PROGRESSIVE LIBRARIAN

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Issue #45 Winter 2016/2017

Librarians Against Rape Culture
Libraries, Sustainability and Degrowth
ALA, IFLA and Cuba
Librarians in Wikipedia
Visibility, Gender, and Classification
Libraries Under Occupation
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Why PLG? Why paper? Why bridge generations?

Each article in this issue of Progressive Librarian could have supplied a slogan for the January 21st Women’s Marches (or as we called it in Seattle, the Womxn’s March): Librarians Against Rape Culture (Cobb); Degrowth = the only hopeful sustainability under capitalism (Civallero & Plaza Moreno); What now with U.S.-Cuba relations? (Kagan); Stop Cultural Genocide Against Palestine (Mermelstein; Mattson & Twiss); Public librarians love PINK! (Edwards); Womxn Poets! (Kortemeier); Library Workers Unite (Barriage et al.); The 1% Class — Making America Miserable Again! (Pateman).

Every gathering, large and small, in the 676 locations reporting events in the U.S. could easily have included at least one library worker, whether in Washington DC, Nome (Alaska), or Ocala (Florida). That weekend the PLG banner made an appearance at the convention center in Atlanta (Georgia) as librarians attending the midwinter meeting of the American Library Association prepared to join with some 60,000 Atlantans and National Book Award winner and longtime civil rights activist Congressman John Lewis who addressed the pink pussy-hatted crowds. And there were marches in Mexico City, Oslo, Beirut, Accra, Tokyo…members of the 99% around the globe expressing opposition to the new president of the U.S. (Thanks to Wikipedia this data is so easily available, which I suppose makes this editor an ally of the devil’s advocates, along with Scholz and Beman-Cavallaro who urge PL readers to become Wikipedians.1)

Elaine Harger is librarian at Washington Middle School in Seattle, a member of the Seattle Education Association (NEA), a co-founder of Progressive Librarians Guild, and author of Which Side Are You On: Seven Social Responsibility Debates in American Librarianship, 1990-2015 (McFarland, 2016).

KEYWORDS: Progressive Librarians Guild; Library activism; American Library Association; Trump administration and censorship; Disinformation; Librarianship and social justice
Progressive Librarian was being prepared for the printer at the end of the first week of the new Trump administration — a wild week that witnessed tweets and press “conferences” via which the administration lied about easily verifiable information, insisted on the legitimacy of “alternative facts,” characterized the press as “the opposition party,” and demanded that it “keep its mouth shut.”

The week also featured a flurry of actions regarding information ranging from demands that the EPA expunge climate change data from its website to outright deletion of the Spanish language portion of the White House website and the disappearance of LGBTQ rights webpages from the Department of Labor.

And, at week’s end, came the horror of Trump’s executive order regarding immigrants from seven Muslim countries — a ban met instantaneously with protests at airports across the country and in quick order was halted by a federal judge.

Such is the political climate and information environment in which the library profession finds itself today. Navigating this landscape demands a sort of collective action and engagement within community that the profession has long paid lip-service to all the while continuing to serve the interests of the power elite.

We saw this when the American Library Association, immediately after the November election, offered congratulations, cooperation and services to the new administration (Document 1, p. 128-129) — a message coming directly from the elite of the profession, which quickly learned how distant it was from the rank-and-file. An outpouring of opposition via email, Facebook, Twitter, phone calls, etc. to ALA’s post-election letter put the Association on notice that it must stand firm on the profession’s core values. In a flurry the letter was rescinded (Document 2, p. 130) and ALA President Julie B. Todaro issued a letter of apology to members (Document 3, p. 130-131).

On January 30, ALA issued a statement opposing Trump administration policies that contradict core values and at its midwinter meeting in January the ALA Council passed Resolution on Access to Accurate Information, which was based in earlier policy-making done a decade ago by PLG and SRRT members who served on ALA’s governing Council. In 2005, these members persuaded Council to approve the following:

The ALA opposes the use by government of disinformation, media manipulation, the destruction and excision of public information, and other such tactics, and ALA encourages its members to help raise public consciousness regarding the many ways in which disinformation and media manipulation are being used to mislead public opinion in all spheres of life, and encourages librarians to facilitate this awareness with collection development, library programming and public outreach.
that draws the public’s attention to those alternative sources of information dedicated to countering and revealing the disinformation often purveyed by the mainstream media.  

The spirit of safeguarding public information from destruction prompted librarians and archivists to join scientists and hackers, in the days leading up to Inauguration Day, in a preservation marathon of climate data.  

Political agendas served by “alternative facts” and “fake news” are nothing new, although the characteristic historical amnesia induced by a culture of consumption and the educational system in the U.S. makes everything under the sun seem new (except, of course, those things that are truly ancient — Egyptian mummies, Aztec calendars, the Great Wall of China, etc.).  

So, what does Progressive Librarians Guild offer the profession? Why do we insist on publishing a paper, advertisement-free journal? Is PLG, as some have claimed, so disconnected from the newest generation of library and archive professionals as to be irrelevant?  

What PLG offers can be glimpsed via the pages of this issue — raising questions, offering analysis, describing experiences, and suggesting practices that push the envelope on issues the profession as a whole would rather ignore: a culture of consumption; library service to the interests of capitalism; climate change. PLG members offer experience as library activists willing to share insights, strategies, cautionary tales, and welcome the company of like-minded colleagues on the journey.  

We insist on publishing Progressive Librarian on paper and online and advertisement-free because

- the physicality of print is still the best option in preserving the historic record, and the history of librarianship matters to us;
- for many people, young and old, paper is a most congenial interface between text/image, eye, and mind;
- online access gives the journal the broadest possible reach; and
- a journal supported exclusively by subscribers serves the interests of readers, not corporations.  

As for the generation gap, PLG bridges generations. Two authors of articles in this issue were LIS students when their work was accepted for publication, a couple are tail-end-Baby-Boomers, the others are Me Generation, Gen-X or Millennials.  

In Trump’s “America” and around the globe, building bridges between generations and genders and place-of-birth/ancestry and language and culture is essential if we want our communities to meet the challenges of dwindling resources and climate change in a spirit of love rather than xenophobic hatred,
cooperation rather than exploitation. The profession — indeed, the planet —
cannot afford generation gaps. All ages, the entire spectrum of diversities, must
join together in a spirit of common purpose, mutual respect, caring and can-do
enthusiasm in order to counter a power structure bent on destroying everything
that stands in the way of its privilege.

PLG’s newly revised Statement of Purpose begins:

Libraries are an important intersection of the individual, communities
and knowledge. We see librarianship as a profession and practice that
serves to enable the creation of and access to a multitude of forms of
human expression, experience and aspiration. We also recognize that
libraries are sites where structures of injustice, exploitation, control, and
oppression are nourished, normalized and perpetuated. The Progressive
Librarians Guild exists to expose and call out librarianship’s active
and passive complicity and acceptance of those systems, to offer and
practice alternatives to those systems, to empower the voices of those
excluded from positions of power and/or the historical record and to
develop a praxis that contributes to on-going pursuits of human rights
and dignity.10

Readers are encouraged to support the work of PLG by becoming members
and joining in the work of organizing for social change.

PLG needs your support, and the profession needs PLG.

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PLG banner carried by Mark Hudson, Katharine Phenix, Mike Marlin and Vivaldo at convention center during midwinter meeting of the American Library Association and prior to the Atlanta Women’s March on 21 January 2017. Photo by Kathleen de la Peña McCook.
Librarians Against Rape Culture!
Raising Consciousness to Uproot Sexual Violence

*Consciousness transforms brutal facts and painful realities into new knowledge that exposes power and ignites action.*
Kathleen Barry

Today in the United States over 6000 women will be raped. Do you have an hour lunchbreak? 200 women will be raped while you are eating your lunch. If you are getting the recommended eight hours of sleep, while you sleep tonight 1600 women will be raped. According to the latest National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, nearly 2% of women reported being raped in the last twelve months, with rape defined as “completed or attempted forced penetration or alcohol- or drug-facilitated penetration” (Breiding et al. 4). 157 million women are currently living in the U.S., as reported by the most recent Census (Howden & Meyer 2). Nearly 2% of 157 million is 2,500,000: the number of women raped every year in this country, that we can claim to know about. Given that many women who are raped never report the violence against them to law enforcement, indeed never give public voice of any kind to what has been done to them, it is probable that 2,500,000 is in fact an underestimation of the total number of women raped annually. These numbers speak to the prevalence of rape alone, which by its definition involves penetration or attempted penetration, of the mouth with a penis, of the vagina or anus with a penis, with fingers, a fist, or an object (Federal Bureau of Investigation 1). The reality is that there is more to sexual violence than penetration. If we expand our view to capture other forms of sexual assault – such as undesired fondling

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KEYWORDS: Rape culture; Sexual assault; Sexual violence; Gender; Pornography; Feminist movement; Consciousness raising; Trauma; Post-traumatic stress disorder.
or groping, undesired exposure to sexual exhibitionism (i.e., “flashing”), and coerced exposure to pornographic media – we are confronted by the following: 43.9% of women will be sexually assaulted during their lifetimes (Breiding et al. 4). The estimated 12-month prevalence of non-penetrative assault is 5.5%, indicating that during your lunchbreak today, nearly 900 women – at least – will be sexually assaulted. In the United States today, sexual violence against women constitutes a public health crisis of epidemic proportions.

As librarians, we have an ethical, professional imperative as well as a tremendous opportunity to confront the systemic injustices that afflict our society, and to galvanize social change. The epidemic of sexual violence against women in the United States is one such injustice, and a grave one, which has not yet been given significant attention in the field of library and information science. This is unfortunate, as I propose that librarians have at our ready disposal the means to make a meaningful contribution to the ongoing feminist movement to end sexual violence. In this paper I will review the cultural grounding of endemic sexual violence against women as a social phenomenon and follow with a discussion of approaches librarians might take to make our libraries part of the solution so sorely needed to make ours a truly free society, for all its members – women included.

Certainly the sheer scale of sexual violence against women in this country is staggering: 900 women assaulted in an hour, 6000 women raped daily. What no statistics can sufficiently express, however, is the burden of suffering imposed upon those women who are raped, who are assaulted. Along with natural disasters, combat, and life-threatening accidents, sexual violation is considered a traumatic event, associated with serious and potentially lifelong physical, psychical, emotional, and social consequences for victims. Anxiety, fear, a sense of guilt and shame are common in the aftermath of an assault, as are depression, nightmares, insomnia, substance abuse, and a general deterioration in personal health and well-being (Campbell, Dworkin, & Cabral 3; Eby, Campbell, Sullivan & Davidson 569; Chrisler & Ferguson 239; Jina & Thomas 16-19). For women who have endured sexual violence, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is not merely a possible consequence but a probable one. A review of the psychological impacts of sexual violence determined that, in the majority of studies, between 33-45% of women with a lifetime history of sexual assault were reported to develop PTSD (Campbell, Dworkin & Cabral 3). PTSD has also been found to be more common among survivors of sexual violence than among any other group of trauma survivors, including soldiers returning from combat (Olantunjo et al. 1093; Kessler et al. 1052-1053). This burden of trauma has financial implications for sexually assaulted women, who have been found to incur significant healthcare expenses and income losses as a result of their victimization (Chrisler & Ferguson 239). Since women are more likely than men to live in poverty, and women of color and women in
low-income households are disproportionately exposed to sexual violence, the expenses and losses in income associated with rape trauma have the effect of furthering women’s socio-economic, thus political, marginalization (Hess & Román 1; Planty et al. 3; Breiding et al. 5).

It is without doubt an injustice that millions of women each year endure sexual assault, lasting trauma, and marginalization. What must also be recognized is that it is not inevitable. It is not an inexorable fact of life that millions of women should be subject to sexual violence. Rape is not a force of nature. It is a social phenomenon, with social causes and social consequences.

During the women’s liberation movement that developed through the 1970s and ‘80s, feminists rallied to raise public consciousness of sexual violence, fighting for legal reform and social change, and developing much-needed outreach services, such as rape crisis centers, to provide support for victims of violence, who before had been all too often left without assistance or recourse of any kind (Bevacqua, 2000). Of equal importance was the new understanding of rape proposed by feminist writers and thinkers of this era. Their crucial insight was that rape and sexual assault are not “natural” – not biologically determined – nor ineliminable – not an immovable feature of the human condition – but instead linked to the patriarchal organization of western society. By this understanding, sexual violence as social phenomenon is a manifestation of male cultural and political dominance. It is a fact that women make up the majority of the raped, and men the vast majority of the perpetrators (Breiding et al. 1). Indeed, an estimated 99% of female rape victims are raped by males, and when men are raped, in roughly 80% of cases they too are raped by males (Breiding et al. 5). Feminist activists and writers like Susan Griffin (1971), Susan Brownmiller (1975), Andrea Dworkin (1976; 1983; 1987), and others have argued that men’s sexual violence is directly related to the political situation of patriarchy, as a symptom of human sexuality molded within the context of male-dominated society, and as an instrument of women’s ongoing oppression.

In her cross-cultural study of rape in tribal societies, Peggy Reeves Sanday offered compelling evidence in support of the feminist assertion that rape, like all sexual behavior, is determined by sociopolitical and sociocultural context rather than by biology. She observed consistent differences between the cultures she studied with a low incidence of rape compared to those cultures with a high incidence. “Rape prone” cultures were characterized by the social stratification of men and women into discrete classes, by male dominance and an objectifying view of women as men’s property, and high levels of other forms of interpersonal violence (Sanday 63). Sexual interaction was conceived as essentially and inherently hostile, a contest between men and women which the man must win to prove his manhood, while constructions of masculinity – what it means to be a man – were inseparably entwined with aggression and
conquest. One example of a “rape prone” culture Sanday cites is the Gusii people of southwestern Kenya, among whom a high rape rate (as estimated in the mid-1950s) was complemented by a cultural tradition among Gusii males to use sexual force on their wedding nights with the aim of inducing their new wives to cry, the women’s pain serving as testimony to the men’s virility (60). Conversely, “rape free” cultures were marked by greater equity between the sexes, respect for women as individuals, minimal interpersonal violence, and a reverence for the natural world. In these cultures, the concept of masculinity was not constructed around the image of the warrior. An example of a “rape free” society that Sanday describes is the Mbuti people of the Ituri region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Mbuti culture, the relationship between the sexes was defined by mutual respect and balance of power, with minimal sex role division and an almost complete absence of interpersonal violence (65).

Based on Sanday’s findings, a social etiology for sexual violence can be inferred: the acceptance and even valorization of violence in all its manifestations — and eroticized male violence in particular — fused to a foundational ideology of male supremacy.

In the United States, popular media such as television programs, movies, and novels are saturated by imagery and narratives glorifying violence. Men’s violence is of particular popularity in mainstream media, the manly-man warrior with chiseled muscles and a righteous contempt for all things “soft” being the preeminent heroic figure of our cultural imaginary. Relations between men and women are conceptualized in terms of an antagonistic “battle of the sexes.” The current congress is over 80% male (Manning, J.E. 7), and men hold CEO positions in roughly 96% at S&P 500 companies (Catalyst). During the 2014 trial of Owen Labrie, a young man accused of raping a fifteen-year-old female classmate at the prestigious New Hampshire boarding school he attended, witnesses testified that male students at the school used the strikingly macabre term “slaying” as slang for sexual intercourse (Manning, A.). Together these facts reveal that in the United States men’s violence is not merely tolerated but celebrated; that masculinity is bound to aggression as intransigently as sexuality is to violence; and that, in spite of the gains made by the feminist movement, there remains severe political and economic inequality between men and women. Hence, the U.S. meets Sanday’s criteria for classification as a “rape prone” society, one characterized by a high prevalence of sexual violence against women. It is therefore unsurprising that the 2010 European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control International Statistics on Crime and Criminal Justice report identifies the United States as having among the highest reported rape rates in the world (Harrendorf, S., Heiskanen, M. & Malby, S. eds. 25). Indeed, the U.S. was determined to have the tenth highest rape rate among all countries that participated in the survey, with approximately 30 reported rapes per 100,000 individuals. In this report, the country with the highest reported
rate was South Africa, while others on the “top ten” list included Australia (#2), Canada (#4), Suriname (#6), Sweden (#7), and New Zealand (#9). The survey found that Asian countries tended to have the lowest reported rape rates.

While in the context of a “rape prone” society sexual violence against women emerges as if inevitable, its emergence – and persistence – is the product of social, cultural and political factors that promote sexual inequality, male violence, and the eroticization of aggression. Fortunately, social, cultural, and political conditions can be altered: because they have been imposed by humans over the course of history, it is within our power as human beings to deconstruct them. We need resign ourselves neither to patriarchal domination, nor the rape epidemic that is its consequence and its enforcement. Rather, we must begin working to incite the social transformation that will bring it to an end.

As librarians, particularly (but by no means exclusively) those of us who work in public library settings, we are well-situated to act as agents of change in the communities we serve. Libraries are among the most trusted of all community institutions, giving us reason to anticipate that, were we to take a visible stance in opposition to rape culture, we could have a real impact on the public perception of men’s sexual violence against women, effecting increased recognition of such violence as a serious social problem in urgent need of remedy (Horrigan; Willingham 9). As librarians we thus find ourselves in an ideal position to claim a leading role in galvanizing large-scale community-level resistance to rape culture. Since we are presented with an opportunity to capitalize on the public’s faith in libraries to catalyze a shift in consciousness that could advance the movement to end men’s sexual violence against women, it is our imperative to embrace it, for our sisters and our daughters, ourselves, for all women not only in our communities but around the globe. Sexual violence is a fixture of the oppression of women everywhere.

We must act. But what can we do?

Inspired by Lynn Westbrook’s terrific work on the role of libraries in providing outreach to women abused by husbands and boyfriends in situations of intimate partner violence (see: Westbrook, 2009; Westbrook & Gonzalez, 2011; Westbrook, 2012; Houston & Westbrook, 2013; Westbrook, 2015), for my Master’s paper as a student in the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I chose to study how libraries might extend similar support to victims of rape and sexual assault. While many women are sexually assaulted by abusive boyfriends and husbands, sexual violence also occurs outside the context of intimate relationships, and in either case carries with it consequences and concerns distinct from those associated with physical or psychological violence. However, there is a significant gap in the library and information science literature regarding how libraries might serve those who have been sexually victimized. Indeed, a review of the literature unearthed only one paper specifically addressing libraries and sexual violence
As an initial effort to attend to the gap, I sought to identify the unique information needs of sexually assaulted women, for which purpose I interviewed victim advocates at a rape crisis center nearby the University. My ultimate goal was to develop recommendations for library-based programs and services that would fulfill these needs.

Yet it is not enough simply to assist women after they have been assaulted. As Andrea Dworkin wrote, “To think about helping a rape victim is one thing; to think about ending rape is another” (“Remember, Resist, Do Not Comply” 172). If we do not strive for the eradication of rape, there will be a never-ending stream of victims, and we will be struggling to assist woman after woman, one after another, forever. For a wound continuously re-opened, to apply fresh bandages by the hour is meager antidote; the only solution is the radical one: to uncover whatever is making the cut and disarm it. Anything less and the wound will never heal. Unwilling to settle for a Band-Aid, I sought to outline strategies for providing library-based support to sexually victimized women that would simultaneously work towards unmaking rape culture, by increasing public awareness of the problem of sexual violence, its causes and consequences as a social phenomenon, and our shared obligation – and power – to expunge it.

One approach to library response that accomplishes the dual goals of assisting victims and confronting rape culture is to publicly evince awareness of, and opposition to, men’s sexual violence through the institution of library services designed to support those women (and those fewer men) who have been assaulted. Westbrook writes that librarians can become what she calls “guerilla activists” by providing information assistance to victims of intimate partner violence (“Private Crises/Public Responses” 8). Specifically, she highlights the need for librarians to intervene in and thus improve the information provision processes of public response organizations, as in the field of criminal justice, which are critical to victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) but which do not consistently extend effective assistance to these individuals, making it difficult for women to successfully escape abusive relationships. Westbrook invokes the term “guerilla” to emphasize how librarians who work to renovate information pathways and enhancing available information resources in order to assist vulnerable and systematically underserved individuals challenge the institutionalized power structures that reproduce social inequality.

To similar ends, we can serve as “guerilla advocates” for victims of sexual violence, applying our expertise to aid them in navigating the convoluted post-assault processes of obtaining medical attention, undergoing forensic examination for evidence collection, filing reports with law enforcement, and moving forward with court proceedings should they choose to pursue legal action against their attackers. Clear and comprehensible information regarding these processes is not readily accessible to many women, and as I learned in conversation with victim advocates, questions regarding reporting, medical
care, and the legal process comprise the FAQ’s of sexual assault victims. As information professionals, we can create the materials that these women need, such as easy-to-read guidance on reporting an assault, or fact sheets about the Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) procedure. We can make the information they need readily available in our libraries, and be prepared to provide such information at the reference desk. We can educate library staff about sexual violence, so that our staff can better assist assaulted women without acting upon injurious misconceptions about what it means to be a victim of sexual violence. Librarians who have lived through sexual violence themselves may consider sharing their stories, as a means to open lines of communication with other victims who may feel more comfortable reaching out to someone they know has survived a similar traumatic experience.

Moving beyond library walls and into the community, we can pursue relationships with other local agencies and organizations concerned with assisting victims and countering rape culture. Collaboration is essential to the maximization of resources, through fostering creative problem solving and generating increased visibility around a particular problem. In order to confront and effectively combat the problem of rape culture, it is necessary that librarians be proactive in reaching out to nearby rape crisis centers, which provide services to victims as well as public education on the subject of sexual violence. There are many ways that libraries can demonstrate solidarity with these organizations: publicizing the services that these centers offer, promoting the fundraising events and volunteering opportunities crucial to these centers’ survival, offering our spaces for their events and programs, collaborating in the creation of informative materials (e.g. pamphlets, fact sheets). In addition to working with rape crisis centers, we can enter into further partnerships with members of the local Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), such as law enforcement, forensic units at local hospitals, and concerned individuals in the district attorney’s office. Such partnerships would be invaluable in establishing the library as an official information resource for victims and a community institution active in sexual violence prevention. By taking the initiative and getting involved in these simple but powerful ways, librarians have the potential to mend the infrastructure of public sexual violence response while reinforcing the necessity of holistic, community-wide approaches to deconstructing rape culture.

To complement assistive services and collaborations, I encourage librarians to take full advantage of the library’s role as a community hub to raise consciousness around the issue of sexual violence against women through topical programming and conspicuous resistance. Too often rape and sexual assault are obscured by silence: the victim is silenced by a patriarchal culture that wrongly imposes blame on victimized women rather than their male victimizers; silence permeates a society that has deemed sexual violence an
“inappropriate” subject for public conversation. Answering with silence rather than strident reproach, society enable patterns of sexual violence and sexual inequality to perpetuate. Hence, we who want to disrupt these patterns must elevate our voices. If our opposition to rape culture is to instigate social change in our communities, our stance must be visible and unmistakable, our commitment to ending sexual violence broadcast in no uncertain terms to the public we serve. Achieving visibility need not be a difficult undertaking. In our lobbies and at our help desks we should make available materials about the scope of sexual violence against women in the United States, resources available to victims within our communities, and guidance on supporting friends, family and community members who have been sexually assaulted. Posters about sexual violence, readily obtainable from national organizations such as the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), might be posted in oft-used areas of the library (e.g. entryways and restrooms). We can organize events and programs in April, Sexual Assault Awareness Month, or year-round: speak-outs that give victims a platform for sharing their accounts of violence and survival; exhibitions of victims’/survivors’ art and writings; public classes on sexual violence prevention; forums on such facets of rape culture as sexism, male entitlement, and the glorification of violence; healthy sexuality and media literacy workshops for young adults. If there are events elsewhere in our communities that relate to sexual violence prevention, such as lectures or Take Back the Night marches, these should be publicized in our newsletters and on our websites.

In addition to supplementing existing library offerings with new services and programs addressing sexual violence, it is equally necessary that we be self-critical and consider library policies already in place. Careful attention must be paid to the various ways that we, in our libraries, could be unintentionally, unconsciously fortifying the social, cultural and political conditions that foment men’s sexual violence against women. One area of librarianship where critical reflection is of particular salience is collection development. How do the materials that we bring into the library reaffirm or, conversely, subvert the ideological foundations of rape culture, e.g. male dominance, misogyny, or the objectification of women? What messages are the materials we purchase sending to our patrons, about women, about men, about sexuality, about violence? As an example, many libraries subscribe to women’s fashion and men’s “lifestyle” magazines that encourage women to conceptualize themselves as sexualized objects, defined by their attractiveness, and men to view women as sexualized objects placed on earth for men’s enjoyment. Thus these magazines endorse two primary principles of rape culture: the depersonalization of women into sexual objects, and male entitlement to female bodies for sexual use. An additional example would be novels written for boys and men which promote conceptions of masculinity as physically aggressive and dominating. Are we
obligated to host these materials in our libraries, merely because they exist, and because the current cultural ethos ensures a demand for them? If we are committed to deconstructing our contemporary rape culture, we must be purposeful in our collection development decisions instead of quietly acceding to the status quo and purchasing materials that endorse patriarchal and male supremacist values. A related concern is the viewing of Internet pornography in the library. Pornographic media is saturated with misogyny, sexual hostility and sexual violence; to say that pornography objectifies women for men’s purposes transcends understatement. What are the implications when we grant men license to publicly view materials that degrade women in our library spaces? This is a question that must never be excluded from the conversation regarding library policies on pornography. Libraries can be spaces where rape culture is actively resisted, where a vision of a world without male violence against women is drafted, or they can be spaces where the injustices of the status quo are reproduced, to the detriment of the oppressed, to the benefit of the privileged. Social change requires conscious choice.

The recommendations outlined above represent some of the many different options available to librarians who seek to join the struggle to end sexual violence against women. They are not intended to encompass the whole of approaches librarians might take, but instead to serve as an introduction to how we might begin to confront a problem that has as yet received scarce attention from our profession. The epidemic of sexual violence in the United States is an emergency situation; it demands an emergency response. I want you to understand that the only thing you can do that would be truly disastrous would be to do nothing, to accept that in our society one out of five women will be a victim of sexual violence before she dies, and one of every three men admits he would force a woman into sexual acts if he was assured he could get away with it (Breiding et al 4; Edwards, Bradshaw & Hinsz 190); to concede to the depreciation of human sexuality by patriarchal imperatives into an interaction defined by hostility and aggression, a political weapon against women. If we do not strive to transform culture, the conditions that have rendered it a war zone for women will only worsen. Left unchallenged, the rape culture of male power and female victimization will become ever more firmly rooted. As librarians, we have a role to play in uprooting it. Using our professional skills and resources, notably the public’s regard for the library as a trusted institution, we can raise consciousness and ignite grassroots community responses to the problem of sexual violence. Through services for victimized women, collaboration with community agencies striving against sexual violence, targeted programming, thoughtful collection development and policy-making, and continuous conversation, we can join forces with our communities to push back against rape culture. Together, committed to a shared vision of transformation, we can overturn rape culture and embark on the creation of another reality, one in
which women can move through their lives free from men’s sexual terrorism, from rape, assault, patriarchal oppression – a society in which women can be free.

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Libraries, sustainability and degrowth

*Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s need, but not for every man’s greed.* Mahatma Gandhi. Quoted by his secretary, Pyarelal Nayyar (1958).

*Only one Earth.* Motto of the first Earth Summit.¹

Last year, the American Library Association (ALA, 2015) adopted the *Resolution on the Importance of Sustainable Libraries*; since then, other international organizations have been quick to go along with the proposal, reporting on the potential relationship between sustainability and libraries². However, such documents (which, in general, support the role of librarians in building “sustainable, resilient and regenerative” communities and making “sustainable decisions”) remain purely statements of intent that include a handful of trendy topics in their paragraphs, and fall short of being credible action plans. It is worrying to note that, despite the seriousness and urgency of the discussion, these statements tiptoe around a crucial issue — sustainability — that, so far, has not been addressed in depth by library and information sciences (LIS).

The following paragraphs are intended to confront the reader with the impossibility of unlimited growth in a finite biosphere, and are aimed at introducing the notion of sustainability and other concepts related to it — in particular “degrowth”, which remains ignored in many forums on sustainable development, including libraries. The article will also address the links that

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can be established among sustainability, activism, and libraries’ services, activities and policies. The ideas presented here are meant to serve as starting points, guidelines or major strands to help readers search through international bibliography on an issue in need of urgent attention.

Introduction

Nothing is enough for the man to whom enough is too little.
Quotation attributed to Epicurus of Samos.

In the eyes of eighteenth-century Europeans, nature was a bountiful entity of endless life and fertility, ready to be exploited to satisfy mankind’s needs, ambitions and, why not, (insatiable) greed. In those times of Industrial Revolution and deep social transformations, the planet and its ecosystems seemed capable of withstanding both the population growth required by a capitalist economy dependent on the accumulation of wealth, and the wild exploitation that would provide that economy with the raw materials it needed.

The plan — which has not changed in the past two centuries and has never observed any limits — consisted in exploiting renewable and non-renewable natural resources (especially minerals, energy and forestry) to feed a pattern of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services that soon proved unsustainable, both socially and environmentally. According to capitalist “rationale” and discourse, the ideas of “development” and “progress” would then remain bound to an unlimited growth — conventionally measured as the percent rate of increase in GNP — based on the availability of resources and cheap energy.

Today’s strategy remains the same. But the eighteenth century world, with its 790-980 million inhabitants, was very different from the contemporary world, with a population of almost 7400 million people³. And the ability of nature to bear humans’ ongoing assault over the last two centuries (but especially for the last 70 years) in pursuit of “economic growth” has decreased dramatically. This is explained by Daly (2008):

The most important change in recent times has been the growth of one subsystem of the Earth, namely the economy, relative to the total system, the ecosphere. This huge shift from an “empty” to a “full” world is truly “something new under the sun” [...] The closer the economy approaches the scale of the whole Earth, the more it will have to conform to the physical behavior mode of the Earth [...] The remaining natural world is no longer able to provide the sources and sinks for the metabolic throughput necessary to sustain the existing oversized economy — much less a growing one. Economists have focused too much on the
economy’s circulatory system and have neglected to study its digestive tract [...] We have lived for 200 years in a growth economy. [...] we cannot continue growing, and in fact the so-called “economic” growth already has become uneconomic, increasing environmental costs faster than any production benefits, making us poorer not richer, particularly in high-consumption countries.

We are no longer living on an empty planet, but on a saturated one — absolutely exhausted and on the verge of collapse. Coates and Leahy (2006) summarize in two paragraphs the pressure the planet has been subjected to, the structural effects of extractivism, and the indifference displayed towards evidence of impoverishment, both environmental and human:

The review of ecological devastation, much of it occurring in the past 100 years, exposes our economy to be an “extractive economy”. An extractive economy depletes non-renewable resources, exploits renewable resources beyond their capacity to survive, and causes irreparable damage to land, sea and air. Further, the production of toxins along with industrial and domestic effluent greatly exceeds the healing and regenerating capacities of the Earth. The Earth cannot cope with such excesses as human activity has changed the chemistry of the planet and altered the ecosystems upon which modern civilization depends. In fact, no ecosystem on Earth is free from the pervasive influence of chemical discharges. Accompanying this environmental impoverishment has been human exploitation and impoverishment.

Despite considerable information and public attention to environmental concerns, people at large and many businesses and governments have not been motivated to take these issues seriously and have not engaged in effective action toward sustainable practices.

Nature has not been the only one to suffer the harmful consequences of a reckless and abusive socio-economic paradigm. Global society (living humans) has suffered similarly devastating effects. The spread of insecure labor conditions, and the immense “reserve industrial army” that accompanies it — with hundreds of millions of unemployed, underemployed, and economically exploited people around the world — are not a fatality: they are one of the most visible outcomes of imposing such a model. Benach & Jódar (2015) provide a chilling and accurate description:

Today’s world is experiencing an unacceptable labor situation grounded in unemployment, job insecurity and inequality. According to ILO
(International Labor Organization), there are more than 200 million unemployed worldwide, almost 1.7 billion working poor (less than two dollars a day), a countless and unknown army of people working in the informal economy, and what is even more terrifying, a minimum of 21 million slaves, the highest figure in the history of mankind.

Labeled as “disadvantaged,” all these people remain largely invisible to the rest of their fellows, and end up being discarded and thrown away like any other industrial waste. The gap between the “rich” and the “poor” has steadily grown since the 1950s while, at the same time, multinational corporations have further consolidated their economic power. More than a decade ago (2003) the ecosocialist essayist and professor of moral philosophy Jorge Riechmann wondered: “...on a planetary scale, does not an apartheid between rich and poor persist and worsen?”

In a world divided by inequalities and abysses, facing unprecedented ecological, social, economic and political crises, it is sheer madness to insist on the eighteenth-century strategy founded on the unlimited use of resources, continuous growth, and unbridled production. A suicidal madness.

And yet, the machinery keeps going: we continue to march on the business as usual path that is leading us to ecocide. As if they were possessed by the voracious wendigo spirits of the Algonquian myths, too many people in capitalist societies fail to see what is happening; others prefer to ignore the problem and still others deny its existence altogether. Consciously or unconsciously, many have chosen to tread the path of self-deception, to forge ahead relying on technological patches that have not solved but rather masked or even shifted attention from the real problems — a headlong rush that will add its own share of adverse effects to the ecological and social crises we face.

