

Kitabu

The bi-monthly newsletter of the African School Mobile Library
"African Studies by bicycle"

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Dear Reader. Welcome to Kitabu. As we celebrate Black History Month and Ugandan Independence, this issue is a tribute to one of her great contemporary librarians.

The Patron Saint of Village Librarians

If no one has been found suitable to fulfill the role, then I have a candidate to suggest; if there is no one currently in the position as Patron Saint of Village Librarians, then I gladly nominate Gertrude Mulindwa.

For a start, she's been the national director of two national libraries: Botswana and her homeland Uganda. She's been the instigator of a sacred network, co-founding such organisations as the UgCLA - Uganda Community Libraries Association – and I say sacred, because of the multiple blessings, that books and libraries bestow upon us. As director of the Botswana National Library Service, she pioneered the coming of the Village Reading Rooms. Part of the reasoning behind the establishing of the reading rooms of Victorian England – especially for the men - is that they would be a constructive alternative to the public houses. And adults in Botswana and other African countries, use these reading rooms in large numbers, attending literacy classes in the evening after work. Often, these rural libraries are the only buildings in the village, to have electricity running through it. What better way to serve your community or country, than to give everyone the opportunity, to enjoy precious hours with a book?

I'm surprised there's been no monograph written of her: a testament to what she has achieved. What did she think of her time in Wales, while studying for her second degree? Who else was a leading figure, in the founding of the Leadership Academy? Any reflective decisions, after the conferences in Swaziland and Israel? Her thoughts as an African ambassador, with a portfolio for libraries. So much for me as a novice librarian, to ask my trail-blazing senior. To sit and talk with her – to listen to her - would be like a sedentary version, of the dance of the Pwo mask in Angola, when womanhood is celebrated. Ancestress Nambi looking down, must be proud of what her descendant is doing.

Would have loved to have heard her speak in Jerusalem in 2000 at a IFLA - International Federation of Library Associations - conference, representing the Botswana National Library Service, speaking of a necessary tandem: the co-working of the librarian with the literacy teacher. That working together, the two channels for learning can enhance the levels of literacy; and just as important, sustain the progression of those who have learned to read and write.

Good to know that due to her efforts and those of others, that there are more books in Setswana and other local languages and there is on-going collaboration between the Botswana National Library Service and the Department of Non-Formal Education; soldiers from two trenches fighting the same battles, in the crucial War of Read and Write.

Imagining being a child in a Ugandan village and you're doing a project on the medieval architecture of your country. And just as you begin to fret about visuals, to add to the handwritten text, you remember that the Digital Bookmobile is coming by in two days time! You smile again, knowing that you'll get the pictures of the Kasubi tombs and the monumental thatching that covers the royal mausoleum. So much to give thanks to her for and for the members of the UgCLA, past and present.

Sometimes when we give praise, we applaud the wrong person. Why should I laud the politician with his twists and turns and hidden agenda, when I can celebrate the librarian with his unchanging manifesto and welcoming transparency? I wonder, has a librarian, in any country, ever been given National Hero or Heroine status?

In the library in a village called Kitengesa,
Solar powers the evening service.
Another in Kabubbu,
Is a host of seminars and workshops:
And all are invited to learn and go forward.

In those blessed villages of Uganda, what she began, others are facilitating the progress. These are the guardians of what went before and of newer initiatives, such as the use of library services, in 'Health, Reading and Computer Camps,' that enhance knowledge of nutrition, sexual health and information technology, for the teenage attendee. Guardians that are Emmanuel Mawanda, Anette Ssebbagala, Rita Katetemara and Augustine Napagi

If the jury is still out, tangled up in deliberation, let me be the unraveller. If the decision makers are suffocating in debate, I can offer the needed solution. Because she has surpassed herself, inspiring and nurturing others; at the time of writing, because she co-founded and maintained the sacred network, I can think of no other name to put forward as Patron Saint of Village Librarians, than that of Gertrude Kayaga Mulindwa.

Sources - UgCLA - AfLIA - IFLA
Rural Village Libraries Research Network - Global Giving - Edutopia

The ASML has **FLIGHT AND OTHER STORIES** by **James Apee**
and
THE TREASURE by **Peter Katuliiba**

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