

Continuity and change in West African librarianship: revisiting Mary Niles Maack's research in Senegal and the region

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ABSTRACT

Mary Niles Maack's 1978 dissertation on the history of libraries in Senegal constitutes a landmark contribution to the historiography of librarianship in Africa and to international librarianship. In this article Maack's dissertation, her 1981 book-length adaptation of it, and her subsequent writings about West African library development are first situated in the political-economic, professional, and scholarly context of the late 1970s, before the dissertation is evaluated in terms of her sources and methodology. Her key theme of continuity and change, her analysis of the French colonial heritage and postcolonial French efforts to preserve influence in West Africa, and the wider relevance of the study are discussed. Maack's book was well received. Her work provided raw material for various other authors as well as for five subsequent journal articles by Maack herself. An attempt is made to answer the question, what might a dissertation on LIS development in a francophone African country such as Senegal cover today? It is suggested that the precolonial heritage, political-economic factors, information technology, development aid, and renewal of the library profession in Africa would require more attention. However, it would not be easy for a PhD student today to match Maack's scholarship.

KEYWORDS

Maack, Mary Niles
Library History
Senegal, Libraries
West Africa, Libraries
Francophone Africa, Libraries
Colonialism
French colonial heritage
Historiography
Political economy

INTRODUCTION

Fifty-five years have passed since Mary Niles Maack submitted her dissertation for the DLS (doctor of library science) degree to the School of Library Service at Columbia University. An adapted version of her dissertation, *A history of libraries, archives and documentation in Senegal from their colonial beginnings to 1975* (Maack 1978), was subsequently published by the American Library Association under the title *Libraries in Senegal: Continuity and change in an emerging nation* (Maack 1981b). Her work remains a landmark contribution to the historiography of librarianship in Africa. Although the title of the dissertation identifies it as an historical study, it is also a contribution to international librarianship, as the most comprehensive country study completed in that continent at that time.

In this article I revisit her study of Senegal and her subsequent writings about West African library development, re-evaluating them firstly in the political-economic, professional, and scholarly context of the late 1970s. I then revisit her dissertation and her book and briefly discuss her subsequent articles on West African librarianship, before turning to what has happened since 1981, to ask, “If the dissertation were to be written today, how would it be different?”

THE POLITICAL-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Political economy did not feature in the curriculum when I was in library school during the mid-1960s. This was probably the case in the USA and elsewhere too. Politics and economics seemed to be quite far removed from what was thought relevant to us as librarians. However, what was happening in countries such as Senegal can be seen as a direct outcome of the international political economy, succinctly defined as “the interplay of economics and politics in world affairs” (Woods 2001, 277).

After the Second World War, the former colonial empires of the Western powers were rapidly dismantled. Following a wave of decolonization, by December 1960 all the French colonies in West Africa as well as the two major British colonies there, Ghana and Nigeria, had gained independence. However, the colonial powers sought to retain economic and strategic interests in their former colonies. In a much more challenging environment, against the background of the Cold War, proxy wars in various regions, and greater competition for influence and economic advantage (resources and markets), France and Britain turned to other forms of power to keep the former colonies advantageously aligned to themselves. Other players such as the USA and the Soviet Union also competed for influence in the newly created “Third World” block. Competition mainly took the form of military aid, development programs, economic manipulation, and cultural diplomacy. The last three affected library development directly. Library development was a relatively minor component of development aid. Libraries benefited to some extent from the presence of agencies such as the British Council and the United States Information Agency, which served as showcases of modern (Western) librarianship, but also “poached” some of the most promising local librarians. Economic manipulation, aggravated by the oil crisis which followed the Yom Kippur War of 1973, led to indebtedness, lack of hard currency, and cutbacks in health, education, and social services, with dire consequences for the funding of libraries. In the major powers the increased competition created awareness of the need for better information and understanding of the developing world (now more generally referred to as the ‘Global South’). In the USA this gave rise to acquisitions programs such as the National Program for Acquisitions and Cataloging (Ishimoto 1973). The program, which was later decried by some

African librarians as “bibliographic imperialism” (Britz and Lor 2003), had some positive side-effects in the developing world, for example, in supporting national bibliographic control efforts. In the United States and elsewhere, the Cold War also led to increased funding for the teaching of foreign languages, and for area studies programs (Katzenstein 2001).