Undeniable realities

There is denialism [...] when it comes to the ecological crisis as such, and in particular as regards everything that means accepting Earth’s biophysical limits. In this broad sense, mainstream culture is undoubtedly denialist. Jorge Riechmann (2016, p. 32).

At least since 1972 it has been internationally recognized that “industrial societies’ collision with the biophysical limits of the planet casts serious doubts on the possibilities of a decent human life in a habitable planet” (Riechmann, 2014). In 2008, Cairns pointed out:

Exponential population growth on a finite planet means less resources per capita, and humankind is dependent upon the resources of the
biospheric life support system for survival. However, humankind has acted, in the past, as if it does not recognize either of these obvious realities.

According to the summary of the preliminary results of the *Millenium Ecosystem Assessment*, called for by the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 2000 and initiated in 2001, the capacity of the world’s major ecosystems (cropland, marine, forest, freshwater, desert and grassland) to provide elements and services that are essential to life (wood and fiber, water, biodiversity, carbon storage...) is in decline. This, together with climate change and the unprecedented increase in world population and pollution levels, is posing the greatest threat to global ecological stability ever known to humanity.

Some authors refer to this situation as “the Great Acceleration”: the existence of an economy that consumes everything around it in a desperate attempt to continue growing, and of activities that, during the last 60 years, have transformed human societies, the planet and the relationship between them. Today, no one doubts that changes are happening at a vertiginous pace, but it is still difficult to accept that the crux of the matter lies in human activity.

The alterations induced by human beings since the Industrial Revolution have been of such a magnitude that some authors refer to our time as a new geological epoch: the Anthropocene. An epoch where the impact of human activities on natural systems can be found in practically everywhere, and changes occur at faster rate and a higher intensity than in the past, with unpredictable consequences for both natural systems and human societies. Thus, living in the Anthropocene means to develop in a context of intense, fast and overarching changes that outline a horizon of great uncertainty and unpredictability — a horizon that, in general, neither individuals nor institutions are prepared to face (González, Montes & Santos, 2008, p. 71).

One of the scholars who has put a lot of thought and effort into explaining what has been argued to this point is the aforementioned Riechmann:

The ecological crisis is not an ecological problem: it is a human problem. It has to do with anthropogenic global warming, over-consumption of resources by human societies, massive extinction of species, which is to a large extent the result of human behavior... The impact does not come from, let’s say, the strike of a huge asteroid that would have collided, by some bad fate, with Earth (as we assume it happened in previous biospheric crises): we are the source of the impact. That is
why we should always talk about a socio-ecological or an ecological and social crisis. And we should always be clear that to emerge from the quagmire of the crisis, rather than “management” of natural resources or “management” of environmental crises, what we do basically need is human self-management. A different way to conduct ourselves — both individually and, above all, collectively (Riechmann, 2012).

In 2011, a group of seventeen Nobel laureates released a memorandum on sustainability that urged:

Humans are now the most significant driver of global change, propelling the planet into a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene. We can no longer exclude the possibility that our collective actions will trigger tipping points, risking abrupt and irreversible consequences for human communities and ecological systems. [...] We cannot continue on our current path. The time for procrastination is over (RSAS, 2011).

Maiso (2015), in the same vein and with the same forceful tone, expressed his worries at this “human-made” geologic epoch we are living in, though he would go a step further and insist that we are talking about human agency within capitalism12:

[...] we can expect nothing more from the development of capitalist society, nothing that is not destructive. [...] Very few people still think that the commodity society will bring welfare to everybody. Slogans like sustainability reveal that what threatens to destroy life on this planet are no longer accidents, wars or natural catastrophes, but the mere business as usual of planetary capitalism.

Signals are unmistakable. And yet, by ignoring scientific evidence and the warnings launched by numerous scholars, organizations, institutions and civil movements, many voices still insist on denying the undeniable: the unsustainability of the hegemonic system. They insist on minimizing capitalism’s effects on the planet and its inhabitants (see Radetzki, 2001) and on the possibility of freeing economic growth from the biophysical limits imposed by the biosphere (see Brock & Taylor, 2005), and the first and second laws of thermodynamics. At this point it is important to notice that the establishment denialism — which is even more striking when global warming is taken into account — has been (and is being) supported by research projects and studies largely funded by vested interests.

On the opposite shore of denialism, there is an extended family consisting of the many different ecologist, environmentalist, conservationist, etc. movements.
They can be regarded as a current of thought and action committed to protecting
the planet and caring for its inhabitants, which denounces and opposes all forms
of aggression against the environment, while working to prevent, stop or reverse
them. While some of these movements are rooted in certain struggles and ideas
of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries (return to nature, anti-
industrialism, animal protection) and stems largely from the work and thought
of Alexander von Humboldt or H.D. Thoreau, it can be said that the beginning
of modern environmentalism — as it is understood today — was sparked by
the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962. Among other things,
that book succeeded in raising awareness and knowledge about environmental
problems and how human activities affected the planet. Environmentalism,
led by groups such as Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth, gained notoriety
in the 1970s as part of the counter-cultural movement, and managed to put
environmentalist issues on the global public and political agendas. Earth Day
was established in 1970 while, at the same time, Lewis Mumford published
the second volume of *The Myth of the Machine*; two years later the first United
Nations conference on the environment was held; in 1979 James Lovelock
published *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*; and in 1990, Barry Commoner
presented *Making Peace with the Planet*.

In general terms, the environmentalist movement seeks to reconcile the
human presence on the planet with the conservation of natural resources and
the survival of all life forms. Most of their research, discussions and practices
revolve around the concept of sustainability. Understood as “ecological
viability”, sustainability considers that human activities (both economic and
social) must not deteriorate in any way the ecosystems on which they rely. They
must respect biophysical limits and act responsibly, thinking about the future.
Sustainability brings together two concerns: one with the carrying capacity
of natural systems, the other with the great social, economic and political
challenges facing mankind today.

Despite the international weight of the ideas advanced (and the reasoning
provided) by the environmentalist movement, little has been done to reduce
humanity’s ecological footprint. We are running out of time and means to
find (good) solutions to the current socioecological problems, the “window
of opportunity” is a narrow one; in fact, in its 2013 report, the Worldwatch
Institute asked: *Is sustainability still possible?*

**The idea of sustainability**

*I live if you live. The other has to live so that I can live. Nature
has to live so that I, a natural being part of that Nature, can live.
This is not a profit-and-loss calculation; it is a confirmation.*
Franz Hinkelammert (2012, p. 74).
“Sustainability” is a long-standing concept that first appeared in print in the seventeenth century, in texts on forestry. After the publication of *Silent Spring*, the environmentalist community became more and more interested in the relationship between economic growth and development on the one side, and environmental degradation on the other. In his 1966 essay *The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth*, British economist Kenneth E. Boulding stated the need for the economic system to be informed by ecological reality and its limited resources; in other words, to adjust to our planetary limits. The term “sustainability” was included in the first report of the Club of Rome (1972), and in 1980, as a specification of the idea of ecological viability, “sustainable development” was coined and identified as one of the “global priorities” in a report by the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources).

Two years later, the United Nations World Charter for Nature set out five conservation principles that should guide human activities affecting nature. In 1987, the WCED (World Commission on Environment and Development), a United Nations committee led by Gro Harlem Brundtland, published the report *Our Common Future*. Known as the “Brundtland Report”, it includes the most widespread definition of sustainable development:

Sustainable development is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs”.

Since then, sustainable development has focused on achieving an environmentally sustainable and socially fair economic growth. In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development published the *Earth Charter*, which proposed the building of a fair, peaceful and sustainable society for the 21st century through an action plan called *Agenda21*.

In September 2015 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 *Agenda for Sustainable Development*, a set of 17 *Sustainable Development Goals* seeking to eradicate extreme poverty, and fight against inequality and injustice as well as climate change.

Based on the concept of sustainable development, the “green” or “environmentally friendly” marketing model was introduced: using terminology from the environmental movement, twisted disingenuously to capitalism’s advantage. It was a facade attempt, disguised in alleged ecological concerns (Hezri & Ghazali, 2011), aimed at solving a small percentage of problems caused by the hegemonic system, without even considering the possibility of correcting or removing their primary causes. As a few voices warned at the time, the “green wave” not only failed to reduce the human impact on the planet, but made the situation worse by triggering new business opportunities.
Much has been discussed about what “sustainability” and “sustainable development” really mean. For the *status quo* it is a “contestable concept, like liberty or justice” (Dresner, 2012): its definitions are flexible enough to accommodate to the context, the field of study or the interests at stake. However, authors such as Hermanowicz (2006) have very clear ideas and leave very few ambiguities when it comes to exposing them:

The principle espoused in the Brundtland report is quite clear. It calls for modifications of current human activities in recognition of their adverse effects on future generations. The “business as usual” scenario of global development would lead to severe adverse consequences in the future according to its critics.

Simon Dresner (2012) highlights the social and institutional aspects of sustainability (which demand to give proportional shares of “natural capital” to everybody) and points out that “sustainability is an idea with a certain amount in common with socialism.”

Sustainability continues to spark heated debate (see Lemonick, 2009, and Barnatt, 2013), and the notion itself is constantly put into question, especially by certain authors and research groups (ranging from ecological economists to ecosocialist thinkers, green scholars, political ecologists, and activists) who have long been working on what could be the outlines of a post-capitalist transition program. Convinced that without anticapitalist rupture there is no way to avoid a very dramatic outcome, all of them warn that the prevailing rhetoric on “sustainable development” only seeks new ways to perpetuate the current way of life — or, at least, the current lifestyle of a privileged human minority in the planet.

Such rhetoric, they argue, places the focus on economic progress and growth as key factors in human development, while “minimizing” their impact or negative consequences by introducing some corrective (and sometimes merely cosmetic) measures. But those adjustments, they add, would merely defer the problem to a later date. Besides insisting on the impossibility of a “green capitalism” (Tanuro, 2011), critics claim that the unsustainable hegemonic economic system seems to have rendered the idea of “sustainability” into officialese as a result of adapting it to its own needs and interests; that their advocates obstinately refuse to recognize and accept that there are biophysical limits to growth, let alone to admit that those limits have already been exceeded; and that all that come into their minds is a set of escape maneuvers: escaping the limits to economic growth, escaping from planet Earth, escaping human nature. As Riechmann put it in a recent interview (Rodriguez, 2015):

There is a lot of chit chat, a lot of green marketing, a lot of propaganda, a lot of images on display, stylemes and unwarranted appropriation of
contents. There is too much propaganda going around, too much trend-following distorting everything. Magazines sell us the concept of good life, while featuring full-page advertisements of big energy companies. That is what the dominant culture metabolizes as ecology, and it is very harmful because it has certainly nothing to do [with ecology], it is very far from what it ought to be, from what we should do.

As already mentioned, the most critical sectors unambiguously question the capitalist model of production, distribution and consumption: one that ignores all limits and pursues an ongoing growth, both extensive (colonization and commodification of public and private spaces, ecosystems, resources, the cosmos) and intensive (information technology, biotechnologies, nanotechnologies); they advise that neoliberal economic ideas threaten our life and our world; they seek recognition of the damage caused to the planet’s ecosystems and the species that inhabit them (including humans); and they express the urgent need to do something (real) about it: in particular, to avoid future damages and to reverse the existing ones. Which leads to the profound change that society should undergo in order to achieve such a goal.

These voices have developed much of their theoretical work and their praxis around a series of issues such as (individual and collective) “self-limitation”\(^{18}\), an “ethic of sufficiency”\(^{19}\), the “steady-state economy”\(^{20}\), “ecosocialism” “ecofeminism”, “biomimicry”, the “precautionary principle”, “ecological justice”\(^{21}\), and “environmental ethics”, to name a few. There is also an international network of researchers, practitioners and activists working on degrowth\(^{22}\) as a repoliticization of sustainability and as “part of a broader social movement which works on the hope that we can downscale in an equitable and democratizing manner”\(^{23}\).

Degrowth

*It is entirely up to us. If we fail, nature will simply shrug and conclude that letting the apes run the laboratory was fun for a while but ultimately a bad idea.* Richard Wright (2004, p. 31).

Degrowth is a social movement anchored in ecologism, anti-capitalism and anti-consumerism. Basically, it proposes that there are biophysical limits to growth that have already been exceeded (causing an alarming exhaustion of natural and energy resources) and it is therefore necessary to drastically reduce the levels of production and consumption — these levels being the main causes of all environmental problems (climate change, pollution, threats to biodiversity) and of many social inequalities.

Degrowth does not entail a decline in fundamental human well-being. Much on the contrary, its proponents argue that a decrease in consumption would
create non-consumerist ways of life, much healthier in every possible way. It would also stop First World’s neocolonialism: the massive and sustained use of global natural resources to maintain lifestyles that squander food and energy resources and generate huge amounts of waste, at the expense of the Third World.

Among seminal contributions concerning limits to growth and degrowth, the work by Romanian ecological economist Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen deserves special attention. The Entropy Law and the Economic Process (1971) and Energy and Economic Myths: Institutional and Analytical Economic Essays (1976) are probably two of his most influential books. In the first one the author stated that Earth’s carrying capacity — i.e. the planet’s ability to sustain human populations and their levels of consumption — is doomed to diminish, since natural resources are finite and they are being depleted. In the second, he drew attention to the fact that “economic history confirms that great strides in technological progress have generally been touched off by a discovery of how to use a new kind of accessible energy”, and remembered that “according to the basic law of thermodynamics, mankind’s dowry [i.e. free energy received from the sun, on the one hand, and the free energy and the ordered material structures stored in the bowels of the earth, on the other] is finite”, meaning that “in a finite space there can be only a finite amount of low entropy and that low entropy continuously and irrevocably dwindles away”. In his writings, the ecological economist stressed the fallacy of the notion that man can reverse the march of entropy, and concluded: “The truth, however unpleasant, is that the most we can do is to prevent any unnecessary depletion of resources and any unnecessary deterioration of the environment”.

In 1972, Edward Goldsmith and Robert Prescott-Allen, editors of The Ecologist, published A Blueprint for Survival. In that text they called for a rapid de-industrialization to avoid the planetary life-support systems’ irreversible destruction. One year later, in Small is Beautiful (subtitled A Study of Economics As If People Mattered), E.F. Schumacher criticized the neoliberal economic system, pointing out that proposing a way of life and development based on capitalist growth and consumption is absurd. On the other hand, he advanced a new paradigm he called “Buddhist economics” — maintaining welfare while, at the same time, reducing growth and consumption.

By the year 2000, the term “degrowth” defined a current of socio-political action aimed at voluntarily and permanently downsizing the economy. The first international conference on the subject, Research & Degrowth, took place in Paris in 2008, and has been repeated every two years since. French economics professor Serge Latouche (author of Farewell to Growth) is currently one of the movement’s leading intellectuals.

Today, many researchers agree that degrowth is no longer an option: the choice now is how to reach it. The Spanish anthropologist and environmentalist Yayo Herrero explained it in a recent interview (Batalla Cueto, 2015):
Q. There will be degrowth, that’s for sure, and if it is not reached peacefully and progressively, it will be reached abruptly and violently.

A. Of course. Degrowth is not an option, there will be degrowth whether we like it or not. It is already here, the choice is about whether or not the degrowth in the material sphere of the economy, that is, being able to manage things globally using less energy and materials, is attained in a fascist way — and I say fascist because in the end each individual and each group living on more resources than those provided by its own territory, do so at the expense of other territories, stripping those territories of their resources and depriving other people of the opportunities to make a life for themselves. When Hitler said that the Aryan race needed a certain living space, and that if they did not have it within its borders they would have to invade other countries to get it, or when Bush, while bombing Iraq or Afghanistan, said “our lifestyle is not up for negotiation”, what was actually behind both sentences was the notion that some people deserve to have a certain lifestyle, even if it is built at the expense of others. That is fascism, and that is what we are heading for if we fail to create a movement or a current of opinion large enough to press for the necessary and inevitable degrowth in the material sphere of the economy in those places where consumption is highest. We must ensure an economic metabolism that sticks to the limits of what we have, and we must do it now, because we have already exceeded the planet’s carrying capacity.

Spanish physicist Antonio Turiel, one of the main critics of endless growth, pointed out something similar in another interview (Álvarez Cantalapiedra, 2012), besides contributing supplementary terminology:

Q. Do you think that rhetorics such as those of the “transition”, “degrowth”, “slow” or “livingsimple” movements [...] can help us to move away from the extractive and consumerist economy that is at the root of our current problems?

A. Obviously, yes. But, in any case, I think it is important to stress that degrowth in relation to current levels, the simplification of systems, or the need to reduce our society’s pace, are not only logical, but inexorable imperatives. In short: it is not an act of will; degrowth, simplification, slowing down are things that are going to happen whatever we do, because the opposite is physically impossible on a planet with dwindling resources and accelerated degradation. The only choice we are left is whether we want to pilot the process or leave it to
its own free will, letting social collapse to happen. Perhaps this is the most important message to convey: degrowth is not an option, but we can decide on whether or not to crash.

**Sustainability and activism**

*Is it enough to have a critical consciousness — one you take out for a walk twice a day as you would do with your dog? No, it should be clear that it is not. There is little point in having a critical consciousness if it is not linked to collective action. What we need is critical consciousness in praxis contexts.* Jorge Riechmann. Blog *Tratar de comprender, tratar de ayudar.* November 12, 2013.

In a 2004 article, Cairns describes the planet’s and its inhabitants’ situation as follows:

The twenty-first century represents a defining moment for humankind. This globally dangerous period of human history has two major threats: (1) overshooting global carrying capacity for humans and (2) major damage to Earth’s ecological life support system as well as natural capital and the ecosystem services it provides. Should humankind fail to replace unsustainable practices with sustainable practices before the middle of the twenty-first century, this irresponsibility and lack of concern for posterity will probably result in global catastrophe. Humankind must repudiate some beliefs and alter its attitude towards technology and exponential economic growth. Technology can be extremely useful, but it cannot develop ethics or values — humankind can.

A result of irresponsibility and lack of awareness, this critical situation is denounced at international levels by many voices who, kindly or vehemently, oppose the current (unsustainable) paradigm and warn that the vision of capitalist economic progress is flawed; that consumerism is doomed; that oil production has already peaked; and that life as we know it is about to change significantly and, perhaps, irrevocably.

Those voices belong to activists. And their numbers and their strength increase day by day.

Activism is aimed at bringing about social, economic, political, educational or environmental changes that are tangible, in order to make improvements, prevent or solve problems or fill in the gaps in a society. According to Fuad-Luke (2009):
Activism is about [...] taking actions to catalyze, encourage or bring about change, in order to elicit social, cultural and/or political transformations.

Nowadays, activism takes many different forms, reflecting in part the undeniable influence of new digital technologies (a tool that provides new means and channels to establish links and to promote change proposals). Activists often carry out both individual and collective actions; in the latter case, they are usually connected to some kind of social movement, defined by Tarrow (1994) as:

Collective challenges [to elites, authorities, other groups or cultural codes] by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interactions with elites, opponents and authorities.

Regarding sustainability and degrowth, although there is a “generic” activism (mostly linked to environmentalist movements), those who support them usually gather in special interest groups. These are created around specific issues, which may have either an anthropocentric (e.g. anti-poverty, etc.) or a biocentric approach (e.g. animal rights, etc.).

One of the main tasks of an activist is the information gathering, organization and dissemination about a certain topic. The distribution of such knowledge (through pamphlets, newsletters, zines, digital means...) is essential for raising awareness in a community (or in society at large). It also helps to create spaces for critical and informed debate, where possible actions can be discussed and organized. Actions can range from resistance and the launching of cooperative projects to civil disobedience, boycott, street art, hacking, demonstrations, strikes and many others.

Speth (2009) stresses that the first thing to do before moving into action is to face reality; in this specific case it means to know the truth about current environmental and social conditions (from global warming and climate change to loss of biodiversity and ecosystems, pollution, resource depletion, poverty, inequalities, etc.). At this point, and as noted above, quality information plays a crucial role in understanding what is going on, how, and, above all, why.

Libraries can — should — be part of those processes and movements, and they can do more than only being information providers to activist groups. They are able to take on many other roles, much more committed, even militant roles.

Activists and libraries, or an activist library

What is the use of an excellent academic curriculum in a 4° C
We could replace “curriculum” with “library” and Puig Vilar’s quotation opening this section would continue to serve as reminder that we are standing on the edge of a precipice. Technological advances, glorious structures, or excellent systems will be useless in a collapsing world. Libraries will be hit just as hard by the changes and crises affecting the planet and its inhabitants as any other institution and any other collective body or human group.

Since libraries are part of a local, regional and global society, and therefore are traversed by all their problems, breakups and setbacks, they should put aside any kind of “neutrality” discourse, assess the situation they and the community they serve are going (or can go) through, weigh the role they can play (especially considering the huge value of library collections and services) and their responsibility, then take sides and act.

While the (in)formative role of libraries — the one played “by default” — is essential for the development of activist movements and for raising community awareness, libraries should not be merely passive providers of data, physical spaces or technological means.

A first step toward library activism should be to stop waiting for inquiries behind the reference desk, and to provide valuable and up-to-date information even outside their walls. Libraries can distribute annotated bibliographies or share freely accessible resources about the impossibility of infinite growth in a finite world, biophysical limits, climatic change, entropy, peak everything, urban agriculture, recycling or consumption reduction — among many other important and possible topics — on their websites and social networks as well as within their physical spaces. Placing this information at a visible location (virtual or real), and keeping those contents updated and active, clearly indicates a position and a commitment.

Beyond their shelves, libraries can be a source of selected, high-quality information for educational institutions of different levels, social and cultural organizations, neighborhood associations, etc. From urban gardening collectives to groups of local artists, county or town governments, religious associations or naturalist squads, all can benefit from readings and audiovisual documents related to sustainability (and unsustainability), the significance of the Anthropocene, actions that can lead to degrowth.

Going a step further, the library might consider abandoning those behaviors that have brought humanity this far. In particular, they should consider their consumption patterns. As Madorrán Ayerra (2013) points out:

In our capitalistic system, not only are we not more free being able to chose what we consume, but neither are we aware that our desire is
stimulated to induce us to consume, that desires presented as “needs” when they are really “wants”. Besides stimulating it, capitalism turns materialistic desire insatiable, meaning that consumers are never satisfied, they always want more — which has harmful environmental, social and economic consequences — for global consumption is essential to the system’s survival. But we certainly must think of consumption not only as a means of reproducing economic paradigms, but also ideological. Consumption and oversupply produce part of the conformism with the system, the feeling that all that is needed is to continue consuming.

Libraries should critically assess the use and diffusion of particular technologies and the support they give them. They should also consider the management of their resources (water, electricity, plastics, paper) and their waste production (especially those that may be polluting). As mentioned above, degrowth is no longer an option: the option is how to reach it.

Moving some more steps forward, libraries might assume what Löwy (2002, 2004) calls an “ecosocialist ethic”: social, equal, supportive, democratic, radical and responsible. In other words, libraries might take positions “without any concession to contemplative or overly optimistic visions regarding increasingly serious ecological crises” (Aranda Sánchez, 2014).

They can work toward envisioning new possibilities against hopelessness, resignation, toward exploring alternatives to the current capitalist, consumerist, mercantilist, extractive, aggressive, exploitative panorama. They can foster cultural anti-capitalism and build connections between tradition and a new generation of creators and artists. Moreover, libraries do not have to limit themselves to the cultural sphere. They can actively support some of the points that Harvey (2014) presents as characteristic of anti-capitalism (see Pérez, 2014). For there is no “green” capitalism reconciled with nature in the short or long term; capitalism is inherently expansive.

Neither is perpetual growth nor constant expansion possible, as capitalism advocates suggest. A “steady-state” economy needs to be encouraged — one where people seek to have enough instead of always craving for more. A sort of modernized “subsistence economy” which might be able to achieve a balance between human and the planet’s well-being, and the available resources. It is also necessary to defend commons and common good, public and collective interests, and community life, against appropriation, competition and accumulation.

Libraries can work for the de-commodification and democratization of all possible goods, starting with one as strategic as knowledge. In order to go about tackling degrowth and a paradigm shift, it is necessary to suggest and socialize alternatives to the market, individual and global competition, profit-based models, etc. Libraries might lead by example and put the notions of eco-
efficiency, biomimicry — the one seeking to build human systems by imitating natural ones — and deglobalization, into practice.

The idea behind the phrase “think globally, act locally” has been a driving force of the western modern environmental movement since it was put on the map some four decades ago. By assuming an activist and militant role, libraries can use their structures, collections and know-how to bring about changes in their communities — no matter how small these changes and these communities may be. Eventually, they can join forces with other libraries and many other social actors to try to force changes at the national level, and beyond. But it is probably at the local level where the results can be better attained. Being, as they are, institutions seen as a model of resource sharing, cooperation, and community responsiveness, they can use their advantageous position to launch certain messages, showing themselves as a clear, committed example of collaborative problem-solving. An example that should be highlighted, explained, documented and publicized, so that it can be repeated and replicated. And above all, it must be thought and rethought. For, as Spanish philosopher Manuel Sacristán (1996) pointed out, every decent thought must always be in crisis.

Conclusion

Respect existence or expect resistance. Anonymous.

Humanity is entering the age of irreversibility: desertification, melting of the poles and changes in the behavior of certain living beings are the most visible examples of human-induced processes — processes for which there is no going back. Shiva (2005) states:

We share this planet, our home, with millions of species. Justice and sustainability both demand that we do not use more resources than we need. Restraint in resource use and living within nature’s limits are preconditions for life and social justice.

However, few, if any, real sustainability policies have been envisaged so far, let alone degrowth ones. Instead of applying the brakes and reversing unsustainability, business as usual continues with merely a few institutional changes designed not to meet environmental and social demands but to accommodate the requirements of big companies and financial institutions. An escape forward strategy to guarantee economic growth and financial stability, and to protect both against criticism from civil society by using legal and administrative tools to hinder and punish social protest and civil disobedience on the one hand, and on the other, by encouraging wishful thinking and a dangerous
illusion of control that, from cinema to newspapers, seek to anesthetize people with the idea that, sometime in the future, technology will solve everything. A dual strategy flavored with a verbal paraphernalia (declarations, open letters, lists of objectives and international goals) that do not change reality in the slightest, but, apparently, eases consciences.

All this verbiage falls onto fertile ground: a vast majority of the population is not interested in hearing certain truths. For, as Canadian historian Margaret MacMillan points out, “the capacity of human beings to ignore what they do not want to know is unlimited” (El País, 2013). Ignorance buys tranquility.

The best antidote in countering collective self-deception is neither skepticism nor denial or despair, but working to raise awareness and advocating for action. And for all types of measures designed to change our production model, reduce consumption, degrow, manage available resources responsibly. For libraries, it is time to go beyond declarations and speeches and to become a trench, a space of resistance and reflection, thought and putting that thought into practice.

Libraries should also establish caring and trusting relationships with their community and foster selfless actions, so as being able to say “it won’t be for want of trying on our part, we helped as much as we could”, as Spanish poet Antonio Orihuela puts it in one of his latest books (2011), quoting a story that, to some extent, leaves the doors open to hope.

An old man was walking along a beach in Mexico after an uncommon spring storm. The beach was full of dying fish thrown ashore by the waves, and the man was throwing them back to the sea one by one. A tourist saw him, approached him and asked, “What are you doing?” “I try to help these fish”, the old man said. “But there are thousands of them on these beaches; throwing a few back to the sea is useless”, complained the tourist. “It is helpful to this one”, replied the old man, as he threw one fish back to the ocean.

NOTES

2 IFLA had made public a similar declaration more than a decade before, though it had not the same spread. See IFLA (2002).
3 According to data provided by PRB (2016) for August 2016.
4 It is curious to realize that nowadays “nature” is to be understood as just the environment and those non-human living beings inhabiting it; human beings remain out of the picture. Apparently, humans have nothing to do with natural laws; in fact, human problems are in general addressed separately. The mental division between
the “natural world” and the “social world” (and everything surrounding the creation and maintenance of such a fracture) probably played an important role in sustaining the human’s exploitation of the planet, at least from an intellectual/ideological point of view.

5 For an alternative to the dominant account provided by the World Bank and IMF on “poverty reduction” at a global level, see e.g. Kirk (2015). According to some statistics, 59% of the current population live below the poverty line. See also UNDP (2016). For a detailed analysis, see Odekon (2015).

6 For several Algonquin peoples (Ojibwa, Saulteaux, Cree, Naskapi, Innu) from Canada and the United States, the wendigo, windigo or witiko is a supernatural entity. Possessed by immense greed and a voracious hunger, it goes as far as to engage in cannibalism and other excesses to satisfy its instincts. Nowadays, indigenous peoples have established parallels between environmental destruction and the greedy behavior of the wendigo — or the people possessed by the spirit.

7 “Economists and politicians, on their part, fall in the same practice of self-deception, looking for a kind of reasoning that is more attractive than realistic. For instance, they speak of restarting growth, despite the fact that this economic crisis will never end; of accepting sacrifices now in order to obtain a future prosperity when, in reality, each adjustment is leading us to the catabolic collapse; of plans of rescue necessary to restart the economy, when in reality these are only useful to plug the holes of big banks; or of policies favoring employment which in reality are the degradation of the conditions of workers, etc. And the fact is that, again, our leaders look for a heroic narrative in which, thanks to their determination and their statesmanship, they will be able to return to the earlier situation, that is to a state of endless growth [...] The problem with the heroic narrative is not just that it is wrong; it is that it is leading us to disaster” (Turiel, 2011).

8 In 1972, the first of the reports of the so-called “Club of Rome” was published. Titled The Limits to Growth, it was commissioned to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, funded by the Volkswagen Foundation, and coordinated by Donella H. Meadows. Authors used a computer simulation model to track the interactions of five variables (world population, industrialization, pollution, food production and resource depletion) under three scenarios. Two of the scenarios resulted in total collapse. Despite criticism, the report put on the international agenda the idea that growth cannot be infinite on a planet with finite resource supplies.


10 See IGBP (2015).

In the same line expresses Hansen (2013) when he points out that: “The Anthropocene encourages thinking beyond the autonomous self, but it tends to promote high-modernist schemes to improve climatic conditions [...] the Anthropocene would be better understood as yet another alternative modernity, a deeply ambivalent assertion of human sovereignty at this particular postcolonial moment”.

13 See Worldwatch Institute (2013).
17 See Alves (2009) for an approach to green spin and greenwashing; Smith (1998) for an analysis of green consumerism and green marketing; Cottle (2015) for green jobs and green economy; Christoph (2014) for a study on Green New Deal; and a review of all this terminology in Wehr (2011).
18 “Only people who set themselves limits can acknowledge the existence of others and, ultimately, accept them in their midst; and that hospitality towards strangers is perhaps the only grounds for envisioning any possibility of civilizing social relations on this beleaguered planet” (Riechmann, 2004).
19 “Sufficiency principles (as opposed to mere efficiency) such as those of restraint, respite, precaution, have the virtue of partially resurrecting well-established notions like moderation and thrift, ideas that have never completely disappeared, and will indeed be in need as guides to action in a less unsustainable and more resilient economy” (Barry, 2012).
20 “It will be very difficult to define sufficiency and build the concept [of sufficiency] into economic theory and practice. But I think it will prove far more difficult to continue to operate [as if] there is no such thing as enough” (Daly, 1993).
22 See Asara et al. (2015).
23 See Schneider, Kallis & Martinez-Alier (2010).
24 One example is the movement known as “minimalism”, supported by such characters as James Wallman (author of *Stuffocation*), Leo Babaura (*The Power of Less*) or Marie Kondo (*The Magic of Order*).
26 The conference of 2014 was opened with the intervention of Naomi Klein, who had just published *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate*. See Germanos (2014).
27 E.g. to displace the opposition between private property and state power as far as possible by common rights regimes – with particular emphasis upon human
knowledge and the land as the most crucial commons we have (#3); to slow down
daily life to maximise time for free activities conducted in a stable and well-
maintained environment protected from dramatic episodes of creative destruction
(#6); or to support the greatest possible diversification in ways of living and being,
of social relations and relations to nature, and of cultural habits and beliefs within
territorial associations, communes and collectives (#11). The technology-related
points, however, may be strongly challenged.

28 See Scheffers et al. (2016).

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Introduction

The island of Cuba was inhabited by a number of indigenous peoples before the European age of conquest. The earliest archeological evidence dates to 3100 BC. Although some small communities remain, these cultures were largely destroyed by the colonizers. In 1492, Christopher Columbus landed in Cuba and claimed it for the Spanish Kingdom, and it remained a Spanish colony until Spain lost the Spanish-American War in 1898. The Treaty of Paris brought the war to a conclusion. The US gained control over Puerto Rico and Guam, and paid Spain $20 million for the Philippines. The US also took over Cuba and administered it until its formal independence in 1902. A 1901 amendment to the US Army appropriations bill, known as the Platt Amendment, stipulated conditions for the withdrawal of US troops, stated that the US had the unilateral right to intervene in Cuban affairs, and established the right for the US to lease land for naval bases. The Platt Amendment was incorporated into the Cuban Constitution in 1901, and became part of the 1903 Cuban-American Treaty of Relations. The US Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay was established in 1898 and continues under this authority. The US then occupied Cuba again from 1906 to 1909, 1912, and 1917 to 1922 to quell various rebellions, including an attempt to form a separate black republic in Oriente Province in 1912. By the 1930s, formal intervention was no longer required to maintain US domination.
The 1959 Cuban Revolution threw out the US client government of Sergeant Fulgencio Batista. The US again tried but this time failed to overthrow the Cuban government through the Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961. Anything might have happened during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, but the world managed to survive destruction from US and Soviet nuclear bombs.

