# Critical Library Pedagogy in Practice

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Elizabeth Brookbank and Jess Haigh assert their moral rights to be identified as editors of this work, as do all the individual chapter authors assert their moral rights to be identified as authors of this work.

# Table of Contents

## 11. Liberate Our Library: Exploring Critical Librarianship Through a Critical Race Theory Lens. Marilyn Clarke

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"The place in which I'll fit will not exist until I make it."

### James Baldwin

I must foreground this chapter by stating that I am a Black mixed-race woman. I have been schooled in white systems and must acknowledge that I also in some ways perpetuate the influence and power of white systems through my studies and my work because of the structures I have been born and raised in. In the library, I work in and use white systems and spaces. Libraries are white spaces organised by white classification systems, and their contents described by white subject headings. I operate in whiteness yet my body is Black. I survive in these confines. I struggle, agitate, and make 'good trouble, necessary trouble' (Lewis, 2018) in these spaces because I am compelled to do so. The emotional labour of writing this chapter in the context of the struggles by Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) students and BAME library workers to, in Audre Lorde's words, 'dismantle the master's house' (2018) must not be disregarded. The struggle is real. I read Baldwin's words, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, as a provocation to guide my liberation and decolonisation work—to drive me, to inspire me, and to keep me safe.

In this chapter, I present the work that Goldsmiths Library (Goldsmiths, University of London) has done over the past 18 months (at the time of writing), and is continuing to do, as part of its decolonisation work. Goldsmiths Library has led a number of initiatives under the liberation banner, 'Liberate our Library,' with the prime objective being the dismantling of structurally racist practices embedded in the Eurocentric university. This work is in answer to questions of discrimination and inequality within librarianship and within the context of the higher education (HE) sector in the UK and its participation—conscious or otherwise—in maintaining institutional racism.

We cannot deny that libraries are as complicit in the perpetuation of silencing marginalised voices as the institutions in which they sit. For example, by simply supplying what is on reading lists without any attempt to engage instructors in conversation about these issues, or towards

balancing out the criticality of the collections, libraries are complicit in silencing the communities that face significant disadvantage. In what follows, I critically examine library practices which perpetuate inequalities and marginalise certain communities, using critical race theory as a lens through which to expose and explore the impact on people through practice.

Locating this chapter in the anti-racist student movements from South Africa to the UK, I plot how the voices of students have influenced and galvanised the decolonisation campaign and work at Goldsmiths, through the practice of critical librarianship and acts of resistance.

By calling out social injustice and taking an honest look at what we do as library workers, I demonstrate how libraries can work towards decolonising collections and reading lists, while equipping students with key skills in using library resources to aid their own research with criticality in mind.

As a collective, library workers are good at sharing best practices. My hope is that by reading about what Goldsmiths is doing, other libraries will seek to do similar work to expose injustice and explore the use of reparative measures in honour and respect of the communities they serve.

### *Surfacing structural racism in the Eurocentric university*

It is against the backdrop of recent worldwide student liberation campaigns calling for decolonisation across all areas of the academe, and the role of the library as a partner agent of social change, that I base this chapter. I will use critical race theory, with its main aim of dismantling social injustice as shown by Rollock (2011) and Dixson (Ed. 2017), to examine how university libraries, knowingly or otherwise, are complicit in perpetuating normative whiteness and racial inequality in the practice of knowledge production, acquisition, and dissemination (Cupples, Grosfuguel, 2019).

Critical race theory is a scholarly theory, which is internationally used to challenge racial inequality in education, using race as a social construct. The theory has its origins in legal scholarship and dates from the 1970s and 1980s, and it is now used in a multidisciplinary way. It is said to have been formally adopted in the field of Educational Studies by Gloria Ladson Billings and William I Tate IV in their 1995 article 'Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education' (Ladson-Billings, Tate IV, 1995, p. 48). The authors

foreground their seminal article on tackling inequality in the American school system by adopting critical race legal theory, thus:

"...we attempt to theorize race and use it as an analytic tool for understanding school inequity. We begin with a set of propositions about race and property and their intersections. We situate our discussion in an explication of critical race theory and attempt to move beyond the boundaries of the educational research literature to include arguments and new perspectives from law and the social sciences".

As repositories of knowledge libraries must understand the tarnished foundations upon which they are built and deconstruct practices that have long discriminated against those who society marginalises. I will take an intersectional approach (Hill Collins, Bilge, 2016) in recognition of a person's many identities, as structural inequality impacts gender, race, class, religious belief, and disability; for no one factor alone shapes the human experience.