By the 1970s the “Modernization Theory” of economic development postulated by Walt Whitman Rostow (1960) was being questioned, as many countries had failed to progress through his five stage development process. New, and more pessimistic “theories of underdevelopment” emerged (e.g. Frank 1967; Wallerstein 1974), leading to a critical reassessment of development aid (e.g. Cassen 1986).

THE PROFESSIONAL AND SCHOLARLY CONTEXT

In the late 1970s, to what extent were librarians and library school faculty aware of the political-economic dimensions of development and aid, or of librarianship in the Global South in general? In the UK a debate about appropriate LIS development had arisen in the 1960s. Ronald Bengtson contributed to it with his well-known books *Libraries and cultural change* (1970) and *Cultural crisis and libraries in the Third World* (1979). However, it was not until the 1980s that critiques by librarians from the Global South (e.g. Amadi 1981; A.A. Briquet de Lemos 1979; Antonio A Briquet de Lemos 1981; Mchombu 1982) appeared in LIS journals, and it is not until the 1990s that they had much influence on how librarians thought about development and aid. Even today, whilst some excellent LIS aid programs have achieved success, there is little sign that LIS professionals have paid much attention to the extensive body of development theory (e.g. Haynes 2008; Nederveen Pieterse 2010; Rist 1997).

As Alfred Kagan has chronicled in his book on progressive library organizations (Kagan 2015), the late 1960s and 1970s were a period of growing activism in the library profession in the United States and Western Europe. Dissent gave rise to new professional groups. In the United States this led to the establishment of the American Library Association’s Social Responsibilities Round Table, in which issues of social responsibility, including intellectual freedom, racism, feminism, gay and lesbian rights, censorship and peace, were addressed. However, it was only in the 1980s that progressive groups started becoming actively involved in international issues such as repression in Nicaragua and apartheid in South Africa. Similarly, the late 1980s saw the rise of librarian activism relating to international issues in the United Kingdom and Sweden.

In the 1970s there was significant growth of research in comparative and international librarianship (Lor 2019, chap. 2). In the United Kingdom, members of the Library Association who were interested and engaged in international research in 1967 formed the International and Comparative Librarianship Group (Whatley 1977). Attempts were made to delimit international and comparative librarianship and to distinguish between them. Along with edited collections of chapters, international surveys, and country studies, the first brief texts on appropriate research method in comparative librarianship were published (Danton 1973; Simsova and MacKee 1970; 1975). The methodology proposed was largely based on the work of educational comparativists such as Bereday (1964). There were no comparable texts for international librarianship, but the procedures and checklists proposed for comparative studies (e.g. Collings 1970) would have been applicable to single-country studies as well. The default research paradigm of library science was unquestioningly

positivist, as exemplified by Herbert Goldhor's (1969) *Introduction to scientific research in librarianship*. There is no evidence in Maack's dissertation that she had been exposed to any of the developments mentioned here.

Of course, Maack did not set out to contribute to international and comparative librarianship, but to write a history of libraries and related agencies in Senegal. A series of "comparative library studies", concise descriptions of libraries in single countries, had been published by the British publisher Clive Bingley during the 1960s and 1970s. They contained some historical background; Maack (1978) cited one of them, on France (Ferguson 1971). At that time library history was already an established genre. However, full length historical studies of a single country are rare. Few are to be found in the brief bibliographies following the country entries in the *Encyclopedia of library history* (Wiegand and Davis 1994). Most of the works listed there dealt with specific periods, types of libraries, or themes. General world histories of libraries, such as the third edition of the *History of libraries in the Western World* (Johnson and Harris 1976), were also arranged first by period, then, where necessary, within each period by type of library. Major, multivolume national histories of libraries such as those produced in the British Isles (Hoare et al. 2006) and France (Vernet et al. 2009) are a more recent phenomenon (Davis 2010).