The US broke diplomatic relations with Cuba in 1961. Each country established an “Interests Section” in the other country in 1977. The Interests Sections were housed within the Swiss Embassies. The US imposed a commercial, economic, and financial boycott of Cuba, phased in immediately after the 1959 revolution and extended in 1962 and 1963. Little changed from that time until December 2014, when President Obama announced the beginning of a new approach to relations with Cuba. I will address the current situation near the end of this article.

US government actions to overthrow the Cuban government and the gains of the Cuban Revolution have been two-pronged, external and overt as well as internal and clandestine. These long-standing and brutal measures have included propaganda, diplomatic and commercial isolation, trade embargo, sabotage, terrorism and military support to counter-revolutionaries (including the 1976 bombing of a Cuban commercial airplane), the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, numerous assassination plots against Fidel Castro and other leaders, possible biological and chemical warfare, and efforts to create fake civil society organizations to foment political opposition. The CIA, US Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Congress have played key roles. In 1983, Congress created and funded the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to engage in secret civil society initiatives. One of the first recipients of NED funds was the Cuban American National Foundation based in Miami. The 1992 Cuban Democracy Act, better known as the Torricelli Act supported US non-governmental organizations and individuals to bring “non-violent democratic change to Cuba.” This was intensified with the 1998 Helms-Burton Act described below.1

The violent, imperial history between the US and Cuba has permeated all aspects of US relations with Cuba, including library relations. Some members of the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) of the American Library Association (ALA) members took up issues around Cuba starting from at least 1989. Although not an official SRRT activity, a librarians tour to Cuba was publicized in the June 1989 SRRT Newsletter.2 Cuba and its library profession created a big splash in the international library community when its libraries and librarians hosted the 60th International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) Conference in Havana. This 1994 meeting was the first IFLA conference ever held in Latin America. Although the ALA Council supported the venue,3 many US librarians were dissuaded from attending the conference due to the embargo and the voices of prominent conservative
librarians, especially Beverly Lynch. Because of this debate, SRRT affirmed its support for the venue in 1993. More than 100 US librarians attended, and 67 holding various political perspectives signed a statement endorsing the normalization of relations and an end to the US embargo. The statement also noted the Cuban librarians’ “…deep professional commitment to common professional objectives…,” and that the signers were “…deeply moved by their generosity… despite their problems.”

Early SRRT and UK Activities and the Helms-Burton Act

ALA SRRT followed up the IFLA conference with a program titled, “Cuba: the Cultural Cost of the Blockade,” at the June 1995 ALA Conference in Chicago. Al Kagan chaired, and the panel featured Marta Terry, Director of the Biblioteca Nacional Jose Marti in Havana, Jose Manual Perez of Ediciones Melcher in Puerto Rico, and Ann Sparanese from the Englewood (NJ) Public Library. All had participated in the Havana IFLA Conference. In line with State Department tactics, Terry received her visa only hours before her flight.

There was very little activity around Cuba in ALA or SRRT from 1995 until January 2000. But the US government including the Congress were busy during this period. Congress passed the Helms-Burton Act in 1998 (Public Law 104-114), which was intended “…to bring about a peaceful transition to a representative democracy and market economy in Cuba.” Among other provisions, it extended the embargo to foreign companies trading with Cuba, authorized television broadcasting from the US to Cuba (TV Marti), authorized funding dissident groups, and prohibited recognition of any Cuban government that includes Fidel or Raul Castro. In other words, this so-called “peaceful transition” meant what we now term “regime change” and was fully intended to destabilize the Cuban government. In retaliation, the Cuban Government passed Cuban Penal Code and Law #88, the Law for the Protection of National Independence and the Economy of Cuba. This law made it illegal to take money or get support for activities sponsored under the Helms-Burton Act.

The US government then funded numerous tiny dissident groups, including the “independent librarians” in Cuba and the Friends of Cuban Libraries in the US. The so-called independent librarians were neither independent nor librarians. They were dissidents who had private book collections, who supposedly opened these collections to other Cubans. They were journalists, lawyers, doctors, poets, etc. who had never worked as librarians. Although the US had closed its embassy in Havana, it did have an Interests Section located in the Swiss Embassy. The US Interests Section gave books, equipment, and other aid to these private “libraries.” Robert Kent from the New York Public Library was the chief proponent of the tiny group, Friends of Cuban Libraries. He visited Cuba at least ten times delivering various kinds of aid and money
for USAID funded organizations. He was arrested and deported on his last trip in 1999.8

A USAID funded website in Florida, CubaNet, and Friends of Cuban Libraries (FCL) alleged intimidation of the “independent librarians.” These groups appealed for help to the IFLA Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression Committee (FAIFE). FCL’s propaganda campaign gained momentum when FAIFE issued a 1999 report based on information from both FCL and the Asociación Cubana de Bibliotecarios (ASCUBI), the Cuban library association. However, the report basically affirmed the FCL position, that is repression of the “independent librarians.”9

Progressive librarians in the UK were the first LIS group to respond to the US destabilization campaign. The Cuban Libraries Support Group (CLSG) was established on 1 July 1999. The objectives were to support: “Cuban libraries, librarians, library and information workers and the Cuban library association (ASCUBI); Cuba’s free and comprehensive education system and high literacy levels; and the Cuban people’s right to self determination and to chose the social, political and economic systems which support their library service.” The CLSG worked in partnership with four British organizations: Information for Social Change, a progressive librarians’ network; the Library Association (LA), which passed a motion in favor of Cuban libraries at its Annual General Meeting; Book Aid International, which sends books to Cuban libraries; and the Cuba Solidarity Campaign. The Cuban Libraries Support Group built on a positive 1994 resolution to the LA by calling in 1999 for LA recognition of Cuba’s advancements in librarianship, literacy, and education; recognition of the difficult economic conditions caused by the “illegal 40 year US blockade,” urging IFLA to call on the US government to end the blockade, and sending a fact-finding visit to Cuba.10 The Library Association’s Annual General Meetings approved both of these resolutions, but both were referred back to the International Committee and never got to the LA Council.11

Responding to the FAIFE Report’s criticism of Cuban government actions against the “independent librarians,” Ann Sparanese submitted a resolution to the SRRT Action Council which was passed by Action Council at the ALA Midwinter Meeting in January 2000. In this way, SRRT went on record by rejecting the legitimacy of the Friends of Cuban Libraries, supporting exchanges between US and Cuban librarians, supporting the efforts of the CLSG in promoting positive interaction, calling for an end to the travel ban and blockade, and advocating the normalization of relations between the US and Cuba.12

In March 2000, Rhonda Neugebauer, Latin American Studies Bibliographer at the University of California Riverside, led a tour of 17 US librarians to further investigate the Cuban library situation. They went to the National Library, the National Technical Library School, and attended a five-day library colloquium.
Several people also visited two of the so-called independent libraries. Neugebauer reported that the first home had a normal sized bookshelf and the second had no books at all. The owners said that they got monthly shipments of books and other materials and some money from Miami and Mexico. Some of the books were published and donated by the prominent right-wing Cuban American National Foundation in Miami.

**Background on the US Propaganda Campaign and the “Independent Libraries”**

In 1998, the couple Ramon Colas and Berta Mexidor created the first so-called “independent library” in their home. In 1999, the US government funded a US domestic group, Friends of Cuban Libraries, to support the “independent libraries.” Its chief agent was Robert Kent at the New York Public Library. Colas and Mexidor immigrated to the US in December 2001, and established the non-profit organization in 2003, Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba. They set up a website, published a 3-fold brochure, and issued a poster featuring 17 imprisoned “librarians” (including photos of 15) and a small foldout pamphlet with profiles of the individuals. It is interesting that the pamphlet listed the organization’s contact addresses and phone numbers in both Havana and Miami. In 2003, Ramon Colas testified before the Committee on International Relations of the US House of Representatives, where he claimed that the dissident movement was…legitimate and authentically Cuban. To imply that it was created by the United States Interests Section in Havana is racist, since it means that Havana underestimates its own people to such an extent as to believe that they are not capable of struggling for themselves for their own liberty.

However, note that an IRC document showed that the Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba received 98% of its funding from the US government.

The US Interests Section in Havana stepped up its destabilization activities in the fall of 2002 under its new head, James Cason. His actions included attending meetings in dissidents’ homes where he gave informal press conferences, personally launching the youth wing of the tiny dissident Liberal Party, and hosting a workshop for “independent journalists” in his home. Cason’s initiatives were very far over the line for diplomats in any country, and he consequently provoked the arrest of seventy-five people, some involved with the “independent librarians.” However, reports did not list these individuals primarily as librarians, but rather as people with other professions.
For example, Friends of Cuban Libraries identified eight of these individuals as librarians, but an Amnesty International report showed no connection to libraries for three of them. The other five had “private libraries” in their homes. Amnesty described five of them as journalists, five as leaders or members of human rights organizations, one as a surgeon, and one as a poet. The point of this analysis is that not even the Friends of Cuban Libraries and Amnesty International could agree on just who these so-called librarians were.

The US government’s propaganda campaign swung into action, and many people of good will who previously supported Cuban issues denounced the arrest of the seventy-five dissidents. But note that the dissidents were not arrested for speech, but rather for engaging in other unlawful activities, including receiving support from the US under the Helms-Burton Act for the purpose of “regime change.” The Wall Street Journal published an article on “Cuba’s Jailed Librarians” just before the 2003 ALA Annual Conference in Toronto. The Wall Street Journal author complained that although there would be a program on Cuba at ALA, it would not include any members of the so-called independent librarians. The article named three librarians who were taking the lead in countering Mr. Kent and the Friends of Cuban Libraries: Ann Sparanese, Rhonda Neugebauer, and Mark Rosenzweig. Further, the author noted that Nat Hentoff of the Village Voice had been castigating ALA in his columns on this issue. (This author had a particularly nasty phone call from Mr. Hentoff before the ALA conference.) However the ALA International Relations Committee did provide a forum for all points of view for a large audience at their conference program in Toronto but took no action. A New York Times article just after the conference called the debate “a little cultural cold war.” The article quoted Kent as well as ALA President Mitch Freedman, International Relations Committee Chair Winston Tabb, and ALA Councilor Mark Rosenzweig. Freedman and Tabb said that the issues were still too murky for ALA to take a position, but Rosenzweig called the so-called independent librarians “a rag tag bunch…on the fringes of the dissident movement.” The Los Angeles Times published an opinion piece critical of ALA after the conference, which was then picked up by National Review. Articles were also allegedly published in the Washington Times and in some other newspapers. There was also a debate that year in the pages of the U*S*A*B*A*S*H*E*D Librarian between its columnist Sandy Berman, Al Kagan, and Ann Sparanese. To complement the propaganda campaign, the Bibliotecas Independientes published a fiction anthology of the winning entries of their literature contest sometime in 2003.

In response to the US campaign, Cuban investigative reporters Rosa Miriam Elizalde and Luis Baez published a book titled, “Los Disidentes.” In that work, the authors gave more biographical information about Ramon Colas. He was a psychologist who had held important positions in public health. He formed the Partido Revolucionario Martiano in 1994, and became a member of
the Colegio Medico Independiente (Association of Independent Physicians). He joined the Partido Solidaridad Democratica in 1996, and became the chair of its Las Tunas branch in 1997. He created and became director of the Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba in 1999, and then immigrated to the US in December 2001. He then became a member of the Cuban exile right-wing La Fundación Nacional Cubano Americana (Cuban American National Foundation), based in Miami. And he worked as an announcer on the Foundation’s radio program.

In Elizalde and Baez’s book, they described how the dissident organizations were infiltrated by the Cuban government, and how 12 government agents became dissident leaders. These agents testified at the trials of the 75 people convicted in 2003. Nine of these government agents worked as “independent journalists.” They wrote that they were assigned directly by the US Interests Section to write specific articles attacking the Cuban government, the articles were then checked by the Section before being sent out to the media in Miami and Puerto Rico. In exchange, the agents, believed by the US Interest Section to be dissident journalists, were paid and guaranteed expedited US visas. According to a real Cuban journalist who was bought by the program, most of these “independent journalists” did not know anything about the profession, and they became the object of jokes because of their lack of knowledge of grammar and composition. The informants testified that these so-called “journalists” often made up their stories in order to show their benefactors what they wanted to see. These articles were published under different names to make it seem that there were a large number of dissidents reporting.26

It is worth emphasizing the profound cumulative effect of US propaganda and its most important instrument, the Helms-Burton Act, which in calling for “regime change” was in effect a declaration of war. Cuba’s National Assembly of People’s Power did everything it could to counter Helms-Burton through its Law for the Protection of National Independence and the Economy of Cuba. By passing that law, the Cuban government made it clear that those getting money and resources provided through Helms-Burton would be considered subversive, not just ordinary domestic government opponents. The 2003 crackdown and arrest of 75 dissidents must be understood in this context. Although some of these 75 were very likely committing serious crimes, it is quite possible that some of those arrested were not doing much more than the kind of non-violent protest activities that are seen as normal in many countries of the world. It is collusion with the US propaganda campaign organized through the Helms-Burton Act that made these acts subversive under Cuban law.

Some Cuban dissidents who did not take direction and funding from the US Interests Section were not arrested. For example, Spanish born but Cuban citizen Elroy Gutiérrez-Menoyo was free to travel around the island and pursue his goal of democratic change through dialogue. He was invited to government gatherings, and was allowed to travel to Spain where he was born. However,
Gutiérrez-Menoyo noted that he only cooperated with people who are “totally independent.”27 One can only speculate as to whether the Helms-Burton Act had the opposite effect intended, that of shutting down dialogue within Cuba.

Investigation at ACURIL Havana and Progress at IFLA Boston 2001

The ALA Latin American & Caribbean Subcommittee of the International Relations Committee (IRC) held a hearing at the Midwinter 2001 meeting where Robert Kent and others testified. The subcommittee found the information inconclusive with both sides questioning the accuracy and intentions of the other, and therefore the subcommittee recommended no further action.28 The full IRC decided to keep the issue on its agenda, and especially to gather information at the forthcoming meeting of the Association of Caribbean University, Research and Institutional Libraries (ACURIL) in Havana.29 A high-level US delegation of prominent librarians did go to the ACURIL meeting. They tried to contact nine “Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba” in Havana, but were only able to visit four of them. Two of the phone numbers given on the US government funded CubaNet or given by Robert Kent did not connect to the persons listed, one collection no longer existed, and two people had left the country. The US delegation found collections from 200 to 2000 volumes. None of the proprietors claimed to be librarians, and all stated that they were “dissidents,” “counter-revolutionaries,” or “members of opposition movements.” All said that they had been detained, for several hours up to several months, for political activities not related to their collections. The US delegates also visited several public libraries, where they found books that Robert Kent said were excluded from the catalogs, including one supposedly banned book that was recently checked-out. Kent had claimed that banned books were sometimes held but not represented in library catalogs. As a result, the delegation recommended formal cooperation between ALA and ASCUBI and between the Library Information Technology Association (LITA) with the Sociedad Cubana de Información Científica y Técnica (SOCICT, the Cuban Society of Scientific and Technical Information). The group also recommended other forms of cooperation, including a formal resolution on cooperation between institutions for the forthcoming IFLA conference in Boston.30

Following up on these recommendations, the IRC successfully passed a resolution at ALA Council in June 2001. It urged the US government to share materials widely in Cuba including with the public libraries, urged the US government to establish lower postal fees for sending books, opposed US government efforts to limit information to Cuba, and urged IFLA to work to improve the Cuban people’s access to books and other information materials on all topics.31

IFLA then passed a resolution at its 2001 Boston Conference urging the US government to eliminate obstacles to access to information and professional
interaction imposed by the embargo, and urged the US government to share materials with Cuban libraries, not just the “independent libraries.” IFLA also urged the Cuban government to eliminate such obstacles. In an historic move, ALA and ASCUBI signed a cooperation agreement at the Boston meeting.32

**ALA Council’s Policy Statement on Cuba**

The ALA International Relations Committee (IRC) brought a Resolution on Access to Information in Cuba33 to the 2003 Annual Conference in Toronto. It included advocating “regime change” in Cuba, as advocated by the Friends of Cuban Libraries. The Council went into informal session for 30 minutes to consider the issues. Several speakers said that the resolution was hastily and poorly constructed, and was a response to national attention in the press. The Council allowed Marta Terry, former director of the Jose Marti National Library in Havana, to speak for a delegation of five Cuban librarians in attendance. She thanked ALA for the opportunity to come to the meeting, and said that they were defending the rights of 11 million Cubans to library service and cultural access. In the end, the Council referred the issue back to the IRC and the Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC).34 The two committees established a task force,35 which was asked to report back at the Midwinter 2004 meeting.

The Council endorsed the IRC/IFC joint report as ALA policy at the January 2004 Midwinter meeting.36 It stated that ALA was deeply concerned about the recent arrests and prison terms of the “political dissidents”, but also that these dissidents did not consider themselves librarians. The report concluded that ALA joins IFLA in offering support to the Cuban library community in promoting free access to information, called on ASCUBI to implement a code of ethics (which it did), called for the elimination of the US embargo and travel restrictions, called on Cuba to adhere to Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, supported IFLA’s call for a visit to Cuba by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights with special attention to the recent arrests, and urged the Cuban library community to take a leading role in advancing freedom of information and expression. The report also noted the recent policy of the Canadian Library Association opposing foreign government attempts to undermine Cuba’s government through “economic blockades, subversion, military adventures, assassination attempts and outside funding of political opposition through ‘civil society’ organizations,”37 and called on IFLA to further investigate the role of “independent libraries.”38

ALA’s report was not good enough for Nat Hentoff and some other defenders of the “independent librarians.” Hentoff wanted ALA to support the “independent librarians.” Responding to a story in *Library Journal Academic Newswire* titled, “ALA and Cuba: Who’s Afraid of Nat Hentoff,” Steve Fesenmaier posted Hentoff’s rebuttal to ALA policy (as represented in the IRC/
IFC report) to the SRRT listserv. And Hentoff published a short article in his syndicated column about ALA’s failure to call for the immediate release of the so-called librarians in the group of 75 who were arrested in 2003. Hentoff then published a longer article in Village Voice News, and returned his 1983 John Philip Immroth Memorial Award (given by the ALA Intellectual Freedom Committee), and demanded that his name be taken off the list of winners. (His name still appears on the list with a note about his renunciation.) Editor of Library Journal, John Berry III then defended ALA in an editorial noting the thorough IRC/IFC report and showing that Hentoff’s headline, “The ALA’s Shameful Silence” was completely wrong and “sensational.” Berry noted that Library Journal had printed almost a dozen accounts on ALA’s Cuba discussions since 2000, and that ALA had made concerted attempts to establish relationships with Cuban working librarians and their professional association, ASCUBI. Then Hentoff published another letter to the editor in American Libraries. There were also several more columns and letters there, as well as a dialog between Hentoff and John W. Berry, then current IRC chair and executive director of the Northern Illinois Learning Resources Cooperative.

As IRC Chair, John W. Berry tried to go beyond the 2003 report endorsed by the ALA Council at the 2004 Orlando ALA Annual Conference. He misrepresented his intentions at the IRC meeting, and this only became clear in his report to the ALA Council. In that report, he said he intended to send letters in support of health care for sick prisoners which would be accompanied by a resolution from the Board of Trustees of the Vermillion (South Dakota) Public Library demanding the release of the “independent librarians.” Three current IRC members were able to prevent sending these letters through discussion on the Council floor, and Berry later personally apologized for his misrepresentations to these IRC members: Al Kagan, Herb Biblo, and Ismail Abdullahi. It is also interesting that the Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba set up an exhibit booth at the Orlando meeting.

**ALA Travel Policy and an Ambush**

SRRT called for an end of travel restrictions to Cuba at the 2004 Orlando meeting. The IRC finally wrote a free travel resolution, which was passed by the ALA Council at Midwinter 2006 in San Antonio. The text was general and did not refer to any particular countries. But there was more funny business at the San Antonio meeting. Robert Kent had obviously contacted and convinced the ALA President Program speaker, radio personality Romanian-American Andre Codrescu, to spend half his time attacking ALA for its stand on the “independent librarians.” ALA President Michael Gorman was completely taken aback, but handled it with amazing calm while defending ALA’s position. The Chronicle of Higher Education then published an article misrepresenting
both the speech and ALA’s position. Michael Gorman responded by publishing a letter in The Chronicle calling Codrescu “…rude and devious to accept an invitation (and a fee) to speak on a topic and use that opportunity to attack your host…” Two more prominent invited speakers also briefly supported the “independent librarians,” former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright at the 2006 Annual Conference and journalist Anthony Lewis at the 2008 Midwinter Meeting. It is noteworthy that both Codrescu and Albright have East European roots, and had personal experience with the previous communist regimes. Their kneejerk Cold War responses are therefore not especially surprising. Codrescu was born in Romania and Albright’s family came from Czechoslovakia. As for Anthony Lewis, when he was told what ALA had actually done, he admitted, “Well, I really don’t know that much about the issue.”

Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba and other US NGO Funding

President George W. Bush established a commission to deal with current policy towards Cuba and make plans for US intervention in a future “transition government.” The commission included members of all Cabinet level agencies, and it was chaired by the Secretary of State, Colin Powell. In 2004, the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, issued its first report to the President. It proposed a budget of two million dollars to re-stock, strengthen, and expand the Cuban independent library network. It recommended a future National Commission on Progress through Education that would assist Cuba’s libraries in a “transition government.” Perhaps most importantly for this article, the Commission recommended that the Institute for Museum and Library Services and the American Library Association support the effort of the future transition government to renovate and modernize Cuba’s libraries, museums, and other information resources. The Commission’s second report included more of the same language, and called for “transition, not succession.” It recommended the creation of a Cuba Fund for a Democratic Future with initial funding of $80 million over two years, and then no less than $20 million every year “until the dictatorship ceases to exist.” $24 million of the initial amount would go to “access to independent information.”

Michael Dowling, Director of the ALA International Relations Office, researched and printed a “Cuba Update for ALA Annual 2008.” He noted that his office and the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom filed Freedom of Information requests to USAID and the State Department to get information on US support for the “independent libraries” in March 2007, but had got no response. But he said that much information was already available. For example, the US government spent $74 million for “US democracy assistance for Cuba” for 1996 to 2005. He briefly noted the $2 million for the “independent librarians” in the Commission’s budget (described above), and listed further
US government aid for the “independent libraries” through Freedom House, the Sabre Foundation, the Pan American Development Foundation, the People in Need Foundation (Czech Republic), and the Mississippi Consortium for International Development and Jackson State University. He noted that the Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba reported government funding of $81,821 for 2005 and $129,945 for 2006 (98% of its income for both years). Dowling also wrote that USAID had an open call for bids on $20 million to “hasten a peaceful transition to democracy.”

Friends of Cuban Libraries at IFLA

Michael Dowling’s 2008 report also noted that the US Embassy set up a meeting for Ramon Colas with the Uruguay Library Association before the 2004 Buenos Aires IFLA Conference. And that the Friends of Cuban Libraries asked the national library associations of Estonia, Poland, and the Czech Republic to pass a resolution at the 2005 Oslo IFLA Conference in support of the “independent libraries,” but nothing came of this effort. In 2006, the national library associations of Latvia and Lithuania passed support resolutions, but the Lithuanian association later retracted its resolution after learning the complete story. Robert Kent also tried to convince the Hungarian library association to pass a similar resolution but without result.50 This author also personally saw Kent’s messages at the Oslo meeting on the IFLA message board to the delegations of more countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Friends of Cuban Libraries Last Try

Three ALA councilors brought another resolution in support of the “independent librarians” to the 2008 Annual Conference in Anaheim. However two of them were first time councilors who like Anthony Lewis really did not know much about the issue. In fact, it seemed that all new councilors were contacted that year by Mr. Kent and his supporters. The new councilors soon learned more about how they were being used, and withdrew their support. That left the resolution without a seconder, and it could not be introduced at the Council. Peter McDonald, Chair of the ALA Resolutions Committee, provided the necessary backstory at a meeting of the Council Forum. McDonald also exposed Steve Marquardt’s dirty tricks on the Council floor. In a particularly nasty move, ALA member and purported Amnesty International Legislative Coordinator for Minnesota, Steve Marquardt had created a “version 2.0” of Michael Dowling’s “Cuba Update for ALA Annual 2008” report inserting much information favorable to the “independent librarians.” However, he did not put his name on the first page, but only on the last page of this long document, making it seem that this version also came from Michael Dowling. He then
emailed it to all the councilors making the message appear to come from ALA. As director of the ALA International Relations Office, Dowling was not amused. After being admonished, Marquardt issued “version 2.1” with his name at the top. This clearly stepped over a line and the Council was clearly fed up with the supporters of dirty tricks in Cuba and now in the United States.51

The last action of Friends of Cuban Libraries appears to have been at a 2011 conference on “Cuban Futures” held at the City University of New York Graduate Center where Rhonda Neugebauer and Dana Lubow gave a talk on a project to send a bookmobile stocked with books for the US to public libraries in Granma Province. According to a hostile article published by Friends of Cuban Libraries, one of their members challenged the two presenters on their depiction of the situation of Cuban libraries and their analysis of the so-called “independent library movement.” The last posting under “Recent News” on the organization’s website was dated Oct. 7, 2011.52

Conclusion

The Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) is the most well-known and financed Cuban exile organization in Miami. CANF has been a staunch supporter of efforts to tighten the US embargo and to subvert the Cuban government. It is instructive to consider their evaluation of the use of funds allocated under the Helms-Burton Act. In a March 2008 report, they declared the US government program

...utterly ineffective due to restrictive institutional policies and lack of oversight and accountability of grantee recipients within the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the primary U.S. government agency tasked with distributing democracy funding53 [emphasis added].

The report states that a significant majority of the funds were actually spent by (so-called) non-profit agencies for their operating expenses. It gives examples of four US-based NGOs: the first spent only 19% of its US government funding in Cuba, the second only 4%, the third 81%, and the last 27%. The report stated that the agencies had to ship in all their supplies at ten times the cost compared to if they bought them on the local Cuban market.54 From all available accounts, it seems that the Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba have also been utterly ineffective inside Cuba. Several US and international visits to these homes have shown lack of awareness of their existence in their own neighborhoods, little traffic, and little use of the small collections.

Furthermore, it is illegal under US, Cuban, and international law to secretly finance domestic opposition in another sovereign nation. For example see 18 US Code § 951 - Agents of foreign governments:
(a) Whoever, other than a diplomatic or consular officer or attache, acts in the United States as an agent of a foreign government without prior notification to the Attorney General if required in subsection (b), shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than ten years, or both.

(b) The Attorney General shall promulgate rules and regulations establishing requirements for notification.

If a similar law was strictly applied in Cuba, the vast majority of Cuban dissidents would be in jail. There are similar provisions in French, Spanish, Belgian, Italian, Swiss, and Swedish law.55

Although ineffective in Cuba, Helms-Burton funding has been quite successful domestically. US propaganda against Cuba is nothing new and has been going on for years. The demonization of Cuba has been widespread and has pervaded the mainstream media, so not surprisingly most Americans have been easily taken in. Given the US environment, it is remarkable that SRRT was able to counter the propaganda campaign and prevent the ALA Council from falling into the USAID and State Department’s trap. Ann Sparanese especially deserves a great deal of credit for her tireless efforts in educating the Council. Friends of Cuban Libraries has been thoroughly discredited, and it has seemingly disappeared.

Perhaps the emerging political, economic, and cultural thaw, exemplified by the opening of embassies on 20 July 2015, and the meetings between Presidents Raul Castro and Barack Obama will have wide ranging positive effects. But there is also a threat that this political thaw may bring foreign subversion of a different sort that can gradually undermine the gains of the Cuban Revolution. The hope is that the new cooperative movement will transform state enterprises into the engine that will jump-start the economy while remaining true to revolutionary principles.56 In the meantime, small private businesses are flourishing.

The US and Cuba have created a bilateral commission to coordinate the further normalization of relations concerning migration, illegal drugs, law enforcement, human rights, property claims presumably including Guantánamo Bay, and probably US destabilization activities. New regulations allow US telecommunications and Internet corporations to operate in Cuba, and US debit cards can now be used in Cuban hotels and restaurants. Direct mail has been established, and an environmental accord has been signed. One of the most far-reaching changes is allowing Cuban access to the US banking system. But all this has been done by executive orders, and only the Congress can rescind the trade embargo. Furthermore a new US president could reverse any of these accomplishments.

And we are now seeing a swing in US public opinion because of the thaw. Many more people from the US are already travelling to Cuba due to Obama’s
lifting of most of the travel restrictions. They are seeing a different reality than has been depicted in the US mainstream media for so many years. This will increase in fall 2016 when direct commercial flights between the US and Cuba will be initiated.

The Cuban Revolution has made an enormous difference in the lives of the great majority of the people, especially in education, health care, race relations, and the eradication of poverty. On these points, it is clearly miles ahead of its peers. This author finds their accomplishments in combatting racism particularly noteworthy, although there is always more to do.

But the US obsession with overthrowing the Cuban Revolution has had a major impact on freedom of speech and the press. The examples of the 1973 US-backed overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile, the invasions of Grenada (1982) and Panama (1989) and many other covert US operations to destabilize other governments throughout history show that Cuba had no choice but to do everything to prevent a US coup. In this new situation it will be interesting to see how Cuba will restructure its information and communications policies, including dealing with the US corporations itching to make new profits.

SRRT’s ability to expose US foreign policy towards Cuba has made it possible for ALA to establish a respectful relationship with ASCUBI and many Cuban librarians. In the process, SRRT has also educated many US librarians about US foreign policy. It is a remarkable achievement, and something to build upon for the future.

NOTES

2 SRRT Newsletter, no. 92, (June 1989): 5.
3 1986 CD #40, Annual.
5 “Statement of Librarians from the United States and Puerto Rico on U.S.-Cuba Relations,” SRRT Newsletter, no. 114, (December 1994): 7. It is interesting that the title of the statement refers to Puerto Rico as separate from the United States, and shows a sense of Latin American solidarity.
8 Memo from Ann C. Sparanese, SRRT Action Councilor to Pat Wand, Chairperson, ALA IRC Latin American & Caribbean Subcommittee, January 8, 2001, page 2,


10 These resolutions are unpublished. The 1994 resolution included a UK cooperative agreement with ASCUBI (Cuban Library Association), material aid to Cuban libraries, and twinning initiatives between UK and Cuban libraries.


14 http://www.friendsofcubanlibraries.org/FAQs.htm#Who%20Are%20the%20Friends%20of%20CubanLibraries


20 Ibid.
22 Email message from Ann Sparnese (sic, Sparanese) to members of the ALA Council, no date.
32 “International Relations Committee and Intellectual Freedom Committee’s Report on Cuba (2003-2004)” (ALA CD#18.1), unpublished; SRRT Newsletter, no. 136
Council document 18.5.

ALA Council minutes, June 2003, unpublished.

Al Kagan represented the SRRT position on the task force.


43 “Resolution on Rights of Librarians and Library Workers to Travel” (2005-2006 ALA CD#18.2), http://www.ala.org/offices/iro/awardsactivities/resolutionrighttotravel.


50 Ibid.


54 Ibid., 10. The 4 grantees were: Center for a Free Cuba, Directorio Democratico Cubano, Inc., Grupo de Apoyo a la Democracia, Inc., and Accion Democratica Cubano, Inc.


56 From 9%, 22% of the economy was in the non-state sector in 2013, and that is expected to rise to nearly 50% in the near future, including cooperatives and small private businesses in both rural and urban areas. 498 cooperative had been approved by mid-2014, including conversions from state enterprises and new private initiatives. Cliff DuRand, “Cooperative Cuba” (Laredo, TX: Center for Global Justice, 2013), http://www.globaljusticecenter.org/cooperative_cuba; “A Cuban Economic ‘Update’ with an Emphasis on Worker and Producers Cooperatives: 498 Enterprises Approved so Far” (Brussels: International Organisation of Industrial, Artisanal and Service Producers’ Cooperatives (CICOPA), 2014, http://www.cicopa.coop/A-Cuban-economic-update-with-an.html.
Cultural genocide extends beyond attacks upon the physical and/or biological elements of a group and seeks to eliminate its wider institutions... Elements of cultural genocide are manifested when artistic, literary, and cultural activities are restricted or outlawed and when national treasures, libraries, archives, museums, artifacts, and art galleries are destroyed or confiscated. David Neressian.¹

For approximately the past hundred years, the Zionist movement has been engaged in an intense process of nation building in the land of historic Palestine. The problem, from the Zionist perspective, was the existence of a predominantly non-Jewish Palestinian population in the very area slated to become a Jewish state. The solution, from the Zionist perspective, was the disappearance of the Palestinian people.

For more than sixty years, the attempt to disappear Palestine has taken three primary forms: the physical destruction of Palestinian property and expulsion of people from their homes, the legally enshrined discrimination against Palestinian people both inside and outside Palestine, and the ongoing process of cultural genocide that threatens Palestinian identity at its core. These processes are inherently intertwined, but the first two are often given more attention than the last. This study will briefly touch upon physical destruction and legal discrimination to provide a framework for understanding the primary topic of the study: an example of the ongoing process of cultural theft and destruction.

