

Konuk Yazar / Guest Author

Reflection on Risk in the Endeavours of Librarianship and Human Rights

Kütüphanecilik ve İnsan Hakları Çalışmalarında Risk Üzerine Düşünceler

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Abstract

Many people have reached out to this author over the last decade from a number of different countries in different parts of the world as they encountered the 2007 book “Librarianship and Human Rights: A Twenty-First Century Guide”. On that subject, this article offers the author’s sustained learning as well as frustrated reflection. Building on the recent book chapter entitled “Critical Reflection on Librarianship and Human Rights: A Book and Continuing Endeavor”, which was published in 2016 in the “Emerald Book Series: Advances in Librarianship (Volume 41) Perspectives on Libraries as Institutions of Human Rights and Social Justice”, attention is given to street level library and information workers. Those individuals, who may never be compensated for their good fights, or worse, may suffer loss because of them, yet continue to choose compassion and conviction over complacency in their work. The intention is to acknowledge the difference between rhetoric and experience on the ground, especially at is pertains to personal and professional risk.

Keywords: Librarianship; human rights; critical reflection; social justice; risk.

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Öz

Yazarın 2007 tarihli “Librarianship and Human Rights: A Twenty-First Century Guide” (Kütüphanecilik ve İnsan Hakları: Yirmi birinci yüzyıl rehberi) başlıklı kitabı ile karşılaşan dünyanın farklı yerlerindeki çeşitli ülkelerden çok sayıda kişi son on yılda yazar ile iletişime geçmiştir. Bu makale, yazarın söz konusu bağlamda sürekli öğrendiklerine ilişkin birikimler kadar düş kırıklıklarının yansımalarını da sunmaktadır. 2016 yılında yeni bir kitap bölümünün geliştirilmesi ile beraber sokak düzeyinde kütüphane ve bilgi çalışanlarına dikkat çekilmiştir. Adı geçen kitap bölümü, Emerald Kitap Serisinin “Emerald Book Series: Advances in Librarianship (Volume 41) Perspectives on Libraries as Institutions of Human Rights and Social Justice” (Kütüphanecilikte İlerlemeler - 41. Cilt - İnsan Hakları ve Sosyal Adalet Kurumları Olarak Kütüphaneler Üzerine Perspektifler) başlıklı kitabın içinde yer alan “Critical Reflection on Librarianship and Human Rights: A Book and Continuing Endeavor”, Kütüphanecilik ve İnsan Hakları Üzerine Eleştirel Düşünceler: Bir Kitap ve Sürekli Çaba başlıklı bölümüdür. Doğruluk/ iyilik adına verdikleri uğraş ve mücadeleleri ile desteklenmeyen, daha da kötüsü bu nedenle kayıplar veren insanlar her şeye karşın inandıklarının arkasında durarak yollarına devam etmektedirler. Özellikle kişisel ve mesleki riske girmek söz konusu olduğunda hedef, konuşma ve uygulama arasındaki farkı kabul etmekten geçer.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Kütüphanecilik; insan hakları; eleştirel düşünce; risk.*

In the summer of 2015 I wrote a difficult book chapter entitled “Critical Reflection on Librarianship and Human Rights: A Book and Continuing Endeavor”, which was published in 2016 in the *Emerald Book Series: Advances in Librarianship (Volume 41) Perspectives on Libraries as Institutions of Human Rights and Social Justice*, edited by Ursula Gorham, Natalie Greene Taylor, and Paul T. Jaeger. The piece was a personal-professional reflection on my unlearning and learning since the 2007 publication of my project *Librarianship and Human Rights: A Twenty-First Century Guide* (Samek, 2007), as I continued in my commitment to its original three-step agenda. That agenda was articulated as follows:

“First, this book encourages library and information workers to take a stand in the debate about what constitutes library work. Second, this book uses library and information rhetoric related to human rights (e.g., freedom of expression, freedom of thought, freedom of inquiry, privacy confidentiality) as an entrée to taking a professional interest in broad issues such as sustainable development, pandemics, poverty, war and peace, torture, destruction of cultural resources and government intimidation. Third, this book conceives the library as a point of resistance.” (Samek, 2007, p. xxv).

