Evaluating the Impact of the Swahili Expressive Arts Collection

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Beginnings

• Collection’s story
• Users’ experiences and perceptions
• Impact of images, metadata
• Unanticipated connections, consequences
About IWU

The Ames Library
Africa & IWU

- International Studies Major, African Studies concentration
- Campus events
- Study abroad
Lamu, Kenya

Swahili Expressive Arts Collection
The Study

• Funded by a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant from the Illinois State Library

• Survey

• Main questions focused on:
  – Captions and metadata
  – Theme of collection
  – Student perception of Africa before and after viewing the collection
Captions

“Although pictures of people dancing shows charisma and community within a culture, they do not necessary show religion, conveyed by the captions. The captions covered the unseen meanings behind the actions.” [26]

“They better explained the reasoning behind the occurrence. It helps to explain the ideals and traditions of the people. They gave me insight into the traditions and reasons for them.” [23]
Captions

“They gave me a general idea about what the picture was, but I did not understand some of the terminology. I am not familiar enough with the culture to grasp the full meaning of the photos.” [17]

“I thought that the captions assumed that you have some baseline knowledge about activities which occur in Swahili celebrations.” [16]
Theme
Perceptions

“I’ve always been taught about the negative issues Africa faces. This collection introduced to me what they do for fun, and showed pictures of how beautiful the water is in Africa. Those are things teachers do not really talk about.” [2]
Perceptions

“I have been to Kenya, but the people portrayed in this collection were very different from the people I encountered. The cultures were very different. Through this collection I encountered a new culture form [sic] a land that I thought I already knew to some degree.” [6]
Perceptions

“I had no idea Kenya had such a rich Islamic tradition.” [29]

“All of these pictures were a drastic contrast from the dark, dirty and fearful images of Africa that are often what I think of when thinking about Africa. [...] Some of the architecture was truly stunning and not something I expected to see in the Africa of today.” [3]
Perceptions

“I have always known of the great cultures of Africa, and I greatly appreciate this expressive art view of Africa. I think that for a lot of people, it could really change the way they perceive Africa and its cultures.” [8]

“I have always knew that Africa was a great place filled with love and life.” [22]
In closing...

• Changes to the collection
• Connections
• Marketing, awareness of collection
• Future directions
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• Illinois State Library
Attributions

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The Ames Library: University Communications, IWU
Lamu, Kenya Map:
Lamu, Kenya Coast:
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The Swahili Expressive Arts Collection is online at
http://www.iwu.edu/library/resources/image_collections.shtml