Hannah Mermelstein is a school librarian and Palestine solidarity activist based in Brooklyn, NY. She has coordinated more than 25 delegations in Palestine, and in the US organizes with Adalah-NY, The New York Campaign for the Boycott of Israel, and with Librarians and Archivists with Palestine.

KEYWORDS: Cultural genocide; Palestine; Israel; Nakba; Zionism; Palestinian libraries; Librarians and Archivists with Palestine.
In 1948, much of the wealthy and formally educated Palestinian population was concentrated in Jerusalem and other urban centers. When Zionist militias swept through these neighborhoods, they physically pushed thousands of people from their homes and caused tens of thousands more to flee in fear. Many Palestinians left in haste, grabbing only what they could carry as they ran. Others thought they would return a few weeks later, once the fighting died down. In many cases, members of the educated class left behind some of their most prized possessions: books.

The soldiers raiding these West Jerusalem neighborhoods were closely followed by teams of librarians from the Jewish National and University Library at Hebrew University (later referred to as National Jewish Library or simply the National Library). They gathered approximately 30,000 books from private Palestinian libraries and, according to testimonies from those involved in the project, began to catalog books by subject and often by owners’ names. In the early 1960s, however, close to 6,000 of the books were revisited and labeled with the letters “AP” for “abandoned property”. The library catalog shows no information on provenance, or former ownership. If that information had formerly been recorded, it seems to have been erased or at least carefully concealed.

To this day, the books’ call numbers begin with the letters “AP.” The National Library has thus maintained a likely unintentional collection of looted Palestinian books, easily identifiable to those who understand what “AP” means. It remains unclear why certain books were labeled “AP” and others were not. Indeed, the remainder of the 30,000 plundered books, which were embedded into the library’s general catalog and are also still housed there, are much more difficult to identify.

This study will focus solely on the 6,000 books with the “AP” designation, and aims to contribute to uncovering a particular historical episode and to offer suggestions on how to move forward with the information the study gathers. It will place the story of Palestine’s looted books in the larger political contexts of Zionism and other cases of looted cultural property during times of war and occupation, namely that of Jewish property looted by Nazis. Most concretely, it will begin to establish an understanding of how the “Abandoned Property” books at the Jewish National and University Library may be linked to their former owners and eventually restored to their place in Palestinian cultural memory.

**Historical Context**

“Imagine that you wake up one day and your entire human environment is gone.” Sami Abu Shehadeh, PhD student, political and social activist, and Yaffa resident, attempts to explain the impact of the Nakba on the Palestinian
people. Nakba, or catastrophe, is the Arabic name for the displacement and dispossession of the Palestinian people immediately before, during, and after the founding of the State of Israel. On May 13, 1948, one day before Israel declared itself a state, Zionist armies literally pushed 50,000 Palestinians from Yaffa into the sea. Boats transported people to Gaza, Egypt, and Lebanon, where many of them remain today. In a strikingly short time span, Yaffa’s Palestinian population dwindled from 120,000 to fewer than 4,000 – an entire human environment disappeared.

People are often displaced during war; they either flee the fighting or are driven out at gunpoint. When the fighting ends, they begin the sometimes complicated psychological and legal processes of reclaiming their land and property. The case of Palestine stands out as one of the more extreme cases of displacement, one in which the fleeing of the indigenous population was not incidental but was necessary for the creation of a Jewish state in historic Palestine. Because the ethnic cleansing was incomplete, however, the new Israeli state enacted laws and policies to guarantee the creation and continuation of an artificial Jewish majority.

In 1950, the Israeli government passed the famous “Law of Return,” guaranteeing that “Every Jew has a right to come to this country.” The law describes the granting of Israeli citizenship to any Jew in the world who wants it. Meanwhile, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, a right guaranteed to all people in the world and specifically reaffirmed for Palestinian people by the UN in the 1948 Resolution 194, has been systematically denied. Arabic street names have been replaced with the names of Zionist leaders. Hundreds of Palestinian villages have been destroyed, and the rubble of homes covered by fast-growing non-native pine forests planted by the Jewish National Fund with donations from around the world. One of the most striking laws is the Absentee Property Law, which declares that those who left the country during the fighting of 1948 no longer have rights to their property if they first left to an “enemy country,” and that those internally displaced are considered “present absentees,” still without access to their land and property. As many who fall into the latter category often bitterly remark, “We’re here when it’s time to pay taxes, but we’re not here when we try to claim our rights.”

In 1948, the Custodian of Absentee Property took control – but not ownership – of all refugees’ property, including books. This measure was supposed to be temporary. In 1950, the Absentee Property Law declared the Custodian the “owner” of the property until a proper owner came forward, and at the same time made it virtually impossible for Palestinians to come forward to claim their property.

Not only would an acknowledgment of Palestinian ownership threaten Zionist legitimacy, but the incorporation of the books into the Israeli narrative actively served Zionist interests. While the institutions could have simply
 discarded the books, their preservation has become part of Israel’s conception of itself. Just as hummus is now an Israeli food, Palestinian books are now Israeli artifacts. The colonizer’s identity exists only in relation to the colonized.

At the same time, the “Abandoned Property” books provide a reminder of a past that Israel would prefer to forget. While their owners remain scattered throughout the world in exile, the books sit in Jerusalem, severed from their owners and their former homes but housed with each other, still in historic Palestine.

The AP books also serve as a testament to the burgeoning intellectual culture of Palestine and the Arab world in general, and Jerusalem in particular, in the 1940s. These books are not the average mass-produced popular fiction or cheap commercial publications. They are largely scholarly volumes, mostly in Arabic, and many are rare or out of print today.

The maintenance – whether intentional or not – of the AP collection is thus especially poignant. While the Israeli government and affiliated institutions have attempted to render the AP books meaningless to Palestinian people, their efforts have proven incomplete. Researcher Gish Amit uncovered this story, and projects like The Great Book Robbery – a film and interactive website including translation of part of the National Library’s catalog of AP books – continue its publicity. To my knowledge, neither the National Library nor those attempting to shed light on this case have conducted provenance research regarding these books, so this study aims to begin this process. But first it is useful to explore other examples of looted cultural property – particularly in Nazi Europe – and the process of its return to its former owners.

Nazi Looting of Jewish Cultural Property

One of the best known examples of physical and cultural destruction of a people is the Nazi holocaust perpetrated against Jews and others. I will focus not on physical destruction of people or materials, but on the looting (and survival) of Jewish cultural property, particularly books. No two historical events are the same, but it is instructive to examine some of the parallels and differences between cases of Nazi looting of Jewish property and Zionist looting of Palestinian books.

The Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg (ERR) was established in 1940, and over the following years confiscated millions of Jewish cultural items. Though occasionally coming into conflict with Nazis who simply wanted to destroy Jewish cultural property, the ERR had widespread governmental support from those who sought to understand their “enemies”. The ERR kept detailed records of the confiscation of libraries, with addresses, dates of seizure, and the number of crates shipped from each place. Some of these ERR lists survive to this day. It is unclear whether such detailed official documentation exists in the case of Palestine, but thus far only a small amount has been discovered.
Eventually, in both the cases of Palestine and Nazi-controlled Europe, most victims had fled or were forcibly removed, and the books remained under the control of the occupying power. As in Palestine with the Custodian of Absentee Property, “[t]he property of Jews who had fled the Nazi onslaught was declared ‘ownerless,’ and therefore the ERR had the ‘obligation’ to store it in safe places within the Reich.”

Because the Nazi government sought to understand the Jews, it often forced Jewish laborers to process and catalog the books. The conscripted staff of the Reich Security Main Office, or RSHA, found itself in a precarious position. On the one hand, Jewish librarians wanted to document and care for these stolen Jewish collections; on the other hand, they worked in inhumane conditions for a government that wanted to annihilate them. Additionally, the threat of deportation to death camps hung over everyone, and eventually most of the workers were indeed deported.

Similarly, Palestinian prisoners of war in 1948 were forced to loot each other’s homes, and in some cases their own, to gather books from them and prepare them for removal by the National Library. Since the cataloging took place only after the war ended, the labor was no longer forced prison labor, but Palestinians were still needed for their Arabic language skills. Aziz Shehadeh, a Palestinian lawyer with Israeli citizenship, loved his job cataloging books in the National Library, but also notes that, “I’ve seen the entire Palestinian tragedy through these books. A catastrophe.”

Multiple efforts at restitution of looted Jewish property have been conducted. These fall roughly into two categories: those conducted just after the end of World War II and those currently under way as a result of renewed efforts to retrieve stolen property. A few of the more instructive examples can be used as a basis for understanding and beginning to work on the case of looted Palestinian books and other property.

In 1941, the Nazis established Theresienstadt concentration camp in a town called Terezin on the outskirts of Prague. This camp housed wealthy and prominent Jews from various countries and served as a “model camp” to show the world that the Nazis’ treatment of Jews was humane. Therefore, those in the camp were, at least at the beginning, permitted many of the amenities not usually provided to concentration camp inhabitants. One such amenity was a community library and bookmobile.

Many people arriving in Theresienstadt brought books with them, and thus a collection was established. Nazi authorities soon supplemented this collection with libraries stolen from Jewish institutions throughout Europe. The books had no common language or subject, and were cataloged by professionals in the library. Eventually, the Nazis’ motivation for the operations in the library became much more insidious: Jews were to catalog materials for future inclusion in the “Museum of the Extinct Race.”
Eventually, the vast majority of Theresienstadt residents were deported and killed. The head librarian and one other staff member survived, and voluntarily remained in the camp for three months after liberation until they could fully organize and catalog the 100,000 volumes in the library. The books then found their new home in the Jewish Museum in Prague.\textsuperscript{18}

In the years immediately following World War II, the Jewish Museum in Prague underwent a massive process of restoring materials to their prior owners. Of more than 190,000 volumes that the museum acquired during and immediately after the war, 158,000 were returned.\textsuperscript{19} In 2000, the Czech Republic passed a restitution act that required all state institutions to return art obtained illegally between 1938 and 1945. Although not a state institution, the Jewish Museum committed itself to the spirit of the act and began provenance research on many of the items in its collection. Additionally, the museum has a section on its website called “Terms for the filing of claims for the restitution of books from the library collection of the Jewish Museum in Prague which were unlawfully seized from natural persons during the period of Nazi occupation.” Explaining that all books “shall be transferred free of charge to the natural person who owned them prior to the seizure,”\textsuperscript{20} the website lists specific instructions on how to file claims, which descendants and relatives may do so, and the documents required.

Austria and Germany, perhaps because of their unique culpability in regards to the Nazi Holocaust, have conducted rigorous provenance research and returned more items than have most other countries. In Germany, the Lost Art Internet Database contains data on cultural objects which as a result of Nazi persecution or the direct consequences of the Second World War were removed and relocated, stored or seized from their owners, particularly Jews, or on cultural objects where, because of gaps in their provenance, such a story of loss cannot be ruled out as a possibility.\textsuperscript{21} The database is divided into two sections. The first, “Search Requests,” allows those who have lost items to register them, and allows current owners or custodians of questionable objects to search for claims to those objects. The second section, “Found Object Reports,” does the opposite: it allows current owners to register items with questionable history and individuals and institutions to search for their items. Clicking on an individual record brings information about the item as well as a photograph of the object. Although the majority of the material in this database is art, this can again be a useful model for thinking about the restitution of other cultural property, including books.

In 1998, Austria passed the Art Restitution Act, and in 2009 modified federal laws concerning the restitution of cultural property. The Commission for Provenance Research has since worked with federal museums and collections to inspect materials and archives for signs of previous ownership. This is not primarily a response to individual requests, but is an ongoing effort deemed
Important in and of itself (Commission for Provenance Research, n.d.).\textsuperscript{22} In its introduction to its Provenance Research and Restitution project, The Austrian National Library recognizes its history and accepts responsibility for its role in the plundering of Jewish property. After declaring that the institution’s “historical heritage… is not free of injustice and guilt,”\textsuperscript{23} (Austrian National Library, 2007, para. 1) it poignantly affirms that “[o]nly by an exemplary, sensitive, and honest dealing with its own past can the Austrian National Library lay claim to credibility as the central memory institution of this country.”\textsuperscript{24}

In contrast, the case of looted books in Belarus is perhaps more similar to the current state of AP books. The National Library of Belarus received more than one million books at the end of the war, half of which had been looted from Belarus, the other half from France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. While little attempt was made to identify books during the Soviet regime, the years since have seen provenance research efforts for at least a small portion. Several thousand books with identifying marks have been transferred to the Rare Book Department, which has created catalog cards and other data files on the books, now online.\textsuperscript{25}

Despite these small efforts, many limitations remain. First, a number of the Hebrew and Yiddish language books have yet to be cataloged. Second, only a small number of the trophy books have been transferred to the Rare Book Department, with the vast majority of them still somewhere in the library’s general holdings and virtually impossible to identify. Finally, while some provenance research is being conducted, there is currently no effort or willingness to return the books to their owners, with the exception of a small number of books returned to the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{26}

Similarly, the “Abandoned Property” books in Palestine remain under the control of a government unwilling to return them to their owners. Unlike in Minsk, where the National Library of Belarus has acknowledged the existence of the books and the fact that they were looted, the National Library in Jerusalem has yet to do so. While the case of Palestinian stolen books is made somewhat easier by the designation of “AP” by Israeli authorities, we must remember the tens of thousands of books that did not receive this designation and are probably embedded in the general collection, similar to the books in Minsk. Community representatives as well as individual countries have worked to identify and occasionally return looted items. In late 1951, Dr. Nahum Goldmann of the Jewish Agency and World Jewish Congress called a meeting in New York of twenty-three Jewish organizations to discuss material claims. The result was the formation of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, or the Claims Conference. The Conference represented those organizations present and began to negotiate with the German government for compensation and restitution of looted materials. Negotiations resulted in agreements, which the Claims Conference notes on its website were “unique in human history. All
three entities involved – the Claims Conference, West Germany, and Israel – had not existed at the time of World War II, and yet all entered into an agreement for compensation for crimes committed during that time."

To date, as a result of laws negotiated with the Claims Conference, the German government has paid more than $60 billion to Nazi victims, and the Conference continues to work with governments and banks to more completely compensate victims for their losses. The organization’s extensive website includes detailed information about every aspect of its work, including a large section on Artwork and Cultural Property, and we would be well served to look at the Conference as a model for the case of Palestine and restitution of property, both cultural and otherwise.

In 2001, the Commission for Looted Art in Europe created the Central Registry of Information on Looted Cultural Property 1933-1945. Operating under the auspices of the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Judaic Studies, the Central Registry researches, documents, and publishes information on the looting of cultural property by the Nazis, and advises families and institutions. Perhaps most impressive is the “Information by Country” section of its website, which lists more than forty countries and organizes information into a number of very useful categories.

Considering the examples above, one might ask how specifically provenance research can be conducted when individual owners cannot be found. A valuable case in point is the Offenbach Archival Depot.

Early in 1945, Allied troops uncovered hundreds of hidden repositories containing property stolen by the Nazis. The Office of Military Government for Germany, U.S. Zone (OMGUS), along with other U.S. institutions, took on the responsibility of recovery and restitution. In 1946, when it became clear that this was a bigger job than originally imagined, the Offenbach Archival Depot was established, and by the time it closed in 1949, the depot had returned more than 2.8 million books, in thirty-five languages, to fourteen different countries. This effort, the “largest book restitution program in history,” was accomplished through cooperation between numerous qualified individuals and organizations, including the U.S. Army, the Library of Congress, its Mission in Germany, and a number of Jewish organizations.

Offenbach Archival Depot director Seymour Pomrenze, and his successor Isaac Bencowitz, developed a comprehensive system for sorting and identifying the volumes in the facility. Looking at bookplates, stamps, and other markings, staff created an inventory of clearly identifiable items and quickly returned them to their countries of origin. The unidentified items were further researched and again, once enough information was known, returned to their countries of origin. In addition, former owners of books could file claims that were examined at the depot.

This seemingly well-oiled machine was not without challenges. The restitution program was not only the largest of its kind in history, but certain
accepted practices did not necessarily make sense here. For example, the return of books to the country of origin in which the Jewish community was recently decimated was not only illogical; it was downright offensive to some. Discussions ensued: while it was commonly accepted that books should be returned to individuals and their families whenever possible, what was to be done with books that were partially or wholly unidentifiable?

Many agreed that the books should go somewhere where they could be of greatest use to the Jewish community from which they came, but with the survivors of Jewish communities now scattered around the world, this was not an easy task. People stressed that regardless of the solution, all distribution of materials should happen in concert with a representative group of Jewish religious and intellectual leaders. Finally, an agreement was reached to turn over the unidentifiable books – about 500,000 items – to the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction Foundation (JCR) on a custodial basis, with the stipulation that owners would be sought and their books returned to them. The JCR then began the process of distributing the books to libraries and Jewish cultural centers throughout the world.

When considering European efforts to restore property to Jews, one cannot help but imagine the possibilities that exist in the case of Palestine. A major limitation in the latter case is that unlike the situation in post-war Germany, Israel still controls the documents in question and the lands from which they came, and its officials still refuse to acknowledge the historical fact of Palestinian presence and ownership of property before 1948.

While Israeli law and policy have yet to come close to that of post-war Europe, we can look at international law for guidance. Indeed much of international law was developed as a direct result of the Nazi Holocaust, to try to ensure that nothing of the sort ever happens again. In 1954, the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the event of Armed Conflict declared that “the preservation of the cultural heritage is of great importance for all peoples of the world and... should receive international protection”. The Convention prohibits the looting of cultural property and, in the event that this provision is not followed, calls on countries “to return, at the close of hostilities, to the competent authorities of the territory previously occupied, cultural property which is in its territory.”

One obvious problem in the case of Palestine is that we have yet to see the “close of hostilities.” The system of occupation and colonization is ongoing, and Israel’s borders, which have never officially been declared, are constantly expanding. Still, the National Library in Jerusalem is an institution claimed by a state that is considered part of the international community. We are not merely talking about records of military occupation authorities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but documents in an official state institution stolen from people who, more than sixty years later, continue to struggle for their rights of return, restitution, and compensation.
A 1952 letter from Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to the Claims Conference’s first president, Dr. Nahum Goldmann, asserted that “[f]or the first time in the history of the Jewish people, oppressed and plundered for hundreds of years... the oppressor and plunderer has had to hand back some of the spoil and pay collective compensation for part of the material losses.” The irony of this statement, when juxtaposed with the case of Palestinian oppression and plunder, cannot escape us.

There is a small minority of Jewish Israelis who, through grassroots organizations like Zochrot (“Remembering”) attempt to decolonize their own identities by remembering the Nakba and supporting the Palestinian right of return. The vast majority of Israelis, however, and all state institutions, still deny Palestinian claims to land and history, because as in many other colonial settler situations, the very acknowledgment of Palestinian identity would necessarily delegitimize Israeli identity. This core contradiction must be faced and dealt with if we are to move forward with any semblance of justice for the Palestinian people. In the meantime, we can begin to prepare for the political moment in which return of property is possible.

While the rest of this study primarily begins the process of individual provenance research, perhaps the most relevant parallel between the cases of post-WWII Jews and post-Nakba Palestinians is the discussion of collective return to a community dispersed throughout the globe. To this end, any efforts at individual linkage of books to their owners should be seen in the larger context of the Palestinian right, as a collective, to control its cultural property.

Searching for Palestinian Owners

The story of Palestine’s “Abandoned Property” books now housed in the National Jewish Library fits squarely into a larger narrative of cultural property theft and destruction in Palestine, as well as that of a long history of similar incidents arising from wartime plunder. In order to add depth and concrete possibility to the discussion of the AP books, this study not only compares Palestine with other historical situations but also examines particular books at Israel’s National Library and identifies ways that the AP books can be linked to their original Palestinian owners.

In a visit to the library, researcher Gish Amit and filmmaker Benny Brunner discovered clear personal inscriptions of Nasser Eddin Nashashibi at the front of a book called Makramiyat. In another poignant example, Dumya and Hala Sakakini, daughters of the famous educator Khalil Sakakini, went to the library after hearing rumors that their father’s collection was housed there. The librarian explained to them that the books are abandoned property and they have no right to them, but they were able to look at one of the books they remembered, and confirmed by looking at the marginalia that it was indeed their father’s book.
These two cases led me to believe that I might find identifying information in some AP books. I set out looking for markings such as name plates and bookseller stamps; handwritten notes, including owners’ names, dedications, and marginalia; librarians’ or catalogers’ markings; and request slips or checkout cards indicating prior use.

There are close to 6,000 books labeled “Abandoned Property” in the National Library, most of which are in Arabic. The website of The Great Book Robbery has translated into English brief records of the first 200 listed in the library’s online catalog. I looked at thirty-four books, most of which appear at the beginning of the list. They seem to be representative titles, encompassing linguistics, science, religion, philosophy, literature, and more. Two of the books were chosen because Amit\(^40\) indicated that they may contain identifying information.

While the AP books are in closed stacks, they can be requested and viewed in a reading room. Kara Francis, an Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies graduate student at Hebrew University, visited the library on three occasions in order to view all of the requested books. She photographed any markings that might be useful and sent the data to me. Colleagues fluent in Arabic helped translate notes, decipher handwriting, and provide further context for some of the names and types of comments found in the books.

Of course, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a name was written by an owner, a reader, or a cataloger, and many notes were either cut off or faded. I have consulted with others and cross-referenced Amit’s work, but the results are not without some degree of conjecture. I have noted below where assumptions were made. Because this study is more qualitative than quantitative in nature and included only a very small number of books in its study sample, its purpose was more to begin to establish the viability of further provenance research than to generalize about the collection as a whole.

Of the thirty-four books examined, only one had a personal stamp (see Image 1), and three or four had stamps or seals from institutions like libraries or booksellers. One book (AP 77), an astronomy dictionary, had a stamp reading (in Arabic): “Al Taher Brothers Bookstore, Yaffa” (see Image 2). Al Taher Brothers was a known bookseller before the 1948 Nakba.\(^41\)

Another had a stamp reading “Public Library of Beirut” (or “Public Bookstore of Beirut,” as the words for “bookstore” and “library” are the same in Arabic). Another book (AP 163) bore the seal of a bookbinder named Hijab, located “behind Al Azhar mosque in Cairo” (see Image 3). Interestingly, the book was printed in Istanbul and not in Egypt.

Unlike stamps and seals, handwritten names were abundant. Again, it was sometimes difficult to tell whether a name was written by an owner, an author, a bookseller, a reader, or a librarian’s note. In some cases an owner’s name was familiar, but in order to make educated guesses about the others, I looked
primarily at the placement of the name.

If it was inside the cover or on the title page, it was likelier to be an owner than a reader. If it was a signature repeated over and over again on a page in the margins of the middle of the book, I assumed that it was likelier to be a reader than an owner. If the name was written in what appeared to be librarians’ or catalogers’ pencil, and particularly if it was written next to an AP number, I assumed that this was an author’s name written by a cataloger. This was usually verifiable with a quick look at the catalog, but some books had several authors, making the process slightly more difficult.

Of the thirty-four books, seven to eleven (about 25 percent) have owners’ names written inside them. Four of these are owned by the same person, Mohammad Nimer Al-Khatib, whose name was mentioned by cataloger Butrus Abu-Manneh in an article by Gish Amit:

Every book had a sequential number… and beneath it we wrote an abbreviation of the owner’s name in English. For example, the letters SAK stood for Sakakini, NIMR meant Nimer, and so on. Those letters appeared both on the inside cover and on the index card.42

This gives further confirmation that “Nimer” was an owner of many of the looted books. Further
research shows that Mohammad Nimer Al-Khatib was a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood and Arab National Committee in Haifa in the 1940s who survived a 1948 assassination attempt by the Haganah, the Zionist paramilitary organization that later became the Israeli army. In addition, an internet search in Arabic brings up a number of forums that list Mohammad Nimer Al-Khatib as son of Abdel Fattah, the same name as in the stamp from father to son in one of the books mentioned above (see Image 1). It can thus reasonably be assumed that the leader and the owner are the same Mohammad Nimer Al-Khatib. In addition, I confirmed with Gish Amit that not all of the AP books were taken from the Jerusalem area; many books from Haifa and other parts of Palestine also ended up at the National Library.

In two books, we found the name of Sakakini, one of the other owners mentioned by cataloger Butrus Abu-Manneh. In one, an Arabic drama book, “Khalil Sakakini” was written; in the other, a four-volume work on Turkish civil law, “Sari Sakakini” was written (see Image 4). Khalil Sakakini was a pioneer in the Palestinian educational system of the early 1900s, and Sari was his eldest son.

We had specifically sought out one of these books because of its mention in Amit’s article, whereas the other we came upon in our search of some of the first books listed in the catalog. Interestingly, in another book that Ait suggested included Sakakini’s name, we found only the name of Dr. Yusuf Haikel, the last mayor of Yaffa before 1948 who later served as Ambassador of Jordan in Washington and many other cities around the world. Three or four of the thirty-four books contained apparent personal dedications. In an Arabic language book (AP 23) was written, “Gift from Isaf Nashashibi to Saleh Nammari,” the latter name having been crossed out (see Image 5). Another book (AP 22), one of Mohammad Nimer Al-Khatib’s religious books and one with the most writing, included several names, dedications of prayer to keep the book safe, and a handwritten dedication from father to son (see Image 6).

In some ways, marginalia can provide the richest data, as there can be many types of notes written in margins by a variety of people. On the other hand, this information is also hardest to link to a specific prior owner without much more research. Indeed, we did find marginalia in many of the books, but it was often unclear who wrote the notes, and most of the notes were obviously about the text itself and did not clearly indicate ownership.

Of the thirty-four, we found sixteen with marginalia. This category excludes notes that we can reasonably assume were written by librarians and catalogers; these will be addressed below.

In a few cases, the opening pages of a book had a handwritten table of contents and/or what appeared to be a list of several volumes or books in purple ink, presumably by an owner. In some cases, we found what appeared to be prices, and in others, dates (sometimes date of publication, sometimes not)
inscribed in the first pages. Oftentimes we found notes on the text, including definitions of words, translations of Arabic words into Hebrew probably by Israeli researchers (see Image 7), and grammatical notes (see Image 8). Occasionally a line of poetry was written (see Image 10), or a comment on the prestige of a particular writer. Other notes and/or drawings appeared to be simple doodles (see Image 9).

It is clear that a variety of people, from the original owners to present day researchers and everyone in between, have interacted with these materials, and that these books have a rich story to tell. Telling this story is beyond the scope of this particular study, and the precise context of all of the notes and guesses about who wrote them will be left for future research.

As far as catalogers’ and librarians’ notes, almost every book had an AP number and/or author’s name written on the inside cover or title page. Since these gave us no more information than we already had from the catalog, I excluded these. However, I did note the cases in which a call number was included in writing, but was not included in the National Library’s online catalog.

These call numbers could mean that the books had previously been cataloged, or could simply indicate another way of categorizing them now; either way, they can provide more information.

I had occasional difficulty determining whether a note was written by a cataloger or by an
owner or researcher. However, we can reasonably assume that most written in the same pencil as, and in close proximity to, the AP numbers were probably written by catalogers. Furthermore, in some cases we found what Butrus Abu-Manneh referred to as cited above: the letters “NIMR” to signify Mohammad Nimer Al-Khatib’s books (see Image 11).

Twelve to fifteen of the thirty-four books had what appeared to be catalogers’ or librarians’ notes other than the simple AP number and author’s name. In most cases, these notes were numbers: call numbers, dates, and other unidentified numbers. Some notes were harder to decipher than others, and as with the marginalia, the exact codes used by librarians and catalogers must be further researched if we are to glean definitive information from their notes.

Eighteen of the thirty-four books had request slips or check-out cards. This does not necessarily mean that the rest of them have never been viewed; in fact, it is likely a fluke that the request slips are still present, either accidentally or purposefully left by a researcher. I noted the slips and cards because they tell us more about the story of the books themselves. For example, many of the check-out cards contained stamped due dates, indicating that the books were once available for check-out, whereas they are now in closed stacks. Most of those with check-out cards had stamped due dates in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. One had a stamped
due date of 2008, which either means the AP books were able to be checked out until very recently, or that this book was only recently classified as “Abandoned Property.” In addition to physically examining the books themselves, I looked at the National Library’s online catalog for further information about the books’ histories. Sixteen of the thirty-four books had notes in their records of “old classification” followed by Dewey Decimal numbers and sometimes subject headings. Most of the rest had at least one Dewey Decimal number in their MARC records, but “old classification” tells us that the books may have been previously cataloged before being designated “Abandoned Property.” This matter calls for further research.

Notably, though not surprisingly, the National Library contains no indication of former ownership in its online catalog. Including information about provenance in catalog records is not uncommon, particularly in rare book collections. In fact, in the past few decades, several MARC record fields have been added, and official cataloging rules and practices have been adopted to facilitate the documentation of books’ histories.46

For example, in the wake of World War II and the closing of the Offenbach Archival Depot, The Library of Congress (LOC) received more than 5,700 items from the JCR. The books were given bookplates to honor their history, and the LOC entered a provenance note in the MARC record of each book.47 MARC tag 561 for the book Afn shprakhfront reads, in part, |a Vols. 1 (1934) and 3/4 (1935) [under P10.A35] of Set 1 of this title were presented to the Library of Congress by Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc., a New York-based umbrella organization that served as a trusteeship for the Jewish people in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust.48

This first step of acknowledging looted property can lead to the further step of return.

Conclusions and Recommendations

When I began my research process, I feared that we would examine dozens of books and find no personally identifying information, or at least none that clearly indicates owners. I was pleasantly surprised that about one quarter of the books we viewed indeed had owners’ names written inside, and many more had additional information that can be used to identify owners. This confirms that return of the materials to individual owners, while tedious, is indeed possible.

The amount and quality of information we found in just thirty-four books is astounding. We know who some of the owners were, which bookstores or publishing houses they came from, who has requested to view these books over the years, what information people found interesting in the books, what words researchers needed to define, and much more.

Still, there is ample room for further research into this case and for further analysis of the research already conducted. Much could come from the
examination of a larger percentage of the AP collection, and eventually from a full database of all the books and all the information we can glean from them. However, this would require many hours of library visits and collection and organization of data. Before this step is to be taken, it seems useful to explore more fully the data we already have. For example, without too much difficulty, one could find descendants of those owners whose names are in the books. We could also search for the sixty people or families listed as former owners in the National Library report of March 1949. It might also be possible to contact some of the booksellers or families of booksellers and printers listed in the catalog or stamped in the books, and to inquire about the records they kept.

For the less clear markings in the thirty-four books I examined, it would be useful to show photographs to someone more versed in cultural and intellectual history of Palestine in the 1940s as well as National Library cataloging practices. This way, we could begin to tell more definitively by the types of markings, inks used, placement of writing, and other factors, who wrote which notes and what they mean.

During this process, I tried only a couple times to contact the National Library, and only with general questions about the story of the books, because I did not want to jeopardize my ability to conduct the research. It would be useful to interview more people involved in the cataloging process of the AP books between 1948 and today, and perhaps to find sympathetic library workers currently in the system who either know more about the story of the books, or who are interested in finding out more. While some of the research I conducted would have been necessary no matter the degree of cooperation with the institution, the work would have been expedited had we been able to learn more from the library itself.

As we continue to search for former owners, it is equally important to assert that the AP books are indeed Palestinian books. When doing so we can learn much from the example of Jewish books looted by Nazis. In the case of the Offenbach Archival Depot, debate arose about where unidentified books should go. It was never questioned that they should be “returned,” the issue was how to return books to a community dispersed throughout the world.

The similarity to the case of Palestine is uncanny. The worldwide Palestinian population stands at over ten million, with more than half in exile and many more internally displaced. It is imperative to begin discussions about returning property to Palestinian communities, but there are no easy answers. Who represents the Palestinians? Should the books go into a Palestinian governmental archive? A cultural institution? A Palestinian organization in or near Jerusalem, or as close to the origin of the books as possible? A new library far from Palestine and thus protected from Israeli occupation? The only clear necessary step in this process is the inclusion of Palestinian voices, and particularly Palestinian refugee voices, in any discussions on the return of their collective property
to their community. In some ways, the importance of this story lies simply in its telling, and the AP books as a collection take on new meaning with each examination. Not only do they represent a more or less unintentional reminder of Israel’s theft of Palestinian cultural and intellectual property, but they are also a living archive with meaning in the relationship between and among the books and their owners. For example, while AP book owner Mohammad Nimer Al-Khatib was part of a number of groups specifically aligned with the famous Husseini clan, Dr. Yusuf Haikel, another AP book owner, “was considered to be an enemy of the traditional supporters of Haj Amin Al-Husseini, and a supporter of King Abdullah.” One might wonder how the books’ or the men’s relationship to each other changes within the context of a captive collection of looted books from six decades ago.

The disappearance and theft of Palestinian cultural heritage corresponds with the disappearance and theft of Palestinian land and the largely unsuccessful Zionist attempts to disappear Palestinian people and identity. Many Palestinians talk about the ongoing Nakba that continues through simultaneous processes of occupation, colonization, and apartheid. Laws, policies, systems, structures, and attitudes keep the Palestinians struggling for survival on multiple levels. For example, the censorship of Palestinian textbooks inside Israel is not unrelated to the maintenance of a collection of so-called “abandoned” Palestinian books in Israel’s National Library.