THE DISSERTATION

Sources

Maack's (1978) dissertation was the result of some five years of research, including eighteen months' field work (September 1973 to March 1975) in Senegal, where her anthropologist husband, Stephen Charles Maack, was also conducting research. During this time, she visited forty-five Senegalese libraries, interviewed over forty library staff and other personalities in Dakar and St Louis, and consulted primary source materials in the National Archives of Senegal and seven other Senegalese archives repositories. In France she used the overseas section of the French National Archives and conducted some further interviews (1978, xvi–xvii). These sources, together with annual reports and conference papers and an impressive list of published materials were listed in Maack's "Selective Bibliography" (1978, 546–62). The bibliography included an impressive variety of published materials in French and English, covering bibliographies, directories, surveys, archives, libraries and librarianship, scientific research, literature and education in Africa, and general works on Senegal and African history. The bibliography reflects the breadth and depth of Maack's research; it remains a useful source of information not only about the history of Senegal before independence in 1960 and during the first fifteen years after that date, but also more generally about French colonial policies and practices in West Africa, the French educational system, and the development of scholarly Africanist research. It touched on French territories beyond West Africa, and on some aspects of British colonial history. Although there is no indication that she was aware of comparative librarianship, Maack covered most of the themes of a comparative study as recommended by Collings (1970) and later expanded by Krzys and Litton (1983).

Methodology

Maack cited no methodological works of any sort, nor was there any discussion on the choice of a research orientation or paradigm. The categories of sources utilized were mentioned in the Abstract and the Preface, and they were listed in her Bibliography. A chapter on

methodology was not *de rigueur* in the 1970s but students were expected to display an intelligent, methodical, and critical approach to the evidence they assembled in support of their conclusions. There were no formal statements of hypotheses or research aims, but in the Abstract some guiding questions were implied:

Conceived as a general history of libraries and archives in Senegal, this study aims to relate the overall pattern of library service during the colonial period to the subsequent development of libraries since independence, to analyze the continuing influence of the French political and cultural legacy on librarianship, and to examine those areas where departure has been made from colonial precedents.

Since the primary goal of this thesis is to provide a general overview rather than a narrative history of individual organizations or institutions, the perspective is broad, encompassing the development of all types of library and archival collections and the growth of the library profession. This approach makes it possible to analyze both the interrelations within the library field and the relationship of libraries to the Senegalese government in terms of planning, priorities and funding.

Continuity and change

The above statement implied the theme of continuity and change, which was subsequently highlighted in the title of Maack's (1981b) book: relating the development of libraries to library, archival and educational conditions and practices in France, as the colonial power, and examining the continuing French influence after independence.

Less clearly delineated in the background was another theme, that of the continuity of the African traditions. Maack referred several times to the existence of pockets of precolonial Islamic literacy and the continuing existence of collections of literature in Arabic script, but she considered very small libraries (less than 2000 volumes) and collections in non-Western languages to be beyond the scope of her research (p. xviii-xix). She also mentioned the undiminished importance of oral tradition among the largely illiterate population, and the continuing roles of *griots* (traditional genealogists and praise-singers), and *marabouts* (Muslim scribes) in post-independence politics (pp.3-4), recognizing that this underlying continuity in West African society deserves further attention.

The main body of the dissertation comprised eleven chapters, divided into two major parts. Part I covered the period from 1803 to 1950, when library and archival collections were assembled by French colonial officials in line with policies in metropolitan France. Part II covered the period of transition to independence when this work was taken over by professional French librarians who followed modern (French) library practices and had some access to more substantial resources, and also covered the first fifteen years of independence, until 1975.

