
Collection development and cultural context: The accommodation of professional to cultural values among Senegalese Academic Librarians

Bernard Dione

École de Bibliothécaires, Archivistes et Documentalistes (EBAD)

Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar

Dakar, Sénégal.

E-mail address: Bernard.dione@ucad.edu.sn



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Abstract:

Access to information for all, confidentiality, and protection of reader's privacy as well as intellectual freedom are LIS core professional values. These values also apply to collections by ensuring their development and their classification are as neutral as possible. Values can be defined as conceptions of the desirable that guide the way social actors select actions, evaluate people and events, and explain their actions and evaluations. And even if human beings share the same values, value systems are different across cultural environments. The value system is the particular way values are prioritized by a social group. In this study, we describe and explore the interactive co-existence and adaptation of professional values within the cultural value system of Senegalese academic librarians. The findings highlight the fact that, on the cultural level, Senegalese academic librarians essentially emphasize, in the value system, the interests of the social group they belong to, the respect of social order and adoption of normative behaviour in order to facilitate their relationships with the other group members. The values favour a strong integration of the individual into a group but do not encourage an action and thought autonomy which may destroy social harmony. On the professional level, they regard access to information, preservation and conservation of heritage and the denial of all sorts of discriminations as essential professional values. As professional values conflict with cultural norms, Senegalese academic librarians often seek a compromise, a balanced position to make decisions which do not basically question their cultural values. When a compromise is impossible, the final decision is made in favour of cultural values. This attitude furthered self-censorship in selecting materials for library collections. Senegalese academic librarians tend to avoid books that might not reflect the beliefs or ideas of their community.

Keywords: Professional values, Cultural values, Academic librarians, Collection development, Self-censorship, Senegal.

A profession, says Shera (1970), is a service performed for the benefit of humanity and with a high sense of purpose and dedication. As a profession, Librarians are dedicated to ensure to their communities' free access to information and ideas. To achieve this dedication, they must acquire strong professional skills and competencies, but they need also to integrate a set of core values that serve as foundations of their profession. Intellectual freedom is one of those LIS core professional values.

Access to relevant and up-to-date information is crucial to the economic and social well-being of nations (Rosenberg, 2002). The right to access political, social, scientific and economic information and cultural expressions contribute to an enlightened citizenship. Access to the widest range of ideas and information enables citizens to participate in public affairs and make informed choices.

In Africa, the issue of free access to information is more and more recognized as an important topic. The importance of that issue is emphasized by the African Platform on Access to Information (APAI) Declaration adopted on 19 September 2011, which defines free access to information as follow:

[...] the right of all natural and legal persons, which consists of the right to seek, access and receive information from public bodies and private bodies performing a public function and the duty of the state to provide such information;

[...] an integral part of the fundamental human right of freedom of expression, essential for the recognition and achievement of every person's civil, political and socio-economic rights, and as a mechanism to promote democratic accountability, good governance;

[...] instrumental to fostering access to education and health care, gender equality, children's rights, a clean environment, sustainable development and the fight against corruption;

In academic settings, free access to a diverse range of information is vital for critical thinking, freedom of inquiry, and innovation. Academic Librarians play a key role in this process by selecting, acquiring and disseminating books, journals and other materials essential for research and teaching. Unbiased materials selection is essential for providing the academic community with information on all topics and from all points of view so that they can get informed opinions about both local and global issues. So, it is important to ensure that academic librarians are committed to Intellectual freedom.

Commitment to Intellectual freedom is a core value for the library and information professions (IFLA/FAIFE, 2007). As stressed by Dresang (2006), "In the position of collecting, preserving, and providing access to information and ideas, the library profession upholds intellectual freedom as one of its key ethical principles" (p.170). According to Dresang (2006):

"Intellectual freedom as a concept in librarianship means freedom to think or believe what one will, freedom to express one's thoughts and beliefs in unrestricted manners and means, and freedom to access information and ideas regardless of the content or viewpoints of the author(s) or the age, background, or beliefs of the receiver".

