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Multiple ways of knowing

Global perspectives on academic libraries re-imagining systems of knowledge

The recorded evidence of the killing of unarmed Black people by excessive police force in the last few years has brought attention to the institutional racism in the United States, but the killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, at the hands of U.S. police was the tipping point, sparking protests worldwide calling for racial justice in a global display of solidarity.

In academia, the ShutDownSTEM initiative organized a strike on June 10 for participants to stop research activities to reflect and take action on systemic inequalities in science research communities. The scientific and academic community was asked "to do the work to eradicate racism and create a just, equitable, and inclusive STEM field: It is not enough to say that you stand in solidarity. We need you to be accountable. We need your actions."[1]

Reflection by the International Insights column editors, Clara M. Chu and Jaya Raju, on this day, resulted in the focus of this column. Three library and information science educators, scholars, and prior practitioners were invited to address the question: What is the academic library's role in resisting and eradicating systemic inequalities in science/ systems of knowledge to advance multiple ways of knowing? This column engages global perspectives on the need for academic libraries to stop reproducing institutional and systemic racism and other forms of discrimination, while advancing multiple ways of conducting research and learning, reimagining

scholarship and science in higher education, and engaging epistemological thinking that examines knowledge systems and power.

Equal Access and Contribution to Knowledge (EACK): The academic library's role—Kanwal Ameen, University of Home Economics (Pakistan)

The subjects of equal "access" to knowledge/information and equal "contribution" in the advancement of knowledge and scientific research have many dimensions. Equal Access and Contribution to Knowledge (EACK) is related to the economic, geographic, racial, ethical, and other conditions and priorities of an individual, group,

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or society. Moreover, information poverty also causes information inequality—be it due to lack of infrastructure needed to access knowledge, information skills, knowledge-sharing culture, or intellectual support systems. Economic disparity, intellectual biases, and information poverty grossly hamper equal access to information and contribution by individuals and nations to the world treasure of knowledge. Poor information skills work as barriers to accessing and producing high-quality knowledge and scholarship. Limited information skills in searching, finding, using, and sharing without checking its origin, authenticity, timeliness, and trustworthiness culminate often into making weak arguments, illogical fallacies, misguided decisions, indulging in pseudo-scholarship, and spreading both fake news and underlying agendas of information producers. Therefore, academic libraries must be at the forefront to encounter information poverty among the community by addressing their information skills.

The role of academic libraries becomes crucial in creating equal opportunities to access knowledge by all their communities when empathy and equity for diversity and marginalized communities are decreasing the world over. Based on my experience of academic libraries in both developed and underdeveloped countries, I can say that the vision and practices of academic libraries in developing countries are generally still collections and sources-centered, instead of client and access-centered.

Moreover, by applying self-censorship, academic libraries avoid providing access to information sources that may displease majority members of their community. Such content may be related to the studies of religion, sectarianism, politics, history, gender, etc. Also, governments in these countries regulate publicly available publications despite democratic political systems and may ban certain material declaring it "not suitable." Furthermore, the accessibility of knowledge to people with disabilities is poor among these countries both in virtual and physical environments.

To eradicate disparities in EACK, academic libraries need to facilitate both research on marginalized communities, and provision of equal services to them and their collections. Solutions to accessing sensitive scholarly works must be identified to overcome issues of censorship. Academic libraries should support subjugated research areas in their liaison work with departments in fields such as gender and women's studies; ethnic, race, and diaspora studies; and comparative religions. These strategies by academic libraries will be much valued in advancing EACK.

Reimagining Māori knowledge— Spencer Lilley, Massey University

Māori are the Indigenous peoples of New Zealand. After the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, the country was colonized by the British. Although the Māori language version of this treaty recognized Māori sovereignty and rights of self-determination, these were not upheld. Like other Indigenous nations that have gone through colonization, Māori find themselves dominating the negative social statistics, including high levels of unemployment, incarceration, educational failure, and welfare dependency.

The Black Lives Matter movement in the United States has resonated with Māori and ethnic minorities in New Zealand who feel that justice and other systems of the state have been oppressive towards them.

The education system, modelled on the English one, has had a major influence on Māori social outcomes. Early education of Māori focused on assimilation by restricting how Māori engaged with their culture and on disciplining children for speaking te reo Māori (Māori language) at school. Despite these actions, Māori culture and language have survived and started to thrive again. This renaissance was initiated "by Māori, for Māori" and supported by non-Māori "allies." Although supported by successive governments, there are still too many non-Māori who are unaware and do not understand the impact colonization has had on Māori. A critical part of this is the dominant nature of

Western forms of knowledge and values, and the disregard for worldviews that underpin Māori knowledge systems.

