

**PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION OF LIBRARY AND ARCHIVAL  
MATERIALS: LESSONS FROM THOMAS MOFOLO LIBRARY OF THE  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LESOTHO**

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**Abstract**

*The paper is on the preservation and conservation practices at Thomas Mofolo library. It examines the situation and the environment under which the library and archival materials are kept and made accessible to the users so as to pinpoint the main enemy of the TML collection. It goes on to look at the impact of increasing number of users on the dwindling resources.*

*The paper is divided into six parts. The first part is the introduction which deals with the structure of the paper. The second part is the background information on Thomas Mofolo Library. The third part is on the problems Thomas Mofolo Library experience with regard to the preservation and conservation of its collection. The fourth part is on the measures taken by Thomas Mofolo library to preserve its collection. The fifth part deals with the future activities of Thomas Mofolo Library on preservation and the sixth part is the conclusions.*

**Background**

The Roman Catholic Church established the National University of Lesotho the only university in the country in 1945. The university library was established in 1954 for the then Pius X11 University College. In 1964 when Pius X11 became the University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland, the library also became the fully-fledged University Library and assumed important functions like inter-library lending, depository library for government documents of the then High Commission Territories of the then Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland Protectorate and some of the United Nations agencies. In 1966 when the three countries got their independence the name of the University changed to the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. In 1975 when the National University of Lesotho was established the library became the Library of the National University of Lesotho.

Thomas Mofolo Library is the main library of the University with branch libraries at the Institute of Extra Mural Studies in Maseru, Faculty of Agriculture also in Maseru and Leribe Library which caters for the Institute of Extra Mural Studies and Faculty of Agriculture in Leribe. This paper will concentrate on Thomas Mofolo Library located in Roma, the main campus of the National University of Lesotho.

The mission statement of the library as stated in the Thomas Mofolo Library strategic plan is as follows:

As the principal information resource for the University Community of staff, students and researchers, the Thomas Mofolo library strives to provide a dynamic information service to its clientele in order to give a practical meaning to the University's purpose as a centre of excellence in learning, teaching and research (Lebotsa 1997: 9).

In order to accomplish this mission the library collects the materials, processes the materials and prepares the retrieval aids so that the users can easily access the materials. It is also the duty of the library to protect the materials for the benefit of the future generation. So the mission of the library can be summarised as to collect, make accessible and preserve materials for the users.

The library has three floors, the basement, the ground floor and the first floor. The library was last extended in 1979, and it was predicted that it would be ready for expansion in 1994. Unfortunately it has not yet been extended. The library has a seating capacity for 362 readers including the reading carrels when stretched to the maximum. According to the NUL Annual Statistical Bulletin the total enrolment for the university for 2000/2001 was 4176 (including full- time and part- time students) which means that the library in 2000/2001 academic year could only accommodate 11% of the student population. This academic year 2002- 2003 according to the User services librarian 1600 students (full-time and part- time) have been admitted to the first year programmes. The student population has increased yet the reading space in the library has remained the same for 23 years now.

The library serves students, staff and the general public because of the scarcity of public libraries in the country. The National Library, which is operating as the public library, is the only public library in the country. The other libraries, British Council Library and the American Cultural Centre Library which used to serve the public have been closed down. As a result the Thomas Mofolo Library does not only serve students and staff but it serves the general public as well. This results in the library being over-used. The library opens at 8.30 in the morning Monday to Friday but at 8.00 in the morning students are already waiting for the library to open so as to secure seats and rush for reading material. The facilities at Thomas Mofolo are grossly inadequate. There are four photocopying machines, with one exclusively for use by the library staff and the other three are for users. This is an inconvenience for the users and they are sometimes tempted to steal the materials or tear pages from the documents because the photocopying facilities are not easily accessible and one has to queue for a long time. The acquisition department, the department responsible for ordering library materials, can only buy two copies of each title (though in the past the practice was that maximum of four copies per title could be purchased). This is due to the increasingly unfavourable foreign exchange rates as most of the books are purchased from overseas.

The library building is suitable for library and archival materials. In Lesotho there are no high temperatures which play a major role in accelerating the damage to library and archival materials and the propagation of insects. The monthly average temperature in Maseru is 8°C in the coldest months of June and July and is highest at 24°C in January. However there is a wide range between daily maximum and daily minimum temperatures. Typically this is 18°C in winter and 15°C in summer. In the basement of the library where the archival materials are kept there is an air conditioning system which regulates the temperatures and as a result the materials do not suffer from the adverse climatic conditions.