I will explore how the production of knowledge is based on Eurocentric epistemologies that primarily represent the Western, White, male, Christian world, while disregarding marginalised and Indigenous voices. The very structures of our universities are posited on the history of colonialism (Cupples, Grosfuguel, 2019). Therefore, the organisation of knowledge (e.g. classification, subject headings) mirrors this approach. Libraries have integrated this approach and thereby continue to silence and discriminate against marginalised and minority voices.

I will draw on the 'Liberate our Library' work that my current institution—Goldsmiths Library—has begun in order to address inequalities and discrimination within the library and beyond in the academe. This work draws on student campaigns around teaching and outcomes, as well as the questioning of our own practices as library workers. I will outline how this work aligns itself with the current *Goldsmiths Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy*'s aim to 'liberate our degrees' (Goldsmiths, University of London, 2019).

Kenyan writer and academic, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1998) asks, "Are they ready to decolonise their minds?" In this spirit, I will discuss how these systems must be questioned and challenged if we are to be true to the values of our profession. For example, the way books are arranged on the shelves using a number of outmoded classification systems and subject headings whose roots stem from the historical racialisation of non-white peoples. We are currently conspiring with systems and practices which are

non-inclusive and deeply offensive to certain communities of library users. Acknowledging this is of course not new. Many library workers have been speaking and writing about these injustices, but how many libraries are making positive changes and educating their users about these injustices? How many are critically questioning the impact of their praxis?

## Pervasive coloniality and Eurocentrism in the western academe

In the past few years, students have been busy calling out injustices across university campuses around the world. Many of these injustices are rooted in racist practices conducted in structurally racist institutions because of the lasting legacy of colonialism and slavery—practices which, of course, partially or sometimes wholly funded many educational institutions. What are the roots of structural racism in the academe? Why are students asking questions such as: Why is my curriculum White? Why isn't my professor Black? And, why must Rhodes Fall? (Bhambra, Gebrial, Nişancıoğlu, 2018) Where do libraries position themselves?

Before the UK's National Union of Students (NUS) started running its #LiberateMyDegree and 'Why is My Curriculum White?' campaigns in 2015, the 'Rhodes Must Fall' campaign began at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, with students calling for the removal of a statue of British colonialist, Cecil Rhodes on their campus—a legacy of the British Empire (Arday, J., Mirza, 2018). The movement, known internationally as #RhodesMustFall, successfully forced the university to dismantle the statue.

The very structures of university buildings, including libraries, can themselves be foundationally rooted in colonial history and slavery. Goldsmiths has a near 50% BAME student cohort; ignoring the impact of colonialism and how it has facilitated institutional racism is not an option, and is why the library would never play the 'libraries are neutral' card. These movements have inspired the decolonisation work. They have also re-opened old wounds for those library workers who identify as BAME.

It is important to cite the start of these student movements towards the work to decolonise the university from its very foundation stones, to what is taught in the classroom and by whom. In a Times Higher Education opinion piece (22 July 2019), Saloshna Vandeyar, a professor in the Department of Humanities Education at the University of Pretoria, quoted a student of the #RhodesMustFall campaign:

"Getting a degree here is a form of mental slavery and colonisation. We can no longer breathe! We want to breathe! We must exorcise the colonial ghost from the curriculum. We want relevant knowledge, we want to study African history; we want to reclaim our black history".

This cry for justice was similarly echoed by students in UK universities where, for example at Oxford University, the Rhodes Must Fall In Oxford (RMFO) campaign called for the decolonisation of the institution, in three areas: the curriculum, the representation, and the iconography. Like #RhodesMustFall in South Africa, it called for the removal of a Cecil Rhodes statue outside Oriel College, as representative of traditional academia and its sole focus on the White, Eurocentric, West as the foundation of all knowledge.

As recently as 2019, there was a 4-month long student occupation at Goldsmiths, primarily led by Muslim BAME students under the name of GARA—Goldsmiths Anti-Racist Action—who successfully called the Senior Management Team to account over many issues. Some of the commitments that have been made by the management team include: appointing BAME ambassadors across all academic departments, rolling out mandatory anti-racism training across all staff (starting with the senior team), removing statues from Deptford Town Hall that had historical links to the slave trade, and openly educating both the staff and students as well as the local community about this important piece of history (Statement of commitments made by Goldsmiths Senior Management team to Goldsmiths Anti-Racist Action, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2019).