The book was dedicated to the many courageous library and information workers throughout the world and through the generations who have taken personal and professional risk to push for social change. Now in late December 2017, I share some of my sustained and frustrated reflection from a few years ago, as I remain both inspired and haunted by street level library and information workers who may never be compensated for their good fights, or worse, may suffer loss because of them, yet continue to choose compassion and conviction over complacency in their work.

Many people have reached out to me over the last decade from a number of different countries in different parts of the world as they have encountered the book (Just a few weeks ago Dr. Güler Demir (2017) reviewed the book for a journal in Turkey). All of these individuals have unknowingly given me significant pause about my privilege and position as a senior academic in a democratic higher education. A system in which I have been well rewarded and awarded for my academic labour along the continuum of library history, intellectual freedom and social responsibility, librarianship and human rights, global information justice, intercultural information ethics, and academic freedom. Along this range, I have taken up the full right and responsibility of academic freedom, as it is now and always has been written into my employment contract language. Not many people can say the same. My thoughts have always been on those individuals who cannot, including the vast majority of library and information workers worldwide who tackle a complex balance of research, documentation, classification, security, preservation, and risk.

The subject of librarianship and human rights, I have come to know, is a lifelong educational endeavour. I expect I will never be satisfied with my level of understanding. My unlearning began in 2008, very soon after the book was published, when Kathy Carbone (Performing Arts Librarian, California Institute for the Arts (CalArts) invited me to speak at the January 2009 Arts in the One World conference at CalArts in Valencia, California. The conference theme was ‘Motherhood and Revolution: How women, and mothers in particular, are innovating in conflict and post conflict circumstances, and expanding the models for ways in which one is an artist in the world’. The conference, by virtue of its host institution, was multi-sensory, inclusive of soliloquy, dance, lullaby, academic panels, theatre, visual art, biography and so on. I was there to speak academically about collective memory. However, numerous conference delegates had survived genocide. One Western scholar confessed in her talk how the publication of a career-making book for her had deeply hurt its subjects in Rwanda. The subjects no longer accepted that author in their village, because of a deep sense of betrayal that their experience had advanced the reputation of the scholar.

The time in Valencia affirmed I had dedicated the book project to the appropriate people. Also that very regrettably I had, in some instances, become more associated with the rhetoric of librarianship and human rights than the people who realized it on the ground. This bothers me. I write less than I used to. I speak less than I used to. I still do both, but very economically in the instances I am given encouragement to fail and to learn. Quite likely, any group that invites me to speak or write on the subject of librarianship and human rights already has it figured out. They do not need me to explain to them what they know from life and labor. However, it is common for established outsiders to be invited inside to reiterate what insiders have already expressed too often with risk. It is a practical tactic. I understand it and I am careful when visiting inside not to put much weight in my own press.

I landed in Sarajevo in April 2012. Sasa Madacki (*University of Sarajevo* Human Rights Centre) and Mario Hibert (Department of Comparative Literature and Librarianship, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo) invited me to give a keynote at the International Convention of Slavic Librarians on the theme of Librarianship, Human Rights and Activism. After the conference, where I made a spectacularly miscalculated delivery (far too formal and forceful), I spent more reciprocally satisfying and unofficial time with students in the Department of Comparative Literature and Librarianship who were in one of Mario’s classes. Mario and I subsequently met

with several students to explore urgent topics on their mind (e.g., human rights protections for sexual and gender minorities, including at the University). My walks and talks through and around the city full of buildings with bullet holes, twenty years after the war, were rousing. Not long after my return to Canada, I was sent from Mario media coverage of University of Sarajevo students whom had duct taped their mouths in a peaceful protest of homophobia (which took place in the faculty hall of the University of Sarajevo) (*Je li bolje začepiti usta?*, 2012, April 23). I was of course already safely home in Canada and speaking freely.