Each university in New Zealand has an academic unit that offers courses that focus on Māori knowledge and language but studying these is not normally compulsory and it has been possible to graduate without having specific exposure to Māori content. However, there is a growing recognition that this is not a sustainable position to have, as there is increasing demand by professions and employers for graduates with the ability to engage with Māori communities and an expectation that universities will ensure that Māori have opportunities to succeed. Qualifications are being restructured to not only have Māori-focused courses but to have Māori content spread across the entire curriculum and incorporated into individual courses.

This is particularly challenging for individuals who have always operated in a context where Western knowledge systems are paramount. It requires non-Māori faculty to not only increase their own understanding of Māori knowledge, but to also identify how they can incorporate it into their courses. The latter may also require collaboration with Māori faculty members to ensure that the content is applied in culturally appropriate ways. Faculty are being strongly supported through this transition by professional development courses covering cultural issues, and how to incorporate these into curriculum design.

The role of the academic library in this process is highly important, as it not only provides materials for faculty seeking to increase their knowledge, but also assists in finding resources that will contribute to learning modules in courses and qualifications. Although most libraries have Māori specialist staff available, it is also important for faculty librarians to have a strong understanding of how Māori knowledge is represented in their disciplines.

On race, class, and knowledge in academic libraries—Ana Ndumu, University of Maryland-College Park

Higher education institutions are grappling with growing pressure to move beyond espoused social responsibility to strategic, sustained measures toward eradicating White Western dominance in academia. Academic libraries, generally seen as the guardians of knowledge production, are also implicated in this widespread discontent. Academic librarianship the world over has tended to sustain the status quo in its practice and education that uphold racist, Eurocentric, class-based, and other hegemonic systems.

Such biases have resulted in many perils, including the cooptation and appropriation of Black, Indigenous, and other cultures in scientific "discoveries" and for commercial consumption; crimes against humanity in the name of science and innovation; the caricaturing and infantilizing of people of color through "empirical" research; and the dismissal of scholarship that ventures beyond dominant intellectual traditions. The implications of this dehumanization include, for example, "ethnic" library collections that remain detached from context or communities along with peer-reviewed publications that position people of color as genetically inclined toward fatalism[2] and pathology.[3] We see this connection between intelligentsia and bigotry in the inhumane objectification of Black women such as Sarah Baartman,[4] whose body was paraded and prodded as the last link between animals and humankind, and later Henrietta Lacks,[5] whose body cells were pilfered and engineered for medical research. This same othering and pharmaceutical profiteering were behind the exploitation of rural and indigenous communities in Tuskegee, Alabama; Guatemala City, Guatemala;[6] and Kano, Nigeria.[7] A racist continuum is evident in academic tenure systems which disregard topics that do not satisfy the White gaze, as renowned novelist Toni Morrison[8] puts it, or eschew the "logics and tactics of enmity," according to Alex Feldman.[9]

Academic libraries can advance multiple ways of knowing. Dennis Ocholla rightly suggests that academic libraries can stretch higher education by modeling decolonial, emancipatory, and humanizing practices.[10]

This radical academic library approach—that is, of community empowerment and civil rights—was modeled for me when I was a new librarian at a historically Black college and university (HBCU).

These institutions were founded prior to desegregation in the United States and continue to provide educational opportunities while centering the African American experience. An Afrocentric pedagogical mission scaffolded our library instruction, reference provision, collection development, outreach, and professional development. HBCUs continue to be significant social equalizers. They educate a third of all Black collegians, despite comprising just 2.4% of colleges and universities in the United States.[11] HBCU libraries play a critical role in championing other ways of knowing and resisting what Ocholla calls the "intellectually colonized mindset."[12]

To counter inequalities, academic librarians must ensure that information and opportunities are accessible to those relegated to the margins of societies. Rather than relying on the Global North's scholarly communication industry, academic libraries can promote open scholarship and publishing in non-European languages and amplify research by, about, and for Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color in the Global South. Instead of appeasing privileged and Western learning norms, academic libraries can be spaces where first-generation and nontraditional students and scholars find belonging and representation. The work of advancing global change through multiple ways of knowing means that social justice must be front and center.