## **Preservation and conservation problems at Thomas Mofolo Library**

The main enemy of the TML is its clientele and the librarians as well. The very people who are supposed to look after the library together with the people who the library has been created for the sole purpose of serving them are the ones who are responsible for destroying the collection. Before the windows were burglar proofed users were throwing books out of the windows, by so doing they were not only stealing books but also they were damaging them as well.

1. Theft: Users steal library materials from the library, sometime they borrow materials and do not return them. In his report to the library Board the Serials Librarian said:

Of late a number of current issues are going missing from the display shelves. The trend seems to be confined to certain social sciences titles. The section wishes to suggest that current issues of these titles be made available only on request (National University of Lesotho 2002a).

2. Vandalism: Users tear pages from the library materials especially from books and periodicals. In the Library Board meeting of May 2002 mutilated books were exhibited so as to make members of the Board aware of the seriousness of the problem.

3. Rough Handling- Users do not handle library materials with care, sometime when marking important pages in a document they fold the pages and they also lean on the documents when using them.

4. Photocopying: Photocopying is very stressful to documents especially when it is done a lot and without proper handling. At TML users do photocopying for themselves without any supervision due to staff shortage. Because of the escalating cost of books students prefer photocopying rather than buying books.

5. Eating and drinking in the library. Sometimes users smuggle food and drinks into the library. Food attracts insects and rats which are harmful to books. The library staff is also guilty of this offence of bringing food and drinks into the library.

### **Measures taken by TML to solve these problems**

There are library regulations which are given to users when they register with the library. The regulations are there to make users aware of what is expected of them as users of the library facilities and how they are expected to behave in the library. The regulations are designed to provide security for the library collections. If a user loses library materials he/ she has to replace the materials or pay the market price of such materials. There are fines for late returns.

The library has a theft detection machine at the exit. The library materials (books and periodicals) are sensitised by inserting tattle tape into them, so that if the user tries to walk out of the library without properly checking out the library material an alarm is raised. When the user borrows material a desensitising process takes place before books and documents are taken out of the library. For reference materials, serials and other materials that are not to be taken out of the library the tattle tapes that cannot be desensitised are used. However the determined and the knowledgeable thieves can circumvent the system by removing tattle tapes from the materials thus making it easy for them to pass through the exit without the system being able to detect the materials. The height of the system is very low and this means that the

system cannot detect materials if they are above a certain height even if the tattle tape is in place.

The theft detection machine is an electronic system that uses electricity and when there are power outages that are very common in Roma, the system becomes completely useless. Another problem is with the system vendor, the company which installed the machine is based in South Africa. As a result when there is a problem with the system it takes a long time for the vendor to come and repair the system.

Before books are taken to the open shelves they are covered with self- adhesive polypropylene film which is a sort of plastic cover. It protects books from dust, dirt and increases the life span of the book. The library has got a Bindery Unit. The bindery has modest equipment for the purposes of repairing damaged library materials reinforcing books as well as the restoration of library materials.

There is a security guard who is deployed to the library. The main duty of the guard is to check users as they leave the library. NUL has contracted Security Lesotho a private security company, to provide it with security guards. The guards are trained and inducted by the Security Lesotho. This point has been captured very well in the report of the NUL Security Task force which states:

It is important to note that the University has no say over crucial aspects of personnel function within Security Lesotho. Such as discipline, transfers, promotions etc. This practice makes it difficult to control logs on efficient staff from this company who are frequently removed and replaced by new staff, who in turn get transferred also after gathering valuable specialised experience, to the consternation of those managing security operations at NUL. The Fire Safety Unit suffers most in this regard (National University of Lesotho 2001:6).

The salaries of Security Lesotho guards are low as compared to those of their NUL counterpart. For instance a security Lesotho guard earns M847.00 per month while NUL guard is paid M2798.00 per month. The low salary of Security Lesotho could have implications for NUL as has been observed by the NUL security task force:

It is further noted that poor recruitment practices by the Security Company (such as low pay of its personnel vis-a- vis that of NUL) could have a negative impact on staff morale. This state of affairs can render the staff vulnerable to temptations of befriending student criminals or strangers (National University of Lesotho 2001:20).

In the Department of Safety and Security there is a unit of Fire Security. The main responsibility of the unit is to make fire brigade teams, train staff and students in fire fighting techniques and to see that buildings are protected from fire. The thirty security guards (from Security Lesotho) are given on the job-training in fire fighting techniques and they are also given a training of three hours per week. However since the guards are not employed by the University they are transferred as and when their employer so wishes and when new security guards are transferred to NUL they have to be trained all over again, this practice has tended to hinder the progress and the development of the unit.