## Liberate our Library, or Moving towards the liberated library and engaging with critical librarianship at Goldsmiths Library

In his case study of the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC), Jonathan Furner, Professor of Information Studies at UCLA, advocates for the use of critical race theory to tackle practices steeped in non-inclusivity and outright discrimination:

"The adoption of critical race theory as a stance in the field would mean examining the beliefs about the neutrality and objectivity of the entire field of LIS and moving toward undoing racist classification and knowledge-management practices. Such a stance would be a major contribution that could have an impact on the development of new approaches to organizing and accessing knowledge about marginalised groups."

### Liberate our Library: addressing social injustice

The critical pedagogy movement has given libraries a mechanism to engage in that very work. Libraries can challenge the dominance of, for example, the White, Western canon, by alerting users through user-focused liberation collection initiatives to the many indigenous scholars who are overlooked by traditional courses. Libraries can build expertise in sourcing such literature through skilled searching, by promoting 'alternative publishers', and by teaching students to cite authors from the Global South. These are just a few ways in which librarians can be agents of change towards social justice. We cannot continue knowingly to operate blind to the realities of an education system that still leads to "…achievement inequity, not as a 'gap' signifying deficit or individual failings, but as a 'debt' rooted in centuries old processes of exclusion and oppression that are re-shaped and reinforced in the present" (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

### Liberate our Library Working Group: getting organised

Goldsmiths Library has a dedicated working group leading on decolonisation initiatives called the 'Liberate our Library Working Group'. The group—initially a Task & Finish Group—was made up of staff who came together through their interest in social justice work, but it soon became clear that this was not 'task and finish' work. A Task & Finish Group looks at one item for completion and once the work is done, the group disbands. Decolonisation work, however, will be ongoing for many years to come. It will take considerable time to, as Sara Ahmed (2012) says, "… chip away at the old block". With a colonial legacy so deeply entrenched within the educational structure, which includes how we produce, discover and share knowledge, we are talking about uprooting centuries-old thinking and its impact. This is by no means a task to be taken on lightly or in a piecemeal manner.

At the time of writing, the group consists of staff covering the following areas: Director of Library Services, Subject Team Leader, Head of Discovery Services, Digital Assets & Systems, Acquisitions, Special Collections & Archives, and Reader Services. It was also important to the group to have the input of the Student Union (SU). To that end, the Library is fortunate to have the involvement of three SU officers on the Working Group: Education Officer, Welfare and Liberation Officer, and Liberation Coordinator. It is important to the Library to have students at

the heart of what it does, and by including the SU member representatives we can tap into the needs and concerns of the student population. One must never be in a position where one takes such action without being inclusive, especially when it comes to decolonisation work. It is through listening to students that the Library can fully inform its library workers of what change is required.

### Building the 'liberate my degree' collection

When it came to diversifying the collection, the Library initially took inspiration from the Goldsmiths Student Union 2016 bookmark campaign. This consisted of students placing SU produced bookmarks in books they had read, making further reading recommendations to fellow students based on what they deemed the underrepresentation of marginalised voices. The idea was that these bookmarks would then find their way back to the library team triggering the acquisition of the suggested title. All in all, a great idea, but few of the suggestions actually found their way back to the library team. It is not known for sure why so few were received, or if the project was suitably promoted within the SU and the Library, but it was an idea to keep and develop. It inspired the 'Liberate our Library' work and we chose to mirror the language of the students' campaign.

Taking this idea forwards, the book suggestion form was changed to include a question as to whether the proposed title was a '*liberate my degree*' request. This also meant dedicating a portion of the book budget to the campaign, which was done accordingly. At the time of writing, £3,000 is assigned annually towards '*liberate my degree*' books and resources.

Such requests were guaranteed to be purchased. Over the period of late 2017–2019, 200 resources, mainly books and a handful of DVDs, have been purchased. Suggestions came in either via the suggestion form or were recommended directly to subject librarians or other staff members. A record is kept of all the purchases, recording the requesting student's department and reason for making the request, if desired. This record is used as a tool to promote the work to academic departments, and they are often extremely interested in what titles students have requested.

We used several approaches to promote the '*liberate my degree*' collection . Initially, they were promoted on the Library Twitter account, alerting followers to the purchase as well as the campaign opportunity. But this prompted us to ask, how would users searching LibrarySearch (Primo) find them? How could they be captured as a searchable collection? It was

decided to tag the books using the MARC 500 field with 'liberatemydegree', making all titles discoverable as a liberation collection. Users can now search using 'liberatemydegree' to find all materials bought as part of this campaign. This search term is promoted at student induction sessions and in all promotions for the overall project, and the search has thus far been performed 316 times. The aim is to do more promotion in the future to raise awareness amongst both students and academics.