Intellectual freedom means the refusal of all kind of censorship. Nevertheless, not only did censorship occur right from the beginning of the history of libraries, but some of the leading

people in promoting censorship were librarians and publishers. As Moellendick, (2009) mentions, “For a period of time, censorship was a key responsibility of the librarian, along with trying to persuade the public that reading was not frivolous or harmful”.

In Africa, censorship and self-censorship practices are well documented in Journalism and media (Skjerdal, 2008). Skjerdal (2008) mentions that contrary to public perception, official censorship is not very widespread in Africa; but self-censorship is a very common practice all across Africa. Usually, the main reasons that lead to self-censorship are related to external pressure: Skjerdal (2008) noticed that journalists can “alter media content in order to avoid personal reprimands and stay clear of accusations of inciting social or political tensions, political pressure, etc.”

In the library and information field, there are not a lot of studies on censorship and self-censorship practices in Africa. It is clear that librarians, unlike journalists, are less exposed to external pressure, excepted in the case of banned books. But as Intellectual freedom is a core value for library and information science professionals, it is important to understand the reasons that can determine librarians to adopt self-censorship attitudes because they have the responsibility to build library collections that meet the information needs of their communities.

Educating African librarians to hold and defend Intellectual freedom as a professional core value is the best way to avoid censorship and self-censorship in libraries in Africa. To better understand this point of view, it is necessary to define the concept of “value” and to specify and the impact of values on the ethical determination of human actions.

Rokeach (1973) defines a value as being:

an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence. A *value system* is an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states of existence along a continuum or relative importance (p.5)

Values are “enduring” belief means that they are not permanent and can be held for a limited period of time. Values are shared by members of a group; but may or may not be based on faith (Gorman, 2008). Nevertheless, they express what seems useful to people in their lives (Schwartz, 2006). More specifically, groups and individuals, in order to cope with reality in social contexts, transform the necessities inherent in human existence and express them in the language of specific values about which they can then communicate. As mentioned by Schwartz (1994):

Specifically, values represent, in the form of conscious goals, responses to the three universal requirements with which all individuals and societies must cope: needs of individuals as biological organisms, requisites of coordinated social interaction, and requirements for the smooth functioning and survival of groups (p.21).

Thus, Schwartz (1994) defines values as being trans situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity. This means that values serve the interests of some social entity. They can motivate action, giving it direction and emotional intensity and functioning as standards for judging and justifying that action. In a nutshell, the main characteristics of values can be summarized as follow:

- (1) Values are beliefs linked inseparably with affects; i.e. when someone's values are respected, she or he feels comfortable, but if challenged, she or he is confused, unhappy;
- (2) They are related to desirable objectives which motivate people to act; i.e. what people believe is good or bad, what they think should and should not be done, what they hold to be desirable or undesirable is expressed by their basic values.
- (3) They transcend actions and specific situations;
- (4) They serve as criteria for assessing actions, as well as policies, people or events;
- (5) Values are ordered by importance relative to other values to form a system of value priorities;
- (6) The relative importance of multiple values guides actions (Schwartz, 1994).

As beliefs, values have three components: (1) a cognitive component: the person who adopts a value knows the way to behave or to choose the right action; (2) an emotional component: the person feels some emotion for or against an action, approves or disapproves it based on the value she or he prioritizes; (3) a behavioural component: the adopted value shows itself in attitudes and in actions; it motivates actions (Wach and Hammer, 2003; Rokeach, 1973).

Applied to collection development activities, it means that as a librarian, the values I hold can impact my neutrality when selecting materials. On the cognitive side, I can refer to my values to determine what book should be integrated into the library collection. But on the emotional side, I will approve or disapprove a particular content because it confirms or challenges my basic values. And finally, all this will lead me to alter my behaviour in such a way that I will or won't acquire a particular document. So basic values held by librarians can impact their attitudes in acquiring or self-censuring document, information or contents.

Thus, it is important to evaluate the support of the library community worldwide to intellectual freedom. Are Library professional values universally adopted in all countries?

Library literature shows that Intellectual freedom is a core value in American and European Librarianship. But do other Library communities outside Europe and the USA share this commitment?