Following the historical trajectory on a period by period and theme by theme basis, and making heavy use of contemporary accounts and archival sources, Maack described how the colonial model evolved: initially driven by the needs of French administrators and colonists, then by scholarly and scientific research needs, and later by the need to prepare the colony for independence. After the West African colonies gained political independence, successive French governments were intent on ensuring continuing French influence, and on countering that of newcomers such as the United States. As part of French strategy, the *Organisation*

internationale de la Francophonie (OIF) was founded in Niamey, Niger, in 1970 to promote political, educational, economic and cultural cooperation among countries (currently eighty-eight) in which French is an official or culturally significant language (“Portail de l’Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF)” 2023). Maack also traced the evolution of French colonial and post-colonial policies: the initial French *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission); development of a small local, French-orientated Senegalese elite; hasty preparation for independence after the Second World War; massive injections of French development aid after independence; the concept of *la francophonie*; and continuing *coopération* oriented to the expansion of French language and culture, so that African writing was encouraged – in French, not in African languages, in contrast with policies in Anglophone Africa.

The French heritage: asset and burden

Significant French development aid, particularly in supporting the University of Dakar and research institutes in Senegal, and French emphasis on promoting the French language and culture, prolonged French influence well after independence. Maack tracked the adaptations and modifications to the French legacy after independence, showing how awareness grew in Senegal of the need to depart from the French model and recover and preserve indigenous culture, and how changes were introduced. She also identified the factors that inhibited change. These included the limited availability of trained personnel and funding, reflecting the lack of appreciation of the need for libraries and archives in official and political circles. Many Senegalese politicians and officials had been educated in France, where public library development was less advanced than in the Anglo-American and Nordic sphere – much to the chagrin of forward-looking French public librarians. At the turn of the century Maurice Pellisson (1906) had compared French public libraries unfavorably with those in the United States, Britain and Germany. Sixty years later, in a well-researched dissertation, French public libraries were again compared unfavorably with those in the United States and Britain (Hassenforder 1967). Maack cited both works. Forty years after Hassenforder, the *retard français* (French backwardness) again came into sharp focus (Bertrand 2006; 2010).

The colonial heritage was both an asset and a burden. On the positive side, from the mid-1930s the French colonial authorities had taken an interest in scientific research, which had led to the development of small specialized documentation centers. In 1936 a permanent research institute, IFAN (*Institut français d’Afrique noire*, later *Institut fundamental d’Afrique noire*) was created for the scientific study of Black Africa and, more specifically, research into the population, geography, history natural resources and products of French West Africa (p.65). Well-qualified and competent archivists, graduates of the *École des Chartes*, such as André Villard (p.68), were employed to reorganize and manage the colony’s archives. They were also placed in overall charge of the colonies’ libraries, which they conscientiously tried to develop against considerable odds. As a result, Senegal was relatively well-endowed with archives and documentation centers, but libraries for the general public and children were poorly developed.

After independence, library development in all sectors was inhibited not only by inadequate funding and staffing, but also by the cumbersome local bureaucracy operating on the French model. Unfortunately, Senegalese librarians also followed the continental European pattern of separate library associations for different library sectors. Two competing library associations were formed. AIDBA (*Association Internationale pour le Développement des Bibliothèques en Afrique*) was open to all library workers regardless of qualifications, and lobbied for

library development in Africa generally. ANABADS, (*Association Nationale des Bibliothécaires, Archivistes et Documentalistes Sénégalais*) limited its scope to Senegal and its membership to graduates of elite French *grandes écoles* (advanced professional schools) and others who had received graduate education in librarianship, archives, or documentation.

Hegemony

Would French influence wane? In their efforts to maintain French influence in their former colonies, the French were not only concerned with linguistic and cultural influence in *la Francophonie*, but also with preserving French economic and political hegemony in West Africa. Of course, Maack's dissertation predated the more widespread current use of the term 'hegemony' in relation to the political economy of information. Whilst noting certain events and processes, such as the devastating effect of the withdrawal of French price supports for Senegal's main export crop, groundnuts (p.202), Maack did not discuss these in political-economic terms. In the 1970s critical discussion of the world financial system and the effects of exploitative neoliberal economic policies in the Global South was not common currency in the library literature or in library schools. In that respect Maack was a child of her time. In any case, her research was concluded too soon for her to be able to chronicle later developments and to determine whether the French model would, in a process of Africanization, gradually morph into a new African synthesis. Later accounts such as those of Sturges and Neill (1998) and Diana Rosenberg (2001) have shown that in many cases the erosion of the colonial library heritage was due to the lack of relevance of the colonial library model to national development. Consequently, it attracted little interest, and insufficient resources.