A member of the Cataloguing staff, Lizzie Cannon, suggested that a *Liberate our degrees* bookplate would further highlight the books in a physical way. She is an artist and designed an image consisting of a group of raised fists in neutral colours, defiantly held high against a bold yellow backdrop. At the bottom of the bookplate, the following text was used: "This book was purchased on request as part of 'Liberate our degrees'". Again, the focus was on a strong visual representation of the social justice work as a protest. This bookplate means that even users with no knowledge of the campaign simply browsing shelves and opening books, might discover the liberation collection. The bookplate is also a prompt to seek further information.

In the academic year 2019–2020, the Library produced *Liberate our Library* card wallets with the same raised fists image and the link to the liberation webpage. Subject Librarians use their subject LibGuides to point users to the *'liberate my degree'* book suggestion page, while also highlighting recent purchases as part of the campaign. To date 224 books have been purchased from across 15 of Goldsmiths 19 academic departments.

I interviewed a Masters student studying at Goldsmiths for an MA in Cultural Studies for a video as part of a presentation I gave at a libraries conference. Of the project she said:

"…augmenting the library collection with books from a range of cultures is really, really great because oftentimes there isn't the money to order books at all beyond what's either on the reading list or whatever, and this is an opportunity to introduce books that heads of department are not aware of, and extend the cultural diversity of the library's collection."

When asked what it meant to have their recommendations in the library collection, the student answered:

"It's really, really empowering, as I said there's a lot of times one might have a really good idea, but there isn't the resource to support that idea."

*Diversifying reading lists using Talis Player*

Another method utilised to capture the student voice directly at Goldsmiths was to pilot using Talis Player to create diversified or alternative reading lists in collaboration with academics and students, in support of decolonising the curriculum.

Talis Player is software that is used with online texts and integrates with Moodle, Goldsmiths' virtual learning environment (VLE), to facilitate collaboration between students and academics in a flipped learning environment. It encourages students to make annotations to the text selections they are assigned, allowing for direct debate and questions about the resources.

The department of Sociology was interested in creating a collaborative tool as part of their decolonisation initiative, using a 'flipped classroom' methodology. This led to the Subject Librarian for the department liaising with the Library's Reading Lists Coordinator about the possibility of creating a reading list for such a module. This was when the Talis Player was demonstrated as a method for creating a decolonised reading list. The lecturer in question wanted to trial the method on a module called 'Decolonising the Modern World' and felt that Talis Player would work well for the project. After the librarian demonstrated the capabilities of the system to the lecturer, it was decided they would set up a demo list. Once the lecturer added some starter items, a base list was created. The lecturer then wrote instructions on how to use Talis Player with a heading statement that explained the purpose of the list in terms of the decolonisation agenda and how students could interact with the list:

"As part of the wider 'Liberate our degrees' initiative at Goldsmiths, we want to find ways for staff and students to work together to challenge and critique dominant norms in higher education—this includes the prevalence of university curricula dominated by white/ European/ middle-class/ cis-male/ heteronormative/ ableist perspectives. In what ways might we centre the work of marginalised voices in our teaching instead?" (Loveday, 2018).

The lecturer went on in the statement to explain that the collaborative list gives the student a direct way to have a say in what their cohort should be reading in line with the liberation agenda, and to challenge the dominant narratives "underscored by Eurocentric perspectives, concerns and assumptions" (Loveday, 2018). In Talis Player, the students were able to

simply highlight some text in the document that makes a comment box appear. From here, they could comment and/or make their own resource suggestions. The Library was then able to monitor the interactive list and order any suggestions that were not already a part of the collection.

Another example using the Talis Player functionality is the 'Decolonising research methods' list created by an Academic Skills Lecturer in English for Academic Purposes. This list consists of over seventy readings and is linked to a 10-class researching workshop of the same name. These workshops cover: The Enlightenment, History, Borders, Religion, Language, Education, Gender, Capitalism, Democracy, and Progress (Ewing, 2018):

These workshops are based on the premise that Western academic research is an activity that occurs in a set of historical, political and social conditions that are tied to colonial and imperial practices. Taught by an academic lecturer, each workshop involves:

- Generating and reflecting on ideas and experiences related to the theme of the workshop.

- Discussing attitudes, assumptions and motivations that underpin academic study and research practices.

- Engaging with academic writing produced by peoples who have traditionally been marginalized in Western academia.

- Analysing participants' own values in relation to these contexts."

These workshops have proven to be hugely popular, as they speak directly to the decolonisation agenda by challenging and deconstructing old epistemologies, and by moving away from the privilege and authority of the canons of knowledge production in the Westernised university.

