



## Looking to decolonize your public library? Address Aporophobia First

John Pateman and Margaret Demillo

### Abstract

This article will examine some of the deeper conversations that need to happen before a public library can fully institute a decolonization and reconciliation plan. Using mass observation as evidence, the authors argue that acts of discrimination are often mistaken as racism, when in many cases the 'us versus them' mentality is rooted in a perverse and often unconscious fear of poverty and of the poor. A decolonization plan cannot be fully implemented until aporophobia and to a greater extent, the confines of capitalistic society are fully understood by library staff.

### Introduction

Under the leadership of John Pateman the Thunder Bay Public Library (TBPL) is addressing the issues of racism, decolonization and reconciliation head on. As these uncomfortable discussions unfold, some emerging themes have emerged. There is no doubt that racism exists in Thunder Bay, Ontario and that TBPL is one of many Eurocentric public organizations that exudes institutional racism. But current discussions, both direct and indirect are highlighting an undercurrent to the perceived racism issue - economics. In fact, it is the fear of poverty and of the poor ('aporophobia' to be precise) that is at the root of many decolonization and race relation discussions.

Thunder Bay, Ontario is a city with a population of slightly over 107,000 people. The city sits near the head of Lake Superior and is often referred to as the 'Lakehead'. The city is revered for its geographical beauty, slate blue skies are reflected in the largest of the Great Lakes. A large formation of mesas (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesa>) on the Sibley Peninsula ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sibley Peninsula](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sibley_Peninsula)) in Lake Superior

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake\\_Superior](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Superior)) resembling a reclining giant has become a symbol of the city that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities recognize as 'Nanabijou' or the 'Sleeping Giant'. The natural beauty of the area is haunted by the community's reputation as the 'murder capital of Canada', a city with its racism headlining in national newspapers and the focus of Tanya Talaga's book *Seven Fallen Feathers* that captured the tragedy of Indigenous youth within the City.

Pateman has started very serious and awkward discussions within the library and the larger community, stating: "Thunder Bay Public Library recognizes, accepts and acknowledges that racism exists in Thunder Bay and at TBPL. Racism is the problem and only a strong anti-racism response is the answer." (Press Release, Thunder Bay Public Library, 2018).

The TBPL board approved an action plan to support the advancement of initiatives in decolonization, anti-racism, reconciliation and relationship building with Indigenous peoples - in direct response to the findings from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action. The library is the only public institution in the city that has actually taken such proactive steps to enact change.

### **Thunder Bay Public Library**

In 2018, TBPL held a number of Community Conversations (focus groups of 8 - 15 people) to inform the development of its Strategic Plan for 2019–2023. Every sector and demographic were engaged in this process, including arts / heritage, business, criminal justice, community, faith, Indigenous, health / well being, seniors, women and youth. The aim of these conversations was to identify community aspirations and concerns so that TBPL can become both community-led and needs based. Community intelligence was also gathered via an online Community Survey. TBPL's community consultation groups – the Community Action Panel, Youth Advisory Council, Indigenous Advisory Council – as well as TBPL Board members and staff, were used to validate and prioritize the primary themes which emerged from the community conversations and survey. These themes formed the basis of the following strategic objectives:

- Foster a safe, clean and healthy community
- Challenge institutional and systemic racism
- Cultivate diversity and inclusion
- Mitigate the impact of homelessness and poverty
- Encourage and support youth

These strategic objectives are aspirational for any organization. However, some people have suggested they are beyond a public library's 'raison d'être'.

Can a public library be a catalyst for change? The library is "a very seditious organization because we can engineer social change in a very quiet way" - quoted from Pateman in the *Globe and Mail* (Galloway, 2019).

Interestingly, the Thunder Bay Police have aligned their strategic directions with TBPL. In the same article, police chief Sylvie Hauth stated the police are "...with them (TBPL)" when it comes to trying to change things in the city.

Responding to reports that Thunder Bay had the most homicides per capita of all municipalities in Canada in 2018, Chief Hauth followed, "It's no surprise... we do have very high socio-economic issues in our community." (Turner, 2019)

These socio-economic issues are often the topics of hushed whispers about 'those people'. Like many public libraries, TBPL is a sanctuary for the homeless, the new immigrant, those economically disadvantaged, those with mental illness and others disenfranchised by society. Often the perception of sanctuary is matched by library staff's perception of an unsafe work environment. For a marginalized patron, the library is warm, dry and quiet compared to the streets. Library staff members, however, see the library as smelly, messy and full of loud people who are not necessarily borrowing books. The 'us versus them' mindset festers in this maligned psychological space. The antipathy towards this patron is based on fear, real or perceived, not because of physical violence but a fear of the patron's poverty status.