It is not a trivial issue. Dole, Hurych & Koehler (2000), surveying how Librarians around the world do prioritize their values, note that:

There is a differentiation of values among countries. The divide appears to be between developed and developing countries. We believe the need to respond to a very different set of economic and social conditions are responsible for these observations (Dole, Hurych & Koehler, 2000, p.296).

This difference in value systems among library communities from various contexts is also mentioned by Koehler et al. (2000):

In Africa, service was most often identified as the first value, however information literacy and intellectual freedom were also frequently so identified. However, while service and information literacy were the two most often "rated" values by African librarians, equity of access was third of the "rated" values (p.501)

But from a professional point of view, values serve as arguments and basis of communication with the other people and the other professional groups. Thus, professional values constitute a central element of the identity of a profession. They help us state what we, as a profession, believe in, and what the essential basis of all our work is (Gorman, 2008, p.18).

To understand how value systems can vary among a group which holds the same values, it is necessary to consider two other concepts: the structure of values and notion of value system.

The concept of value system refers to the way individuals or groups rank or prioritize their values into a hierarchy. In fact, at the individual level as well as for social groups, the values are classified in ascending order. It is the relative importance granted to multiple values that guides the action and the behaviour of the individuals and the groups. Thus, even if as information professionals we hold the same values, our value systems can be different depending on the way we prioritize them.

The value system is a coherent structure (Schwartz, 1994). The structure of values refers to the dynamic relationship between them. The value structure expresses the conflicts and compatibilities likely to arise when individuals or groups pursue an action that can enhance or obstruct different types of values. For example, free access to all types of information and confidentiality can conflict with social responsibility. Our post-September 11 era, characterized by terrorists' attacks all over the world, can be very illustrative of this potential conflict between our values. For example, as a librarian, if I clearly identify a reader using library materials in order to perpetrate crimes, which one of these values should I refer to? Should I call security services in conformity to social responsibility or should I respect confidentiality or free access to information? This kind of value conflicts occurs frequently in our cultural environment. For example, some books like Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* are banned because they are considered as disrespectful and slanderous towards Islamic belief. As a librarian and a Muslim and a citizen, incompatibilities between social and professional values affect my decision to acquire this book or not. The value conflicts are consubstantial to the structure of values. They are inevitable and they can rise in all contexts. Cultural values can conflict with professional values. But even professional values can show some kind of incompatibility. For example, the professional value "preservation and conservation of human cultural heritage" can conflict with free access because materials are damaged by users.

In social contexts, professional values must be accommodated to social values. Because values are acquired both through socialization to dominant group values and the unique learning experience of individuals (Schwartz, 1994).

Socialization can "be defined as the comprehensive and consistent induction of an individual into the objective world of a society or a sector of it" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p.150). The socialization process includes two levels: primary socialisation and secondary socialization.

Primary socialization is the first socialization an individual undergoes in childhood, through which he becomes a member of society (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). By internalizing and participating in the activities of a group, the individual acquires the distinctive values which define the identity of this group. These shared values are interiorized and lived under the shape of aspiration, ideals to be achieved, faiths, ideologies, criteria of judgment and evaluation of people and actions. They are expressed in the moral speech of the group and

aim to help reduce possible conflicts between individual interests and those of the group. It is evident that primary socialization is the most important one for an individual.

Moreover, values that are institutionalized during the primary socialization are protected by establishment of sanctions. Berger & Luckmann (1991) writes that:

“The new generation posits a problem of compliance, and its socialization into the institutional order requires the establishment of sanctions. The institutions must and do claim authority over the individual, independently of the subjective meanings he may attach to any particular situation. The priority of the institutional definitions of situations must be consistently maintained over individual temptations at redefinition”. (p.80).