Wider relevance

The continuity to which Maack referred, namely the ongoing post-independence cultural and political influence of the former colonial power, is of course relevant not only to former French colonies. Why this continuing influence? Seldom have I seen the ongoing influence of a colonial power on LIS in former colonies dissected so thoroughly and insightfully. Clearly, Maack's mastery of French was a great asset, as was her methodical approach to the French educational, archival, and library systems, to which she devoted an appendix, "Definition of French library and educational terms" (pp.532-535). (I would have found it very helpful as a foreign student in 1970-71, when I first encountered French university bureaucracy.)

Maack's dissertation is of interest in relating library development in Senegal, the central administrative seat and the most developed of France's West African territories, to library development in other French territories. There are also insightful comparative comments on the situation in British colonies. For the student of comparative librarianship, the dissertation is a mine of information. There are many implied comparisons, some of which she used in later writings. As an American librarian, Maack did not fail to notice various features of libraries in Senegal which reflected French influence and which contrasted with the American way of doing things, such as the hierarchical and elitist staffing structure, the modelling of library training on the French pattern, the role of the numerically insignificant but influential *conservateurs* who controlled libraries in addition to running the colony's archives, the presence of documentation centers, rather than Anglo-American special libraries, and various aspects of library administration and services such as closed stacks, shelving of books by size and accession number, and the payment of fees for library membership. Throughout, Maack's

awareness of difference was non-judgmental, informed by her sympathetic understanding of Senegal's French heritage.

THE BOOK

At first sight, Maack's (1981b) book *Libraries in Senegal: Continuity and change in an emerging nation* does not differ greatly from her dissertation. An adaptation for publication by the ALA and intended for library professionals, it is somewhat shorter but covers much the same ground. On closer inspection, it is evident that the text was quite extensively rearranged and reworked. This was not a 'quick and dirty' adaptation. Maack's thoroughness and attention to detail are evident here too. The contents and order of some chapters were rearranged. The long abstract and preface in the dissertation were replaced by a new introductory chapter in which her research is situated in the context of modern African history and the theme of continuity and change is emphasized. Because Chapter 1 was inserted, the chapter numbers in the book do not correspond to those in the dissertation. Chapter 10 combines material from chapters IX and X, so that both versions end with the Conclusion in the eleventh chapter. The long and thoughtful conclusion of the dissertation (pp.517-531), gives a good summary, and identifies major influences and themes, including the role of individuals, bilateral and multinational aid, and the relation of library development to national goals. However, in the book this is reduced to three pages. At various places in the book the amount of detail was reduced, for example details of the French background which would have been of interest to comparativists and students of French colonial history, but not to a more general American audience. For that audience, all the French quotations were translated into English. Abridgment is also evident in the reduction of the number of figures (from seven to three), tables (from twenty-three to seven), and appendices. The dissertation's very comprehensive "selective bibliography" was replaced in the book by a slightly shorter "selected bibliography". Footnotes in the dissertation were replaced by endnotes. Except for these relatively minor changes, the substance of the work is unchanged. What remains is informative and readable.

RECEPTION AND CITATION

Maack's book came to my attention at an early stage of my research in international and comparative librarianship. Although few citations of Maack's thesis can be found, her book has been cited in works on African librarianship (e.g. Olden 1995; 2015; Sturges and Neill 1998) and in overviews of international and comparative librarianship (e.g. Bowdoin and Lee 2014; Dione and Diouf 2010), including my own work (Lor 2010; 2014; 2015; 2019). Bernard Dione, a professor in the *École de Bibliothécaires, Archivistes et Documentalistes* (EBAD) at the *Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar*, cited Maack in various articles on libraries and library education and the library profession in Senegal and Sub-Saharan francophone Africa (e.g. Dione 2012; 2014; 2015; 2016). Maack's work has also been cited in articles and theses about library development in other regions, for example in Namibia (Webb 2012) and Trinidad and Tobago (Ackbarali 1992). It was interesting to see Maack being cited as a source of background information on Senegal in an article on the relationship between the Senegalese military and the state (Matissek 2019). Maack's dissertation and book have proved to offer very useful raw material for country and comparative studies.