### **Aporophobia**

'Spain's prestigious language foundation Fundéu BBVA has chosen 'aporofobia' (aporophobia) as its word of the year for 2017' (Dunham, 2017). Aporophobia can be roughly translated into English as a fear of poverty and poor people.

Fundéu BBVA credits Spanish philosopher Adela Cortina with coining and circulating 'aporofobia' in the press to bring attention to the fact that xenophobia and racism are often used to explain the disdain shown towards migrants and refugees when that aversion is often caused by their poverty status rather than for being foreign.

Thunder Bay has a long history of a working class, union-strong society with a relatively leftist leaning political tendency. Regardless of these roots, the community was never able to fully realize its ideological potential as a socialist state and became entrenched in capitalistic thinking. With this thinking came the inevitable losers of capitalism - the poor. Poverty implies scarcity, discrimination, isolation, crime, ill health, homelessness, antisocial behaviour, and powerlessness. The notion of 'winners' and 'losers' creates 'us' and 'them'.

For the purposes of this article, 'us' can be described as a front-line library worker, likely female between the ages of 29-54 with at least a high school education and a median salary of \$48,000CDN. 'They' are more difficult to define, firstly because the library does not collect data on patrons regarding socioeconomic status. 'They' are perceived and classified as 'the other' arbitrarily and unequally by staff; that is, not all staff will consider the same patron as 'the other'. There are times when one staff member's 'them' is another's 'us.' It can be asserted, however, that 'those' patrons are from a considerably lower income level, likely on some form of government assistance and are regulars at the soup kitchen and shelters near the various library branches. A definite gender bias is evident with an eighty/twenty split as male/female, with both genders represented between the ages of 29-74.

In her article 'Please Admit You Don't Like Poor People So We Can Move On', (2018) Hannah Brooks Olsen captures how witnessing poverty and perceiving scarcity creates biases in people who are not poor.

Perceptions of poverty have substantial impacts on the way people collectively think and act. Imagine a community meeting about a proposed homeless shelter, wherein self-proclaimed 'concerned' neighbours begin every testimony with something along the lines of 'I care about the homeless! I really do! But...'

and then follow their opener with something that expresses an unfounded bias about people living in poverty -

'...I'm worried about increases in crime.'

'...why do we have to pay for their housing?'

'...they'll just trash it!'

'...how will I explain them to my children?'

These sentiments — which assume that homeless individuals are criminals, that they're freeloaders, that their very existence is somehow damaging to children — are not based in research, nor do they account for the complexity of socioeconomic status. They are, instead, based on a reaction to poverty and scarcity that is intimately linked to our own survival mechanisms.

TBPL is not exempt from such sentiments. This exact same conversation happened recently when an attempt was made to establish a Transitional Housing facility for Indigenous youth in Thunder Bay. Fear of 'the other' — expressed as fear of crime, violence, drug dealing, gangs and guns — dominated the discourse, and drowned out the very real needs of young Indigenous people who are literally dying on the streets because their basic needs, including food and shelter, are not being met. The perceived crimes of drugs and guns are prioritized over the real crimes of hunger and homelessness.

In 2018, TBPL solidified its partnership with Anishinabek Employment and Training Services (AETS). AETS is an incorporated, not-for-profit organization, with over 21 years as part of a national network delivering an Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program. The objective of the national program and each of the regional agreement holders is to increase the participation of Indigenous Citizens in the Canadian labour market. This partnership enables AETS to accommodate its continued growth to empower the Anishinabek and support the TBPL's strategic plan in Community Hub development, decolonization, relationship building and facilities renewal at two library sites.

Library staff members were not happy at this development. Some staff members were candid with their opinions and shared them respectfully with management.