Secondary socialization is any subsequent process that inducts an already socialized individual into new sectors of the objective world of his or her society (profession, associations, work places, etc.). The training period is a process of secondary socialization. During the phase of training, young professionals acquire skills, knowledge and all capabilities that make them members of a profession. They are educated to behaviours and values of their profession. Merton (1957) defines socialization and professional socialisation as:

The process through which individuals are inducted into their culture. It involves the acquisition of attitudes and values, of skills and behaviour patterns making up social roles established in the social structure [...]. From this standpoint, medical students are engaged in learning the professional role of the physician by so combining its component knowledge and skills, attitudes, and values, as to be motivated and able to perform this role in a professionally and socially acceptable fashion (p.40-41)

However, the socialisation process is dynamic. Socialization does not consist of a simple internalization of the cultural values. Professional values are not passively internalized. During the process, they are interpreted, negotiated and reinvented by new professionals in their daily activity.

Values express what is desirable in society and constitute the lexicon used to express what is desirable in the social interactions (Schwartz, 2006). Because they are registered in the interactions, the values are included, internalized, and reinterpreted by each of the members of the social group. Individuals appropriate them and reproduce them in a different way during their actions and their interactions with other members of the group.

Because, the professionals' activity takes place in a given sociocultural and historic context, the profession is an element of the social division of work and yet, social roles are socially defined. The exercise of every social role involves at the same time the control of the knowledge essential to the exercise of the role; but also, the knowledge of the values and the attitudes that are considered appropriate for this role.

Like in the primary socialisation process, on the professional level, receiving the same training does not implies that all students assimilate and reproduce without change the essential values of their profession. As Baszanger (1981) notes, the image of the passive student being moulded, shaped, like soft dough, socialized by the Faculty of Medicine, does not fit reality. The margin of autonomy of the students reduces the extent and the nature of the control of the profession. Students, as the professionals in the workplace, internalize and

negotiate the values of their profession. For this reason, the integration of values from the individual's point of view allows one to understand the differences of value systems between professionals and the behaviours which ensue from these various systems.

To understand why value systems differ according to contexts, we have conducted research to describe and explore the interactive co-existence and adaptation of professional values within the cultural value system of Senegalese academic librarians. Our study aims to answer the following research questions: (1) What is the Senegalese academic librarians' dominant cultural value system? (2) How do Senegalese academic librarians prioritize their professional values? (3) How do Senegalese academic librarians adapt their professional values to cultural values?

This exploratory and descriptive process adopted a mixed methodology approach: two types of data collecting methods have been used: a questionnaire based on Schwartz's Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) (Schwartz, 2006) and semi structured interviews.

The questionnaire was used to determine the Senegalese academic librarians' dominant cultural value system. The findings highlight the fact that, in the Senegalese academic librarian's value system, the dominant values are universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity and security. Such a value system favours the individual's integration into the group, solidarity, family security and refusal to undertake actions which may endanger group harmony. In most of their actions and positions, they try to safeguard the interests of the social group they belong to, the respect of social order and adoption of normative behaviour in order to facilitate their interaction with the other members of their group. The value system favours a strong integration of the individual into the group but does not encourage autonomy in actions and thinking which may threaten the harmony of the social group.

On the professional level, Senegalese academic librarians prioritize "access to information", "preservation and conservation of heritage" and the "denial of all sorts of discriminations" as essential professional values. When professional values conflict with cultural norms, Senegalese academic librarians often seek a compromise, a balanced position to make a decision which does not compromise their cultural values. When a compromise is impossible, the final decision is made in favour of cultural values.

It is noticeable that Senegalese academic librarians put the "pluralism of the opinions", "respect for diversity" and "intellectual freedom" in the last places in their system of professional values. Intellectual freedom is ranked at the last place by Senegalese academic librarians. This is completely the opposite for American Librarians who put forward "customer service", "intellectual freedom", and "respect and protection of privacy of users" (Dole & Hurych, 2001). It confirms the existence of differences already raised in the way librarians are ranking professional values (Dole & Hurych, 2001; Dole, Hurych & Koehler, 2000; Koehler, et al., 2000).

The direct consequence that can be inferred from the Senegalese academic librarians' value system is that it is liable to favour self-censorship in selecting materials for library collections. We have managed to verify this by conducting interviews with librarians.