SUBSEQUENT PUBLICATIONS

1981

Maack herself mined her dissertation to produce several articles relating to libraries in francophone West Africa. In a study of the cultural role of libraries for the general public in that region, she discussed the philosophy of public library service during the period covered by her book, 1803-1975 (Maack 1981a), covering the same ground selectively: the initial creation of small libraries for the colonists as “an antidote to exile”, the promotion of libraries as a means of disseminating French culture, and then the post-World War II movement to set up a system of libraries for the general reader. Here Maack referred to UNESCO’s groundbreaking Seminar on Public Libraries in Africa, held in Ibadan, Nigeria, in 1953 (UNESCO 1954), where it was clear that there was glaring contrast between the level of provision in Senegal and the British colony of the Gold Coast (now Ghana).

1982

In the following year Maack published a lengthy and systematic comparative study of the patterns of library service that had developed in two former British colonies (Ghana and Nigeria) and two former French colonies Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire (Maack 1982). She placed library development in the context of the relevant economic, social, political and educational factors of the colonial periods, taking into account the “economic and social evolution; ...political institutions and ideologies; ...educational progress; the role of librarians and library promoters, and the influence of international exchange and foreign aid” (1982, 176). Her approach here and some of the language used suggests that she may in the meantime have been exposed to contemporary literature on the methodology of comparative librarianship:

The purpose of this study is to investigate the historical evolution of libraries within each country; to establish similarities and differences among the four countries; and to offer a simultaneous comparison, focusing on the causal factors that have led to markedly different approaches to national library planning (p.174).

This is strikingly reminiscent of texts such as those by Danton (1973) and Simsova and MacKee (1975). However, no methodological texts were listed in her lengthy bibliography. The bibliography does provide evidence of much additional reading, including works by Ghanaian and Nigerian authors and many other works not listed in the bibliography of her dissertation.

1986

By the time the above-mentioned article appeared, Maack’s correspondence address was temporarily at the *École nationale supérieure des bibliothèques*, in Villeurbanne, France, and from this point she is seen to direct more attention to metropolitan France and the feminization of the library profession (e.g. Maack 1985). However, she did not lose interest in West Africa, as is shown by her article on the role of external aid in library development in that region (Maack 1986). Here she presented a systematic approach to development aid, distinguishing between four categories of aid, personnel, collections, buildings, and multipurpose projects, and making a thoughtful distinction between technology as a process, the apparatus of technology, and products of technology. She saw the nature and

effectiveness of aid projects as being determined by the role of the donor, the transmission process, the role of consultants, infrastructure, and receptivity, discussing these factors in some depth. She briefly raised the issue of cultural dependency and fears of neocolonialism. It is worth noting that she cited Phillip Altbach (1977) and Ali Mazrui (1975) here, reflecting a growing awareness in LIS of the political-economic issues mentioned earlier.

1987

This was followed by an article on library research and publishing in francophone Africa (Maack 1987). Here, Maack updated the histories of the fledgling library associations, AIDBA and ANABADS, which she had described in her book, focusing on their publishing activities. AIDBA's *Bulletin*, first appeared in 1971, but due to a lack of funds it was published very irregularly. When Maack wrote her article, ANABADS had not been able to produce an issue of its planned journal. EBAD, the Senegalese library school, had stepped into the breach with its own journal. When that was temporarily suspended in 1981, the school's students started their own newsletter, *Papyrus*, which included some substantive papers. The number of qualified professionals was growing, creating a pool of potential authors, and more research was being completed, but there were no regularly published regional journals in which research could be reported. Maack emphasized the importance of such journals for the communication of research findings, creating a forum for discussion of current professional issues, allowing cross-fertilization of the region's anglophone and francophone traditions, and improving south-south communication. Her article concluded with practical recommendations for regional cooperation to improve the situation.

