a) To assess Maklib’s multiethnicity services to the community.
- b) To assess users’ perceptions about multiethnicity in Makerere University.
- c) To highlight the future of multiethnicity library services to the community.

2.0 Literature Review

Countries in the modern world have struggled with the idea of belonging as one wondered whether European belonging would be appropriate in a multiethnic Europe (Amin, 2004). The idea of ethnic belonging was slowly fading as Europe had become a home to people from different countries due to Diaspora connections, it was then noted that an imaginary European belonging that acknowledges cultural difference without basing on religion or ethnicity was needed (Amin, 2004). This meant that Europe had to embrace multiethnicity.

Multiethnicity is increasingly embraced in certain countries like the USA. According to Dingemans & Datel (1995) businesses owned by minority diffused into the commercial districts and minorities elected into offices where they were previously for the dominant races. Further more Negrón (2014) states that there is a steady increase of ethnic diversity in the USA. Ethnic diversity helps promote cross ethnic networks which strengthens groups through various resources such as economic transactions and intermarriages while breaking ethnic boundaries (Negrón, 2014). Therefore multiethnicity is seen as an advantage in modern societies where people come from different backgrounds.

According to Pier (2015) Uganda is a multiethnic country that has regions with different political, religious and cultural orientations and the political leaders also have to transcend through the political ideologies of the different regions. This is seen as an example successful pluralistic society. Further still Savolainen (2008) states that Uganda is a multiethnic state and therefore as other countries on the African continent, actions such as politics are greatly influenced by ethnicity. This means that Ugandans have learnt to work with people from multiple ethnic backgrounds.

According to a scientific study, Uganda is the most ethnically mixed country on the planet (Blake, 2015). Uganda is home to more than 40 different indigenous ethnic groups, including the Baganda, Iteso, Basoga and Banyankore - all of which have their own languages, cultures and customs. Similarly Makerere University has continually attracted many cultures within Uganda and across borders and the continent. Makerere University is equally an ethnically diverse campus. Makerere University Library being a spring- board for academic excellence meets the challenges of serving this diverse populace.

The multi-ethnic collections at Makerere University Library are still diversifying and have grown in number due to the nature of the university; one of them being the oldest and biggest

university in Uganda if not East Africa. In order to meet the demands of this diverse community, Makerere University library has through the Legal Deposit Act (1985) collected reading materials through direct deposits from authors, publishers, donations from individuals and local and international organisations.

The need to address multiethnicity in the library is well represented in the literature, for example, Love and Edwards (2008) highlight the need for library outreach to non-traditional, non-classroom-based groups to cater for the incoming international students who are less familiar with the systems. To achieve that need, Love and Edwards (2008: 22) observed that the University of Illinois at Urbana -Champaign Library created several positions including an Outreach Librarian for multicultural services which generated a number of partnerships between the library and campus student services.

3.0 Maklib's Multiethnic services

The multiethnic collections housed at Makerere University Library include; music collection, archives (audiovisual and paper), dissertations and thesis, international bodies, government publications, monographs, and electronic resources. Makula- the Makerere University Library's online catalogue exhibits the different languages in which the multi-collections appear. Access is given to all communities despite the primary library users being students and staff of Makerere University. The Library webpage is also another source of information to all communities. Information literacy programs have been availed to users and digital and multimedia resources have also been established at Makerere University Library.

Maklib has got information resources on Buganda Kingdom, Church missionary society, Makerere University, Uganda Protectorate, Individuals such as Sir Albert Cook, Ham Mukasa, Apollo Kagwa, etc. Therefore, Maklib has a great role it plays in providing the services since it houses documents on Buganda, and documents on the Uganda Martrys Namugongo. The project proposal therefore will bridge the gap by linking Buganda government collections, Makerere University and those of Uganda Martrys Namugongo. This will eventually fill the missing gaps and guide in better service provision as well as promoting the genealogy and local history collections in Uganda.

4.0 Methodology

The study used a qualitative method with two case studies; Buganda Kingdom and Uganda Martyrs Shrine Namugongo.

4.1 Case Study: Buganda Kingdom

It was revealed that the Buganda Kingdom was aware about the Makerere genealogy and local history collections present since Makerere has been a major institution serving the country for a long time. Their perception about the collections was that history of Uganda starts with Buganda, therefore, Buganda had a much organised system which the foreigners found easy to work with and that's why everything started with Buganda Kingdom.

One of the kingdom official feels that majority of the people in various communities do not know if the collections exist. He says that Makerere University is viewed as a place for higher qualifications. Therefore in his view, Makerere has not reached out to the communities to make people aware of these collections. He further suggests that;

- Makerere should set up a place in the library where nonstudents could sit and read
- Have extensions into the various communities in the country e.g. spread out to other regions
- The government should make the Internet affordable to people, so that everyone can be able to access.

The genealogical and local history collections the Kingdom houses are;

- Genealogy of the kings
- Individuals like Ham Mukasa
- Portraits of kings and Buganda chiefs
- Clan genealogy
- Letters of kings of Buganda to the Queen of England.

It was noted that the Buganda kingdom does not have records on Uganda Martyrs because they were just mere servants in the kingdom.

The collections at Buganda kingdom library have mainly been promoted to the public through descendants of individuals for example, Ham Mukasa, Semei Kakungulu, etc

In regard to preservation of the collections, it was discovered that there's a plan to embark on digitising the collections for posterity.