Some of these opinions had rationale - the library was losing space for the collection (AETS was taking over almost an entire floor at two library locations) or concerns over shared resources in TBPL's unionized environment. Some staff worried that the library would lose its status as an institute of society and simply become a landlord. These legitimate (and more importantly, legitimately posed questions) were few and far between, and were answered in an open forum via TBPL's weekly staff newsletter. Most staff, however, chose to voice their concerns to patrons, politicians and the public and then engage in acts of micro-aggressions. A TBPL board member, already influenced by some of these staff, asked at the desk, 'How are you going to keep the smokers away from the front door once those people move in?' When asked to clarify, the board member explained that once AETS moved into the library, there would be increased traffic by Indigenous people, and 'they' smoked without heeding the signs to stay clear of the entrance. Rumours in the coffee room included the suggestion that TBPL entered into the partnership because 'only Indigenous organizations are given money. This is Pateman's way to get government funding.' TBPL staff expressed resentment when hot breakfasts were delivered to AETS early morning meetings: 'My tax money is paying for that bacon'. The biases identified by Olsen emerged.

When TBPL management addressed the murmurs and micro aggression, the tone of the murmurs became one of raised eyebrows and suggestions that free speech was under attack. Instead of 'My tax money is paying for that bacon', comments like 'I'm not going to say anything but it sure must be nice to be paid to eat' were observed. TBPL staff resisted realizing the partnership potential with AETS; they knew where AETS was located and that they did some sort of training and that their clientele was indigenous, but the resisters insisted they didn't know why AETS was in their library. Meet and greet events were organized so the two groups could learn about the other. TBPL staff questioned the expense of the catered events; some staff refused to attend. Six months after sharing a physical desk with AETS, many TBPL staff still stated that they didn't understand the partnership; the 'us' and 'them' dynamic permeated TBPL's already fragile organizational culture.

Around the same time, patron-banning and incident reports were on the rise across the library system. TBPL staff complete incident reports when the behaviour policy is breached. The behaviour policy has a number of considerations ranging from unattended bags to weapons in the library. Patrons can be suspended temporarily for being among other things noisy or intoxicated, threatening staff or for acts of physical violence. Most incidents do not result in suspensions and even less result in banning letters. Staff members are encouraged to capture all incidents, minor and serious in an incident report so risk assessments can be better addressed. At about the same time as AETS was settling onsite at one library, incident reports at another branch spiked. The increase in reports wasn't necessarily alarming, as cyclical spikes are common (cold weather, government pay days, full moon). What was alarming was an increased notation of race in the reports such as 'Aboriginal patron', 'Indigenous man', 'First Nations woman'.

### **Racism**

Racism has long been an issue in the broader Thunder Bay community but had always been simmering on the back burner at TBPL. Management insisted it was time to address it head on. Part of that process included mandatory intercultural competency training. External consultants were brought in to facilitate joint training sessions with AETS and TBPL staff. The groups worked together during the day on self assessments and development activities. It was a long day in a conference room. The topics were deep and at times conversations were difficult. Many people did not want to be there; some even stated so to the facilitators. About three quarters of the way through the first day, a profound conversation occurred between TBPL and AETS staff at one of the tables. It went something like this:

AETS staff: 'We've never had to deal with issues like we are dealing with now. We never had problems before we moved into the library.'

TBPL staff: 'What issues do you mean?'

AETS: 'Those people. We've never encountered smelly people, sleeping people, violent people, people with mental health issues, people who just hang out all day. We've only ever had to deal with our clientele - people who want to work.'

TBPL staff to TBPL staff: They get us!’

This revelation revealed the larger truth. The discord was not necessarily about race. The AETS staff who spoke of ‘them’ was Indigenous. The TBPL staff was white. The two bonded over their fear of the poor patron, and more importantly, their own fears of scarcity and they became ‘us’. ‘Them’ was the mentally ill, smelly, ragged, poor patron.

And then something similar happened. The facilitators told a story that happened on the day they arrived in Thunder Bay. They had never visited the community before but were familiar with race relations as reported in national newspapers. The story goes that after an almost hour wait for a taxi at the airport, they got into the cab and started a conversation with the driver.

Facilitator: ‘Why is there such a long wait for a cab at such a small airport in Thunder Bay?’

Taxi driver: ‘Nobody wants to drive a cab up here. Our company has nineteen cabs, but we only have two drivers. All these people come to the city from up north. They don’t want to work. No one wants to work. In the old days everyone worked at the mill but now none of these people want to work. I’m Polish, my family is Polish. We work hard. But these people nowadays they just sit around.’