Similarly, the work of Baladna in Haifa or the Yafa Cultural Center in Balata refugee camp to preserve Palestinian identity is not unrelated to the efforts of Gish Amit and Benny Brunner to document the story of the AP books. The struggle of refugees to return to their homes is not unrelated to the struggle to return the AP books to their rightful owners. The abundant research in the case of Nazi looting of Jewish property is not unrelated to the need for research in the case of Israeli looting of Palestinian property.

In July 1948, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion famously wrote in his diary about the Palestinian people, “The old will die and the young will forget.” The old may be dying, but the young are not forgetting. Under the surface of any interaction in or about Palestine lie the ghosts of the past, powerfully resurrected in a multitude of cultural heritage projects with one eye on the present and another looking towards the future. It is my hope that this study of the “Abandoned Property” books will contribute to an ongoing process of decolonization through memory and return.

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NOTES


2 Gish Amit, “A strange monument: The collecting of Palestinian libraries in West Jerusalem during the 1948 war, and their changing fortunes at the Jewish National and University Library,” 2011. Received from author; to be published in 2011.


12 Pugliese, “Bloodless torture,” 244.


14 Mohammad Batrawi, personal communication, January 11, 2011. [Editor’s note: Mr. Batrawi passed away on March 15, 2011, aged 82 years.]


17 Intrator, „‘People were literally starving...’“ 513-522

18 Intrator, “‘People were literally starving...’” 513-522.


24 Austrian National Library, Provenance research and restitution, para. 7.


34 Waite, “Returning Jewish cultural property,” 213-228.


40 Amit, “A strange monument.”
41 Sami Abu Shehadeh, personal communication, April 24, 2011.
44 Amit, “A strange monument.”
48 http://lccn.loc.gov/52054681
49 Amit, “A strange monument.”
51 Morris, The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem.
52 PASSIA, Palestinian Personalities, 87.
54 Since the completion of this study, I have personally visited the library and examined more than thirty additional books. The results are similar: an ample amount of marginalia, quite a few owners’ names, and the occasional bookseller stamp. The conclusions are the same: tracing the individual ownership of much of the AP collection is indeed possible, and discussions of collective ownership necessary.
"Reflecting the World Increasingly Made Right": From Response to Action in Public Libraries

Abstract and author's note: This is an adaptation of a presentation given in November 2015 at a symposium on Historical Trauma at the University of Montana, USA. Librarianship is a profession primarily and rightly focused on practice. This essay on public libraries and historical trauma should be understood from that perspective. So many professional librarians, doing real work in communities to address issues of trauma and community development – whether they use that language or not – don’t always have the luxury of time to reflect on where our work might fit into the larger discussion on historical trauma. The essay suggests ways in which librarians can address issues of historical trauma through stories and space.

In a 2015 piece on what librarians can learn from social workers, Sara Zettervall wrote “one of the primary tenets of social work is that each person is an expert on his or her own life. Another is that each person should be viewed in the context of his or her full existence because we are all inseparable from the systems in which we live.”

I came across this piece while preparing remarks for a symposium on historical trauma. The symposium was broadly interdisciplinary, bringing

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KEYWORDS: Public libraries; Historical trauma; Library services; Community.
together scholars and educators from a variety of fields. As the only librarian presenting, my contribution was to explore the ways in which public libraries might address issues of historical trauma in their communities. If we apply the social work concept that people are inseparable from the systems in which we live, in what ways can librarians, and public library systems in particular, address historical trauma with individuals and communities?

Mohatt, pulling from the literature, defines historical trauma as “a complex and collective trauma experienced over time and across generations by a group of people who share an identity, affiliation, or circumstance” and note that in the past twenty years the concept of historical trauma, originally used to describe “the experiences of children of Holocaust survivors ... the term has been applied to ... many other cultural groups that share a history of oppression, victimization, or massive group trauma exposure.”

The library literature is silent on the subject of public libraries and historical trauma. Keyword searching in subject databases turned up very little, and nothing that directly uses historical trauma as a concept in service provision. Given the dearth of professional literature, I will draw upon some sources outside our profession and fold them into professional practice in a way that I hope illustrates how librarians can address issues of trauma in order to promote healing and agency. In the process I’ll demonstrate how librarians are moving beyond simple response towards deeper, more deliberate action – what librarian Michael Stephens calls “reflective action” – that can help people think in new ways about the library and about themselves.

I’ll share two examples.

When I was in graduate school I recall someone saying that the purest intellectual contribution that librarianship can make to the world is through cataloging. Particularly before the development of electronic catalogs and keyword searching as a common practice, the ability of researchers to locate information in a library depended almost entirely on how librarians classified an item. When speaking to audiences of non-librarians, I urge researchers to think about this for a minute – because access to the materials essential for their research depended not on systems and language devised by members of their own fields, but by members of ours. This put librarians in a profound position of power over access to information.

Cataloging language often reflected the ethic of the time, or what Sandy Berman calls the “prejudices and antipathies” of both the population at large and the professionals developing standardized subject headings, which he deemed “chauvinistic.”

Berman contends that Library of Congress subject headings could only “satisfy” parochial, jingoistic Europeans and North Americans, white-hued, at least nominally Christian (and preferably Protestant) in faith, comfortably situated in the middle- and higher-income brackets, largely domiciled in
suburbia, fundamentally loyal to the Established Order, and heavily imbued with the transcendent, incomparable glory of Western civilization.”

This is the context, then, in which the Library of Congress subject headings for Homosexuality and Lesbianism were created – with a note to see also “pathology” and “sexual perversion” or, later, “sexual deviancy” and in which the Dewey Decimal Classification of Homosexuality was categorized as an “abnormal sexual relation.” The cross reference was deleted from the 14th edition of Dewey in 1942, though in 1989 homosexuality was “classed under Social Problems” before finally being reclassed under “Sexual Relations.”

Thanks in part to Berman’s advocacy, the Library of Congress cross references were deleted from the subject headings in 1972, two years before the American Psychological Association depathologized homosexuality.

Retroactive de- and reclassification is no small undertaking for a library, however, and in this way a patron researching homosexuality at the Los Angeles Public Library found himself browsing books about gay men shelved next to books about “incest and sexual bondage.” Librarian Linda Rudell-Betts was so struck by her patron’s dismay at the library’s organization that she vowed to begin reclassifying the books, one by one. She justified the monumental task of reclassification by writing “while we librarians can’t take away the history of discrimination and neglect of civil rights of LGBT people, we can reflect the world increasingly made right and fair in how we group our books, DVDs and other materials on the library shelf.”

I’ll shift to the east coast now, to the Ferguson Municipal Public Library. On August 9, 2014, an unarmed black teenager named Michael Brown was shot by a white police officer. What many outside the profession (and outside Ferguson) might not know is that the Ferguson Library, under the direction of a librarian who had been on the job for five weeks and who had one full time staff member, was the only agency in Ferguson that remained open to all during protests that rocked the city. Ferguson library director Scott Bonner posted a simple sign in the library: “During difficult times, the library is a quiet oasis where we can catch our breath, learn, and think about what to do next. Please help keep our oasis peaceful and serene. Thank you!” The message is significant because it identifies the library as not just as a place to learn and catch one’s breath, but as a place where one can “think about what to do next” – a place not just for reflection, but for action.

During those days in August, the library served not only as an oasis, but as an ad hoc school where children who were unable to attend classes could come and engage in learning with each other. Bonner made the deliberate decision to keep the library “open and to partner with teachers and community agencies to provide education, information, and emotional substance to the citizenry” of Ferguson. In addition to providing this oasis of space, the library directly addressed issues of trauma by creating “Healing Kits” backpacks containing...
books and worksheets about coping, source material about civil rights history, a list of resources for adults to get free or inexpensive mental health information nearby, and a teddy bear. Patrons were able to check out the backpacks, use the materials, and return the packs for others – though they were welcome to keep the bears.12

As the protests died down, the library maintained its commitment to being a safe space.

In the fall of 2014 they were one of the galleries that hosted an art exhibit called “Hands up, don’t shoot!,” a show “organized by the Alliance of Black Art Galleries to give local artists the chance to respond to Brown’s killing.”13 And in November, after a grand jury decided not to indict the police officer who shot Michael Brown, the library posted to Twitter, “Many other orgs closing. But we will stay open to serve people of #Ferguson as long as safe for patrons & staff ... Love each other.” In interview after interview, Bonner reiterated that “this is a library. It’s what we do” and that his library was “not notable, just noticeable”14 – but it was notable enough that 100 of his peers from around the country nominated the Ferguson Municipal Public Library for the Gale-Library Journal 2015 Library of the Year Award.

How can we connect these two examples to the ways in which libraries can address issues of historical trauma? It comes down to two fundamental services libraries provide their communities – space and stories.

Lia Frederiksen writes that “it is commonly known among library workers that public libraries are often the most accessible public spaces for those who are excluded from other public spaces.”15 Liz Brewster looks at library space as a “therapeutic landscape,” placing emphasis on the “public library as a space of restoration and the promotion of well-being, rather than as a curative environment.”16 If we think of historical trauma in part as resulting from the removal or restriction of people from a certain space, and if it is indeed true that public libraries are often the most accessible public spaces for those who have been excluded, then there is great potential for libraries to serve as restorative spaces, as the Ferguson Public Library demonstrates.

If we think about historical trauma in part as resulting from the disruption of a narrative by the people who should be telling it, what role can public libraries play in helping people reconstruct their own narratives, particularly when we’ve established the level of control librarians have traditionally exerted over the organization of and access to information? Researchers in other fields have pointed to instances of indigenous families crafting narratives for healing and self determination, and of resilience itself as a response to historical trauma.17 More broadly, and in the context of our own profession, which provides access to rather than constructs stories, we need to consider biases towards dominant narratives. Mark Brimhall-Vargas, a librarian, cuts directly to the issue. He writes that as librarians we need to consider “our own stories, our own beliefs
and ideas about what counts as knowledge and who gets to produce it ... [for example], we think about publication as a legitimate form. But what if that is not available to particular communities, especially if they have subjugated knowledge?\textsuperscript{18}

It should be the librarian’s duty, within that privileged place of power over collections, and within that “therapeutic landscape,” to be sure that people can find themselves represented in the narratives on our shelves. This has huge implications – it means understanding what people are really looking for when they come to the library; it means collecting from small presses, non-mainstream authors, and non-print materials. It means, where you can’t collect these, that you connect people with them in other libraries. It means, also, that you provide the space for people to connect with each other, to share their own stories, to build or reclaim their own narratives and to develop collections and programs and services locally produced and reflective of the community. It means that people can recognize themselves in their libraries.

Linda Rudell-Betts’s patron didn’t recognize himself in the stacks in part because “dominant cultural narratives” often serve mainly “as reminders of historical trauma” whereas family and community narratives speak to resilience, action, and aspirations.\textsuperscript{19} Libraries can challenge these dominant cultural narratives, which can in turn influence how people not only understand the library, but themselves and each other.

Brimhall-Vargas moves from narratives of resilience to a “narrative of resistance” noting the roles that public libraries can play in the “triangulation of information” and the “production of knowledge” that leads to resistance. I’ll quote at length:

\begin{quote}
It is often assumed that members of marginalized communities know everything about their own identity or history. Yet even saying this reveals how patently untrue it is. To develop a rich understanding of one’s own experience, certainly to be able to contextualize and historicize that experience, requires access to information often housed outside the community. Making connections between communities and their libraries is critical for the preservation of a larger narrative of resistance. Access to these resources allows for a reinterpreted reintroduction of one’s own experience into a larger body of information. In other words, histories that seem static can come alive again when literate and knowledgeable citizens produce their own reinterpretations.\textsuperscript{20}
\end{quote}

A third example of libraries engaging with communities in this way comes from the State Library of Western Australia, where their Storylines project, an “online archive ... relating to Aboriginal history” helps correct the fact that as librarian Damien Webb so perfectly puts it, “collections were built about
[Indigenous peoples], but not *for* or *with* them.”21 As an example of the good work Storylines is doing, photos that were initially given to the library and cataloged by non-Indigenous people are being identified by Indigenous communities and re-cataloged with “additional genealogical and biographical information.”22 Storylines allows people to remotely access digitized materials, search in Indigenous languages, and add stories about images. In a powerful nod to cultural protocol and, I would argue, recognition of historical trauma, users can ask that the library restrict access to images for reasons of “sensitivity” or “sorrow.”

In helping people discover their own narratives of resistance, libraries demonstrate what Rebecca T. Miller, writing about Ferguson, calls “stepping in with heart” – which she notes calls for a “deeper engagement, especially in difficult times.”23

Most public librarians I’ve met share Linda Rudell-Betts’s and Scott Bonner’s sense of justice. We also tend to share Bonner’s sense of humility. Librarians are more likely to categorize their work in these areas as response to community need, where I contend that their work represents action and, in the cases of the LA Public Library, Ferguson Municipal Public Library, and Storylines project, significant action. You can’t reclassify even a portion of the books in the third largest public library system in the United States and call it simply a response. You can’t hold classes for children when schools are too afraid to open or host an art exhibit called “Hands up, don’t shoot,” and call it simply a response. You don’t create beta searches in Native languages, feature a prominent “restrict” button in your database, and regularly engage in digital repatriation and say that you are simply “responding” to patron needs.

These actions might have been catalyzed by something external to the library, but they are actions nonetheless. These three libraries serve as examples of what can be accomplished when librarians move beyond response and towards that “reflective action” that Michael Stephens writes about. And, as Ferguson shows us, when you’re the only agency that stays open for everyone in the midst of a city burning, you’re sending a powerful message about the role that libraries play in helping people rise from those ashes and reclaim their own voices, communities, and lives.

NOTES

5 Berman, *Prejudices and Antipathies*, 15.
20 Brimhall-Vargas, “Where the Rubber Meets the Road,” 196

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


In the 1930s H. G. Wells envisioned a new, free, synthetic, authoritative, permanent “World Encyclopedia” that could help World Citizens make the best use of universal information resources. He called his vision “a sort of mental clearing house for the mind, a depot where knowledge and ideas are received, sorted, summarized, digested, clarified and compared” (Wells & Mayne, 1938). Wells dubbed his proposed resource the World Brain. His idea did not go without notice. Arthur C. Clarke, in his 1962 book Profiles of the Future, predicted that the construction of this World Brain would begin to take place by the year 2000 (Clark, 1962). On January 15, 2001, Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger formally launched Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia. Welcome to the World Brain! Enter librarians, stage left!

Wikipedia is often a sensitive and controversial topic when discussed within the realm of Librarians and other Information Professionals both within and outside the environment of Academia. The fact that the source can be edited
in an open access manner by any individual gives rise to the claim that the Information contained within the resource is inaccurate and that efforts regarding the website are to be treated as outside the scope of professional development for scholars of all kinds. There are, however other factors to consider and steps which Librarians, especially, can take to alter this situation while improving and utilizing a widely-known, heavily used, currently self-administrated source of global Information.

A primary fact to remember is that Wikipedia is not Academia’s knowledge, it is The World’s knowledge. Information contained within the online encyclopedia covers an expanse that reaches into more modern-day topics, hot button issues, pop culture, and everyday life than peer-reviewed academic databases and journal articles. For instance, should an individual within or outside the walls of a University or College seek Information regarding the video game HALO, (a very famous sci-fi style first-person player), one would be quite hard-pressed to locate material that covers in-depth details of the game in an academic resource. Wikipedia, in contrast has a great deal of content regarding the game including production credits, financial returns, plot summaries, public reactions, and development details. Should a Student of any kind, however be attempting to write a paper, on say: whether video games have reached a level of production to be considered on equal footing as fiction literature, motion pictures, or major music recordings getting information regarding such a video game can be incredibly handy for arguing the case academically. Again, however there exists a dearth of Information on specific games inside traditional Academic environments.

An important element to remember when dealing with Librarianship is that the people being served are Patrons, not Customers. Customers are individuals utilized by a business entity for the purpose of revenue generation while Patrons are individuals who utilize educational resources as an investment in themselves. A Customer is a means to an end but a Patron IS the end while the resources and most importantly the services are the means. Anyone who uses an Information resource or service has the potential of becoming a Patron for a Librarian as the user is merely a Patron to whom the Librarian has not yet reached out. Another crucial part of the Librarianship Field is keeping in mind the idea that if all has been done properly, Patrons will not know that Librarians have done anything at all. This, of course is a bitter pill to swallow when regulations of budget allocation for educational services and resources are based on quantifiable output resulting in performance-based funding. It must also be considered, however that users of other Information resources do not take into account the process of Information acquisition when utilizing a particular source: web surfers do not tend to sit in awe of the algorithms that run a Google search. They type in a word or phrase and expect to get a desired result and as long as this happens no fuss is made. It is only when a resource does not work as expected that a person calls attention to it.
Turning this idea to Wikipedia it serves Librarians well to remember that Patrons will use this website regardless of what Information Professionals say, think, or do. It is large, well known, comprehensive, easy to navigate, requires minimal control vocabulary input, and a resource which despite claims of a lack of validity does have a very active reviewer presence and requires editors to state their sources.

Librarians have also struggled over the years with problems of outreach, as in how to find the Patrons yet to be contacted in order to direct them to credible sources and instructional services offered by their Public, Academic, and Special Libraries. The fact is, however that where Patrons are is very well known: they are on Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, Reddit, Instagram, IMGUR, YouTube, etc., and it is merely the effort of a Librarian presence which is lacking within these areas.

The claim that Wikipedia is unreliable due to the fact that the website can be edited by anyone is also one which is skewed. The resource does not contain its inaccuracies due to the fact that anyone can post to it but primarily because the correct people do not, or at least not in sufficient quantities. This offers a great opportunity for Librarians to utilize their special skills as expert researchers in order to validate, correct, build-up, and fill in gaps within articles as well as create new, well researched articles on topics yet to be covered. Of course, the benefit of such activity is that Librarians would not need to create any framework or administrator properties within Wikipedia itself because the resource is already in existence, it is already open for editing access, and it is already monitored. The last point is very noteworthy as it must be advocated that if Librarians are to increase their presence in the editing environment of Wikipedia it must be done so with the clear statement that the intention is not to take over the editing power and that the work is not in the vein to make Wikipedia an elitist, Academic source but rather to utilize the same editing access that all users enjoy to add credible material using the specialized skillset which Librarians possess alongside the already existing open access editors. The aspect to recall is the fact that Librarians are not experts on every subject, but simply at their core are expert researchers.

One such expert librarian that I must mention, and without whom would not be at involved in Wikipedia, is Dr. Kathleen de la Peña McCook, a Distinguished University Professor at the University of South Florida (USF), School of Information. By the fall of 2014 she had integrated Wikipedia editing into the coursework for some of her classes. As one of her students, I was hooked almost immediately. Her goal for this is to increase librarian participation in the online resource. This encyclopedia that “anyone can edit” has been proven to be nearly as accurate as Encyclopedia Britannica (Giles, 2005), but there is, of course, room for improvement. And who else is better suited for that task than Librarians! But although there are currently 27,484,517 editors in Wikipedia English, only 318 are self-described Librarians (Wikipedia, 2016).
And there are other people missing from this pool of content creators, women. According to the Wikimedia Foundation (2011) only 9% of Wikipedia editors are female. This online resource can never meet founder Jimmy Wales’ goal of encompassing all of human knowledge with this current composition of editors.

Not only has research shown that most Wikipedia editors are male, we also know that most of these editors are from North America and Europe. Although an ideal way to address this imbalance would be to recruit from the Global East and South, an effective alternative can be to recruit participants via a series of edit-a-thons held at college campuses. Here we can gather information professionals, including library students. Because the makeup of student bodies at college campuses are roughly 60% female (U.S. Department of Education, 2015), with the percentage of library students who are female even higher (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014), we have a strong likelihood of gathering a majority of females for these events. College campuses in North America offer a diverse student and faculty population, many of whom are from countries outside of the United States. Therefore we have a reasonable chance to have for our edit-a-thons an ethnically/nationally diverse set of participants.

To help address these issues in our own small way we started hosting edit-a-thons in the fall of 2014. By the time this article is published I will have hosted the third such event here at USF. All Information Professionals are welcome to join us, in person or remotely, by using Google Hangouts. Although there are several edit-a-thons that address Wikipedia’s lack of female editors, our events are the only ones I know of that also seek to recruit and retain Librarians and female editors. We believe that these events can create a situation where participants enjoy the editing experience, are supported by their co-editors, and are inspired to continue contributing to this “World Brain.” We will build relationships with Library Science communities, and the new editors will learn from and connect with each other.

So what do the editors at our edit-a-thons do? Although our demographics are quite unique in the universe of Wikipedia projects, in practice we are a microcosm of the Wikipedian community at large in that we create new articles, expand existing articles, research, copy edit, add references, revert vandalism, upload images, add links, et cetera. What sets us apart is that we approach this with a highly developed skill set uniquely suited for this task. We do this with a selfless idealism, one that attracts us to this profession, is further instilled in us as students in our field, and one that should naturally lead us to make Wikipedia even better. Furthermore, we believe that edit-a-thons are only a first step, as librarians and information professionals, in this endeavor.

The great disadvantage to Wikipedia when attempting to recruit Librarians, Information Professionals, and other Scholars to participate in editing pages
is the fact that the perception of Wikipedia as an inaccurate resource does not lend itself to the professional development of those who work for institutions of education. Essentially, if a person works for a Library or University/College it is unlikely that they will get acknowledgements from their peers as having accomplished professional level work and most certainly not contract-extension nor promotion-worthy recognition. If the number of scholars editing within the website could be raised then the level of reliability within the resource could be raised in turn. If the level of reliability could be raised, then the level of recognition of scholars participating within the open editing process would be more professionally regarded. If the work could be more professionally regarded then the number of scholars willing to participate could also be raised as a result, thus continuing the process of reliability and recognition.

To this end this article’s authors would like to propose the creation of an official consortium of Wikipedia Librarian editors. In theory the initial attempt at such a group would be within the Tampa Bay region of Florida where the authors currently live, but there is no reason why such a concept should have to be geographically limited to such an area as a rule. The concept is to have Librarians of as many backgrounds as possible form an organization, (or at least a loose confederation), of individuals who would be willing to edit Wikipedia on a regular basis and remain in contact with one another frequently to keep abreast of progress, questions, and pitfalls. Such a group is in the brainstorming process at the moment but is hoped to reach out to already existing organizations, should any become known to the authors, both within the Librarianship and Wikipedia circles and would continue to grow to seek recognition as an official professional development organization by local, state, or national accrediting bodies. With this goal in mind and the progress already laid out by likeminded individuals and groups, it is these authors’ conclusion that it would be possible to take on the goal of fortifying the existing Information world!

REFERENCES


In 2012, I faced a dilemma in the course of my daily cataloging duties at my home library, the University of Arizona Poetry Center. We had acquired a new anthology, *I’ll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women*, whose aboutness was clearly captured in its subtitle—yet I had difficulty representing that aboutness on the shelf or in the catalog; we had no designated spaces in our Anthologies section for conceptual writing or (in particular) writing by women. I began to wonder: was there an argument to be made, in terms of literary warrant and social justice, for the creation of spaces highlighting female and female-identified authors in my home library?

*I’ll Drown My Book* has led me on a journey several years in the making. Women’s voices are still underrepresented in literary publishing, as I will show; in order to combat this erasure, I have undertaken a visibility project in my home institution. Through this project, I seek to highlight and amplify the voices of female poets in the holdings of a single library by enhancing subject analysis

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**KEYWORDS:** Gender; Inclusion; Poetry collections; Women; Poets; Feminism; Female and female-identified authors; Bias; Classification systems; Intersectionality; Literary publishing.
in cataloging practices and creating a shelf marking system for anthologies that focus on women’s writing.

**Background**

The University of Arizona Poetry Center is a special-collections library dedicated to contemporary poetry written in or translated into English; I serve there as a Library Specialist, reporting to the Poetry Center Librarian, and my primary duties include reference, acquisitions, cataloging, educational outreach, and metadata/digital archives.

The Poetry Center’s physical collections include over 47,000 books, most of which are available to the public in an open-stack, browsable format, shelved alpha by author. However, since anthologies (which have many authors) cannot be shelved in this way, the library’s Anthologies section is shelved by geographic location or by subject. Some of the sub-sections in the Anthologies section reflect issues of representation in the publishing landscape, highlighting groups of writers who have historically been underrepresented in the literary canon: these include separate shelves for anthologies of African American, Native American, and LGBTIQ writing, among others. However, until now, there has been no analogous system highlighting writing by women, who are also underrepresented in terms of the literary canon. The library’s holdings include approximately 180 anthologies that focus exclusively on poetry by female and female-identified authors; these anthologies are scattered throughout the Anthologies section according (mostly) to geographic affiliation.

The relatively large number of anthologies of poetry written by female and female-identified authors released over the last half-century (the temporal focus of the Poetry Center’s holdings) speaks to the need to amplify and highlight women’s literary writing; these anthologies are made in an effort to push back against the erasure of women’s writing created by a publishing industry that, in some ways, still perpetuates institutional sexism. This erasure is discussed with some regularity in the scholarly literature and is also apparent from empirical data. No woman has ever won a Pulitzer Prize or National Book Award for poetry twice; fewer than 30% of the winners of these prizes have been female since their inceptions in 1922 and 1950, respectively, though both prize committees have honored women more frequently than men in the very recent period 2010-2015 (National Book Foundation; The Pulitzer Prizes). Meanwhile, VIDA: Women in Literary Arts, a research organization, has documented the appearances of women in the pages of prestigious journals, anthologies, and reviewing publications since 2010, finding initially that some major publications (such as the *New Yorker*, the *London Review of Books*, *New Republic*, *The Atlantic*, and the *Times Literary Supplement*) favored male authors and male book reviewers by ratios of 2:1 to 4:1 (“The Count 2010”;
Oggins 182); furthermore, at the time the VIDA counts began, both major for-profit publishing houses and independent literary presses appeared to favor titles by male authors by similar margins (Franklin).

So pronounced a bias is likely not the product of individual editorial prejudices, but of less visible and more profound societal forces. John Freeman, the former editor of GRANTA magazine, observed in response to the first VIDA count that even though he and his staff solicited male and female authors evenly, the final count of pieces accepted for publication still favored men; he asked the troubling question, “how gendered are our notions of storytelling?” (Page).

The answer may be: very gendered indeed. In a survey of the literature on gender and artistic production, Diana L. Miller finds evidence to suggest that Western cultural ideals of the artist are “implicitly masculine”: from the popular image of the artist as tortured loner obsessively focused on art-making (to the exclusion of all else, including domestic duty: a role much more socially acceptable for men than for women), to aesthetic evaluations (which tend to favor the work of men), to the entrepreneurial nature of the artist’s labor (which requires behaviors more socially expected of men than of women), female artists—including literary artists—are systematically de-centered in artistic professions (120). Miller posits that this effect may be felt to a lesser degree by artists in fields such as poetry that do not require the massive and irregular time commitments common in other artistic fields, such as film (127). This is possible, but has yet to be quantified—and unfortunately, there is sufficient gender inequality in poetry to go around, as we see in the numbers from VIDA, the Pulitzer Prizes, the National Book Awards, and others.

The good news, however, is that change may be in the air. VIDA’s efforts have garnered a great deal of publicity, and the editors of several important literary publications (including New Republic and Harper’s) have publicly committed to making improvements (“The 2015 VIDA Count”). In 2014, Jean Oggins found that the 2010 VIDA count correlated with an increase in selection of female editors and work by female writers in the Best American anthology series of 2011—though this effect virtually disappeared in 2012 (192, 193). The 2015 VIDA count gives cause for cautious optimism: the past year’s numbers show that some very prestigious venues (New Republic, Harper’s, GRANTA) made significant progress toward parity, while other important journals (Poetry, Tin House, The Harvard Review, Ninth Letter, jubilat, and a hearteningly large number of others) maintained already-commendable levels of gender representation, achieved parity, or actually published more women than men (“The 2015 VIDA Count”). VIDA is now working to expand its reach, conducting separate counts to shed light on the representation of women of color, LGBTIQ women, and women with disabilities, and calling 2015 “The Year of Intersectional Thinking” (“The 2015 VIDA Count”). It’s to be hoped that the impact of the original count will be felt in these areas, too.
Despite these causes for optimism, it’s clear that much progress remains to be made: the centrifugal forces of decades (and their harmful effects) are unlikely to be dismantled easily or quickly. Given the contemporary history of literary publishing—along with the often-invisible but insidious societal obstacles outlined by Miller—female writers are likely to look at these latest VIDA numbers with hope and approval, but also with caution. Indeed, the most recent VIDA data show progress toward more equitable gender representation in literary publishing, not equity itself—and the numbers, while important, don’t measure all forms of bias (see Piper and So’s discussion of gender stereotyping in the language of book reviews for another type of potential obstacle faced by female writers).

As long as a gender imbalance persists in literary publishing, we are likely to see a partial erasure of women’s voices in poetry, and it is this erasure that I hope to combat in my own local context by highlighting women’s writing in UAPC’s Anthologies section. This project was designed to accomplish two main goals: to make anthologies of women’s poetry more visible on the physical shelf, and also more visible in the library’s OPAC through enhanced cataloging practices resulting from item-level subject analysis.

**Shelf Marking**

The process of making women’s anthologies more visible on the Poetry Center’s physical shelves proved complicated. Initially, I planned the creation of an entirely new shelf designation for women’s anthologies, in the spirit of the shelves devoted to LGBTIQ writing, African American writing, and others that already exist in the library’s Anthologies section. This seemed, at first, like a relatively straightforward task.

However, that plan began to falter as soon as I tried to name the new section. I wished to do this both inclusively and precisely, and initially I planned to include the words “gender,” “women’s,” “queer,” and “feminist” in the nomenclature. I felt that all four of those terms were necessary in order to include poets who were biologically female; whose gender expression was female; and who adopted radical, queer, and feminist stances. But as I continued to study the literature (especially the current scholarship on feminist and queer cataloging praxis), I became less certain of my ground. Was there a name for this section, I wondered, that could avoid reinforcing oppressive, regressive, and “fixed” gender binaries (Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto), and that would likewise avoid privileging one way of knowing over another? For example, it was quickly apparent that it would not be appropriate to call this section “feminist” only, as some of the female-centric works in UAPC’s Anthologies section did not self-identify with the feminist movement or concern themselves with feminist politics. It would, however, be equally inappropriate to eliminate
self-identified feminist, radical, and queer writing from the section, since these political movements have had profound implications for women’s poetry as they have for other art forms. In fact, it is highly probable that women’s anthologies, like “women’s collections...owe their number, size and vigor to feminism, with its dual commitments to activism and scholarship on behalf of women” (Hildenbrand 1). Furthermore, as I examined the anthologies, it became clear from the books’ editorial statements that an effort to privilege gender in the aboutness of each item (at the expense of other intersectional concerns) might seriously undermine the intentions of the anthologizers, many of whom were speaking to and from a very specific cultural, geographical, or political context in addition to their focus on female and female-identified writers. Should these works be gathered together or “dispersed across disciplines” (Olson and Schlegl 69)?

At this point, I reached out to colleagues at The University of Arizona for advice and informal conversation. One such conversation, with Associate Professor of English Adela C. Licona and Assistant Professor of Digital Culture, Information, and Society Jamie A. Lee, had a particularly strong impact on the course of this project. From our meeting came the idea, first put forward by Dr. Licona, to leave the books in their existing geographic and cultural contexts on the shelves, and to mark each women’s anthology instead with a color-coded sticker dot. By doing this, she pointed out, we could also expand the scope of the project well beyond visibility for female and female-identified writers: we could, using differently colored stickers, go on to highlight work that addressed issues of disability, socioeconomic class, and others, heightening visibility for social justice issues amongst our anthologies in a much more ambitious way. This proposal effectively allowed us to let books occupy more than one space on the physical shelf: it created a more fluid, less hierarchical, and arguably partially queered shelving system. I say “partially,” since queer theory by its nature “resist[s]...social practices that freeze identities in time and universalize them” (Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto 414); the creation of a shelf classification or marking system is a fixing action, and yet such fixing is (probably) necessary if resources are to be discoverable. But by leaving books in their original context on the shelves and marking them for discoverability according to additional criteria, it is possible to encompass more ambiguity and fluidity within our Anthologies section, while keeping sight of the project’s original goal: to amplify and highlight the voices of a group of writers who are underrepresented in the literary canon.

Subject Analysis

As part of this visibility project, I also performed item-level subject analysis, expanding the use of the MARC 650 field in my personal cataloging practice.
As each volume came off the shelf to be marked, it cycled to me before re-shelving; I examined existing bibliographic records and used the 650 to add topical subject terms where appropriate, drawing primarily from LCSH. (The use of subject heading lists like LCSH can also perpetuate problems: see Berman, along with Olson and Schlegl, for detailed analysis of how subject heading lists can exclude and marginalize certain constituencies. However, LCSH in particular has the potential to link many resources together at once because of its widespread use, and it is the controlled vocabulary most compatible with my home institution’s cataloging software—an extremely important consideration in practice.) I would also be open to the creation of a list of subject headings specific to UAPC, if the items in the collection appear to require it, in the tradition of special libraries like the Kinsey Institute Library and in the spirit of feminist disruption, interrogation, and interruption (Zhou; Olson, “Mapping Beyond Dewey’s Boundaries”).