2001

Some years later Maack returned to her earlier work in francophone Africa to address the theme of books and libraries as instruments of cultural policy (Maack 2001). In her book she had described the resources and activities of the various cultural centers that had been set up in Dakar by foreign agencies. Building on that research, in this article Maack compared the strategies of cultural diplomacy employed during the Cold War by Britain, France and the USA in setting up cultural centers (Maack 2001). These centers facilitated the learning of their respective languages and promoted appreciation of their policies and cultures through lectures, movies, and the provision of books and libraries. The article provides much additional background on the origins, mandates, and policies of the US Information Service (USIS, later US Information Agency, USIA), the British Council, and the Alliance française, and referenced literature published since 1981.

A dissertation today?

What might or should a dissertation on LIS development in a francophone African country such as Senegal look like today? The following are some aspects that come to mind.

The precolonial heritage

A historical account would necessarily start well before the arrival of European colonists. Today there is much greater awareness of the region's pre-colonial past than was the case when Maack's book was published. As a Tanzanian library leader and scholar pointed out four decades ago:

The view that precolonial Africa had no culture and no history is false and unacceptable. The European officials, scholars, and missionaries who popularized this image of Africa were ignoring the evidence of rich cultures that could be seen all over the continent (Kaungamno 1984, 184).

Arguing for early library origins in Africa, some African scholars have claimed three African antecedents in the Hellenistic Library of Alexandria, Egypt, the library of the Monastery of St Catherine's in the Sinai, Egypt, and the collection of libraries in Timbuktu, Mali (Jurgens and Momoniat 2020). The first two may strike some as ahistorical, but it is known that Timbuktu was a great center of learning, where significant collections of Islamic and other manuscripts in Arabic and vernacular languages were assembled from the 13th Century onwards, and have been preserved to the present day in the traditional custody of leading families. These libraries made world news when, threatened by fundamentalist rebels in 2012/3, most were heroically evacuated by Timbuktu residents (Rasmussen 2014). Timbuktu was by no means the only center of learning in the Sahel region, but serves as a symbolic reminder of a rich written heritage that is shared by countries throughout West Africa, including Senegal (Ngom 2017; Nobili 2013). Having made that point, it is important also to recognize the continuing relevance of Africa's rich oral resources of indigenous knowledge and African science (e.g. Ashie-Nikoi 2019; Chowdhury et al. 2021; Millar 2007).

Political-economic factors

Maack's study was undertaken in the 1970s, with an intelligent understanding of the historical background, the heritage of French colonialism, and the context of an emerging national state. Today's dissertation would additionally have to take cognizance of major geopolitical and ideological shifts: the end of the Cold War, the aggressive rise of China on the world stage and its growing involvement of development projects in African countries regardless of their human rights record, renewed Russian imperial ambitions (including interventions in the Sahel by Russian mercenaries), and the revindications of militant Islam, to name a few. French influence in Africa is waning. After more than fifty years of independence the long-standing French military presence is less welcome in its former colonies in the Sahel region, which stretches from Senegal's neighbor, Mali, in the west, to Chad in the east, and is racked by coups as well as by separatist and jihadist insurrections (Cherbib 2018). The fragility of the French colonial model was exposed in 2002 when a civil war broke out between northerners and southerners in Côte d'Ivoire, hitherto considered an exemplary, stable and prosperous state (Congressional Research Service 2023). Senegal itself, which enjoyed an image of relative stability thanks to the combination of a strong army and a weak state (Matisek 2019), has recently been shaken by political conflict (Franklin and Adeoye 2023).

The promise of library development in Senegal implicit in Maack's account has not been fully realized (Dione 2012). For example, after many years of advocacy and the passing of library legislation in the 1970s, the creation of a national library has been stalled for lack of funds (Dione and Diouf 2017) – and, I would add, lack of political will, as so often in Africa. The weakness of public library development continues to be a sad and ironic legacy of French colonialism.

