


Chapter 3

The Library Amid an Epistemic Storm: Research Descriptions on Indigenous Knowledge Services

Collece Takaingehamo Chisita

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7375-8627>

University of South Africa, South Africa & Durban University of Technology, South Africa

ABSTRACT

Modern academic libraries in Africa have their roots in colonialism. As such, they have not evolved to adjust to calls for providing services that resonate with balanced epistemic experiences in multicultural communities. The lack of library services that incorporate modern and indigenous knowledge services raises concerns about whether such institutions have no interest in leveraging indigenous knowledge as an alternative epistemology that provides solutions to contemporary problems. The chapter explores the extent to which libraries have incorporated indigenous knowledge. The study will use a qualitative methodology to understudy the position of libraries toward indigenous knowledge. It will explore how epistemic aberration can be resolved for the benefit of Indigenous people.

INTRODUCTION

A number of scholars questioned the authenticity and value of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) due to their marginalization by colonialism (Plockey, 2015). This marginalization has led to some people questioning whether academic libraries are capable of collecting, processing, storing, and disseminating their knowledge (Plockey, 2015). As depositories, collectors, organizers, distributors, and mediators of communication, librarians, and the information profession, especially those in educational or other scholarly institutions, play a vital role in leveraging Indigenous Knowledge and Information for sustainable development. Librarians serve as reservoirs, accumulators, organizers, distributors, and mediators of communication to those who yield Indigenous Knowledge and sources of information (Nakata, 2005). Indigenous knowledge has been integral to human existence and life continuity in Africa for many centuries, and that most African countries depend on indigenous knowledge directly or indirectly to survive (Eyong, 2005; Magni, 2017). As Indigenous Knowledge is an alternative epistemology, it is

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-8827-0.ch003

important to examine how African libraries can respond to epistemic justice in the context of calls for leveraging Indigenous knowledge.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The current library system in Africa has its roots in the colonisation of Africa when the colonialists established libraries to provide for their epistemological and recreational needs. A series of subscription libraries serving the elite class were established beginning in 1886 with the Bulawayo Public Library, followed by Gwelo Public Library in 1887, Queen Victoria Memorial Library in Harare in 1902 and Turner Memorial Library in Mutare in 1904, among other areas (Chisita, 2014). The enactment of the National Library and Documentation Services (NLDS) Act in 1985 in Zimbabwe provided the legal basis for the provision of nation-wide access to library services in Zimbabwe. According to Section 4 of the NLDS Act 4 the functions are as follows:

(a) Regarding constituent and affiliated libraries— (i) promoting the widespread enjoyment of publications with educational, scientific, cultural, recreational, or sporting value across Zimbabwe; (ii) establishing, maintaining, and developing a high standard for library facilities; (iii) operating an inter-library loan facility and documentation facility; and (iv) training librarians in order to ensure, maintain, co-ordinate, and develop a high standard of librarianship.

(b) Provide, maintain, coordinate and develop facilities for consultation by citizens and the free lending of publications for reading, research, recreation, and study, in relation to constituent libraries.

It should be noted that the NLDS Act (1985) provides a clear path concerning the development of a library system for countrywide access to library services, however, it is not explicit on issues concerning epistemology. Literature confirms that the independence of Zimbabwe ushered in a government guided by socialist principles. According to Meisenhelder, (1994) the goal of the government during the first decade of independence was to begin the transformation of the country into a socialist society. Zimbabwe made significant progress towards socialist transformation as evidenced by numerous social reforms to improve the quality of life for the citizens, for example, widening access to social services including education and health, and nationalisation of key economic sectors (Meisenhelder, 1994). The collapse of communism and end of the cold war coupled with the global recession led to the abandonment of socialism and adoption of the Economic Structural adjustment programmes (ESAP) in 1991. Upon realizing that the Zimbabwean economy was not creating enough jobs, especially given the depressed investment environment, the government decided in 1991 to implement ESAP prescribed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Nyon, 2018). These measures affected social services and libraries were not excluded. The NLDS as an institution was still in its infant stage as its implementation started two years before the adaptation ESAP in 1991. It should be noted that in the first decade of independence issues concerning epistemic justice concerning library services had not become a well-articulated issue as it is in the twenty-first century. Academic imperialism has overextended libraries and information professionals as a result of dominant pronouncements from powerhouse information institutions (Yeon, et.al, 2023). The author asserted that the pronouncements mentioned above required a uniform understanding of processes and practices in our modern information society.

An analysis undertaken by Patin et al. (2020) suggests that epistemicide occurs when a number of epistemic injustices are occurring which are collectively reflected in a systematic and structured oppression of a particular way of knowing. According to Patin & Yeon (2019), epistemicide refers to the act of

17 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-library-amid-an-epistemic-storm/354747

Related Content

Risk, Activism, and Empowerment: Women's Breast Cancer in Venezuela

Mahmoud Eid and Isaac Nahon-Serfaty (2015). *International Journal of Civic Engagement and Social Change* (pp. 43-64).

www.irma-international.org/article/risk-activism-and-empowerment/139199

Severing Corruption from Everyday Life: Some Reflections from Nigerian Political Space

Babatunde Joshua Omotosho (2014). *International Journal of Civic Engagement and Social Change* (pp. 13-25).

www.irma-international.org/article/severing-corruption-from-everyday-life/122438

Requirements of a Digital Platform for Psytrance Parties

Sérgio Tenreiro de Magalhães (2015). *Exploring Psychedelic Trance and Electronic Dance Music in Modern Culture* (pp. 132-145).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/requirements-of-a-digital-platform-for-psytrance-parties/134678

Policies and Strategies for Institutional Participatory Governance

José G. Vargas-Hernández (2023). *Societal Transformations and Resilience in Times of Crisis* (pp. 169-191).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/policies-and-strategies-for-institutional-participatory-governance/313327

The Organizational and Social Complexities of Managing and Retaining Generation Z Employees in the United States Retail Industry

Darrell Norman Burrell, Orna T. Bradley-Swanson, Amalisha S. Aridi and Eugene J. Lewis (2022). *International Journal of Public Sociology and Socioterapy* (pp. 1-14).

www.irma-international.org/article/the-organizational-and-social-complexities-of-managing-and-retaining-generation-z-employees-in-the-united-states-retail-industry/297202