The facilitator listened intently to what was said. He took careful note of what was unsaid or implied. In his first encounter in Thunder Bay on his way to deliver intercultural competency training, the facilitator witnessed racial bias in the first hour of his arrival. This bias was presented as somehow predicated on an economic value system: ‘All these people come to the city from up north. They don’t want to work’. The perception that ‘people nowadays they just sit around’ manifests in the driver’s fear of his own potential scarcity. Poverty, the perception of poverty and ultimately the fear of poverty instilled in those who are not poor is often at the root of race relations.

### **Colonization**

Colonization flourished throughout the world as a means of gaining access to land and labour resources. It was an outcome of imperialism motivated by



economic greed. The act of decolonization scares some people. Decolonization implies the current economic imbalance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people - in favour of the non-Indigenous person - could in fact shift in favour of Indigenous people. In a decolonized Canada, even the most remote Indigenous communities might enjoy the same standard of living as their non-Indigenous neighbours, with access to clean water, healthy food and equitable education. It is even possible that the economic divide lessens to the point there is no winner or loser, no 'us' and 'them'. For some people, especially those used to a racial divide, the closing of the economic gap and possibility of parity is as disturbing as the concepts of poverty and scarcity.

Colonization in Canada, like slavery in America, needed an intellectual and moral justification to hide its real motivation, which was purely economic – to extract the human value of Black slaves in America and appropriate the property value of Indigenous land in Canada. The pseudo-scientific justification for these economic activities was eugenics – the belief that the human population can be divided into separate races with distinctive characteristics, including intellectual ability. The Black slaves in America and Indigenous Peoples in Canada were re-invented as inherently inferior to the white man who was inherently superior. This ideological and cultural mind set continued long after the end of slavery and the colonization process, although these also continued in more nuanced and sophisticated forms. When slavery and colonization ended this was presented as a moment of conscious enlightenment when the white man realised that what he was doing to Black and Indigenous Peoples was morally and ethically wrong. In fact, there was no such 'light bulb moment' because the real reason why slavery and colonization 'ended' was pure economics and nothing to do with morality or ethics.

When slavery and colonization were no longer profitable to the white man, he used the profits he had extracted from these processes to invest in an even more lucrative project called capitalism. And as is often the way with the white man, he was able to have his cake and eat it. He was able to distance himself from slavery and colonization while at the same time benefitting from the continuation of its ideological base which was embedded in people's minds, i.e. white people were superior to Black and Indigenous Peoples. He could then use

this ideology to divide and rule and entrench his power and wealth under capitalism. He used capitalism to continue enslaving and colonizing the minds of the people he continued to oppress and they became agents of their own oppression.

## **Capitalism**

To challenge capitalism is a huge step to take because it requires that we completely turn a long accepted and entrenched world view on its head. We are required to not only stand in someone else's shoes and view the world through someone else's eyes, but also to reprogram our brains so that we can see their world through our own eyes. It is possible, but by no means easy, to intellectually imagine how this might happen. The barrier to creating a new world view is not our intellect but our emotions, because one of our most powerful emotions – fear – is at play here. Fear is used by capitalism as a deliberate tactic to ensure that we always look downwards upon those below us - for answers to our questions and sources of our frustrations and challenges – rather than upwards at the real, and common, source of our problems.

The middle class look down on the working class, and the working class look down on the underclass. Meanwhile, the ruling class looks down on all of us. Imagine if this sequence was reversed. Imagine if the underclass looked up to the working class to help them climb up the social and economic ladder; imagine if the working class looked up to the middle class to use their resources and connections to break through glass ceilings. And imagine if the underclass, working class and middle class all looked up at the ruling class and realised that this tiny one per cent elite was their common enemy. Then some real change might be possible.

But in the real world the ruling class in America, Britain and Canada can convince the middle class that their enemy is the working class and that the greatest threat to the working class comes from the underclass. When Trump says 'Make America Great Again' this assumes that America was great at some time in its past and that someone is responsible for bringing it down from greatness. But instead of pointing to the real culprits – corporate America – he

singles out the undocumented migrant worker trying to cross the Rio Grande. The same argument was deployed during the Brexit campaign in Britain and the recent federal elections in Canada. The enemy was not the rich and powerful (who we should revere) but the poor and dispossessed (who we should fear). This classic divide and rule tactic is used by the ruling class to entrench their wealth and power.