There are lessons for the library here, too. For example, questioning the Enlightenment and how it gave birth to thinking about 'race' inevitably leads to the construct of 'Othering'. The scientific thought of the Enlightenment led to the creation of a racial taxonomy which placed white over black. 'Race' is a product of the Enlightenment whereby humans were categorised using their racial characteristics. Physical difference led to the domination of one race over the other – white over black. This classification of 'race' has had a major influence in the way library classification schemes were constructed. Their negative influence continues to this day.

## Critical teaching at Goldsmiths

For teaching librarians, all of this also means looking critically at decolonising pedagogies in the classroom, while recognising the coloniality that permeates the knowledge, the resources, and even the very buildings they stand in. Those who teach must learn to teach in forms that are decolonising in order to disrupt the colonial roots in the content and in the praxis. Through imparting a knowledge steeped in coloniality, librarians continue to operate in the hegemonic Eurocentric canon.

A series of workshops taught at Goldsmiths under the title of 'Resistance researching', are "designed to help students think more critically about how we find and why we use information from a social justice perspective" (Liberate our Library webpage). These workshops cover subjects like: 'inclusive citation', which teaches how to represent more marginalised voices while avoiding the privileging of dominant voices, and 'critical information gathering', which highlights the biases in library systems and teaches how to use multiple perspectives when information gathering. It is important to add that librarians are teaching and learning themselves through these workshops by engaging on critical librarianship (see ch. 1 for an in-depth discussion of Goldsmiths' workshops and teaching praxis).

## The Liberate our Library web page: a statement of intent

To highlight this work, and to truly commit to making real and lasting social justice-focused change, it was fundamental to create a dedicated *Liberate our Library* web page. It was important to us that the web page set out the intention and the reasoning behind it, and that it be visible to library users.

The Goldsmiths 'Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2017–2021' (Goldsmiths, University of London, 2017) gave us two broad aims with which to align our work:

- Liberate our degrees.

- Ensure access, inclusion, and robust learning support for all our students.

'Liberate our degrees' was adopted as an aim by the university due to the Goldsmiths Student Union's drive to diversify the curriculum. This aim was an opportunity for the Library to galvanise passion to answer the call for change. Two broad statements on our website stated the vision for

where the library would focus its liberation work, and the reasons for taking this approach (*Liberate our Library* webpage):

"*As part of the Library's strategy, we will engage with the aims of the LTAS[8] commitment to 'Liberate our degrees'.*

- *We will work to diversify our collections, to de-centre whiteness, to challenge non-inclusive structures in knowledge management and their impact on library collections, users, and services*

- *We will take an intersectional approach to our liberation work to encompass the many parts of a person's identity.*

*We are doing this work to decolonise and diversify our collections as part of an effort to ensure the library collections speak to all voices, particularly those that are traditionally underrepresented in curricula and on reading lists.*

*We want to work in a collaborative way with our users in identifying the subject areas that do not address their experiences and identities, and where the canon excludes them.*"

To date, the webpage has been accessed 3290 times, with 50% accessed via the Library website and 11% from the Academic Skills Centre workshop pages.

All this work is ongoing, and what follows next is a discussion of the challenges that lie ahead for libraries when doing liberation work.

## Diversifying collections

One could probably take a good guess at where the majority of books in the average Western academic institution are published. The Global North largely dominates over the Global South. What does that mean for our library collections? It means we are representing only a fraction of students—the majority of whom are White. And it means we are representing only a fraction of knowledge produced in the world. Any knowledge outside the mainstream is marginalised and delegitimised, as Eurocentrism dominates the canons of knowledge. For universities like Goldsmiths, which has an almost 50% BAME cohort, this is a great injustice and is simply not acceptable. It sends a negative message to

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[8] https://www.gold.ac.uk/learning/

BAME communities that says: you are not valued, you are not seen, and your experience does not matter.

Using an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) could aid libraries in developing more inclusive collections, learning materials, and study guides. An EIA is described by Advance HE as "...a tool to help colleges and universities ensure that their policies, practices and decisions are fair, meet the needs of their staff and students and that they are not inadvertently discriminating against any protected group"(Advance HE, 2019, Nov 27). Used to assess collection policies, an EIA will surface any inequalities and remedial action can then be undertaken. Relevant policies and top-level strategies in libraries can ensure collections represent the communities they purport to serve. If libraries include the use of EIAs on a regular basis, at least annually, it will help address the problem of underrepresentation. This would lead to a lasting transformation of the collection, as well as demonstrate a clear commitment to accountability.