This part of the project enhances visibility for poetry written by women in the OPAC; complete, accurate, thorough bibliographic records are an essential component of a given resource’s discoverability. In addition, expanded use of the 650 allows the OPAC (which, after all, is a web resource) to function more effectively as a net or web, connecting multiple resources through their subject headings in multiple and non-hierarchical ways. This view of cataloging is strongly influenced by Hope A. Olson’s feminist critique of subject construction, which encouraged information professionals to think of classification in terms of webs and relationships, in addition to the linear, Aristotelian, hierarchical logic of traditional classification schemes (“How we construct subjects”). Additionally, an expanded use of the 650 field seems to me to be one method of embracing the fluidities and ambiguities of gender (Drabinski, “Gendered S(h)elves”) by allowing for a multiplicity of subject access points (since the 650 is a repeatable field). Finally, expanded use of the 650 strikes me as an efficient way to revise the record where necessary in the continuing effort to combat the “host of untenable—indeed, obsolete and arrogant—assumptions with respect to...women” and other marginalized groups within existing subject heading lists such as LCSH (Berman ix-x)—this in the understanding that such revisions are not assumed to be permanent or perfectible, but occur in response to changing cultural contexts and understandings, and hopefully in dialogue and collaboration with users (Drabinski, “Queering the Catalog”).

Plan of Work

This project, which I persist in mentally labeling “sticker dots for social justice,” is currently in its second phase. In the fall of 2015, my colleagues and I marked roughly 180 anthologies of writing by female and female-identified authors with blue sticker dots; I also performed detailed subject analysis on
each of the newly marked anthologies, adding terms in the 650 field where this seemed warranted. At the conclusion of this phase, I curated a library exhibit titled “Selections from the Permanent Collection: Building Visibility, One Book at a Time.” In this exhibit, I displayed a diverse selection of women’s anthologies, highlighting the rich tapestry of poetries, editorial philosophies, and political contexts these works create within the literary landscape. As part of the exhibit, library staff solicited suggestions from users on next steps for the project (see appendix B); in response to this feedback, we will proceed in summer 2016 by marking and updating subject analysis for anthologies that highlight poetry of disability, among others. I anticipate that this project will continue in phases over the next several years; we will continue to highlight underrepresented groups in our Anthologies section as opportunity presents, adapting our initial Plan of Work (see appendix A) for new topics. This process will be documented and shared on social media in an effort to engage the community and raise community awareness of the nuances of information organization.

Risks and Desired Results

This is an ambitious project, and in some ways it is a risky one. In its initial phase, there was, for example, the risk that some poets might object to the use of their gender as a discovery point (Olson and Schlegl 69; Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto 413); writers may feel that gender is irrelevant to their writing and object to gender-based classifications. This particular risk is, I think, minimal in our specific case, since the anthologies we singled out all used gender as an organizational focus.

In our efforts to highlight women’s poetry, we also ran the risk of appearing to “essentialize” female authorship and experience. This is a critique that has often been directed at the feminist movement, especially in the context of tensions over racial identity and issues related to intersectionality. This risk was, to my mind, a very serious one, and it was the major reason for the adoption of a marking system instead of a new shelf designation for women’s anthologies. My hope was to highlight women’s voices as inclusively, respectfully, and sensitively as possible; I have similar hopes for future phases of the project.

In the final analysis, I hope that by highlighting underrepresented voices in my home library, I will also create a “rhetorical space...where topics can be taken seriously as legitimate subjects for open discussion” (Olson, “Mapping Beyond Dewey’s Boundaries” 233). I would like to see the marginalization of certain voices in literary publishing acknowledged as such a “legitimate subject,” viewed as a loss to readers everywhere, and its correction elevated to a top priority for editors and publishers. There are, of course, multiple ways to accomplish this; VIDA, for example, is doing important work in this area,
as we have seen. This project constitutes a small (but, I believe, a useful and a necessary) part of the ongoing fight against marginalization and erasure in literary publishing. Unlike Shakespeare’s Prospero (or, for that matter, the inspiring group of authors featured in *I’ll Drown My Book*), I wield no “rough magic” or enormous influence in the literary world—but I do hope to create intellectual and physical spaces for dialogue (with users, staff, and authors) in my home institution, to highlight marginalized voices and enhance their discoverability in that institution, to make the classification process transparent, and to engage poetry readers in a serious interrogation of the way we evaluate literature.

WORKS CITED


APPENDIX A
Plan of Work
Poetry Center Anthologies: Highlighting Female and Female-Identified Authors

Problem Statement

The literary output of female, female-identified, and feminist writers tends to be undervalued and underrepresented at the highest levels of literary achievement. This problem results in a “chilling” effect for aspiring female writers, who do not see themselves represented in these high-level positions; it negatively impacts the aesthetic and political diversity of the culture’s literary output; and it helps to reinforce sexist cultural biases.

Project Goals

• To combat the erasure of female, female-identified, and feminist writers’ literary output on a local level by increasing visibility for these writers in The University of Arizona Poetry Center (hereafter referred to as “UAPC”).
• To accomplish this heightened visibility for female voices through the creation of systems that make these authors more visible on the shelf and in the catalog.
• To further the long-term goal of increased appreciation for women’s writing (and women’s ways of knowing) in the literary landscape.

Rationales

• Classification and shelf marking systems create “‘rhetorical spaces’…where topics can be taken seriously as legitimate subjects for open discussion” (Olson, “Mapping Beyond Dewey’s Boundaries” 233).
• Poetry Center patrons tend to discover materials on the shelf primarily, and secondarily by consulting the OPAC.
• The Poetry Center’s Anthologies section is an important access point for new users and for users who wish to explore sets of poems organized by particular themes.

Assumptions
• The literary output of female writers is equal in quality to writing produced by men.
• Poetry Center patrons are interested in work by female authors.
• A marking system and enhanced subject analysis highlighting these writers would increase discoverability for these authors in the collection overall.

Resources
• Staff: Sarah Kortemeier, Library Specialist (project lead); Wendy Burk, Poetry Center Librarian (supervisory support); Julie Swarstad Johnson, Library Assistant, Senior (logistical support)
• Approximately 180 anthologies featuring writing exclusively by female, female-identified, and feminist poets
• Book processing supplies
• Staff access to cataloging software; in-house expertise in cataloging and subject analysis

Timeline
May 2015
• Interview campus experts in LIS/Gender and Women’s Studies for input on issues of nomenclature, intersectionality, and representation (Kortemeier, Burk, Swarstad Johnson)

June 2015
• Create list of works that are candidates for physical marking and subject analysis (Kortemeier, Swarstad Johnson)
• Create list of LCSH subject headings for use in catalog record updates (Kortemeier, Swarstad Johnson)
• Purchase color-coded sticker dots (Kortemeier, Swarstad Johnson)

July-August 2015
• Create list of works for Selections from the Permanent Collection: Building Visibility, One Book at a Time library exhibit (Kortemeier, Burk, Swarstad Johnson); scan works for exhibit (Kortemeier)
• Process books on item level with sticker dots (Swarstad Johnson)
• Subject analysis for processed books: 650 notes incorporating more detailed LCSH subject headings for individual records as appropriate (Kortemeier)
• Document book processing and cataloging; share photographs and updates with UAPC’s Digital Media Coordinator for use on social media (Kortemeier, Swarstad Johnson)
• Reshelve books (Swarstad Johnson, library volunteers)
September-October 2015

• Compile and scan supporting material for *Selections from the Permanent Collection: Building Visibility, One Book at a Time* library exhibit from UAPC archives (Kortemeier, Swarstad Johnson)

November 2015

• Write exhibit labels for *Selections from the Permanent Collection: Building Visibility, One Book at a Time* library exhibit (Kortemeier)

• Install physical exhibit (opening date: November 30, 2015) (Kortemeier, Burk, Swarstad Johnson)

APPENDIX B

User Suggestion Box Constructed for Library Exhibit:
*Selections from the Permanent Collection: Building Visibility, One Book at a Time*

(Nov. 30, 2015-Jan. 23, 2016)
Acknowledgements

This project would not have come to fruition without the support of my colleagues, classmates, and teachers. I wish to thank my supervisor, Poetry Center Librarian Wendy Burk, for generous support of this effort overall; Dr. Kay Mathiesen and my classmates in the University of Arizona Spring 2015 “Social Justice and Information Services” class, who helped me formulate and develop this project; Dr. Adela C. Licona and Dr. Jamie A. Lee, for expert advice and an outstanding suggestion at a crucial juncture; and Julie Swarstad Johnson, Poetry Center Library Assistant, Senior, for enthusiastic logistical support throughout. All errors are, of course, my own.
On June 26, 2016 Librarians and Archivists with Palestine (LAP) and the Social Responsibilities Round Table (SRRT) jointly sponsored the program “Palestinian Libraries Under Occupation” at the American Library Association conference in Orlando. The featured speakers were two leading Palestinian librarians: Randa Kamal, president of the Palestinian Library Association and recently retired as director of libraries at Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, and Diana Sayej Naser, the general coordinator of the Palestinian Library and Information Consortium (PALICO) and director of the Main Library at Birzeit University in Birzeit, West Bank. Below is the text of an interview with the speakers conducted on June 26 for Progressive Librarian by Rachel Mattson.
Mattson, representing LAP, and Tom Twiss, representing SRRT. The interview was transcribed by Tom Twiss and edited for clarity and coherence by Rachel Mattson and Tom Twiss. Randa Kamal and Diana Sayej Naser approved the final text. For another interview with Randa Kamal and Diana Sayej Naser, see George M. Eberhart, “Academic Libraries in Palestine: Challenges and frustrations of information access in the Palestinian territories,” American Libraries, June 27, 2016 https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/academic-libraries-palestine/

Figure 1. Randa Kamal (L) and Diana Sayej Naser at the ALA annual conference in Orlando, June 2016. Photo by Rachel Mattson

Introductions

PL: Could you tell us a little about yourselves?

Randa Kamal: I am from Jerusalem. My family has lived there since a hundred years ago. I have six sisters and two brothers. My mother is alive, but my father, who used to work as a teacher, died long ago. After I finished my school at Dar Al-Tifel Al-Arabi in Jerusalem in 1976 I studied library science in Leningrad, Russia at the N.K. Krupskaya State Institute of Culture. Now it’s called the
Saint-Petersburg State University of Culture. I got my MS there in Pedagogic, specializing in Library and Bibliography. When I came back, I worked at Birzeit University (BZU) for fourteen years. During my work at BZU, I took a training course in English Language Reference Sources at the American University in Cairo, Egypt. And in June 1983, I got a diploma in Educating Library Users from Sheffield University, England. Then I worked in Al-Quds University as the library director for nine branches, and as director for the Palestinian ISBN Agency from 2001 to 2015. In November 2015 I retired from Al-Quds University. I am still the President of the Palestinian Librarian Association.

We, as a family, suffered a lot from the Israeli occupation. My sister and my brother were arrested several times. We always get trouble at checkpoints, or when we want to travel abroad. There is a lot of questioning, stopping us, but we’re used to this. During the peace negotiations I worked with the Palestinian delegation with the technical team responsible for all documents. I provided the team with the information they needed and archived documents in the Orient House—the Palestinian Delegation Office. I was with them for fourteen rounds in Madrid and Washington. But to us it seems this was useless, because it seems the Israeli government didn’t want peace. It seems that they just wanted time to create more settlements. Now there is no land for Palestinians to live in.1

Diana Sayej Naser: I’m from Birzeit originally. It’s a small town north of Ramallah in the West Bank. I graduated from St. Joseph’s high school in Jerusalem. Then I moved to Birzeit University for my Bachelor’s of Arts for English language and translation and a minor in Education. After graduating with a Bachelor’s degree in August 1980 I worked for two years as an academic assistant in the university, working in the library. They were looking for people to go and pursue their education in library science and they offered me a scholarship. After that I went to the States to Indiana University for my MLS. When I came back to my country, I took a job in the library at Birzeit University as the head of the English cataloging section. In 1995 I was on a loan to establish the law library in the same university. When they saw all of my accomplishments in that branch library they asked me to go back to the main library and become the director in 1998. I’m currently involved with lots of consultancy projects, establishing libraries. For example, the last one we were involved with was establishing the mental health library at the Ministry of Health. For more than 20 years, I also used to teach the “Library Skills” course to freshman students at Birzeit University, and gave workshops on Cataloging and Classification and Users’ services through the British Council, and other colleges and institutes. I’m always on call whenever I’m needed for consultancy, or to give training courses on different topics. I have also been the coordinator for the Palestinian Library and Information Consortium [PALICO] since 2005. I used to be the vice president of the Palestinian Library Association when it was reactivated in 1993. I held that position for two terms, until 1998.
I’m the eldest in my family. We are two young ladies and six brothers. One brother passed away from cancer, and five are left, plus my sister. We are from a medium-level family. My father and my mother are still alive . . . and somehow in good health. Yes, we faced troubles like all Palestinian families living under occupation; two of my brothers were arrested—one was imprisoned for one year and one for six months. When they were released they left the country. One lives in Cleveland. The other one is in Russia now. He finished his studies there for a PhD in engineering, he works there as an engineer, and he lives peacefully in Moscow with his family and Russian wife.

Access to Information Under Occupation

**PL: How has the occupation affected libraries and archives in Palestine?**

**Diana Sayej Naser:** During the war of 1948, books and manuscripts were confiscated and stolen from personal libraries, from houses, from homes. After the war of 1948, they were moved to the Hebrew University or the Israel National Library. About 4.1 million books and manuscripts and documents were taken to the Hebrew University. Some—about 30%—are available to Israeli researchers in the Middle East section. The other 70% are stored on the underground floors of the Hebrew University—just given the label “Abandoned Property.”

**Randa Kamal:** This story got out by accident from one Israeli researcher. He’s doing his PhD and he went to the library and found these books and understood that these books were stolen from the Palestinian people.²

**Diana Sayej Naser:** Later, in 1982, the Israeli army invaded the research center in Beirut.³ They knew that this was a research center where they had Palestinian documents, Palestinian research, and Palestinian manuscripts. They stole it. Now we know this material is at the Hebrew University.

**PL: Can Palestinian researchers use these confiscated materials?**

**Diana Sayej Naser:** No. Maybe the students from Jerusalem who study at Hebrew University can use them. But for us, to go from Birzeit or from Bethlehem or from any other university—no. First of all, we’re not allowed to travel from the West Bank to Jerusalem; we don’t have permits. And if we get permits, we’re not allowed to use these resources.

**Randa Kamal:** During the First Intifada and after 1967 until 1993, when you wanted to get a book that Israel had censored, you could get it from the Hebrew University library. But now people from Jerusalem must go and borrow it for you.
Diana Sayej Naser: Sometimes researchers living in the West Bank need materials they can’t find—but they are available, for example, at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. If I as a librarian need a book that I can’t get in the West Bank for our researchers, I might ask Randa or any other colleague from Jerusalem to please go to Hebrew University and bring me this book or to photocopy certain pages for me.

Banned Books and Other Challenges

PL: What obstacles do you face in acquiring books for libraries in the West Bank?

Diana Sayej Naser: We suffer from the confiscation of books at checkpoints, and confiscation of books when we acquire them from abroad. Sometimes the Israeli authorities pick certain titles and ban them simply because of their titles, without regard for the information inside. A book about Palestinian bibliography or a book of poems may be banned because the title is related to Palestine. But sometimes the title doesn’t reflect exactly what’s inside. Inside, it’s poems. Poems require free expression; you have to write whatever you feel. Why would you ban this book just because it has a title related to Palestine?

And when we order books, we don’t always get all of them. Recently, Birzeit University got a book donation through Lebanon. Dr. Anis Sayegh, who is a well-known Palestinian, donated his library to Birzeit University. We got the books at the airport through our dealer in Jerusalem. About fifteen titles were confiscated because they deal with the Israel-Arab conflict.

Before Oslo, we used to go to Jordan and buy books from the Arab countries. We could ship the books that we bought from Lebanon, from Syria, from Tunisia or Morocco to our liaison office in Amman then to Birzeit. The Israeli authorities used to stop the boxes at the borders, open them, take what they wanted, and leave the rest. They would pick and choose, then tell us we were not allowed to get the confiscated titles back. This is how it worked before. Nowadays, to overcome the problem of acquiring books from the Arab world, the Palestinian Ministry of Culture in Ramallah organizes annual book fairs. But not all publishers are allowed to travel to Ramallah with their books.

Randa Kamal: You know, the main problem is the occupation. That means you are controlled by another government. Israel is still censoring, but by other means. When publishers or dealers try to bring their books to a book fair, they have to keep their boxes of books at a tax point for days while they wait for permission. Some of them get it, and some of them don’t. After that, the publishers and dealers have to pay a floor tax. Then when the boxes are allowed to enter after the delay, there is no time to display the books. Sometimes the representative of a university library is not allowed to travel to a book fair.
And sometimes universities can’t send a representative because of the lack of money.

Also, any boxes from a publisher in Syria or Lebanon are not allowed to enter.\textsuperscript{4} Some universities aren’t allowed to go to book fairs. So they try to buy books from book dealers who bring books to Palestine. These dealers aren’t allowed to bring books from Lebanon or from Syria into Israel or the Occupied Territories. But Lebanon and Syria are the countries that have the best publishers in the Arab world. This is a different kind of censorship. Since Oslo, the Israeli authorities do not allow Palestinians to get books from Syria or Lebanon because they are considered enemy states. They check to see where the books are published. They even enter libraries to check shelves. And every year they send lists to libraries...

\textbf{Diana Sayej Naser}: ...lists of banned books. Books you can’t include in your collection.

\textbf{PL}: Who issues the lists of banned books?

\textbf{Randa Kamal}: It’s from the Israeli government.

\textbf{Diana Sayej Naser}: It’s a military office. We don’t know who prepares it, but we get it through a military office.

\textbf{PL}: And if you have these books you have to remove them from the library?

\textbf{Diana Sayej Naser}: If they know, yes.

\textbf{Randa Kamal}: They come and take the books, and sometimes they close the library for several days or months.

\textbf{Diana Sayej Naser}: To investigate.

\textbf{PL}: Are these books mostly about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?

\textbf{Diana Sayej Naser}: They are books on all topics, but mainly on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. If they are published in Syria or Lebanon, we are not allowed to have them. And many of the best books in Arabic are written and published in Lebanon and in Syria.

\textbf{Randa Kamal}: Also, when you order books, the Israelis stop them at the port or the airport. They keep the books for several months. And they ask you, when
they release the books, they tell you to come and pick them up. But then you have to pay money. Why? Because they used their floor.

**PL:** You have to pay rental fees for the floor space the Israeli authorities uses to quarantine your books?

**Randa Kamal:** Yes [laughter]. They rented it for us.

**Checkpoints and the Destruction of Libraries**

**PL:** Can you talk about some of the other ways the occupation affects libraries in Palestine?

**Diana Sayej Naser:** There are checkpoints that prevent researchers and students from reaching the libraries. Also, Israel has destroyed many Palestinian libraries. When Israel invaded Ramallah in 2002, they destroyed a few libraries, including part of Al-Haq Library, Al-Quds University library, and Birzeit University library. During the wars in Gaza in 2006-2008 several libraries were attacked. Some university libraries have been partially destroyed in these attacks—like Islamic University of Gaza, Al-Azhar University, and Al-Quds Open University.
PL: Sometimes we hear the argument that this was just accidental damage during the course of war, that there has been no intentional destruction of Palestinian libraries.

Diana Sayej Naser: Accidentally, you could destroy one, or you could destroy two. But in some cases, they went directly to a specific library on a third floor of a building—such as the Al-Haq Library for Human Rights, which was on the third floor of a building in Ramallah. They went up to the third floor where the library was and destroyed it. If you don’t have the intention to destroy it, you don’t go there. In Birzeit when they came, they went directly to the Special Collections area where we have books on the Palestine-Israel conflict. They picked up a few maps, they picked up a few titles and they took them. They know exactly where they are going.

Randa Kamal: During wars, they know every point where they want to bomb. They have a map. They know from UN resolutions that in any war they shouldn’t bomb any educational institutions or any kind of heritage sites. But Israel, the first things they bomb are educational institutions and heritage sites.

PL: Why do you think they do that?

Randa Kamal: To destroy the civilization of this country, to destroy the memory of Palestinians, to keep them uneducated and ignorant, to keep them living at a very minimal level. That’s it.

PL: Were you in your libraries in 2002-2004 when they were invaded by the army? Did you interact with the soldiers?

Diana Sayej Naser: No. The university was closed. When the Israeli authorities closed the university, we gave classes in Ramallah and other different places. And the students needed books. So we used to go to the library when the soldiers were around. We went illegally just to pick up books for the students and researchers and bring them to Ramallah. This is how we acted for more than a month. Being librarians, we had to do this because the universities were closed for months and the academic life has to move on.

PL: Let’s talk about Gaza. What is the situation for Gaza’s libraries right now?

Randa Kamal: You know, we can’t talk from personal experience about Gaza because it’s not allowed for anyone from the West Bank or Jerusalem to visit Gaza. When you talk about the impact of the Israeli occupation you should be honest. As I haven’t seen it with my own eyes, I can’t say. But I’ve seen pictures
and lots of people talk about it, and there are lots of detailed articles in Arabic and English about it on websites. From that I can just say they destroyed some libraries there. We even lost several librarians from the most recent war.

**PL:** They were killed?

**Randa Kamal:** Yes.

**Diana Sayej Naser:** You know it’s very hard for the librarians in Gaza. They can’t go to attend or participate in conferences or in training courses. For years now they haven’t been able to leave Gaza. They are not allowed. They are under siege. We can’t visit them; they can’t visit us. They do have library schools over there, and they have graduates with no jobs. If they were allowed to come to the West Bank they could probably solve part of our problem (the shortage in library professionals). They have librarians there with no jobs; we have jobs with no librarians.

**Randa Kamal:** Yes, because Gaza is very near to Egypt lots of them even have Master’s degrees. Some of them have PhD degrees. They have a lot of librarians.

**Diana Sayej Naser:** And they even have library programs at the Gazan universities. If they can come to the West Bank, maybe they can fill our vacancies.

**Internet and Electricity Restrictions**

**Randa Kamal:** Another important problem is that libraries and other institutions in Palestine can’t get a high bandwidth for the internet. Until now the West Bank can’t get 3G. It is not allowed.

**Diana Sayej Naser:** Except in Jerusalem.

**PL:** That’s an official restriction?

**Randa Kamal:** Yes. As I mentioned it’s not only for the libraries, it’s for the entire West Bank and Gaza, including any ministry of the Palestinian Authority. But it affects libraries in a special way. Because if you want to download any article, it’s very slow. After two or three minutes, a dealer or publisher says your time is up, so you need to try again and again to download from the internet. And it’s useless. That’s why you can’t get very good benefit from e-resources, electronic resources which need to be downloaded.
**PL:** There are, I guess, no restrictions like this within Israel.

**Diana Sayej Naser:** No. They have even 5G.

**PL:** Is there a justification that’s given for this?

**Diana Sayej Naser:** Just to put a burden. “Security reasons,” as they say.

**Randa Kamal:** Everything is “security.”

**Diana Sayej Naser:** Another issue is that sometimes you can’t access e-resources or the internet because they cut the electricity. For Gaza this is a real problem. In Gaza, in all of Gaza, they have electricity for only four hours a day. Four hours a day! Can you imagine what it’s like to live with electricity for four hours a day—with a refrigerator, with a TV, for the children, for everything? You know that twice we met with Gaza librarians as a consortium via video conferencing: once in a workshop and once in a meeting. The Gaza librarians were able to attend only fifteen minutes out of the two hours. They were cut because the electricity was cut. They called us and they said, “Sorry we can’t continue because they cut the electricity.”

**PL:** And what’s the justification for cutting the electricity?

**Diana Sayej Naser:** Nothing. Group punishment. Collective punishment.

**Collaboration with Other Librarians**

**PL:** It must be hard to maintain an all-Palestine consortium since you can’t go to Gaza and Gazans can’t come to you; since they have limited access to electricity; and since travel between Jerusalem and the West Bank is so difficult. How does that affect the work of consortia like PALICO?

**Diana Sayej Naser:** We use phone calls. Sometimes we use e-mail which everyone can read when they have the time and when they have electricity. But Gaza librarians haven’t been able to join major meetings and major workshops in-person when we have had visiting scholars and trainers. It’s a pity. Because visitors only come for certain days or for certain hours. How do we solve this? We take the presentations and the PowerPoints from the presenters, and send them by email to my colleague who is a coordinator in Gaza. That’s Mr. Rami Al-Hindawi from Al-Azhar University. He takes this material and he reads it. Then if they have someone in Gaza who is more knowledgeable about this topic, they invite him or her to present the workshop using these same
resources. (We get permission from the presenters to do this, of course.) This is one way we have solved the issue of trainings. For meetings ...most of the time we send information via e-mail, and when they have electricity they can read and respond.

**PL:** Does this limit your Gaza-based members’ ability to participate in your consortium?

**Randa Kamal:** They do their best...

**Diana Sayej Naser:** They do their best to participate. For example, last December when we had a workshop on open access and how to build repositories, the materials were very clear. So I passed the information to them. Mrs. Iryna Kuchma, the manager of the open access program of EIFL [Electronic Information for Libraries], came and held the workshop. We invited all PALICO members and all who were interested to participate. The Gaza people couldn’t come. So we passed them the information to use. In 2005 when EIFL came to hold workshops about how to build a consortium, they went to Gaza. They got permission via the Ministry of Culture. They held workshops there, and they held the same workshops in Ramallah.

**Randa Kamal:** But they can’t go directly. They can go through Jordan, Egypt, etc.

**Diana Sayej Naser:** They reach them sometimes. But not all presenters can get permits to go.

**Randa Kamal:** Most of the librarians really are committed to their work, and they want to learn.

**Diana Sayej Naser:** Sometimes it’s time consuming, because, due to checkpoints and the fact that people can’t move freely, you sometimes need to duplicate or triplicate your activities. It’s very hard to travel from north to south, from south to north, etc. With the checkpoints, a few members won’t reach the workshop until the end. Sometimes a workshop is done once and that’s it. But to help others, you have to give it in different areas and locations. This is what the EIFL representative did. She gave three workshops: one at Palestine Polytechnic University in Hebron in the south; one in the middle, at Birzeit University; and one in the north, at An-Najah University. She wasn’t allowed to go to Gaza so she wasn’t able to do it there.

**Randa Kamal:** Every day, people traveling between cities and villages in
Palestine waste a minimum one and a half or two and a half hours waiting at checkpoints. This is the minimum.

Diana Sayej Naser: Before they created all of the checkpoints I used to go from Birzeit to Jerusalem in 45 minutes—direct, with my car. Now, I’m not allowed to go to Jerusalem. And if I get a permit I have to go through two or three checkpoints to reach Jerusalem. Meanwhile, Randa can go from Jerusalem directly to Bethlehem in fifteen minutes...

Randa Kamal: ...but when I come back from Bethlehem maybe it will take two hours.

Diana Sayej Naser: Because they have another checkpoint on the way back. Entering Jerusalem is more difficult than leaving it.

PL: What years did everything change, in terms of your access?

Diana Sayej Naser: After Oslo.

Randa Kamal: Oslo was the worst ...for education, for health, for everything.

Diana Sayej Naser: We were under occupation. Now, we and our Authority are under occupation. This what I always say.

Randa Kamal: Our Authority is like a policeman.

Diana Sayej Naser: They can’t move without Israeli permission.

Randa Kamal: Even the president.

Diana Sayej Naser: Even the president. We’re not authoritative.

Creative Solutions and International Solidarity

PL: I’m impressed by the creative solutions you have come up with to contend with the many challenges you face. Diana, could you talk a little bit about your project to adapt old computers for current use? What was that project and how did it come about?

Diana Sayej Naser: OK. I was on the advisory board of EIFL from 2008 to 2010, and again from 2015-2016. One of EIFL’s programs is called the FOSS program to help developing countries use free and open source software. And
they said that one of the projects is for applying open source to your library. So I went back home and I asked one of my colleagues, Dr. Wasel Ghanem, who is an electrical engineer at the university, “Can we work on a way to use open source to get rid of the problems that we are facing with our old computers?” He said “Yes, we are working on something similar with the Ministry of Education for the schools as a pilot project. We will try to apply it in the library at Birzeit.” So he came to the library, and we looked at the computers. We had a lab with a few old computers and, due to budgeting issues, we couldn’t replace them with new ones. So we said, “OK, we will use open source software to make the old ones act as if they are new computers.” He, of course, understood things technically more than I do, but I helped from the library side. And we jointly produced a user guide that explains step by step how to apply this to old computers. Afterwards, we interviewed students in the lab and asked them “How did you like these computers?” They said “Oh, they are so fast!” These were all the old computers, but we used one new computer as the server to run the twelve in the lab. As a result, our project at Birzeit won the EIFL spotlight prize in 2008 from UNESCO: the Information for All Programme, “IFAP,” which aimed at replicating the successful stories in the EIFL member countries. Our project was replicated one year later in Mali. They said, “We applied your project and it works fine with twenty computers in our lab.”

**PL: How can librarians in the West and the international library community support your efforts?**

**Diana Sayej Naser:** Organizations or institutions could help us gain access to more free e-resources; they could help us with capacity building—training-the-trainers on modern trends in librarianship and users’ services. We could also benefit from exchange programs among librarians to gain new experience, and funding for scholarships to support the attendance of Palestinian librarians at courses, workshops, and conferences, even continuing education in library science. The ALA could pass resolutions and statements of solidarity with Palestinian libraries, and for freedom of movement and expression.

**Randa Kamal:** International library organizations could also pressure the Israeli government to stop the expropriation of books. Also, it would be helpful if we could get more tuition scholarships so that we can send ten or fifteen students to study library science. And it would be good if people our age could get six months or one comprehensive year to update our knowledge. Because, if we are honest with ourselves, we can’t teach with this old information. It would be helpful if there could be more information on the website of Librarians and Archivists with Palestine (LAP). Maybe some international libraries could link with individual Palestinian libraries to exchange books and provide training. It
would help us a lot if international libraries could provide mentoring programs, and if librarians who speak Arabic could give online courses.

**PL:** Are there young people in Palestine who are interested in doing library work and who would like to study abroad?

**Randa Kamal:** A lot of people want to.

**Diana Sayej Naser:** You know, in most cases in our country to get a scholarship a person must be below the age of 40. So if they are interested but over 40, they can’t get a scholarship. And the most younger men or women are recently married and have children. They have young families and they can’t leave. So for the last four years I have asked members of my staff if they would like to go abroad to get an MLS and then come back. I know that there are several people who were interested, but they said “No we can’t leave our families. We can’t go abroad for two years. How would our families survive?” But in 2015, one of our young staff was lucky to get a scholarship from Fulbright, and she is now in the States at Oklahoma for her MLS and will be back in August 2017.

**PL:** It sounds like the thing that interests you most is networking and connecting with other professionals.

**Randa Kamal:** You know, Diana and I benefit a lot from this because we travel more than our other colleagues, and we know more people, and we talk with them and learn more. And it is very important for other colleagues to have that experience. It would be good if others could study librarianship abroad and then come back.

**Diana Sayej Naser:** You learn a lot through networking. I learned a lot being a member of EIFL as a coordinator and on the advisory board. And they also benefitted from several ideas I raised during the meetings. That’s why they told me they wanted me on their advisory board. And lately I gave them a few ideas in regard to their strategic plan and now they are applying them. So sometimes with networking you learn and make others learn from you. It’s a give and take issue. Therefore, it is very important to get more opportunities to participate in and/or join International conferences, training courses, and workshops.

**NOTES**

1 In 1993, Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin signed the Oslo Accords, a framework that was supposed to lead to a resolution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization agreed to recognize each other, and Israel
was supposed to withdraw from Gaza and the West Bank in favor of Palestinian self-rule. Edward Said called these accords “more flawed and, for most of the Palestinian people, more unfavourably weighted than many had first supposed.” http://www.lrb.co.uk/v15/n20/edward-said/the-morning-after


7 Librarians and Archivists with Palestine http://librarianswithpalestine.org/
WASHINGTON, DC — The American Library Association offers its expertise and resources to the incoming administration and the new and returning members of Congress from all parties elected on Nov. 8.

“The American Library Association is dedicated to helping all our nation’s elected leaders identify solutions to the challenges our country faces,” ALA President Julie Todaro said. “We are ready to work with President-elect Trump, his transition team, incoming administration and members of Congress to bring more economic opportunity to all Americans and advance other goals we have in common.”

Libraries themselves – 120,000 strong and embedded in the largest urban centers, small farming communities and school and university campuses – make up a robust national infrastructure immediately available to advance several policy priorities identified by the President-elect. As hubs of learning, literacy, job skills development and access to public services in virtually every community across the country, our nation’s libraries are ready and able now to expand the nationwide reach of these valuable services.

Some of these services are described in detail in a series of papers being
released this week by ALA’s Office for Information Technology Policy, including:

- One Small Business at a Time: Building Entrepreneurial Opportunity in America’s Communities
- America’s Libraries: Powering Broadband Adoption, Access and use
- Libraries Help and Honor Our Veterans: Employment, Education and Community Connection

We trust that these resources will assist the new administration and Congress in addressing several areas of national interest announced on the website for the White House Transition Team, specifically in:

Infrastructure: As many as 33 percent of American households lack home broadband connections. Libraries use broadband technologies to help citizens, especially in the most disadvantaged and rural areas, improve their education, find a job and start a business. Investments and public policies are needed to advance the deployment of widespread high-speed broadband capabilities to libraries and other community anchor institutions, as well as to the general population.