Information and communications technologies

In a country study done today, information and communications technologies (ICTs) would be seen as a key factor in LIS development. Since 1981 the Internet has come, but with it, the Digital Divide, which has thrown into sharp relief the inequities of the international intellectual property regime. For poor countries of the Global South, paywalls inhibit the flow of information from the Global North, whilst South-North and South-South flows are also impeded (Lor 2019, chap. 9). In the LIS literature of the Global South, critiques of Western hegemony, neoliberal, economics and cultural imperialism – already voiced in the 1980 MacBride Report (Calabrese 2005; International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems 1980) – have become louder

Disillusion with the failure of public or community libraries to contribute effectively to rural development in Africa fed into initiatives to harness ICTs, and gave rise, among others, to the telecenter movement. An updated study of Senegal would certainly refer to the Acacia Program of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC, Canada's development aid agency). This program, named after a family of trees which are characteristic of the Sahel region, was designed “to empower sub-Saharan African communities with the ability to apply information and communication technologies [for] their own social and economic development” (Hudson 2001). Senegal was one of the five countries in which telecenters were trialed and studied. Many case studies and comparative surveys have been conducted; generally, telecenters have had mixed success. In particular, the sustainability of their current business model needs to be reviewed (cf. Attwood et al. 2013). It has been suggested that they are an unnecessary reinvention of public libraries. One industry commentator went so far as to argue that libraries “are the future of public access ICT” (Vota 2011).

Aid

The end of the Cold War in 1991 removed one of the main motivators of official development aid (Browne 1997). The four main historical phases of development aid were outlined by Cassen (1986). Since then, too much has changed to cover here. The role of intergovernmental organizations such as UNESCO, international non-governmental organizations such as IFLA, governmental aid agencies such as the IDRC, and foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation would feature prominently in a dissertation written today. From the 1980s onwards, UNESCO shifted its attention away from libraries per se towards national planning of information systems, causing confusion by sponsoring two competing systems, NATIS (National Information Systems) and UNISIST (World Science Information System), which were later merged to form the General Information Program (Pohle 2021). A country study undertaken today would have to map out the multinational context, explaining a veritable alphabet soup of acronyms and abbreviations of organizations, summits, and programs: WSIS, IGF, MDGs, SDGs and many more.

The profession

In the past decade there has been a revival of African library associations. The African Library and Information Associations and Institutions (AFLIA) was founded as a non-governmental organization in 2013. It aims to promote the position of libraries in relation to African development goals. Unlike its predecessors, it has a permanent secretariat based in Ghana, a stable structure, and continuity in leadership. AFLIA has held a series of successful continent-wide conferences and several African Public Library Summits (AFLIA n.d.). This

represents a qualitative leap forward in comparison with the library associations of Maack's time in Senegal.

CONCLUSION

Every generation writes its own history of the past. A graduate student tackling a dissertation on the history of libraries in an African country such as Senegal today would be conducting research in a greatly changed world, employing a different research paradigm, and writing for a different professional and scholarly audience. However, some requirements for successful accomplishment would not have changed: to achieve the combination of intellectual breadth and depth which characterized Mary Niles Maack's dissertation and subsequent writings, would require thoroughgoing and intelligent scholarship of a standard not often attained.

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Brief Bio

Peter Johan Lor holds a DPhil degree (1991) and an honorary doctorate (2008) from the University of Pretoria. He was South Africa's first National Librarian (2000-2003), and served as Secretary General of IFLA during 2005-2008, after which he taught as a visiting professor in the School of Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee during 2009-2011. He is the recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Library and Information Association of South Africa (2022), the IFLA Medal (2014), and the John Ames Humphry/OCLC/Forest Press Award (2020) of the American Library Association's International Relations Committee. In retirement he pursues research as a research associate in the Department of Information Science, University of Pretoria. He has published a book and many papers on international and comparative librarianship. In anticipation of IFLA's centenary in 2027, his current research focuses on the history of IFLA, with an emphasis on its formative years.