A few years later Mario mentioned in correspondence how he and colleagues were patiently waiting for the University to release long overdue pay. As important as academic freedom is, there are issues of higher magnitude (e.g., a living wage, access to clean water, peace not war, security, a sustainable planet, etc.). I recalled how the students I met in Bosnia and Herzegovina shared with me a lack of hope for realizing paid or professional library and information work, as they faced desperately high unemployment rates. Those colleagues at the University faced a difficult challenge of how to voice their opinions. Protection of library and information workers on the ground, even from oppression within their own institutional culture, in just about any part of the world, remains underappreciated as a threat to the global information professions' ability to support human rights. With the rise of social media policies, codes of conduct, and civility and behaviour codes, we must be mindful of the fundamental tensions between equity, diversity and intellectual freedom in the library profession, which publicly pushes those (sometimes) conflicting values.

On 10 December 2017, Martyn Wade, Chair of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions' (IFLA) Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) Advisory Committee, wrote:

In an email on the IFLA-L email list Gerald Leitner, Secretary General of IFLA has today demonstrated the vital link between human rights and library and information services. As we mark the start of the 70th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I am delighted to announce the launch of SpeakUp! - IFLA FAIFE's new blog. This is your chance to get involved in the conversation around how library and information services can turn human rights into reality at blogs.ifla.org/faife. This is a new FAIFE initiative that will provide a new forum for a discussion about how human rights are central to and inform the development and delivery of library and information services - and equally, how library and information services are central to access to human rights (Wade, 2017, December 10).

I responded to this post and will be contributing to the SpeakUp! blog in the New Year. My intention is to illustrate the historical trajectory for this current interest in the topic. IFLA's 2012 launch of its first *Code of Ethics for Library and Other Information Workers* is an important addition to our professional rhetoric, because it is not uncommon to find evidence of library and information workers' action in developing and providing critical services in the interests of human rights, civil liberties and social justice. Society is witness to how library and information workers use their education and experience to ameliorate social concerns, such as by lobbying for copyright reform for peoples with print disabilities, exposing how commercial internet filters are biased against sexual and gender minorities, and fighting to protect sensitive cultural heritage in the context of war, conflict and genocide. However, we should remember IFLA acknowledged the precarious roles played by library and information workers with its

1983 adoption at the General Conference in Munich of the *Resolution on Behalf of Librarians Who are Victims of Violation of Human Rights*. It reads: “In the name of human rights, librarians must, as a profession, express their solidarity with those of their colleagues who are persecuted for their opinions, wherever they may be. The Council mandates the President of IFLA, when informed of specific cases, after due considerations to intervene when appropriate with competent authorities on behalf of these colleagues.” (IFLA Council in Munich, 1983). On 25 August 1989, at the IFLA Council meeting in Paris, it recalled the 1983 Munich resolution and put forth the *Resolution on Freedom of Expression, Censorship and Libraries*. It was not until IFLA introduced its *Code of Ethics for Library and Other Information Workers*, though, that the Association offered specialized clauses on workplace speech and whistleblowing. We need them! But the Code also acknowledges IFLA has no enforcement authority over library administrations. Nor do the vast majority of library associations around the world.

Actualization of any Code depends on multiple and shifting conditions, including: employment terms in any given library administration; labour law and related legislation in any given legal jurisdiction; influence and consensus making within the library and information community and society more broadly; and ultimately, individual conflicting commitments to ourselves, to our profession, to our employer, to our community, and to the law. It is not easy to reconcile these different considerations and there is clear evidence working librarians at times have lost out in the process. For example, while the American Library Association (ALA) adopted its *Resolution on Workplace Speech* (American Library Association, 2005) in 2005, it functions solely as a persuasion and consensus building measure. Thus, the LeRoy C. Merritt Humanitarian Fund exists to provide financial assistance for librarians who have been discriminated against or denied employment rights because of their defense of intellectual freedom including freedom of speech. My own country (like so many) lacks such a critical fund at the national association level. Meanwhile numerous library and information conferences now call for papers and sessions on social justice.