In the questionnaire, we asked respondents to underline professional situations in which their professional values conflicted with their cultural values. We used their answers to select

librarians for interviews. Interviews aimed to understand the situations better, the types of values in conflict and the direction of the decision adopted by the librarians.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve Academics librarians. A particular focus was the impact of both cultural and professional values in their work as academic librarians in the Senegalese context. The first question we asked was: “Do you think that there are specific values to which Senegalese academics librarians refer to in their everyday work?”

Most of our respondents hold that there are no values specific to their work as an Academic librarian living in Senegal. Nevertheless, six librarians out of 12 interviewees recognize that there are specificities and constraints for librarians working in Academic libraries in a developing country. For example, because we lack sufficient budget and smart equipment, stewardship is crucial to answers to user’s needs. But some others constraints can also be related to the mission of the university library. For example, one respondent says, the university is considered “a temple of knowledge”, where democracy and freedom of thought and freedom of expression reign. Thus, the academic librarian must be much more responsible in selecting the library materials. “It doesn’t mean that I’m suggesting that Librarians censor materials, but they have the responsibility to offer a collection of quality, that fits the needs of academics and students.”

Only three respondents assert that there are specific cultural values. One respondent refers to “patriotism” as specific value Senegalese academic librarians must refer to. But his definition of patriotism can be interpreted in the sense of social responsibility, understood in a very narrow way. As for the previous respondent, the librarian must avoid controversial topics. “I’m Senegalese before being a Librarian”, he says. “In our work, we must pay attention to topics that challenge religious beliefs, racial issues, etc.”

The fact that the issue of intellectual freedom is not really prioritized by Senegalese Academic librarians appears strongly in some situations raised by our respondents. Here are some examples extracted from our interviews:

In the first example, the interviewee wonders if they can undertake professional activities that challenge their religious faith. Here is how they raise the problem:

[...] I was preparing an exhibition dedicated to the work of X (*a novelist*) [...]. I was enough involved in there, especially to organise a Round table on his work. It was rather interesting! [...] I was really committed in there. But at some point, reading his biography, I learnt that this person had apostatized. [Silence] That seemed like to me a cold shower. I was very embarrassed [...]. I was really bothered, sincerely, this day I was shot down. I asked myself questions. I said [...], do I have the right, [...] to promote the work of a man who apostatized [Laughter]. Do I have the right [...] to glorify a man who made a supreme sin? [Silence] [...]. To apostatize? It is a supreme sin. [...]. I opened my heart to some friends about it. [...] One friend told me: “you know, it is in the professional frame”.

But paradoxically, this interviewee agrees that the most important professional value is the “free, equal and fair access to information”. They assert that “everybody has the right to access the information they need. [...]. But we have to consider all the sectors of our society”. However, the principle “to ensure free access to information to everybody without distinction” “raises a real dilemma”. They note: “It is very complicated! [Laughter]. It is true that we say without distinction of sex, age, race, etc. (that I say OK), and all this. [...]. That

access to information for all. But I also realize that my cultural values can be in conflict with my professional values”.

According to this interviewee, free access to information, as a professional value, may conflict with some cultural values such as religion, tradition and social order. Then they insist on the necessity of “putting the issue of intellectual freedom into perspective”, in context.

They added:

Maybe I did not express my thought clearly. It is true that it is something rather delicate, I shall say; because in the same time, in the academy, one must be able to understand that people hold [...] ideas which are not still uniform. [...] That’s intellectual curiosity [...] must ever be present. We must be able to read everything, [...] because to be able to criticize things, it is necessary to know at first of what that consists. Let me give some explanation, for example, even for religious matters, we need to look at things without blinders. It is necessary to be rather open-minded, rather critical [...], it is necessary to be open. [...]. It is just for putting in perspective. [...]. But there can be some abuses. [...] somebody who [...] asks me to find for her (him) some very "daring information" on a controversial topic, I’ll say no to her (him). On the other hand, we can have on our shelves documents dealing with sex, because we cannot deny that they exist... But if somebody comes to the library and ask me to search on such precise topic like... let’s say gay contents! I say no! But on the other hand as a university librarian, I think that people have to be open.