Middle class library workers are fearful of working-class library patrons. Working class library workers are fearful of underclass library patrons. White library workers are fearful of Indigenous library patrons. This fear has several elements: fear of the other, fear of poverty, and fear of revenge. Fear that 'the other' might take what we have from us; fear that we may then become 'the other'; and fear that 'the other' may exact revenge on us for what we have done to them. This fear has been used to justify the oppression of colonized, enslaved and working-class people. The 'logic' behind this argument is that the ruling class (with the support of the middle and working classes) have to use increasingly cruel and vindictive methods to hold down 'the other' or they will rise up and inflict a terrible vengeance on us for all the injustices we have done to them. There is an inherent recognition within this argument that wealth and power imbalances have negative consequences but, instead of using this recognition to correct these imbalances, we project our fear of revenge on to those we oppress. This makes us all complicit and compromised by the capitalist revenge system.

Vengeance, vindictiveness and revenge are used to maintain the status quo. These mechanisms justify the oppressive actions of the ruling class, they compromise and make complicit the middle and working classes, and they constrain the capacity of the oppressed to resist and fight back. Black people in America have a long and proud history of resistance from slave revolts to 'race riots' in Chicago and other major cities. One of the primal fears underpinning Trump's America is that the white man will become a minority within 'his own country' and that 'the other' will overwhelm him and take his wealth and power. The response to this perceived threat is to use all the forces at the white man's disposal – most notably the militarised police state – to suppress and subdue 'the other' and act as a constant reminder of who is in charge.

This weaponised response is played out every time a white police officer pulls over a black driver in America. The interaction that follows is overlaid by the whole racial history of America, from slavery right up to the present day. The black driver is quite rightly fearful of the weaponised white cop. But the gun wielding white cop is just as fearful, and maybe more so, of the black driver. This fear is driven in part by his knowledge of all the injustices that white people (including the white cop) have wreaked upon black people and also by the white cop's perceived fear that the black driver he has pulled over might take the opportunity to wreak his personal revenge. The same dynamics come into operation when a white police officer interacts with an Indigenous person in Thunder Bay. The white cop is playing his historical role as the agent of white oppression that is enshrined in law by the Indian Act; at the same time, he knows at some psychological level that this oppression is not justified, and he fears that the Indigenous person may want to take revenge. This raises the stakes on both sides of the encounter – real fear combined with perceived fear – with often tragic consequences.

Perceived 'acts of revenge' not only manifest through mass actions such as 'race riots' in America or 'stand offs' between Indigenous people and white police in Canada, but also in everyday one to one interpersonal interaction between white people and 'the other'. These interactions happen on a daily basis at Thunder Bay Public Library, but few would locate them within the context of fear, vindictiveness, vengeance and revenge that we are suggesting in this article.

### **Social Class**

If library workers can recognize their settler colonial world view, understand what makes them view welfare mothers and homeless people for example, unfavourably, and recognize that poverty - not poor people - is the problem, that poverty can be reduced if not ended, and that the most vulnerable and dispossessed among us are citizens and neighbours who deserve compassion, support, and respect - then there's a real chance to change their heads and hearts. But first they must be able to frame their understanding in terms of class rather than race.

Talking about class is as difficult as talking about race, even though class is a real economic construct whereas race is a perceived social construct. People feel very uncomfortable talking about class because it forces them to recognize that class exists, also it reminds them of where they are in the class pecking order. For those in the working class this can trigger feelings of resentment but, as previously mentioned, these feelings are often misdirected downwards towards the underclass, rather than upwards at the real class enemy. This powerful resentment among the working class is particularly evident among those who have made it out of the underclass. Instead of lowering a ladder down to their former brothers and sisters who remain in the underclass, they pull up this ladder, distance themselves from the underclass, and enjoy the benefits of their new class status.

There are many immigrants who, after establishing themselves in their new home country, argue vociferously against more immigrants being let into the country. This is because they fear the economic competition that continued immigration may bring and the related fear that this competition may push them back down into the underclass. The same dynamics exists between the working and middle classes. Working class people who make it into the middle class (if such transitions are truly possible) often start to despise the very class they have escaped from. They argue 'if I made it so can you, and if you don't it's because you are stupid or lazy.' They fail to recognize that they were only able to 'escape' from the working class because it serves capitalisms interest to let them do so. The middle class works hard for the ruling class and are its eager agents, even though there is very little possibility that many people from the middle class will make it into the top one per cent. What keeps the middle class working hard for capitalism is not their hope that they will make it into the ruling class but their fear that they will fall back into the working class.