Few such conferences push such advocacy into the realm of realizing activism on the ground. The bureaucratic, conservative and socializing nature of our associations and their accompanying conferences often serve as an acculturating control mechanism. For example, as first convenor of the Association for Library and Information Science Education’s (ALISE) Information Ethics Special Interest Group (SIG), I alongside SIG colleagues fought through the red tape of the association before we could bear witness to adoption of the 5 November 2007 *Position Statement on Information Ethics in LIS Education*, ultimately ratified at the ALISE business meeting held on 10 January 2008. A parliamentarian was consulted after a complex back and forth set to about use of the word “should” vs. the word “could” in the Statement. The saga is documented in a legacy article I penned entitled “*“I Guess We’ll Just Have to Wait for the Movie to Come Out”: A Protracted First Stand for Teaching Information Ethics*” (Same, 2012). What emerged as the largest and most active ALISE SIG of its time was forced to curb its enthusiasm for ‘doing’. But it eventually prevailed. The Statement includes the wording “should”. And the SIG lives on because of the intelligent work of a critical sub-community within ALISE today. I still regret not minting the Statement as IFLA’s or that of the International Center for Information Ethics. Both groups endorsed the statement long before

ALISE did and both have more global and intercultural reach. To support the position was and still is a 'no brainer'. So is our attention to children, young adults and the girl child.

There is a common thread from one country, culture and community to another. That the K-12 school student population continues in urgent need of multilingual and multi-format school library collections, and interaction and guidance from professionals steeped in core library values and who advocate for the right to read, view, listen and play. These efforts are needed to realize a stronger commitment to literacy in all its forms, as well as the right to education and the right to the free development of personality. Just about, everything our profession wants to realize depends on those needs being met for everyone. And it is just as true for Canada as anywhere. We certainly have our own problems.

I am ever more motivated to contribute where I have some immediate influence and for me that is at the School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS) at the University of Alberta in Canada, where I serve as Chair, and where as a team we are committed to reconciliation with indigenous communities and our indigenous students. We have an Indigenous Internship partnership with the University of Alberta Libraries that began in 2015. The Libraries fund the Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) degree for the interns. The first graduate of this partnership is Tanya Ball who now works as a professional librarian on campus. There is no other on campus opportunity like this in Canada. And it brings concrete change. Our Library and Information Studies Students' Association currently has an indigenous student as President, Lorisia MacLeod. Our Library and Information Studies Alumni Association currently has an indigenous alumnus as President, Kirk MacLeod. Assistant Professor Dr. Danielle Allard works closely with indigenous communities and is helping to build a database on missing and murdered indigenous women (MMIW). The pioneering project Digital Library North (DLN) is led by our senior colleague Dr. Ali Shiri. It comprises collaboration between the Inuvialuit Cultural Research Centre in Inuvik, Northwest Territories and researchers at the University of Alberta. The objective of DLN is to create a digital library infrastructure to address the information needs in Canada's northern regions. SLIS will have delegates participating by invitation in the upcoming February 9-10, 2018 'Making Meaning Symposium'. The symposium is meant for both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples who are interested in indigenous librarianship, community, and metadata. It's about a relationship building process to address the power in naming. SLIS faculty, students and sessionals serve on the Canadian Federation of Library Associations/Federation canadienne des associations de bibliothèques' (CFLA/FCAB) Indigenous Matters Committee. These and other efforts are unequivocally long overdue. They are critical conditions for our field to earn its place in the future. Much work remains to be done.

In its announcement of the new blog SpeakUp!, the "IFLA Advisory Committee on Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression" encourages us to reflect upon the meaning of human rights in our daily life and labour. "What does it mean to protect, enforce and advocate for human rights in your work and in your life? What are the challenges to the implementation of a more just society that guarantees human rights for all?" My first response is that our profession needs to support those within that take risk. We usually know who they are. Let's start with them as IFLA already guided us to do back in 1983 (IFLA, 2017, December 6).

In closing, it's easy for me to write this article. The risk is not mine. I would like to warmly thank my newfound colleagues in Turkey for inviting my words here. And let's be

clear. They already deeply understand librarianship and human rights. Perhaps their present need, though, is for someone to articulate this firmly from safety?

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