Conclusion

As an epistemic wave on disrupting established paradigms in teaching, learning and knowledge creation in higher education that perpetuates inequalities in society, makes its global sweep, the role of academic libraries in resisting systemic inequalities in science and systems of knowledge, has come into critical focus. The accounts of three LIS academics, each drawing from their personal experiences in higher education, profes-

sional practice, and their local contextuality, highlight the need for academic libraries to adopt a positionality that is epistemological, reflective and activist in nature. Be it actively promoting "equal access and contribution to knowledge" (EACK); collections and services critically engaging the impact of "Western forms of knowledge and values" on indigenous knowledge cultures; the urgent need for academic librarians to disrupt the "status quo" that perpetuates "racist, Eurocentric, class-based and other hegemonic systems"; or, engaging any of the many other forms of decolonizing and transformative activism, academic librarianship has a critical role to play in empowering stakeholders (librarians, students, scholars, community members) to challenge power and privilege impeding the advancement of multiple ways of knowing.

The need for this activism, on the part of academic libraries, acknowledges that information, the foundational core of academic libraries in all their resource and service provisions, is not neutral or disengaged. The curation by academic librarians of information as outcomes of higher education knowledge creation processes, adds meaning and context for students, scholars, librarians themselves and members of society. Hence, academic libraries have a powerful role to play in re-imagining higher education systems of knowledge through disruption and critical interrogation of the historical, political, economic, social and cultural forces that interact with information.

Notes

1. Shut Down STEM Take Action, https://www.shutdownstem.com/action (accessed June 10, 2020); Particles for Justice (Strike for Black Lives) https://www.particlesforjustice.org/strike-details (accessed June 10, 2020).

2. Margery Fee, "Racializing narratives: Obesity, diabetes and the "Aboriginal" thrifty genotype," *Social Science & Medicine* 62, no. 12 (2006): 2988.

will likely live with this uncertainty for some time. While this time has been extremely difficult, we have also learned lessons that we will take forward, even post-pandemic.

As we peer into their living rooms via Zoom, we are reminded of one another's whole humanity. We have met each others' children and pets. We have built an intimacy and trust that typically does not exist in the office. Through this lens, we have also witnessed incredible tenacity, self-motivation, and self-accountability. We also believe that our relationships with senior administrators have grown and strengthened. We have newfound respect for the hard decisions that senior administrators face and the work they do within often limited or ambiguous parameters that the university puts forward.

Finally, despite how middle management can feel like a thankless and invisible position, this crisis has affirmed the vital role middle managers play in sustaining organizational communications and supporting both our staff and library leadership. Perhaps for middle managers, a central task in the difficult times ahead will be doubling down on self-care and peer support, so we can continue showing up with the tremendous flexibility and resiliency required of us at this time.

Overall, these takeaways—about our staff, our leaders, and ourselves—will no doubt influence how we shape our work well into the future. At the least, we will likely approach our work with greater generosity for one another as colleagues, even when circumstances return to something more like what we had before COVID-19. In the meantime, while these challenging times persist with no sign of abating soon, we will lean into what we have already learned in order to continue showing up for one another. ✌

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3. Race, Ethnicity, and Genetics Working Group, "The use of racial, ethnic, and ancestral categories in human genetics research," *The American Journal of Human Genetics* 77, no. 4 (2005): 519.

4. Katherine McKittrick, "Science quarrels sculpture: The politics of reading Sarah Baartman," *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* (2010): 113.

5. Robert D. Truog, Aaron S. Kesselheim, and Steven Joffe, "Paying patients for their tissue: The legacy of Henrietta Lacks," *Science* 337, no. 6090 (2012): 37.

6. Susan M. Reverby, "Ethical failures and history lessons: The U.S. Public Health Service research studies in Tuskegee and Guatemala," *Public Health Reviews* 34, no. 1 (2012): 17.

7. Dennis Ocholla, "Marginalized Knowledge: An Agenda for Indigenous Knowledge Development and Integration with Other Forms of Knowledge," *International Review of Information Ethics* 7 (2007): 239.

8. Toni Morrison, Interview with Charlie Rose, *Charlie Rose Show,* Public Broadcasting Service, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHHHL31bFPA (accessed August 17, 2020)

9. Alex Feldman, "The genesis of Foucault's genealogy of racism: Accumulating men and managing illegalisms," *Foucault Studies* 25, no. 2 (2018): 275.

10. Dennis Ocholla, "Decolonizing higher education in Africa: Implications and possibilities for university libraries," *C&RL News* 81, no. 6 (2020): 289, https://doi.org/10.5860/crln.81.6.289.

11. U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, "Fact Facts: Historically Black Colleges and Universities, https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=667 (accessed August 17. 2020).

12. Ocholla, "Marginalized Knowledge," 238.✌