## De-centreing whiteness

When one talks of de-centreing whiteness, what does one mean? What is whiteness? If one looks at the representation of staff on leadership teams at the majority of UK higher education institutions, the picture is predominantly White. If one looks at the teaching staff, the picture is predominantly White. If one looks at those in senior positions, the picture is predominantly White. This 'whitewash' is evident from the staff to the curriculum to the books on the library shelves; 'whiteness' pervades the corridors, the classrooms, the boardrooms, and the library. For Khalwant Bhopal, in her book 'White privilege: the myth of a post-racial society', "whiteness is not just an individual identity, it is one that is embedded in different institutions—such as schools universities and the media—as being *the* predominant identity. In such white spaces, whiteness and white Western practices are the norm and those which do not comply with these are seen as outsiders and others. The white practices and identity of whiteness are only available to white groups who operate in these spaces— often at the expense of non-white groups" (p.25).

Therefore, de-centring whiteness in the library is twofold: confronting the problem in the profession and in the practice. If most library staff in the UK—96.7% to be precise (ARA/CILIP, 2015)—are White and most of the books on our shelves are written by White authors from the Global North, then we have a whiteness problem. At the time of writing, there are

only two BAME library directors in the UK. If this lack of diversity continues to go unacknowledged, then "white normativity continues to be a hallmark of modern librarianship" (Hathcock, 2015).

At the same time, it is important not to place the 'lack of diversity' burden on the shoulders of BAME librarians. In the UK this issue is only now being addressed with the formation of groups like *Diversity in Libraries of the North (DILON)* and the *Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) BAME Network*. Many conferences, workshops, and teach meets in 2019 focused on diversity and inclusion. These events have also focused on the whiteness that pervades throughout institutions, highlighting deeply ingrained structural racism. We must, however, err on the side of caution to ensure BAME librarians are not used to solve these problems. It is important here to heed the words again of April Hathcock, "rather than being framed as a shared goal for the common good, diversity is approached as a problem that must be solved, with diverse librarians becoming the objectified pawns deployed to attack the problem" (Hathcock, 2015). Instead, White librarians must acknowledge their whiteness, and through the ongoing work in the critical librarianship arena, "white librarians can better cement ourselves as allies while remaining cognizant of our position as colonizers" (Gohr, 2017, p. 41).

## Challenging non-inclusive structures in knowledge management and their impact on library collections, users, and services

It is important to disrupt the hierarchy in order to decolonise the library collection. This means surfacing the history and many biases in classification systems. This means acknowledging the damage caused by non-representative and offensive subject headings. This means being honest and open with library users in bringing these injustices to light.

"Because Western academic libraries in particular emerged from Enlightenment-derived epistemology and are premised on Euro- and Christian-centric knowledge structures, libraries have unwittingly participated in and supported this legacy of imperialism historically and contemporarily (e.g. biased Library of Congress classification and subject headings)" (Dudley, 2013, n.p.).

This is how critical pedagogy practices have led to the critical librarianship movement. Practicing critical librarianship can lead towards radical change by building libraries that question normativity, that question Eurocentric

epistemologies, that question naming conventions, and that question citation practices which render invisible BAME scholars and scholars from marginalised communities and world regions. Radical change means actively and forcefully moving away from the privilege and authority of the Western canons of knowledge. Making radical change is by no means an easy journey or a simple switch to make, as we have all been schooled in the current model and this is the way we 'do' education. This process of changing also means looking at how library schools are teaching such subjects as classification and cataloguing. These must now be taught through a critical lens if libraries are going to achieve fundamental change. It takes dedication to work for such change, and a large part of building this dedication is to self-decolonise. Emily Drabinski puts this precisely:

"We also have a responsibility to build library collections and service models that help students understand themselves as capable of intervening in and changing the library, the university, and the world. We do this in part by making sure our libraries contain alternative and outsider voices and that we work to include those voices in the literature we search and the classes we teach" (2019, p.56).

## Questioning biases in classification systems and subject headings

### *Tackling Dewey*

Two other areas that are being explored with decolonisation in mind are: classification systems and Library of Congress subject headings. It would be all too easy to hide behind a system of seemingly inoffensive numbers, which many library users will merely see as a numerical system to discover and find the right book amongst many. It is up to the library worker to disclose the prejudices behind these systems through education, by exposing the history and committing to making a change. Goldsmiths library staff have written two blog posts on 'Bad Dewey' and 'Anti-neutrality' (Goldsmiths Library Blogs, 2018) to educate library users on the historical aspects of classification schemes and their inherent bias towards White, male, heteronormative structures, as well as the Library's anti-neutral stance. Actions like this demonstrate a commitment to destabilising the biases that created these systems, which in themselves are a reflection of the cultures in which they were created.