Challenges

- There's always hostile reception when a family is approached for information on genealogy.
- Funding to digitize the worn out collections.
- Gathering information from clans is tedious.

It was suggested that Makerere University being a major institution in the country should liaise with the communities to promote and provide access to the genealogy and local history collections available.

4.2 Case Study: Uganda Martyrs Shrine Namugongo.

It was found out that the Uganda Martyrs Shrine Namugongo has three religious beliefs whose martyrs were killed, the Catholics, Protestants and Moslems. The Catholics and Protestants celebrate the Uganda Martyrs day on 3rd, June of every year. However, Moslems are still undecided on whether they should celebrate Uganda Martyrs day or not and have no records although they have martyrs too and established a mosque there.

4.2.1 Namugongo Catholic shrine

The Parish/ shrine was started in 1935 and named after St. Charles Lwanga who was killed at that place. Every Catholic Church has a relic of the saint that is named after it therefore this church houses a piece of a backbone of St. Charles Lwanga. Other relics are sent to churches around the world that are named after him.

It was observed that the archive is under renovation since 2015 therefore most of the archives are kept away for some time and people are referred to Rubaga Cathedral for archives which is the mother catholic church in Uganda.

There is awareness that there are some books that can only be found at Makerere University Library concerning the local history collections such as the Uganda Martyrs and the bishops. However, one of the challenges is access to the collection. The attendant to the archive reported that he was denied access the last time he tried as he was not a university student or staff and therefore claims Makerere has not reached out to the community as few people are even aware of how they can access that information.

Further still, according to him, Maklib and Catholic shrine don't have similar information as Maklib has special collections of eye witnesses for example Sir Apolo Kagwa and Mitti

The local history collections kept at the catholic shrine include:

- The church building: It has 22 pillars representing the 22 catholic martyrs, poles attaching the pillars representing universality of the Catholic Church.
- Dairies of missionaries
- Monuments since the 1960s
- Records of celebration of 3rd June Uganda Martyrs day
- History of the Uganda Martyrs
- Items such as chairs and shoes of the missionaries

He further reports that preservation is on a standstill although there are plans to protect these items like putting them in glasses, treatment of the chairs, and avoiding wear and tear.

Challenges

- There is lack of finances to promote and preserve these items. The Ministry of Tourism and Trade has not invested money in the shrine as its more of a pilgrim site not a tourist site hence no income generation.
- Security of the items is still a challenge as families of the martyrs have attachments and may want to take them.
- There have been opportunities to travel to other places like Nairobi and Mombasa for capacity building and to learn more about how they handle their collections and preservation techniques, however, lack of the resources to implement what has been learnt.

He suggested that as staff of the shrine and the community, they should have membership and have access to the local history collections at the University.

4.2.2 Namugongo Anglican Shrine

In 2015, a museum was constructed at the Anglican shrine that houses the genealogy and local history of the Christian faith in Uganda.

There is awareness that Maklib has information on local history such as Bishop Stuart and Nsibirwa since Makerere University was a church founded institute.

However according to the attendants at the museum, they think Makerere University has not done much in reaching out to the community as most people including University students are ignorant about local history such as the Uganda Martyrs.

Local history and genealogy collections kept at the museum include:

- Paper archives about the bishops of East Africa and Uganda
- Portraits of Bishops since the inception of Christianity in Uganda
- Portraits of five kings of Buganda since the inception of Christianity in Uganda including Muteesa1, Mwanga, Daudi Chwa, Muteesa2 and the current Muteebi.
- Portraits of the nine Ugandan presidents since independence of Uganda including Muteesa, Obote,Amin, Binaisa, Lule, Okello, OboteII, Muwanga and Museveni
- Sculptures showing the torture and killing of the Uganda Martyrs
- Monuments of bishops

There hasn't been an opportunity to move out and publicize the museum however, media houses make documentaries about it on television and radio but it's given a short time and usually in their interests. Pilgrims also publicize the museum through mouth to mouth marketing. Then also relatives of the martyrs visit the museum in search for genealogy and history of the martyrs. Further more churches from around the world that were named after the martyrs visit to access information on the genealogy and history of the saints.

Preservation techniques

- Portraits are usually treated
- Strict security guidelines: no touching, no damaging, replacements in case of damage
- Security personnel to watch over the materials
- Restricted numbers of people entering at a time

Challenges

- Relatives and friends of the martyrs ask for money to give more information about the genealogy and history of the saints
- Finances to preserve and protect the items are still low
- Staffing levels are low
- Public access to the museum is still low as most people come around during the Martyrs day celebrations.
- The museum personnel have moved around places like game parks, other churches, Bahai temple to learn how they handle their collections in those places. However opportunities to move to other countries to look at their collections have not been pursued.

It was reported that Maklib should avail information on genealogy and local history such as Bishop Cryil Edgar Stuart, Lumumba etc. to the students and public so as to cause awareness of the Ugandan local history.

5.0 Conclusion

Collecting and providing awareness of the genealogy and local history collections is very crucial in promoting multiethnicity in a country. It blends the dynamics of the past and present with available information to the various communities. Therefore, this study projected a proposal of linking up the major three institutions, Makerere University as an academic institution, Buganda government as a cultural institution and Uganda Martyrs Namugongo as a religious institution in the country with the aim of bridging the gaps and promoting genealogy and local history in the country.

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