Education: Libraries provide opportunities for digital and traditional literacy training. From hosting technology camps to teaching coding skills to offering 3D printers, libraries foster the kind of computational thinking necessary for success in today’s world. Ensuring funding for federal block grants to states for the work of libraries will enable local governments to determine how to best meet the greatest needs in their own communities and make wise investments in education.

Serving veterans: Libraries help address many of the challenges experienced by members of the military when they return to civilian life. Libraries help veterans (and their families) search for a job, improve and translate job skills to the civilian context and navigate bureaucracies to receive the benefits to which they are entitled. Further collaboration with the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense will allow libraries to efficiently address the issues facing our returning veterans.

“Through new and strengthened collaborations, libraries are well-positioned to serve as an ever-stronger and flexible resource to advance critical national goals,” continued Todaro. “The U.S. library community looks forward to strengthening our partnerships with federal agencies, the new administration and other key stakeholders at all levels of government.”


Document #2: Text replacing above press release on ALA website

ALA offers expertise, resources to incoming administration and Congress [RESCINDED]

ALA has rescinded this press release and removed it from the website. We regret that this means that the “Comments” section is also pulled down from this location at this time; however, we are identifying the best way to re-locate comments to another public location.

We also invite those who commented on the 11/15 release to post or re-post in the “Comments” section of the AL “Message to Members” from President Julie Todaro and the Executive Board.

On 12/6/16 President Todaro released a statement and Q&A that provides additional information. A Message to Members

posted 11/15/2016

Document #3: Apology to ALA members for 11/15/2016 press release

A Message to Members
A statement from President Julie B. Todaro and the Executive Board to American Library Association members

By Julie B. Todaro | November 21, 2016

Dear Members:

Thank you for your candid responses to our press releases re: ALA’s Libraries Bolster Opportunities. We are sorry that these communications created confusion and anger regarding our Association’s position on safeguarding and promoting its commitment to our core values including diversity, equity and inclusion. We understand that content from these press releases, including the 11/18/16 release that was posted in error, was interpreted as capitulating to and normalizing the incoming administration. ALA administration and leadership issues an apology to all who were negatively affected by these communications.

Our intent was to highlight the invaluable role that librarians and library workers play within our communities as infrastructure for resources and services, and especially where we provide unique services to special populations, such as immigrants and veterans. Yet, our core values as an association are clear—free access, intellectual freedom, privacy and confidentiality. We will stand
for these values unwaveringly, now and into the future. Our work with any
administration must always first be in line with these values. And it is clear
that many of these values are at odds with messaging or positions taken by the
incoming administration.

Please know that we stand by our members. With this in mind, the ALA is
committed to providing a platform where you can share your ideas and concerns.
We have reached out to key ALA staff and have asked for an opportunity for
people to comment with their thoughts, ideas, and feedback. The most accessible
location for this to happen is on the American Libraries blog, The Scoop. Please
feel free to engage with us here.

The ALA is very concerned about the role of our nation’s libraries under
this new administration, both at the legislative level as well as at the state and
local level. That concern, however, should never eclipse our commitment to our
members, to defending our core values and advancing our policy positions.

We have a great deal of work ahead of us as we work to abolish intolerance
and cultural invisibility, and stand up for all the members of our communities,
as we promote understanding and inclusion through our efforts. We believe
that we all must work so that our voices are heard at the federal, state, and
local government levels, and so we can continue to advance the issues and core
values that matter to our members.

Please know that we feel—as does ALA administration and leadership—
that our work with any governmental entity or individual(s) should never come
at the cost of our core values as an organization. We can promise you that this
will not change.

We are all concerned about the future. Please share your thoughts, ideas,
and feedback in the comments section below. We need to hear from you now
more than ever as we continue our work on behalf of our constituents, libraries
and all librarians and library workers. Beginning Monday morning, the ALA
executive board will discuss these issues and our processes and we will use
your comments to help guide us in our discussions and planning as we work to
earn back the trust of our members and prepare for the work ahead during this
new administration.

Thank you again for your patience.

Sincerely,

Dr. Julie Todaro, ALA President, and the ALA Executive Board

posted 11/21/2016

Source: https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/blogs/the-scoop/a-message
This year, I attended the ALA Annual Conference for the first time; I was there to present my winning Miriam Braverman Memorial Prize paper to the Progressive Librarians Guild (officially) and to explore the wider world of librarianship (unofficially, and always). I want to express my deepest thanks to the Progressive Librarians Guild for selecting my paper, and for their sponsorship of my trip; many thanks as well to my home institution, The University of Arizona Poetry Center, and its parent department, The University of Arizona College of Humanities, for additional support of this professional development opportunity.

I wasn’t completely sure what to expect at ALA. On one hand, I’m familiar with the physical marathon that is the Big National Conference experience; my home institution regularly sends staff to these as well as to smaller, regional conferences, and we’ve all learned the importance of things like water bottles, healthy food, and rest breaks. (I was particularly tickled by the signs scattered throughout the convention center that read “Get Your Steps In”: no kidding!) On the other hand, I’m always curious about how my own library work fits into the larger context of the LIS field. This is because I work in a highly specialized environment—a special-collections library dedicated to contemporary poetry—and professional gatherings of librarians are generally full of interesting discoveries and surprises for me, since the work of libraries is so broad. I arrived at ALA looking forward to everything I knew I was about to learn.

One of the discoveries I made at ALA was directly related to the sheer size of the conference: I realized very quickly that this gathering is big enough to

Sarah Kortemeier is a poet and recently qualified librarian; she holds an M.A. in Library and Information Science and an M.F.A. in Poetry, both from The University of Arizona. She serves on the library staff of The University of Arizona Poetry Center.

KEYWORDS: American Library Association; Library conferences.
accommodate some extremely specific concerns in library work, which made me feel right at home! One of my favorite panels, for example, was titled “Diverse and Inclusive Metadata: Developing Cultural Competencies in Descriptive Practices.” The specialized cataloging issues raised in this session correspond with some of the issues I worked on in the project described in my Braverman paper: how do we describe materials for maximum discoverability, and do this in a way that is culturally responsive and respectful? The panelists asked us to consider some thorny and important descriptive problems; for example, when we are trying to help students find indigenous poetry for a class assignment and “indigenous poetry” is not included as a subject term in LCSH, what action do we take? Do we attach additional terms to an existing controlled vocabulary? Do we work to invent wholly new controlled vocabularies? How usable are these new systems and terms outside our local context, and what are the social implications of the answer to that question? In my own project, I had wrestled with very similar questions as I worked on subject analysis for a number of anthologies of poetry written by female and female-identified authors, and I came away from this session feeling as though I had a more thorough grounding in both theory and practice in my cataloging work. In this session particularly (and others more generally) I also felt very strongly that I was witnessing a continuation of the conversations that are currently happening among students in LIS programs: my own program requires its students to discuss inclusivity, cultural competence, and social justice-oriented praxis very regularly, and I was fascinated and delighted to see how the librarians on the panel and in the room carried those ideas forward in their daily work.

I also sought out new ideas and discoveries in the areas of library/information literacy pedagogy and preservation, both of which are areas of professional interest and specialization for me personally and for the work of my home library overall. I came away from the sessions on pedagogy and digital preservation, in particular, feeling excited about potential future intersections between the work of archives and the work of educators; my professional experience outside libraries lies mostly in education, and the longer I work in the LIS field, the more enthusiastic I get about the use of archival collections and primary sources in the classroom. This is an area I hope to work on as my own career develops—particularly in terms of helping students evaluate sources, access voices they might not otherwise encounter, and think critically about archival silences and what those silences mean for our society. The sessions on digital preservation, information literacy instruction, and subject-area library instruction all helped me think about new ways to deliver that content to students in a variety of formats and settings.

Of course, not all discoveries are pleasant ones: I did have one opportunity to watch a colleague absorb and be galvanized by an unwelcome surprise during the conference. In a discussion group for women’s issues, I observed a
young woman hear for the first time that United States law does not currently
guarantee paid parental leave to workers. Incredulous, she sat up straighter;
there was electricity in the room. I carry that electricity forward with me, deep
in the gut. It was, for me, a powerful moment, and a powerful reminder of how
much progressive work remains to be done.

And the work of social justice is urgent. It is all too often a matter of life
and death, as we saw with horrific clarity in the Pulse nightclub shootings, the
brutal attack on the LGBTQ and Latinx communities that happened two weeks
before ALA in Orlando. It was easy to see that those shootings were uppermost
in many minds at the conference; there were Pride pins everywhere and a blood
donation initiative; the memorial service for the victims at the beginning of the
conference was packed and included a very moving surprise speech from Civil
Rights Movement icon and Congressman John Lewis. I keep returning, in my
own mind, to the scrolling list of the victims’ names that closed the memorial—
those beautiful, precious lives. We cannot continue to make these lists. There is
so much work to be done.

But in the serendipitous conversations that popped up all over the conference,
I felt hope and great energy for that work. I found warm human connections
everywhere: early in the conference, for example, I had an entertaining chat
with a librarian who had held a job at Eureka College, which is located in
a small town in Illinois a couple of miles from my mother’s family’s farm;
I also had a wonderful conversation with Julene Jones of the University of
Kentucky and the Progressive Librarians Guild, who generously took time
from her busy schedule to show me around the exhibitors’ hall. I very much
enjoyed conversing with Progressive Librarians Guild members before, during,
and after my presentation; there was an especially robust discussion during the
Q&A period after I outlined my project, in which we considered how efforts to
promote greater visibility for marginalized voices could (and must) be adapted
for different library contexts. And, finally, I was delighted to find that I was able
to make many connections and new acquaintances at this particular conference
over food. Because this year’s conference occurred essentially next door to
Disney World, restaurants tended to be packed with hour-long waits each
evening; to skip the lines I frequently just went to an open seat at the bar, where
I invariably ended up sitting next to other ALA attendees. I talked to people
from all over the country and had an opportunity to marvel once again at the
humor, warmth, and generosity of my colleagues. This happens at every single
library conference I attend, and I’m always amazed and grateful. Librarians are
a huge part of what draws me to this profession, and I’m looking forward to
seeing what we can accomplish for social justice together in this generation.
Library workers in Beverly, MA were among the city workers picketing outside an event featuring an address from the mayor. The workers are currently without a contract, and have stated that the mayor has been slow to begin the bargaining process.

January 7, 2016
New Contract for Elk Grove Library Workers, Illinois

Library workers in Elk Grove Village Public Library in Illinois have ratified a new four year contract that includes salary increases. The library workers are represented by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.


January 13, 2016
New Contract for Peterborough Library Workers, Ontario

Library workers at Peterborough Public Library have a new four-year contract with city administration. The collective agreement includes a wage freeze for 2016, with increased wages in subsequent years. The workers are represented by CUPE Local 1833.


Strike Vote in Lambeth, England

Library workers in Lambeth, a borough of London, England, have voted in favor of strike action as part of their campaign to protest the closure of library branches, as well as plans to turn some branches into health centers operated by Greenwich Leisure Limited. The workers are represented by UNISON.


January 17, 2016
Vancouver Island Regional Library Workers Reach Tentative Agreement, British Columbia

Workers at Vancouver Island Regional Library have reached a tentative agreement on a new contract. The workers, represented by CUPE Local 401, had voted in favor of strike action back in December if an agreement could not be reached. However, strike action was not necessary after a mediator became involved in the bargaining sessions. The contract has yet to be ratified.
January 18, 2016
Petition Filed to Save Scottish School Libraries, Scotland

UNISON has backed a petition submitted to the government of Scotland asking for school libraries to be protected from planned cuts. East Renfrewshire Council has put forward a proposal that would reduce library services by fifty percent, cutting both library hours and librarian positions.


January 22, 2016
New Contract for Belleville Public Library Workers, Illinois

Library workers in Belleville, IL have a new three year collective agreement that includes wage increases.

http://www.belleville.net/DocumentCenter/View/532

January 29, 2016
2015 United States Union Membership Survey Released

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics has released its annual report on union membership. Among its findings, in 2015:

- union membership was 11.1% – the same as in 2014
- 14.8 million workers belonged to a union
- workers in education, training, and library occupations had the second-highest unionization rate at 35.5% – up slightly from the 2014 rate of 35.3%

https://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm

February 9, 2016
Planned Library Closures in Darlington, UK

Unite, the union representing library workers in the borough of Darlington, has spoken out against planned cuts to library services in that borough. The council has proposed closing two of the library branches in the borough as well as the library’s mobile service, which would also result in the loss of thirty staff positions.
Strike Possible at California State

Librarians, professors, and other faculty at California State University may go on a five-day strike in April if an agreement has not been reached with administration on a new collective agreement. The workers, represented by the California Faculty Association, are asking for a 5% raise for all workers, as well as an additional raise of 2.65% for those at the low end of the pay scale. The administration has offered a 2% pay increase.


February 10, 2016
Supporters Speak Up For Libraries in UK

Yesterday library staff, authors, and other library supporters gathered together at Central Hall Westminster in London as part of Speak Up For Libraries, a rally in protest of widespread funding cuts and closures of library services across the UK. After several speeches from various library supporters and a UNISON representative, attendees were encouraged to meet with their Members of Parliament in the House of Commons. Search the hashtag #SUFLlobby16 on Twitter for pictures and commentary on yesterday’s event.

Staff at several library systems, including Greenwich, Bromley, and Lambeth, are on strike this week in conjunction with yesterday’s protest. Tim O’Dell, a UNISON representative, said: “We’re closing the libraries for a day to fight for the future of the service.”

A library staff member was quoted as saying:

Libraries are a valuable community resource providing all sort of services. What replaces that if you take it away? These gyms will have a few shelves of books—that’s not a library service.

Various boroughs have proposed closing libraries, staffing remaining library branches with volunteers, and incorporating library services into “leisure centers” including gym facilities, in response to cuts in funding.

http://speakupforlibraries.org/sufl-lobby-2016/key-lobby-messages-sufllobby16/
New Contract for Thompson-Nicola Regional District Library Workers, British Columbia

Workers at the Thompson-Nicola Regional District Library System in British Columbia have ratified a new three-year contract that includes wage increases. The workers are represented by BC Government and Service Employees’ Union.

Budget Cuts at National Library of Australia

Coming budget cuts at the National Library of Australia are expected to result in the elimination of at least twenty staff positions and reduced services, including cancellation of subscriptions. Additionally, some services may be outsourced. Community and Public Sector Union deputy secretary Beth Vincent-Pietsch stated:

What’s become clear from our meetings is that the cuts to jobs and programs that have been announced so far are only the start of the process. We expect all of these agencies to be forced to make further cuts. The government needs to recognise the long-term and in many cases permanent damage these cuts will do, and reverse them immediately so that Australia’s cultural heritage can be kept alive.

The reduction in funding from the Australian government will result in similar measures being taken at other Australian cultural institutions, including National Museum of Australia, National Portrait Gallery, Museum of Australian Democracy, National Film and Sound Archive, and National Gallery of Australia.
National Archives Workers Reject Enterprise Agreement, Australia

Workers at the National Archives of Australia have rejected an offered enterprise agreement from the government for the first time in its history. According to the press release issued by the Community and Public Sector Union, the agreement would have removed workers’ “important rights and conditions.” The archives has been under a wage freeze for the past 18 months.

http://www.cpsu.org.au/content/national-archives-staff-vote-70-no-deal

February 24, 2016
New Contract for Woburn Public Library Workers, Massachusetts

Workers at Woburn Public Library have a new four year contract, retrospective to July 2014 that includes wage increases.


New Contract for Lethbridge Library Workers, Alberta

Workers at Lethbridge Public Library have a new four-year contract, retrospective to January 2015. The workers are represented by CUPE Local 70.

http://www.lethbridge.ca/NewsCentre/Pages/Agreement-with-Library-staff-ratified.aspx

February 26, 2016
Strike at Bolton College, England

Bolton College was closed on Wednesday as library workers, lecturers, and support staff went on strike amid proposals for a wage freeze. The workers are represented by UNISON and University and College Union.

http://www.theboltonnews.co.uk/news/14298798.College_staff_strike_over_pay_dispute/?ref=arc

March 3, 2016
The Precarity Monster, Ontario

The Toronto Public Library Workers Union has created a video addressing the issue of precarious work in their library system (see below). This issue
is of central concern to the contract negotiations currently ongoing between the union and the city of Toronto. Maureen O’Reilly, president of the union, has stated:

We’re a female-dominated workplace. Precarious work hurts women, racialized workers and youth the most. We have given generously to the City’s fiscal responsibility — saving money off the backs of the most vulnerable workers in the library is just no longer acceptable.

Library supporters are encouraged to email the Chair of the Toronto Public Library Board to voice their concern with the lack of stable, full-time positions at Toronto’s libraries.


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vF2FTAuzK68

March 9, 2016
New Publication: The Role of the Union in Promoting Social Justice

*Perspectives on Libraries as Institutions of Human Rights and Social Justice*, edited by Ursula Gorham, Natalie Greene Taylor, and Paul Jaeger, has recently been published by Emerald as part of the Advances in Librarianship series. It includes a chapter titled “The Role of the Union in Promoting Social Justice” by Sarah Barriage that draws from the news items included in this blog.


Center for Labor Education & Research Winner of Sessions Memorial Award, Hawaii

This year’s winner of the John Sessions Memorial Award is the Center for Labor Education and Research at the University of Hawai‘i West O’ahu. From the award committee: “The mission of the labor archive at the Center for Labor Education and Research (CLEAR) is to preserve labor history materials for future generations, protect the artifacts and make them accessible for public use, and defend the importance of working class history.” The John Sessions Memorial Award is presented by the Reference and User Services Association of the American Library Association.
http://www.hawaii.edu/uhwo/clear/home/


March 13, 2016
Toronto Public Library Workers Vote for Strike Action, Ontario

Members of Toronto Public Library Workers Union (CUPE Local 4948) have voted in favor of strike action as contract negotiations with the city continue. One of the major issues for the union is the increasing number of precarious positions in the library system.


Plymouth State University Faculty File Petition to Join Union, New Hampshire

Faculty at Plymouth State University have filed a petition to join the American Association of University Professors. Gary McCool, a librarian at the university, said:

> The entire university community benefits when faculty are empowered to help ensure the quality of education at PSU by having fairly negotiated, legally binding policies and conditions of employment.

An election is anticipated to be held in the coming months.


March 23, 2016
Information Picket at Windsor Public Library, Ontario

Workers at Windsor Public Library held an information picket earlier this week amidst ongoing contract negotiations. If an agreement is not reached with the library administration today, the library workers may be on strike tomorrow. The workers are members of CUPE Local 2067.

March 24, 2016
Owens Community College Faculty Association Takes Pay Cut, Ohio

Library workers, child care workers, counselors, and other faculty at Owens Community College in Ohio have agreed to a new collective agreement that includes salary cuts and the elimination of overload and summer pay. The college is under a fiscal watch after enrollment has declined significantly, and members of the faculty association have agreed to the reduction in compensation “in order to continue to provide this important education to students in our community”, according to the faculty association president.


Deal Reached at Windsor Public Library, Ontario

Library workers at Windsor Public Library, members of CUPE Local 2067, have reached a tentative agreement with the library administration, averting strike action. The union and administration met with a provincial mediator before reaching the agreement.


March 28, 2016
Strike in Lambeth, England

Library workers in Lambeth held a two-day strike last week in protest of planned branch closures. The workers were joined by UNISON members from nearby districts, as well as supporters from the community. The planned closures in Lambeth echo a troubling trend in the UK of library closures, conversion of library spaces to exercise facilities, and reliance on volunteers to run library services.


March 31, 2016
Ruling in Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association

The Supreme Court of the United States ruled in Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association earlier this week, resulting in a 4-4 deadlock that
upheld an appellate court decision that the collection of fair-share or agency fees from employees who choose not to join a union is constitutional.


Mass Lay-offs at Argentina’s National Library

Two hundred and fifty workers at Argentina’s National Library, a quarter of its current staff, have been laid off. It is expected that many of the library’s services, including publishing and digitization projects, will not be able to continue operating with the reductions in staffing.


Supervisors Removed from Saskatoon Library Union, Saskatchewan

Workers in supervisory positions at Saskatoon Public Library will no longer be a part of CUPE Local 2669, the union that represents the library’s workers. The library’s administration is taking advantage of the Saskatchewan Employment Act, which allows supervisors to be excluded from joining bargaining units. The CEO of Saskatoon Public Library has stated that the workers in these supervisory positions will be able to form their own bargaining unit, separate from that representing the other library workers.


How Much Are Toronto’s Librarians Worth? Ontario

Union president Maureen O’Reilly says the time has come for the city to treat its library workers properly.


April 2, 2016

Chicago Teachers Union Holds One-Day Strike, Illinois
Teachers, librarians, and educational support staff at Chicago Public Schools held a one-day strike yesterday, closing schools as they held a massive demonstration amid ongoing funding and contract negotiations. School administration have filed a complaint against the Chicago Teachers Union, arguing that the strike was illegal.

For more articles, photographs, and commentary on yesterday’s events, check out #CTUStrike on Twitter.


April 7, 2016
Association of Teachers and Lecturers Calls for School Library Inspections, England

The Association of Teachers and Lecturers, the union representing education professionals in the United Kingdom, passed a motion calling for inspection of school libraries by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills, citing reductions in library collections and decreasing library staff. The individual who proposed the motion stated:

How can you have a school without a library? Libraries are a mirror of the societies in which we live and grow. Should that be forgotten, ignored or disregarded, then it will reflect badly on everything that is truly good about education in its widest sense.


Bristol Library Workers Vote in Favor of Strike, England

Library assistants in Bristol have voted in favor of strike action in response to the closure of one of the city’s libraries and the reduction of hours at the remaining six libraries. The changes in hours of operation has resulted in changes to the library assistants’ work schedules. The workers are members of UNISON.

http://www.bristol247.com/channel/news-comment/daily/politics/bristol-library-staff-to-strike-over-hours

April 13, 2016
Read-In At Toronto Reference Library, Ontario
Members of the Toronto Public Library Workers Union (CUPE Local 4948) held a read-in at the Toronto Reference Library earlier this week. Authors, library patrons and library supporters also participated in the event. The union is currently in negotiations with the library board. One of the most pressing issues facing workers in the Toronto library system is the high rate of precarious employees.


New Contract for Library Workers in Mahoning County, Pennsylvania

Librarians and library assistants at the Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County have a new four year contract that includes bonuses and wage increases. Other library employees, including clerical and maintenance staff, are represented by a separate bargaining unit and are still in negotiations with the library administration.


April 16, 2016
Toronto Library Workers Request No Board Report, Ontario

Toronto Public Library Workers Union (CUPE Local 4948) has requested a no board report with the Ontario Labour Ministry after failing to come to an agreement on a new contract with the library board. The library workers may soon be in a strike position.


April 27, 2016
New Contract for Castlegar Library Workers, British Columbia

Library workers at Castlegar & District Public Library have a new four-year contract retroactive to January 2015 that includes wage increases and improved benefits. The library workers are represented by CUPE 2262.


Pay Equity Payout for Peterborough Public Library Workers, Ontario
Women workers at Peterborough Public Library are set to receive a payout totaling $845,400 in a pay equity settlement after the completion of a review comparing their wages to those of men in male-dominated jobs with the city. The library workers are represented by CUPE Local 1833.


“A Portrait of Failure” — Union Report on Australia’s Cultural Institutions, Australia

Australia’s Community and Public Sector Union has released a report detailing the effects of budget cuts on libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions. The full report, titled “A Portrait of Failure: Ongoing Funding Cuts to Australia’s Cultural Institutions”, can be viewed on the union’s website. The budget cuts have negatively impacted digitization projects, staffing levels, opening hours, and exhibitions. In the accompanying press release, the deputy secretary of the union said:

The people who work in these institutions are dedicated to carefully searching out, preserving, nurturing and displaying the very best of us. Whether it is our fine art or our comic relief, our iconic films or our oral history, our war memories or our family ancestry, we all need our cultural institutions to continue preserving our past and protecting our cultural heritage.


http://www.cpsu.org.au/content/efficiency-dividend-gutting-national-cultural-institutions

April 28, 2016
Raises for Taunton Public Library Workers, Massachusetts

Workers at Taunton Public Library will receive wage increases after a review found their wages were much lower than those of workers at comparable libraries nearby, with the differences ranging from 22% to 26%. Beginning with their new contract that takes effect July 1, library workers will receive incremental pay increases that will, over time, bring their salaries more in line with those of library workers in nearby communities.

http://www.tauntongazette.com/article/20160427/NEWS/160426267
April 30, 2016  
Bristol Library Workers Strike, England

Library workers in Bristol, England went on strike earlier this week in protest of changes to their work schedules. Due to changes to the libraries’ opening hours, workers will be scheduled to work an increased number of shorter shifts. Bristol City Council chose to shorten the libraries’ opening hours instead of closing library branches in order to save money. The workers are represented by UNISON.


May 2, 2016  
Tentative Deal for Toronto Public Library Workers, Ontario

Toronto Public Library Workers Union (CUPE Local 4948) has reached a tentative agreement with the library administration on a new four-year contract. The union engaged in a number of activities over the past few weeks to raise awareness and community support, including a public opinion poll and a Teddy Bears Picket. One of the biggest issues for the union was the precarious nature of work in the library system. Details of the contract are not currently available.

May 8, 2016
Accusation of Union Busting in Newfoundland, Canada

The Canadian Union of Public Employees has accused the government of Newfoundland and Labrador of union busting in response to recently announced changes to library services. Fifty-four of the provinces’ public library branches are slated to close over the next two years, resulting in sixty employees losing their jobs. The education minister recently announced that volunteers and student workers may be asked to staff school libraries during the evenings in order to provide some services to the communities left without a public library branch. Dawn Lahey, head of CUPE Local 2329, said: “What a slap in the face to someone. Not only union busting, but it’s a slap in the face to someone who’s given their life to that library.”

May 11, 2016
Information Picket at Washington-Centerville Public Library, Ohio

Library workers at Washington-Centerville Public Library organized an information picket earlier this week in order to inform the public about their concerns with the library administration’s “stall tactics”. Six years
ago, the workers voted to form the Washington Centerville Public Library Staff Association but have yet to negotiate a contract.

http://www.whio.com/news/library-employees-plan-picket-tonight/6DmWvJEJbraUYVMEMTnKmO/

2015 Union Review Available Online

The latest annual union review, “‘A Seat at the Table’: 2015 Union Review”, based on posts on this blog, was recently published in issue 44 of Progressive Librarian.


May 25, 2016
CUPE Local 4705 Requests Provincial Conciliation, Ontario

CUPE Local 4705, the union representing library and other city workers in Sudbury, ON, has requested a provincial conciliator after negotiations with the city proved unsuccessful. The workers have been without a contract since March 31.


Show of Solidarity for Universal College of Learning Library Workers, New Zealand

On Monday, library staff at the Universal College of Learning in New Zealand were joined by workers from nearby libraries and schools in a show of solidarity in response to planned job cuts as a result of restructuring at the college. The workers are represented by the Tertiary Education Union.


Strike in Lewisham, England

Library workers in the London borough of Lewisham went on strike on Saturday in response to plans to close four of the borough’s library branches. The workers, members of UNISON, were joined by library workers from Lambeth as well as community library supporters.
May 26, 2016
United Teachers of Wichita Vote to Shorten School Year, Kansas

United Teachers of Wichita has voted in favor of shortening the overall school year and lengthening each school day in response to state budget cuts. The alternative option that the union is trying to avoid is the elimination of some librarian, data leader, and custodial positions. The changes to the school year are pending approval from the district school board.

http://kmuw.org/post/wichita-teachers-vote-lengthen-school-days-shorten-year

June 11, 2016
Concerns over Lay-Offs at University of Manitoba Libraries, Canada

The union representing library workers at the University of Manitoba has expressed concern after a quarter of the library’s staff have been let go since the beginning of the year. According to the union president, this reduction in staff will make it difficult for the library to continue to serve their community during the upcoming academic year. The university president has argued that the increasingly electronic nature of library services has lessened the need for librarians. The library workers are represented by the Association of Employees Supporting Education Services.


Labor Programming at ALA Annual, U.S.

At the upcoming ALA Annual Conference in Orlando, the AFL-CIO/ALA Labor Committee will be hosting a session entitled “Building Stronger Libraries Through Collective Action” on Monday, June 27th at 10:30 AM in OCCC Room W101B. From the conference program:

A century after the first library workers union was founded, library workers continue to work within labor unions to improve wages and working conditions. Unions also advocate on behalf of library employers, coordinating campaigns with library administrations to protect and increase funding and awareness.
Speakers will highlight examples of labor-management collaborations for library advocacy, service enhancements, and share strategies and outline legal protections for those looking to form a union and organize through social media.

Additionally, all are invited to attend the AFL-CIO/ALA Labor Committee annual meeting on Saturday, June 25th at 10:30am, OCCC Room W234, and to stop by Booth #2209 in the exhibition hall.


VIDEO: CUPE Launches TV Ad Campaign in Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada

The Canadian Union of Public Employees, the union that represents library workers in Newfoundland and Labrador, will be launching a TV campaign next week to protest the recently announced decision to close 54 of the province’s libraries.

While the province maintains that the closures and resulting lay-offs are necessary due to budget cuts, one of the CUPE ads contrasts the anticipated $1 million in savings with the $1.4 million in severance the province will be paying a former CEO of Nalcor, a provincial energy corporation.

Contact information for the province’s education minister as well as a template email protesting the closures are available via the Newfoundland and Labrador Library Association website.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Sk-rcTHDbU

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdeY2qwt9G4


CUPE 561 Voices Concern Over New Management Structure, British Columbia

Members of CUPE Local 561 have voiced concerns over planned changes to the management structure of Coquitlam Public Library. The library director has argued that the addition of six new managerial positions is necessary in order to engage in more outreach and more technology-oriented services.
The union is concerned with the amount of money that will be spent on these positions instead of being spent on books and other library resources.

June 15, 2016
Barnet Library Workers Strike in Protest of Plans for Unstaffed Libraries, England

Barnet Council library workers are on strike once again in continued protest of planned changes to library services and staff hours. The council is facing serious budget cuts, and in response has plans to keep libraries open to the public without library staff present. They hope to accomplish this by staffing the libraries with volunteers and installing self-service equipment as well as security cameras. Children under the age of 15 years will be unable to make use of these unstaffed locations unless accompanied by an adult. Barnet Council hopes these measures will save £2.85 million.

Six of Barnet’s library branches were closed this week as a result of the strike. Barnet library workers are represented by UNISON.

http://www.nlhnews.co.uk/article.cfm?id=111066&headline=Six%20libraries%20closed%20as%20staff%20go%20on%20strike&sectionIs=news&searchyear=2016

http://www.times-series.co.uk/news/14556223.Unison_members_strike_over__drastic__changes_to_library_services/

Unity Break Held at Berkeley Public Library, California

Members of SEIU 1021 participated in a “unity break” to protest issues with the management of Berkeley Public Library. Workers and administration have disagreed on the process of weeding the library’s collection for some time. The former director of the library resigned after it became public that an exponentially larger number of items had been removed from the library’s collection than had been announced. It has been alleged that a current library worker is being terminated in retaliation for disclosing the accurate number of items removed from the collection. A union spokesperson said:

One of the core tenets of librarianship is intellectual freedom. That the people who brought that to light are being punished instead of rewarded is shameful.
Unfair Labor Charge Filed Against Washington-Centerville Public Library, Ohio

The union representing workers at Washington-Centerville Public Library has filed an unfair labor charge with the State Employment Relations Board in response to what union members have characterized as “punishment” for employees taking sick and family leave.

Library administration is set to begin bargaining sessions with the Washington-Centerville Public Library Staff Association this week. The union formed six years ago but has yet to negotiate their first contract.

Pay Equity for New Brunswick School Library Workers, Canada

School library workers, educational assistants, administrative assistants, and intervention workers in the New Brunswick education system will be receiving pay equity increases after an evaluation found that these female-dominated positions had lower salaries in comparison to other positions. The workers, represented by CUPE Local 2745, will receive back pay for the past four years and additional increases over the next six years.

Information Pickets at Newfoundland Libraries, Canada

Library workers in Newfoundland held information pickets across the province yesterday in order to make their communities aware of upcoming planned location closures. Fifty-four libraries in Newfoundland are set to close over the next two years, resulting in the loss of sixty jobs. The library workers are represented by CUPE Local 2329.
July 1, 2016

Essex County Library Workers on Strike, Ontario

Workers at Essex County Library in Ontario have been on strike since Saturday, June 25. At issue for the workers are proposed changes to policies related to short-term disability and sick leave. The library system has 14 library branches and 58 workers who are represented by CUPE Local 2974. According to the union unit chair: “Management and the county created a phantom issue to push workers out on the picket line – sick time is not a problem at our workplace and the employer and the county know this and have acknowledged it.”


https://cupe.ca/essex-county-library-workers-strike-fair-contract

New Contract for Sudbury Library Workers, Ontario

Library workers in Sudbury, Ontario are among the city’s inside and outside workers who have ratified a new three-year contract after bringing in a provincial conciliator. The workers are represented by CUPE Local 4705.