Discussions about class are often hijacked or diverted by two dominant narratives that are used by the ruling class to maintain their hegemony. One of these narratives is that class no longer exists or is no longer relevant. If the ruling class can get people to buy into this narrative then they can make the class question disappear altogether, along with all the inequities that go with it. If this narrative does not work, they fall back on a second, even more beguiling

argument: 'we are all middle class now'. Not only does this obscure the true nature of the class system but it motivates people to buy into that system by suggesting that it can be a tool which can be used to get on in life. During the recent federal election in Canada there were many references to the 'middle class' but very few mentions of the working and ruling classes. The campaign narrative was dominated by 'the middle class and those who are working hard to join it', the implication being that if you do not succeed in life that is because you are not working hard enough.

Any discussion about race – no matter how difficult that may be – has to start with a discussion about class. And any discussion about class has to be grounded in capitalism, economics and poverty. Racism is a product of capitalism. Capitalism is the cause, racism is the effect and class is the solution. This analysis has been distorted by proponents of intersectionality who argue that identities such as race and gender are of equal or greater significant than class.

While intersectionality and identity politics are important because they motivate people into taking political action, they can also become a distraction from the real struggle, which is the class struggle. Intersectionality and identity politics tend to divide rather than unite. 'Black Lives Matter' alienates some white people. Transgender alienates some feminists. These are important causes and should be fought for and defended but they play into the capitalist game of divide and rule. We only have to see how corporate America has bought into intersectionality and identity politics to understand that it is being used as a tool against the very people it pretends to support. Intersectionality and identity politics focus on differences rather than commonalities, and some of these differences are not real, they are social constructs.

Race is a classic social construct; biologically all of the people on this planet are one race. Our DNA is identical. We may look different on the outside but in many ways, we are exactly the same. Slavery and colonialism were the great engines of capitalism and, although some of the superstructure of these systems has gone, the ideology that created and perpetuated them remains firmly in place. Black people are not being taken from Africa and enslaved today but the ideology that made this possible – that Black people are inferior and white people are superior – lives on in modern day America. Indeed, it can be argued

that this divide and rule between Black and white people is what enables the ruling class to stay in control, such is the power of racism in America.

In Canada, the power of the ruling class is entrenched by the deep divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples; this divide is embedded within the legal superstructure via the Indian Act which created and perpetuates an apartheid system in Canada. This racist superstructure shapes and determines the ideological base in Canada and enables white people and immigrants to look down upon Indigenous Peoples, who are viewed and treated as an underclass by white settlers and new arrivals.

### **Decolonization**

In order to start challenging these false feelings of superiority and inferiority and these socially constructed 'racial differences' between white and Indigenous Peoples, we have to shift the discussion from an ideological and cultural argument to an analysis of the underlying economic system. For example, 'Truth and Reconciliation in Canada' (Truth and Reconciliation Commission/ TRC) requires us to admit the harsh and unpalatable truth that the white man stole the land from the Indigenous Peoples, and that reconciliation is only possible between two equal parties who have equal wealth and power. This means either giving the land back to Indigenous Peoples or, better still, finding a way to share the land with them for mutual benefit. This is what many Indigenous Peoples thought they were committing to when they signed the Treaties. Instead, the land was stolen from them and they were forced onto Reserves.

The white man saw the Treaties as contractual land deals and paid some token economic compensation in return for what became very valuable real estate. This very act of compensation created deliberate divisions and resentments between Indigenous and white Canadians that are still evident today; for example, this resentment is apparent every time a Status Card (which in itself is a powerful symbol of the apartheid state) is presented at a store check out. These perceived unfair economic transactions trigger ideological and cultural resentments such as 'why do those people pay less than me.' This economic resentment is in the mind of every white staff member – either consciously or unconsciously – each time they interact with an Indigenous person in the library.

Another thought that is at the back or front of the minds of library workers is that the library they work in was built on land that was stolen from the Indigenous people; with this thought comes an attendant fear of revenge if the land was somehow taken back. This fear is managed by 'land acknowledgement statements' which acknowledge that something happened in the past but do not admit that this was an injustice or commit to doing anything about it. These acknowledgements are carefully crafted legal statements that merely recognize a historical fact rather than admit culpability, e.g.: "We acknowledge that the City of Thunder Bay has been built on the traditional territory of Fort William First Nation, signatory to the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850. We also recognize the contributions made to our community by the Métis people." (Thunder Bay Land acknowledgement statement).