Maria T. Accardi's social justice work clearly sees the library worker as the agent who can and must make this change: "It is immoral to remain silent and allow this to persist while people are suffocating on the toxic ash of white supremacy" (Accardi, , 2018, p.5).

If we are truly committed to tackling discriminatory practices, then tackling—in Goldsmiths' case—Dewey Decimal is crucial to challenging a hugely damaging system that purports to order knowledge, yet subjugates certain groups of people and is constantly engaged in an act of 'othering'. It is a system that is, like 'race', a social construct that privileges white people at the expense of indigenous and black peoples. As Hope Olson points out: "The problem of bias in classification can be linked to the nature of classification as a social construct. It reflects the same biases as the culture that creates it" (Olson, 1998. P. 233). Much has been written about the racist origins of Melvil Dewey's Dewey Decimal Classification System, which was published in 1876, immediately after the post-war reconstruction in America was over. It will come as no surprise that in this context Black people were classified as 'negroes' and found in 'Biology' and 'Slavery'. Of course, these classifications no longer exist, although black people are still subdivided into groups by race and nationality, under 'Others'. Similarly, and equally offensive, LGBT communities were consigned to 'Abnormal psychology' upon their entry to DDC in 1932. In 1989 this changed to a classification under 'Social problems.' Now LGBT communities are classified at 306.7—'Sexual orientation, transgenderism, intersexuality'. Jewish people were once classified under 'Jewish question', and Asian Americans were once classified under 'Yellow Peril'.

## Challenging Library of Congress Subject Headings

The Library of Congress is *the* authority presiding over all Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). The process for changing these subject headings—from proposing a change to the actual change being agreed upon and implemented—can take several years. All libraries that adopt LCSH—the vast majority worldwide—adhere to these subject headings to allow users to discover books and other resources. Yet LCSH is just as prejudicial and biased as DDC and other classification systems. The headings come from a microcosm of society, yet wield their influence and power across the world—colonialism under a different guise one might venture. It's astounding to think that one library—the US national library—holds such power.

After a two-year fight with the Library of Congress (LC), Dartmouth College student-led organisations successfully lobbied for the removal of the term 'illegal aliens' from subject headings. Although the Library of Congress has agreed to replace the term with 'noncitizens' and 'unauthorised immigrants', the appropriate measures to enact this change still have not been made at the time of this writing. The House of Representatives overturned the decision and ruled that the Library continue to use 'illegal aliens' because it duplicates the language used in US federal laws. Even though there was a lot of opposition to this decision from librarians and the American Library Association (ALA), the subject heading is still in use today. In the Goldsmiths catalogue, it appears nearly 200 times. This is not acceptable. It is not appropriate to wait for the American government to replace these terms. Libraries must act now, and make changes locally that are inclusive and non-offensive.

One of the most steadfastly tireless and fearless critics of LCSH is Sanford Berman. His seminal text on the subject, *Prejudices and antipathies: a tract on the LC subject heads concerning people,* published in 1971, is considered a classic. Berman, a former cataloguer, has fought for many decades for changes to LCSH because of its discriminatory content. He has been successful in hundreds of cases, yet still holds a list of subject heading recommendations yet to be implemented by the LC. Now in his 80s, Berman is still actively pursuing and fighting for change. Even a well-known and respected activist like Berman encounters obfuscation and a myriad of excuses as to why certain suggested headings cannot be adopted or revised. In 2016, upon Barack Obama's nomination of Carla Hayden as the first woman, and first African-American Librarian of Congress, Berman wrote directly to Hayden with the following request:

"Dear Carla,

I realize you've only been on the job a short time, but I feel an urgency about the fact that these critical topics relating to public policy and much-discussed issues have not been recognized by Library of Congress subject headings, although all have been formally recommended and could immediately be assigned to catalogable material:

      MASS INCARCERATION

      DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM

      WAGE THEFT

      SCIENCE DENIALISM

CLIMATE CHANGE DENIALISM

ANTIVACCINE MOVEMENT

NATIVE AMERICAN HOLOCAUST (1492–1900)

REVENGE PORN

ROBIN HOOD TAX

"BROKEN WINDOWS" POLICING

WHITE PRIVILEGE

HISTORICAL TRAUMA

SEX WORKERS

INDUSTRIAL POLLUTION

MORAL INJURY

BENEFIT CORPORATIONS

STEREOTYPE THREAT

IMPACT INVESTING

WAR PROFITEERING

STOP-AND-FRISK (POLICING)