From the point of view of cultural values, the respondent evokes religious beliefs. Religion belongs to Tradition as a core value. And in the opinion of this respondent, the sense of the accommodation suffers no ambiguity. The respondent asserts that: “if somebody asked me to do a research on a topic... of which I disapprove, I think that I would say no. I would say no, maybe there would be penalties, but we shall see what will happen”. In the case of information related to sexual orientation, for example, they would put forward their cultural values.

One of the respondents was more cut and dried: “there is no place for sexual discussion in professional settings. Sex is private. Sexual orientation can’t be a topic for professional discussions”. He mentions:

I can’t answer such questions because I’m convinced there is no place for sexual issues in a professional discussion. For medical purpose, okay, I can understand this in Medicine. But discussions about sexual orientation... It’s so private! And on the other hand, such topics related to sexual orientation are banned by our religion.

In fact, sexual topics are taboo subjects. The Senegalese cultural and religious customs do not allow people to talk about sex in the public sphere. People find it offensive and embarrassing to talk about such topics. In this example again, the librarian adopts the mainstream social position. They don’t question the mainstream thinking of their group, even if it is opposite to the professional value that guarantees free access for all, to all kind of information.

Our final example illustrates that values are enduring but not permanent. People can change their position about a value. Madame X is a librarian. She is very interested in cultural diversity. According to her, multicultural library services are very important in the African context because our societies are very diverse and libraries must help safeguard that richness. But she is married and has a daughter. The daughter grew up and became a teenager. And she began thinking about all dangers and harmful situations to which young girls are exposed. She felt more and more anxious thinking about what could happen. This is the way she explains the situation:

“I used to support Intellectual freedom, free access to all kind of information, diversity, democracy and such things. And in some way, I still support intellectual as a professional core value for librarians. Our materials must show the diversity of our cultures... But I began thinking about it when my daughter became a teen. At that moment, I reconsidered pornographic, racist, xenophobic, and ethnocentric content. I worry that my daughter could access such dangerous contents that could impact her way of thinking and make her a bad person... I put a filter on my computer at home and I started controlling her reading [Laughter]. I know that’s bad, but we are talking about my daughter... [Laughter]. You can understand this..., parents are naturally anxious for their children... But in my professional setting, it isn’t the same. The library is a public institution. Everybody must find what they want...”

But one possible solution in this situation, for our colleague, was to consider that, even if her daughter can be exposed to dangerous materials, the diversity of collections is primordial and reflects the diversity of the real world. As a librarian, holding intellectual freedom as a professional value, she has to educate her daughter in the way she should choose between good and bad information. She confesses clearly practicing censorship in her private life but holds that in a professional setting it is different. But how can we ascertain that when her daughter goes to university she will behave differently?

The other lesson to learn from this respondent is that she illustrates the fact that values are enduring but are not permanent. Some circumstances of our lives can change our values.

To conclude the interviews, we asked all respondents the same question: “In case of value conflict (i.e. when professional values conflict with cultural values) which type of value will determine the decision making?”

Only one respondent seems to hold that in academic settings, intellectual freedom must be considered as a core value. In academic settings, librarians must fight against all kind of censorship: “we have to give access to any type of information. We must respect the non-religious nature of the Constitution of our Country. I think that we must avoid showing ostentatiously our belonging to any religious, cultural, or social groups on the university campus”, he notes. On the other hand, five respondents hold clearly that they would not buy any book banned by the Senegalese law or by the top management of the library or the university.

In conclusion, it appears clearly that when professional values conflict with cultural norms, Senegalese academic librarians often seek a compromise, a balanced position to make a decision which does not fundamentally question their cultural values. But, when a compromise is impossible, the final decision is made in favour of cultural values. This attitude furthers self-censorship in selecting materials for library collections. It tends to make them avoid books, materials or information that might not fit the beliefs or ideas of their community.

On the practical level, this research demonstrates the importance of taking cultural contexts into account and the necessity of reinforcing professional socialization which includes ethics and values in the training of Senegalese academic librarians. Training programs must include courses on professional ethics, but also on diversity. It is important to bring awareness to librarians about these issues and their importance in offering diverse and rich collections of materials and information.

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