Some Indigenous people feel that land acknowledgements are a step in the right direction because they at least recognize that something happened in the past. But recognition requires no action, which makes the white man feel very comfortable, because he doesn't have to do anything to right a historical wrong. The white man can salve his conscience by admitting a historical act, while at the same time distancing himself from it ('that was in the past and had nothing to do with me') and admitting no liability. He can continue to enjoy the benefits, economic and otherwise, of this historical injustice.

Decolonization of public libraries will only become meaningful when the stolen land that they were built on is given back to Indigenous Peoples. In order for the public library to commit to decolonization of the institution, the organization and its staff must understand and accept they are in fact parties to the Treaties. This requires the authentic admission that we all have rights and obligations with respect to Treaties and that we also share the negative impact that colonialism continues to have on us. In order to do this, it is necessary to examine the social and economic constructs that frame and drive colonialism. If aporophobia is one of these constructs the library must start an uncomfortable conversation with its staff and patrons about capitalism, poverty, class and race. This conversation must take place before truth, reconciliation and decolonization of the public library can move forward.



John Pateman, Thunder Bay Public Library ([jpateman@tbpl.ca](mailto:jpateman@tbpl.ca))

Margaret Demillo, Thunder Bay Public Library ([mdemillo@tbpl.ca](mailto:mdemillo@tbpl.ca))

## References

Allemang, J. (2018, May 11) The classless society? Only in Canada, eh? Pity. Retrieved December 1, 2019, Available at:  
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/the-classless-society-only-in-canada-eh-pity/article10761579/>

Andrew-Gee, E. (2019, August 16) Hot-dog harmony: How a Thunder Bay diner and its Coney sauce comfort a divided city, Available at:  
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-hot-dog-harmony-how-a-thunder-bay-diner-and-its-coney-sauce-comfort-a/>

Beaulieu, M. S. (2008) Essays in Northwestern Ontario Working Class History: Thunder Bay and Its Environs. Thunder Bay: Lakehead University.

Beaulieu, M. S. (2011) Labour at The Lakehead: ethnicity, socialism and politics. Kelowna: UBC.

Dunham, A. (2017, December 29) The Local, Available at:  
<http://www.thelocal.es/20171229/spanish-word-of-the-year-highlights-hatred-of-poor-people-aporofobia>

Dunk, T. W. (2003) It's a Working Man's Town: Male Working-class Culture. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Galloway, G. (2019, June 21) Turning the page: Thunder Bay's library a leader among civic bodies in healing a racial divide, Available at:  
<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-turning-the-page-thunder-bays-library-a-leader-among-civic-bodies-in/>

LSPC, T. B. (2018) Lakehead Social Planning Council, Available at:  
<http://www.lspc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018-Poverty-Reduction-Strategy.pdf>

Menzies, C. R. (2010) Indigenous Nations and Marxism: notes on an ambivalent relationship. *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry*, 3(3), 5–6.

Morrison, J. (2019) *Labour Pains Thunder Bay's Working Class in Canada's Wheat Boom Era (First Edition)*. Thunder Bay: Thunder Bay Historical Museum Society.

Olsen, H. B. (2018, July 5) Please Admit You Don't Like Poor People So We Can Move On, Available at: [medium.com/@mshannabrooks/please-admit-you-dont-like-poor-people-so-we-can-move-on-f4e964087b16](https://medium.com/@mshannabrooks/please-admit-you-dont-like-poor-people-so-we-can-move-on-f4e964087b16)

Proudfoot, S. (2019, July 16) *Macleans.ca*, Available at: <https://www.macleans.ca/society/what-does-it-mean-to-be-working-class-in-canada>

Raquel, J. (2019). *Progressive Toolkit: a guide to winning arguments for transformative change*, Available at: <http://classonline.org.uk/pubs/item/1521>

Robinson, O. (2019, September 10) *Decolonizing the public library*, Available at: <https://rabble.ca/news/2019/09/decolonizing-public-library>

Trifonas, P. P. (2010) *Pedagogies of Difference: Rethinking Education for Social Change*. (1st ed.). Abingdon: Routledge.

Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012) *Decolonization Is Not A Metaphor*. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1).

Turner, L. (2019, July 24) "No surprise" Thunder Bay, Ont. has most homicides per capita in Canada: says police chief, Available at: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/tbay-police-chief-responds-to-2018-crime-stats-1.5222398>

Wong, D. (2018) *Moving in the Circle: Indigenous Solidarity for Canadian Libraries*. *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research*, 12(2). <https://doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v12i2.3781>