The library staff were given training in fire-fighting techniques in February this year and it has been agreed that there would be periodic fire drills, so that when there is fire the staff would know what to do. There are fire extinguishers in the library which are serviced every six months. The library had a fire detector system which could detect even smoke in the library. However the system is not working at present.

The users are now allowed to carry their bags in the library so that they can feel that they are trusted and hopefully this will make them trustworthy. The Acting University Librarian in her report to Library Board said:

After weighing the prospects and constraints of operating a shoddy cloak-room at the library, the conclusion was drawn that the service was neither projecting the principles of the library to welcome users, nor instilling a sense of trust among all the users,..... Performance of a cloak-less library will be assessed in a few month's time (National University of Lesotho 2002b: 3).

Whether this would work for or against the library remains to be seen. However there is a lot of controversy regarding this issue. The library books and documents are stamped with property stamps at the back of the title page and also on page 99, documents with less than 99 pages are stamped on the last page with 9 for example, if a document has 53 pages it is stamped on page 49.

The archives and Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (BOLESWA) collection of the library is in closed access. Users are not allowed in the areas where archival materials are kept. A user who wants to use the materials from this section must leave an identity document either student or staff identity card or a valid passport for outside users. The staff of the section keeps the identity document until the materials are returned. Materials from this section are never to be taken out of the library. The fine for keeping the materials from this section after hours is Lesotho M1.00 per hour. This is meant to discourage users from hoarding materials. On the other hand, overdue materials from the open shelves attract a fine of Lesotho M0.50 per day.

Membership of the library is controlled. The registered students and staff are eligible to use the library, for others the membership fee is Lesotho M200.00 per annum and they have to bring letters of references either from the educational institutions they are registered with or from authorities or offices they are affiliated with. The membership entitles them to borrow one item per three weeks. In the past membership for this category was Lesotho M20.00 per annum and they were entitled to borrow six items for six weeks. The library lost a lot of material during that period, hence, the change in policy.

### **Future activities**

There are six categories of activities that are going to be undertaken to improve provision of information. These include:

- The extension of the library is one of the University management's priorities. In his speech at the 27<sup>th</sup> convocation for the award of certificates, diplomas and conferment of degrees His Majesty King Letsie III, the Chancellor of the National University of Lesotho, said:

In the spirit of enhancing the bilateral partnership, we have identified a

number of possible cooperation areas and we invite all companies and individuals of goodwill to come forth and assist the transformation process in any of the following prioritised projects. As a consequence of increasing enrolments, the library facilities across all NUL campuses are overstretched. The main library at Roma campus must be expanded while new facilities are required in other campuses (Letsie III 2002:1).

- At a management forum meeting of 18- 19 October 2002 held in Mohale's Hoek it was decided that strong punitive measures should be taken against theft and mutilation of books.
- At the same meeting it was decided that the possibility of using Institute of Southern African Studies documentation centre reading room should be explored so as to relieve the library of the congestion.
- The library has responded positively to the plea by users to increase the opening hours library beyond 22.30 Monday to Friday, the library is now opened up to midnight. There were requests that the archives section of the library should also extend its opening hours. It is hoped that with extended opening hours users would not be tempted to mutilate documents especially those materials that they can only use in the library, as they would have longer time to use them in the library.
- The library is looking for the possibility of buying surveillance cameras so that users actions and movements in the library can be monitored.
- The library is hoping to strengthen its bindery unit in the near future so that the binding of the materials including serials and local newspapers can be done in-house. At present the binding of these materials is done by commercial binders mainly the Morija Printing Press due to lack of space and manpower.

## **Conclusion**

The number one enemy of Thomas Mofolo library collections is its users, students, staff (including the library staff) and the general public. What is needed is that users should be made aware that the library is there for them, it is their library and they should use it with care and safeguard it. Users need to be taught that the communal property is theirs and each and every member of that community has a share. The security of the library is a shared responsibility, which should not only be the librarian's responsibility, but users should also protect their library materials.

Thomas Mofolo Library has employed some security measures and is still looking for more however it should be borne in mind that:

Perfect security never did exist, and never will, in this chancy world . But controls which enhance security do exist, and it is the library administrator's responsibility to be aware of and to employ those that are most suited to his or her (usually unique) situation (Brand 1984:25).

Now that the library is thinking of purchasing the surveillance camera the library should not relax and think that this is a panacea for its security problems. Whatever security measures are put in place, thieves are always thinking of means and ways of circumventing them.

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