Plans to Close 54 Newfoundland Libraries Suspended, Canada

Dale Kirby, education minister of Newfoundland and Labrador, has announced that the planned closure of 54 library branches in that province has been suspended until an external review is completed. According to Kirby, public concern over the plans to close rural library branches and lay off library employees has prompted the suspension. CUPE Local 2329, the union representing Newfoundland’s public library workers, has held information pickets, ran TV ads, and encouraged members of the community to make their opposition to the planned closures heard.


July 2, 2016

Strike Over at National Museum of Wales
A “long-running dispute” at the National Museum of Wales over weekend payments appears to have been settled after the museum workers accepted the administration’s latest offer. In the past, museum workers were paid a premium for working on weekends, but the museum no longer wants to pay this premium. The accepted offer includes a 4% wage increase and a lump sum payout equal to five years’ worth of premium payments, and comes after workers have been striking periodically for the last two years. The workers are represented by Public and Commercial Services Union.


Strike Vote in Mississauga, Ontario

Library workers in Mississauga have voted in favor of strike action and may be on the picket lines on July 4. The workers, members of CUPE Local 1989, have cited low wages and the precarious nature of many library positions as issues needing to be addressed in the collective agreement currently under negotiation.

http://1989.cupe.ca/2016/07/01/mississauga-library-workers-vote-to-strike/

July 4, 2016
Mississauga Library Workers on Strike, Ontario

Library workers in Mississauga, ON are on strike, closing all 18 library branches. The workers are represented by CUPE Local 1989.


July 7, 2016
Plymouth Library Workers Protest Glass Ceiling, Massachusetts

Library workers at Plymouth Public Library have been handing out pamphlets and wearing buttons that read “End the Glass Ceiling: Library Staff are Town Employees Too”. The pamphlets additionally state the following: “As a predominantly female group, we believe we are being discriminated against on the basis of gender through the town’s refusal to provide wages and benefits that are provided by it to predominantly male and mixed gender employee groups.”
The union has pointed out that positions at the library that require a university education pay less than positions elsewhere with the city that require a high school diploma only. Contract negotiations between the union and city administration are ongoing.


Greenwich Library Workers Stage 48-Hour Strike, England

The planned cancellation of a mobile book service has prompted Greenwich library workers to strike for 48 hours this week. Over the last year, the mobile book service delivered 33,000 books to area children at schools and child-care centers. A Unite official said:

"Literacy is a fundamental human right and anything that erodes that life chance should be strongly opposed. Good reading skills are the key to decent employment in adulthood – so the blinkered actions of the council need to be condemned."

http://www.union-news.co.uk/battle-of-the-books-as-greenwich-library-workers-go-on-strike/

Library Workers in Ireland Vote on Industrial Action

Library workers in twelve counties in Ireland were asked to vote on industrial action after plans were announced to amalgamate library services. IMPACT, the union representing the library workers, has stated that the workers and other relevant officials were not properly consulted about the plans, which could leave some counties without a librarian and force workers to travel long distances to get to their new workplace. In total, 87% of the library workers voted in favor of industrial action. The affected counties include: Carlow, Cavan, Cork City, Cork County, Kilkenny, Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Monaghan, Offaly, Roscommon, Sligo and Westmeath.


**July 8, 2016**

CUPE Shows Support for Striking Library Workers in Ontario, Canada
Striking library workers in Ontario received support from the provincial and national levels of the Canadian Union of Public Employees this week. CUPE officials attended a rally in support of workers at the Essex County Library system, who are members of CUPE Local 2974, as well as a solidarity barbecue for workers at Mississauga Library System, members of CUPE Local 1989. The president of CUPE Local 1989 said: “Knowing we have such tremendous support from our community allies and from CUPE Ontario and CUPE National is nothing short of amazing for us.” Essex library workers have been on strike since June 25. Workers from Mississauga began striking on July 4.


July 22, 2016
Tentative Agreement Reached for Mississauga Library Workers, Ontario

A tentative agreement has been reached between CUPE Local 1989, the union representing library workers in Mississauga, and the city. Details of the agreement won’t be available until it is ratified. The workers have been on strike since July 4.


August 10, 2016
AFSCME offers new member benefit — free college degree, U.S.

The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, a union that represents many library workers and librarians (mostly at public libraries) has just announced a joint venture with Eastern Gateway Community College for AFSCME members to earn an Associate Degree online...for FREE!


August 17, 2016
Library workers in Essex County, Ontario, on strike
Canadian Union of Public Employees urges end to strike.


CUPE Local 2974 https://www.facebook.com/Cupe2974Library/

**August 27, 2016**

School librarians disappearing from Chicago, Illinois

In 2012, Chicago Public Schools had 454 librarian positions in the budget. That dropped to 313 in 2013 and 252 in 2014. Last year there were 217 library positions in the budget. This year, there are just 160 librarians budgeted.

https://www.wbez.org/shows/wbez-news/librarians-continue-disappearing-from-chicago-schools/499ab8a5-b4fc-41e8-a4d2-a9ab68772597

Essex County library workers strike at two months, Ontario

The strike by Essex County library workers is now in its second month and the main stumbling block remains sick time.

http://windsor.ctvnews.ca/new-source-of-frustration-for-striking-essex-county-library-workers-1.3042538#

Ohio public library — 7 year organizing struggle

CENTERVILLE, Ohio (WDTN) – A local public library is spending thousands of dollars every year, not on books, but on legal bills. For more than 7 years, a group of employees at the Washington-Centerville Public Library have been trying to get a union up and running, but the library management claims it wasn’t done properly. This fight is costing tax payers thousands of dollars every year.

“The longer they fight the notion we should organize to support each other and ourselves, the more obvious it becomes that we must,” said Library Union Employee, Joyce Fisher


Union’s website: http://wcplsa.ohea.us
Union opposes LSSI in San Benito County Library, concerned about privatization, California

Mark Weirick, SEIU 521 union organizer, warned against the county working with LSSI, which he claimed had a reputation of taking over and privatizing libraries at the expense of communities and library employees.

http://benitolink.com/privatization-county-library-not-option-official-says

September 2, 2016
Lock-out threat at Long Island University, New York

A contract dispute between the union representing LIU Brooklyn faculty and the university’s administration has led to a planned lockout and threats for picketing, just as the fall semester is set to begin.


Union’s website: http://www.liuff.net

LIU lockout continues, New York

When Kiyonda Hester started the final year of her master’s program in social work, on Wednesday at Long Island University’s Brooklyn campus, an instructor began a course by acknowledging he was unqualified to teach it.

The temporary instructor, who is an administrator, told the students that he had to be there so he wouldn’t be fired, Ms. Hester said. He took attendance and noted that the syllabus had been posted online.

http://www.chronicle.com/article/As-Lockout-Continues-at-Long/237731

September 9, 2016
LIU librarian writes about lockout, New York

Locked out! And not backing down by Emily Drabinski

Four days before classes began — those days we usually use to prep for the new semester — the faculty at Long Island University-Brooklyn was locked out by management. It was an aggressive act, equal parts enraging,
terrifying, and sad. For me, a librarian, faculty member and secretary of LIU Faculty Federation, it feels like a betrayal, really, worse than when we went on strike five years ago. Here is what it’s been like on the ground, condensed from my blog, which I’ve kept from the beginning.

https://medium.com/voices-on-campus/liu-lockout-24a8a3c2fc20#.wg0u78yql

September 14, 2016
LIU Lockout Ends, New York

LOCKOUT OVER by E. Drabinski

Dear LIUFF Colleagues,

We have won a victory. The administration will end their unprecedented lockout effective 11:59 p.m. Wednesday, September 14. We will be reunited with our students and can resume our professional lives. Our collective bargaining agreement is extended until May 31, 2017, and the administration agreed to our condition that we engage a professional mediator to facilitate a fair contract. This timeframe gives us the opportunity to negotiate in good faith while preserving LIU Brooklyn.

The LIU administration will make the faculty whole for health care costs incurred during the lockout period. The union’s unfair labor practice complaints relating to the lockout and our arbitration on pay parity remain active and will be vigorously pursued.

Read more at: http://www.liuff.net/blog/2016/09/14/lockout-over/

Tentative contract agreement on Sunday openings - Rockford (IL) Public library, Illinois

ROCKFORD — The Rockford Public Library Board of Trustees approved a new three-year labor contract with employees tonight that opens the door to Sunday hours. All six branches of the city’s library system are closed on Sundays. Library leaders have long blamed that on contract language that requires them to pay time and a half to employees on Sundays. The higher wages imposed a potential financial burden that kept libraries closed on Sundays despite requests from the public.

Emily Drabinski, secretary of Long Island University Faculty Federation wants to go back to work at the library.

On strike since June 25 - Essex County Library - CUPE, Ontario

The library strike in Essex County continues after contract negotiations once again fell apart.

Officials from the Essex County Library Board issued a statement Wednesday night, saying they spent another two days talking with CUPE Local 2974, but those discussions failed...


September 17, 2016
Behind the Lockout, New York

BEHIND THE LOCKOUT
The Long Island University lockout is over. A rank-and-file librarian explains how faculty won and why it matters for public education around the country.

by Edna Bonhomme & Emily Drabinski


**December 1, 2016**
Janet Irwin of AFSCME Local 88 turns the page on 46-year library career, Oregon

Janet Irwin of AFSCME Local 88 turns the page on 46-year library career.

“I worked very hard getting library workers involved in Local 88,” said Irwin, who served as an elected vice president and secretary of Local 88, as well as a delegate to state and international AFSCME conventions.”

Janet Irwin retired Oct. 31 after 46 years as a librarian for Multnomah County. At the same time, she also surrendered her seat on the Executive Board of the Northwest Oregon Labor Council, where she was the second most senior member.

Irwin has been a member of Multnomah County Employees AFSCME Local 88 for 26 years. Prior to that she was president and 20-year member of the independent Library Employees of Multnomah County. At that time, Portland-area libraries were privately operated by the Library Association of Portland, which received the bulk of its budget from public funds.

Read more about this intrepid union librarian at Northwest Labor Press:


**December 27, 2016**
LOCAL 1321 QUEENS LIBRARY GUILD — A Great Union, New York

A great union.

Executive Board 2016-2019

- President: John Hyslop
• Executive Vice President: Margaret Gibson
• Secretary: Ann-Marie Josephs
• Treasurer: Chinyu Lin
• Vice President Blue Collar: Thomas Wynn
• Blue Collar Representative: Michael Nooney
• Vice President Clerical: Roma Ramdhan
• Clerical Representative: Barbara Halloway
• Vice President Librarians: Kerline Piedra
• Librarian Representative: Elizabeth “Pat” Eshun
• Vice President Professional & Technical (Non-Librarian): Kyle Douglas
• DC 37 Delegates: Edith Batchler, Dorrett Hextall, Kacper Jarecki, Mike Wong
• Trustees: Linda Bannerman-Martin, Sharon Diamond-Velox, Patrica Siska

http://www.local1321.org/index.cfm?action=article&articleID=D1F43AFD-376F-4B2F-B919-ABBE3257D93B

**December 28, 2016**

40th Anniversary, Washington D.C.

Library of Congress Professional Guild, AFSCME Local 2910, celebrates 40th anniversary in 2016

http://www.guild2910.org

National Labor Relations Board ruling, U.S.

The text of the National Labor Relations Board ruling that determines student workers at private universities have right to organize.


Union activism at Yale Libraries — In the family blood — One part of the story 12/01/2016, Connecticut

From *New Haven Indy* article:

Ruth Resnick’s family has lived that story for three generations. Back in 1970, when she worked at Sterling Memorial Library, Resnick joined an
ultimately unsuccessful effort to unionize clerical and technical workers through a group called the Yale Non-Faculty Action Committee, one of several organizing efforts that set the stage for the ultimately successful campaign by the union now known as UNITE HERE (then known as the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees). Resnick watched her late father Sid, who worked in Yale’s law school library, play an active role in the successful Local 34 organizing drive a decade later. Her mom Arlene walked a Local 34 picket line when she worked at the medical school. Wednesday night Resnick attended the City Hall rally with her son Gabe Johnson, who today is one of five Local 34 organizers at the School of Management. He’s keeping a family social justice tradition alive, Resnick said.


December 30, 2016

Christmas Day 2016 — Six months on strike in Ontario

Meet the defiant library workers waging one of the region’s longest strikes ever, by Anne Jarvis, *Windsor Star*

“...Wightman celebrated her 50th birthday on the picket line. Someone else celebrated a wedding anniversary; her husband joined her. At least one member lost her mother. Another lost an aunt.

The strike has been one of the toughest things many of these people have ever done.

Neumiller, who has two young children, pickets three times as many hours as she works — for less pay. One woman collapsed from heat stroke last summer. Now, ‘it’s pretty flippin’ cold out there,’ said Johnson. They all got glove warmers last week.”


Collective self-governance at University of Manitoba — a union issue, Canada

Beyond Bread and Butter, by Jen Hedler Phillis, *Jacobin Magazine*
When we think of strikes, we usually think of disputes over wages and benefits. Strikes make the case that it’s easier for bosses to pay workers more than to run a company without them. But unions often fight for more than money. Workers can walk off the job to demand new rights at work, fighting for control over their working conditions. The recent strike at University of Manitoba focused on these issues. At the end of negotiations, the provincial government intervened, demanding both parties sign a one-year contract with no wage increase. The University of Manitoba Faculty Association (UMFA), which represents 1,200 full-time faculty and librarians, filed an unfair labor practice complaint.


Back to bargaining for Cape Breton University, Canada

Back to bargaining for Cape Breton University Faculty, by George Mortimer

Cape Breton University and the faculty association representing about 150 members are working to avoid a potential strike by heading back to the bargaining table next week.

The faculty association has been in a legal strike or lockout position since Monday following the filing of a report by conciliator Peter Lloyd and the expiration of a 14-day cooling-off period.

The association represents a variety of staff including librarians, research chairs and professors, among others.


Cape Breton University Faculty Association website: http://www.cbufa.ca/news2/

California state workers strike averted, contract vote January 4-17

State employees in California, SEIU Local 1000, which counts library workers among its 95,000 members, voted to strike in November if a tentative contract agreement was not reached. One has been, and it will be voted on in the upcoming weeks. Main sticking points in negotiations were salary increases, a demand from Gov. Brown that workers pay larger
percentage in retirement benefits, civil service reform, and gender pay disparities.

http://www.seiu1000.org


December 31, 2016

Happy New Year from Union Library Worker! Recommended acquisition for all library union activists and all library collections to support and inspire the social/workplace/environmental justice activists in your community!


Articles published in 2016 about union library workers:


Annual compilation of library worker union activism from the blog Union Library Workers.


A personal narrative is presented which explores the author’s experience of working as a teacher librarian and collaborating with local unions and task forces as part of their advocacy for library services and professional duties at intermediate schools.


The article offers the author’s insights on the challenges faced by library managers in writing and revising job descriptions. Topics discussed include working in a union environment adds to the complexity in crafting job descriptions, acquiring a copy of the governing collective bargaining contract is important step for a person going into union negotiation, and
standardized language is the best practice used by managers to familiarize with the state of job descriptions.

Editors Note: Union Library Workers blog was established in 2002 by Kathleen de la Peña McCook. Past contributors include Braden Cannon, Joanna Kerr, and Sarah Barriage. In August 2016, Elaine Harger took over posting to the blog.
Gary Hall’s work aims to explore a “pirate philosophy” for critical humanists that approaches the digital humanities in such a way that they no longer will only consider how open data, digitization, and networked computing affect or define them. Instead, the chapters meander through the ways in which the (post)humanities provide a narrative concerning how information is shared and created that will have a profound impact on their own disciplines as well as the material and conceptual ways our society approaches scholarly communication. While the concept of pirate philosophy is woven throughout the book, the chapters can each stand alone as essays concerning how digital humanities, the book, the scholarly journal, authorship, and copyright affect the practice of academics. Each chapter is a chance for reflection — a chance to reevaluate
how embedded our “critical” ideas are in the modes of scholarly production, and how those modes and formats affect our understanding of our own labor and our ownership over the knowledge we produce.¹

What exactly is *pirate philosophy*? You may be unsurprised to learn it is not a school of thought, or an application of one to scholarly publication or the humanities, but rather a discussion of the way that academics should approach the materiality of their own work: how we produce it, how we share it, and how we take ownership over it through our conceptualizations of individuality and authority (note the etymologies of “author” and “authority”).² Hall bases his title on the etymology of the term pirate: to make an attempt, to try, to test, to endeavor. Rather than discussing the philosophy of pirate parties, Hall instead asks us to test and challenge our assumptions, and test the existing structures that law, custom, and the academic prestige economy compose against the new forms of culture that the digital landscape allows. Given that definition, it might be worth noting that focusing on the phenomenon of digital piracy and its politics will lead the reader astray. The brilliance of the title may be a bit distracting from the task at hand, but once definitions are covered (extensively in chapters one and five, which are the closest approximations to an introduction and conclusion), the concepts begin to fall in place.

There is no predicting where a pirate philosophy will lead. The people acting on the edges of new institutions (the file sharing and networked communications that break copyright law) can draw only from their own legitimacy to do so (p. 141). How people react to these institutions and their effects, such as the impossibility of enforcing copyright or the benefits of widespread materials, will change the landscape and modes of production. How academics react to new modes of production will in turn affect even the legitimacy of what is currently labeled piracy. To give an example of one change already in wide adoption: the creation of works to be freely shared without copyright via Creative Commons (or in other cases, self-piracy).

This book is a bit heavy on philosophy, which I suspect may strike some library-oriented readers as strange. Librarians aren’t used to seeing issues important to us, such as the future of scholarly communication, put into such an “abstract” framework. This format is required, as philosophical arguments often are, because the materiality of these arguments has not appeared yet. As of yet, there is no concept of a post-human university, or a real collaborative sharing of knowledge that de-centers the individual and focuses on the transmission, manipulation, and addition of knowledge.

There are several specific arguments and analyses laid out concerning forms of production that are currently in place, but might not have the transformative power we imagine. For example, though open software has been very powerful in shaping the way interoperable systems have been developed, it is also vulnerable to cooption by neoliberal forces, using free resources to then enclose
and extinguish open options. This exact approach was taken by Microsoft in its famous Embrace, Extend, Extinguish practice. The same is true of open science and open data: freely distributed material, created often at the public expense, which then serves business interests by cutting research costs. But these concerns are not necessarily the crux of the issue. They merely demonstrate that “openness”, however defined, can play into various interests.

This is not to discount Open Access, but merely to paint it as neutral towards the goal of changing the mode of scholarly production and communication. It presents an opening, as does the refusal of academics to publish in journals that do not meet sufficient standards of openness (p. 135). It allows academics to rethink publishing and the academy as a whole. Some academics have gone as far as to abandon a traditional career in the goal of spreading knowledge for free. One prominent voice in this is the YouTube channel PhilosophyTube, which was created by a former graduate student who wanted to give away his degree in a free and publicly available forum.

Much in the same way that we haven’t seen a manifestation of Hamelink’s “An alternative to news”, there is no current infrastructure in place to put some proposed alternative methods of scholarly production into wide use. However, we do see glimmers of the idea, such as the transmission of and addition to news that Twitter tags can supply, or the army of editors and contributors that Wikipedia gathers under its banner. Scholarly blogging has also provided a means for comments to take part in the development of academic writing. These new structures of communication and authorship have become surprisingly mainstream, despite their disruptive potential. It’s the very conservatism of academia that prevents new forms taking hold and radically changing the way in which we do our scholarship.

Chapter five goes into the more practical actions people have taken in the direction of withdrawing their academic labor in such a way that it affects the production of that labor. For instance, Peter Suber’s announcement in 2012 that he would not publish in journals belonging to the Association of American Publishers until they disavowed their support of the Research Works Act, which prohibits Open Access mandates on federally funded research. Hall followed Suber’s example (p. 134).

*Pirate Philosophy* is a work that reflects the critical tradition of the author and the “struggle” against our own complacency that pirate philosophy evokes and encourages. It also realizes how the critical tradition, particularly as used by the humanities, remains embedded in the norms of the academy, complete with the trappings of traditional, paperbound formats that maintain the prestige economy of academic publishing. It is not a guidebook, but more of a meandering exploration of the topics involved, and not always utilizing the same critical lens. Focusing on particular manifestations of scholarly communication, as I did when approaching this book, will lead to frustration. It is not intended to
give final pronouncements on Creative Commons, or copyleft, or any other system of academic scholarly production. Though this is not a manifesto or handbook for the politically engaged, Hall does bring into focus the necessity of academics really struggling with their position not just in the production of scholarly knowledge, but how to authentically live as human beings. It is a call to action without any explicit rallying cry, except to appeal to the best pirate philosophers within ourselves.

NOTES

1 I want to note upfront that because this book is focused around challenging academic assumptions, I will engage directly with you in asynchronous conversation. To pretend there is an authoritative writer whose opinions can be conveyed only in a dispassionate and detached manner is to take part in the same lack of introspection Hall discusses. To get us into the proper mindset for this exercise in self-criticism, I have decided to get this (relatively unimportant) vestige of authoritative tradition out of the way.


3 PhilosophyTube. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/user/thephilosophytube.

This publication by Library Juice Press http://libraryjuicepress.com/ is well timed to coincide with a resurged interest in Marx and how his ideas can be applied to librarianship. It is noted in the Introduction that ‘books on class and librarianship have been few and far between’ and that social class is the final taboo now that gender, race and other progressive topics have been engaged with by the profession. However, the North American focus of this publication does not reflect some important work that has been carried out in the UK – for a sample please see references to works by this reviewer at the end of this review.

The Academic Library as Crypto-Temple: a Marxian Analysis by Stephen E. Bales applies the French Marxist Louis Althusser’s concept of the ‘Ideological State Apparatus’ (ISA) and argues that the public library is a state maintained, superstructural institution designed not to coerce but to persuade the public of the historical bloc’s legitimacy by reinforcing the dominant culture. The historical mission of the public library is to maintain the political / economic status quo. The outcome is to exclude those who feel ‘out of place’ when using the library or who think they ‘don’t belong’ there. They are treated as ‘the other’ by library staff and included patrons. Some people are excluded...
because they refuse to follow the necessary rituals of the library; or they self-exclude themselves because of library anxiety. When functioning as an ISA the academic library acts as a stepladder for restocking capitalism’s middle class technicians, white collar workers, small and middle executives and petty bourgeois of all kinds. In a call to action Bales suggests that librarians should recognise that they work in institutions that incorporate residual yet powerful ideological structures which support the exploitative tendencies of modern capitalism. He compares the symbolisms of temples and libraries and suggests that researchers should focus on how these symbolisms mold library patrons’ actions related to library use or non-use.

**Social Reproduction in the Early American Public Library: Exploring the Connections between Capital and Gender** by Alexandra Carruthers contends that the early public library was established in the service of reproducing the values of the capitalist ruling class and this required the concurrent feminization of librarianship. Carnegie was a union busting capitalist who invested in public libraries as an antidote to the organised strength of the working class. His conceptualisation of libraries as spaces for isolated study reflected the individualism central to his personal philosophy of Social Darwinism. The function of the public library was to socially reproduce the workforce at the institutional level and also to reproduce social values and norms. Public libraries exert a cultural influence that supports the interests of the ruling class. The hegemonic power of the dominant class can be maintained consensually rather than coercively when it gains control over a range of values and norms, to the extent that these are so embedded in society that they receive unquestioned acceptance. Carnegie’s speech ‘The Common Interest of Labor and Capital: An Address to Working Men’ at the opening of the public library in Braddock, Pennsylvania, in 1889, makes clear that libraries assist in the social reproduction of the ambitious worker who is of the most value to their employers. This individual ambition undermined the strength of the union, which depended on the solidarity of workers. Inequality must exist of necessity; the library was not a tool meant to offer social mobility to everyone, but only to the individuals able to distinguish themselves from the rest. Carnegie’s public libraries were to facilitate the occasional personal improvement in a system that remained structurally the same. Public libraries reproduced middle class values and supported capital’s requirements with respect to the social relations of production. Public libraries represented a rejection of unionism and a whole-hearted acceptance of capital’s values. The public library helped to resolve problems of social unrest by supporting workers who desire to compete against their fellow workers for the limited prize of social mobility. Melvil Dewey’s speech ‘Librarianship as a Profession for College-Bred Women’ to the Association of College Alumnae in 1886 is
ideologically consistent with Carnegie’s. He suggested that women were ideally suited to library work because their ‘natural’ skills and abilities could be used to soften and temper disharmony. He compared librarianship to motherhood, with the aim of educating and raising good docile workers who understood their place in society. Individual self-improvement is posited as the reasonable alternative to addressing and altering structural inequalities, and public libraries become the solution to the problem of professional women’s social mobility. The ideologues of capital encouraged both workers and women to accept their social and economic position and struggle on an individual level to become the exception to the rule of ‘inequality of environment’. Recognising that capitalist ideology has deeply influenced public librarianship from its beginning helps us to understand the continuing connection between private interests and public librarianship. Now as in the past public libraries’ value is derived from their ability to prepare a workforce for existing economic conditions. Public libraries’ goal of improving quality of life for their users through access to information and services remains noble and worthwhile, but this is a timely reminder to reflect on the historical roots of the goal of social mobility and the structural possibility of achieving it in a meaningful way.

From Steam Engines to Search Engines: Class Struggle in an Information Economy by Amanda Bird and Braden Cannon suggests that the information economy has replaced the steam engine as the driver of capitalist enterprise. Information is a commodity and the people involved in its creation, organisation, transmission and preservation – including librarians – are commodities themselves. The labor of information workers is a product that contributes to capitalist economies. Librarians are anomalies in an information economy because their work runs counter to the dominant ideologies of property, control and profit. Public libraries are agents of social control. The authors locate the class struggle within the hierarchies and organizational culture of public libraries. Library Assistants see Librarians as authority figures and not necessarily as allies; and Librarians align themselves more with Management than their fellow workers. To create a united workforce means levelling hierarchies and breaking down barriers between Library Assistants, Librarians and Management. One way of doing this is to focus more on individual strengths, talents and abilities rather than professional qualifications. Deprofessionalization is not the problem but the solution to creating a strong, unified workforce. Management are fellow workers because they also have to sell their labor. They may have more control over what they do but they can share this control with their fellow workers, and create more autonomy by developing flatter less hierarchical structures. This in turn will create a more equitable and egalitarian organisational culture. While information work does not exist at the point of production it still directly impacts the efficient management and profit
generating capacities of the economy. Library workers are key agents in the information supply chain which they can either enable or disrupt. Librarians do not use this power because professionalism is a divisive ideology which creates tension and conflict between Librarians and their fellow workers. Librarians serve their own profession and its elevated standing instead of the communities in which they work. They do not share the same values. Deprofessionalization can create greater class consciousness within the library workforce. Trade unions also have a role to play in this process by bringing workers together to raise awareness of their shared class interests. These shared interests could extend to Management who are first and foremost fellow workers who have to sell their labor. The artificial division between workers and Management is as arbitrary and damaging as that between professionals and non-professionals. Bird and Cannon suggest that raising class consciousness is the way forward and that library workers should form alliances with their local communities, join organisations such as the Progressive Librarians Guild, reach beyond the narrow library sector, and build solidarity by linking with wider struggles. But before we can build solidarity with others, we must create it among ourselves, by breaking down the false divisions between non-professionals, professionals and Management. Only then can we affect meaningful and substantial change, as workers and with workers.

Working with Information: Some Initial Enquiries by Steve Wright proposes that the function of information is the ongoing reproduction of what Marx once called ‘the present state of things.’ Information has come to play an increasingly central role within contemporary capitalist social relations. The purpose of information is to secure the expanded reproduction of capital. Wright constructs a compelling argument that information and information technology are vital to capital. He also offers some critical perspectives on information at work over the past fifty years, and gives some interesting case studies, such as the Olivetti factory in Italy. He examines the hierarchical division of labor and how this profoundly atomizes the working class in a political sense, fragmented into a myriad of individual entities, frequently indifferent to any common interests they might share. He explores the parasitic nature of capitalist social relations through the emergence of a white-collar proletariat and a cybertariat, a term used to designate the kinds of work which involves telematics. But regardless of these new categorisations, capital by its nature continues to rely upon labour time as both its measure and ‘the life giving elixir that animates it’ (Marx). Wright’s call is to learn from the lived past and from the imagined future. For example, Cory Doctorow’s novel For the win (2010) features the Webblies attempting to apply lessons from the history of the Industrial Workers of the World to a not-long-distant Asia. Another futurist, Randall Collins, asserts that job losses due to the application of ICT in the workplace are likely
Wright believes that there is still much to learn from Marx’s value analysis, which locates the potential for a new way of living precisely within the social antagonisms that emerge in response to capital’s attempts to commodify human capacities. Information workers can contribute to the construction of coalitions of ‘solidarity and places of encounter’.

**Crisis talk** by Toni Samek presents key talking points from the author’s closing keynote speech at the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) Librarians Conference in October 2012. This is contextualised in a critical commentary about the broader conference activity and there is a select chronology of important events that have occurred since (up to March 2013). The conference theme ‘Contested Terrain: Shaping the Future of Academic Librarianship’ was marketed in terms of the threats posed by Wal-Mart style corporate management that cuts costs by deskilling work, outsourcing professional responsibilities, misusing technology and reducing necessary services and positions. Samek considers how Librarians can push back against this destructive agenda and uses some recent job postings to identify the problem and some potential solutions. Samek concludes by posing a number of questions. Can we move bottom-up from canary in the coalmine to become a leading player alongside our allies in a broader digital labour movement? Is there enough political will among our ranks? Who might recruit and who might be recruited into these re-framed management positions? And why?

**Poverty and the Public Library: how Canadian Public Libraries are Serving the Economically Challenged** by Peggy McEachreon and Sarah Barriage positions Canada as a world leader in developing Community-Led libraries. The Community-Led library movement in Canada emerged from the Working Together Project (2004-08) which piloted many of the ideas recommended by *Open to All? The Public Library and Social Exclusion* (Pateman, 2000). This movement is stand-alone and home-grown and has not required external support, such as that provided to public libraries in the United States by the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation. The Community-Led library movement in Canada is organic and driven by local community needs, rather than a one-model-fits-all approach. As a result, Canada has some of the world’s most socially inclusive public libraries, but it still has a long way to go before it can reach the levels of library usage which are achieved in Cuba and Scandinavia. McEachreon and Barriage suggest that what is now required are intentional strategies and systematic action by public libraries to develop policies, programs, and spaces for the poor that can have a broad transformative effect on poverty and the socially excluded. They identify the barriers to information access and point out that public libraries cater to the
middle and upper classes, directly or indirectly ignoring the unique needs of lower-income citizens. Public libraries frequently have restrictive policies, late fees or replacement costs, and can often be intimidating and unwelcoming to people not acculturated into ‘acceptable’ library behaviours. The organizational systems (E.g. Dewey Decimal) used by public libraries are another barrier for people already struggling to interact with a bureaucratic institution. ‘Library anxiety’ refers to the discomfort people often feel when interacting with the public library. The people who work in libraries may seem unapproachable because they think and act differently than patrons with low incomes, or because of the unwelcoming attitudes staff may exhibit, consciously or unconsciously. Library programs and services are targeted at the middle class, while poor people are viewed as a problem. The review of library services for the poor in the United States references the work of Sanford Berman, John Gehner and Glen E. Holt. The literature review of library services for the poor in Canada cites the Working Together Project. A survey of Canadian libraries identifies good practice in Quebec, Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick and Manitoba. The authors conclude that libraries should stop claiming that they can serve everyone and start focusing on serving those with the greatest needs. They concur with my suggestion (Pateman, 2014) that it is only by focusing efforts on the most marginalised populations that libraries can actually achieve their claim and serve everyone adequately. I have argued that a fundamental shift in how public libraries in Canada operate will have a beneficial impact (Pateman & Williment, 2013).

Lost in the Gaps: the plight of the pro se patron by Carey Sias argues that libraries have an important role to play in helping self-represented litigants to do everything they can to achieve justice for themselves and their families. Public law libraries are in a position to help by providing neutral access to legal information, regardless of patron income or legal qualifications. Public libraries are the most accessible option but many do not maintain robust legal collections in print. And while librarians can provide information they cannot offer legal advice. There are three levels of service typically offered by law libraries. At the most basic level, libraries provide space, books, and computers with internet access. Intermediate Level law libraries may host clinics, lawyer-in-the-library programs, or Continuing Legal Education courses for attorneys or the public. Some librarians take on roles as information creators by developing plain language or interactive forms. Libraries with Advance Level services offer extensive legal assistance to all patrons through self-help centres. Public libraries could also consider operating at these levels and providing assistance and support through partnerships, triage and referral. This will require innovative library services for changing times and a re-setting of priorities, strategies, structures, systems and organisational culture.
This excellent set of articles is the perfect response to the current crisis of capitalism which has exposed both the challenge (exploitation) and the solution (class struggle). It has often been said that capitalism contains the seeds of its own destruction. One of these seeds was planted in the mid-nineteenth century when capitalists like Carnegie funded public libraries as an ally of the exploiting class. The opportunity now exists to transform public libraries into a weapon for the working class, an agency of social change, which gives voice to the voiceless and power to the powerless. By ditching professionalism, neutrality and cultural elitism, public libraries can focus on those with the greatest needs, become pro-poor, work to level the economic and social playing fields of life, and drive nails into the coffin of capitalism.

FOR FURTHER READING

