



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

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Dear Reader, welcome to Kitabu.

### **Lady of the Land Rover Library**

What do Solihull, Amsterdam and Banjul have in common? Before I answer that, or you may have the answer already, here is a little story.

Normally shy, hidden high up in the fig tree, the black-collared lovebird, at her approach, comes lower down to greet her. The warthog puts a temporary halt to his rummaging, the red colobus monkeys defer their play and the equally shy situanga antelope, makes a brief appearance of respect.

She goes throughout the land of her birth, sometimes alongside the river, that carries the name of the land. And as she passes through, the larger flora – the bearers of chronology – applaud her. The mahogany, silk cotton, the baobab and African rosewood; and at the river mouth and onward, the mangrove congregation, bows its head in homage. Showing their respects for the one who carries the sweetest cargo. You may think I'm biased, but I cannot think of a sweeter shipment, than the ferrying of books. They showed their respects for her, because the cargo brought knowledge, of benefit to one and all: including enhanced interaction with the natural world. Whenever she passed by, the fauna and the flora stood and applauded her: saluting Sally Njie

Gaining her librarian qualifications after studies in Ghana and England, she became the first African librarian in her homeland and the first Senior Librarian, of the National Library of the Gambia. She is said to have built the library on a limited budget and limited staffing: training prospective library and information staff, as she went along.

When the British Council withdrew in 1963, it was she who made the decision that the gift of five thousand books, should constitute the foundation of the embryonic library, rather than being distributed throughout the school system. Her idea also, that after training, school librarians would take back to their respective institutions, a collection of books.

As well as the onsite and extension work, there was the writing, such as the annual compiling of a bibliography - Bibliography of the Gambia - of all the books published in Gambia. There was also the publishing of a biographical dictionary, celebrating Gambian stalwarts.

Initially built in Solihull and first paraded to the world at the Amsterdam Car Show of 1948, the Land Rover was her vehicle of mobile library transport; from Banjul, previously known as Bathurst, taking books across the diverse terrain.

The aardvark takes a break from the insect search, the geckos cease their flitting around, the scampering of the sun squirrel stops, while the goliath heron standing in solitude, bows his head to the one that passes, who should be decorated by those who present awards. Through the savannah and round the forest, past the river and the swamp, there is the sound of a certain motor, the sound of a channel to knowledge: of a pioneering woman and her Land Rover Library.

### **Sources** - The Chronicle - Wikipedia

However, Ms. Njie's greatest legacy was how she successfully built up a cadre of Gambian librarians. She started by training school librarians, and later some of them were recruited into The Gambia National Library staff.

Ms. Njie started the issuance of International Standard Book Number (ISBN) and the International Standard Serial Number (ISSN), the sort of birth certificates of all publications, from books to newspapers, which make them traceable in the international publications system. Before the introduction of the ISBN and ISSN, it was not possible to trace a publication printed in the country or to have it deposited in major libraries like the Library of Congress or the British Library.

She also told me how as one of the first Gambian women to drive a car, how when she took books to the villages, crowds would turn up to see if it was indeed true that there was a woman who could drive a car

"Driving my new Land Rover through Gambian villages in the 1950s and 1960s, I realized that I was breaking stereotypes of women not being able to do certain tasks..."

### **Sally Njie**

Ms. Njie was an accomplished Gambian woman. She built single handedly, from scratch, one of the most important institutions in our Republic, our National Library, the depository of our knowledge production and the fulcrum of our knowledge consumption. She was modest, intelligent and keen in the production, distribution and consumption of knowledge in The Gambia.

To her family, friends and colleagues at the National Library like Mr Mbye, Ms Ndow and to all staff of the National Library, I convey my condolences and pray that her soul rests in peace.

**Unless specified, all quotes from Hassoum Cessay – The Chronicle, August 2020.**

The ASML has **THEMES IN WEST AFRICA'S HISTORY**  
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