DRONE WARFARE

HATE ROCK MUSIC

ARMENIAN GENOCIDE DENIALISM

MALE PRIVILEGE

UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

EFFECTIVE ALTRUISM

GEOLOGY, STRATIGRAPHIC—ANTHROPOCENE
(PROPOSED)

CLASSISM IN LENDING

EVOLUTIONARY MEDICINE

EVOLUTIONARY PSYCHIATRY

SECULAR PARENTING

CRITICAL LIBRARIANSHIP

ANARCHA-FEMINISM

To state the obvious, library users everywhere making subject searches under these descriptors are likely to find nothing, since most institutions will not employ subject rubrics unless LC has done so first. And LC has not done so. The result: potentially useful resources are rendered invisible and inaccessible. I trust this is not an outcome that any of us desires.

While there are other continuing deficiencies in LCSH, this matter of 'currency' (or omission) seems paramount.

Hoping you can intervene to unlock these missing topics,

Sanford Berman" (Berman, Gross, 2017).

The list of descriptors Berman highlights are ones which are represented in books on library shelves, yet the power of one library will make them undiscoverable to a large degree. This again highlights the hegemony of the Library of Congress, reflecting hegemonic power in the management and organisation of knowledge in the university. It will take radical acts of cataloguing to bring these subject headings to life. Many libraries will not commit to such a radical action yet the appetite to do so is steadily growing. As the critical librarianship movement grows, such unresponsive and elitist practices by the LC continue to serve as a reminder that the profession is effectively held to ransom when it comes to what constitutes knowledge.

Take the example of the subject heading 'white privilege.' The LC Subject Authority Cooperative Program (SACO) rejected the term for inclusion. Books about 'white privilege' are given subject headings like: 'Whites – Race identity', 'Race awareness', and 'Race discrimination'. None of these descriptors accurately describe what 'white privilege' is. 'White privilege' is about advantage and none of these subject headings reflect this. These headings simply say: these books are about white people. It is a deception. Here is the exact announcement from the LC about the decision to reject the term:

"White privilege"

White privilege is a particular way of viewing racism; instead of looking at the disadvantages that people of color experience, the scholarship examines the privileges white people have. The concept is covered by several existing headings, such as **Racism**; **Race discrimination**; **[class of persons or ethnic group]—Social conditions**; **[place]—Race relations**; **[ethnic group]—Race identity**; etc. The meeting feels that the existing subject headings are sufficient. The proposal was not approved." (Library of Congress, 2011).

Since SACO ruled against the proposal, the subject heading was rejected. How can libraries then subvert this process? Libraries can move ahead and create the headings that the LC rejects. If libraries act collectively in this way, then these much-needed headings can be added to bibliographic records and made searchable. This can only happen with radical acts of cataloguing. And, as Berman suggests:

"What's key is that it happens, making local catalogs vibrant and responsive and relevant. It won't happen as long as systems and individual institutions remain inflexibly locked into 'standards' and tools that too frequently prove unhelpful, actually obscuring or denying access to library resources" (Berman, Gross, 2017).

Goldsmiths intends to begin these radical acts of cataloguing with the heading 'illegal aliens' as an example of cataloguing resistance. The heading will be replaced by 'undocumented immigrants' or another term which does not dehumanise and disparage. The intention is to maintain the link to 'illegal aliens' for educational purposes for the benefit of library workers and library users, in order to recognise the historical context and the need to rectify a wrong.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, what the *Liberate our Library* work at Goldsmiths shows in the context of existing and persistent discriminatory practices within education and our profession, is that a proactive approach that focuses on tackling social injustice and addressing the needs of a diverse user community, bears fruit. It galvanises interest from students, academics, senior management, and library professionals. It engages them in constructive dialogue about existing practices and helps shed light on where they no longer serve us. It inspires and gives hope to current and future generations of all stakeholders that positive change is possible. I expect that concentrated effort across all libraries and higher education

institutions along this trajectory will achieve a great deal to remedy what has remained ignored and unacknowledged for far too long. The truth is that libraries too have played their role in constructing the narrative of racism and it is up to us to dismantle it.

For the next decade, my vision—through ongoing reflexivity and reflection—is that libraries: divorce ourselves from discriminatory subject headings and act locally to represent our resources accurately with terminologies that are inclusive and respectful; agitate to create classification systems which are not racist, derogatory, dehumanising, or offensive; and allow learning and knowledge creation to take place in an inclusive and mutually respectful space. We cannot move away from the inherent whiteness within the academe, the curriculum, and the catalogue, until we commit ourselves to change what already exists.

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