

Cataloguing, Classification, and Critical Librarianship at Cambridge University

Cambridge University Decolonising Through Critical Librarianship Group

Introduction

The Decolonise campaign at Cambridge University included an open letter from the FLY network, for women and non-binary people of colour, to the English Faculty, requesting that the Library ‘move postcolonial books out of the basement and integrate them in the library cataloguing order’ (FLY, 2017). Students were quick to recognise the importance of library systems in the preservation and organisation of knowledge, and they demanded a professional collaboration to address a transformation of the curriculum from within the library system. The student-led Cambridge Decolonise Network first began in 2015, and organised with the call for the University to ‘Decolonise Disarm Divest’ in 2018. Students organised protests and revised reading lists via Facebook groups and Google documents. The Network led to the creation of subject-focused working groups, such as Decolonise Sociology, Decolonise Law and Decolonise Anthropology. They collaborated with groups such as Black Cantabs Research Society, a ‘counter-history project’ designed to ‘place Black students in the institution’s past, present, and future’, which in turn collaborated with the University Library on a ‘Black Cantabs: History Makers’ exhibition in 2018 (Cambridge University Library, 2018; Black Cantabs, n.d.). In its specific mention of library space and cataloguing, the FLY letter encouraged library staff to reflect on the flaws in the Library’s cataloguing processes and to come up with a practical plan of how to learn differently.

Cambridge University Libraries

Cambridge is a collegiate university comprising 31 autonomous colleges, each with its own library, alongside more than 30 faculty and departmental libraries and numerous museums and special collections, all working with the legal deposit University Library. The federated nature of libraries in Cambridge creates obstacles as well as possibilities. Unlike universities with a single, centralised library, we are unable to instigate total and uniform updates. However, this multilayered library ‘ecosystem’ also meant that we could implement swifter changes at a local level. Several libraries were able to respond quickly: the English Library reclassified over 2,000 books under a new subject of Contemporary Global Literature in English; and the Modern Languages Library launched a programme

of consultation on changes to the curriculum, reading lists and book recommendations with students and academics.

Many Cambridge libraries are not tied to larger institutional or international rules of classification but instead work according to in-house schemes. These schemes are often outdated but, equally, they are easy to update. For example, our reclassification of International Relations at Newnham College Library was informed by, but not tied to, Dewey categories. We could easily leave classmarks empty for future flexibility and introduce subsections, such as *Migration*, to make the scheme more hospitable to the growing literature of a rapidly developing discipline. In this project, the addition of a subdivision for *Empires* was a gesture of support for the Decolonise campaign as well as an acknowledgement of imperial practice as an ongoing phenomenon rather than a topic that should always be classified under *History*. Small and simple (if time-consuming) modifications such as this could bring about incremental change and contribute to the dispersed, collaborative and continuing nature of the campaign.

Decolonise the Curriculum: the Library response

We convened a workshop for librarians to find out more about the campaign to Decolonise the Curriculum and to address a topic that seemed daunting to many. In the initial workshops, attendees split into four groups: cataloguing and classification, information literacy, special collections and collection development. The cataloguing and classification group noted that subject headings were not (or need not be) limited to Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). We discussed the politics of retaining a trace of outdated descriptions and the significance of multilingual records in challenging the Anglocentrism of ‘controlled vocabulary’. In anticipation of future search functions, we considered the possibility of using alternative metrics to national borders for cataloguing, such as searching maps by geographic co-ordinates. Workshop participants proposed a glossary of decolonised terms and addressed the importance of reassessing hierarchies for a transformed browsing experience. In practical terms, we planned workflows for manageable changes, and discussed how to realistically update a collection in sections while maintaining a working circulating library.

The many different types of library in Cambridge also afford us access to a wealth of advice from colleagues. A college librarian who oversees a multidisciplinary library catering for undergraduates in every subject may not have regular contact with, for example, South Asian book vendors, but could consult a subject specialist at the University Library, or the relevant faculty librarian, for advice on specific international suppliers in order to improve their foreign-language holdings. For this reason, the development of a network was an important resource in itself.

In order to facilitate this exchange, we set up an online platform populated with case studies, resources and bibliographies (<https://decolonisingthroughcriticallibrarianship.wordpress.com>). We thought it most useful to present this website as a professional resource, aimed at colleagues rather than students or academics, and so address a gap in

the Decolonise campaign around practical measures to incorporate its politics into library working methods. We also felt that a tailored professional resource would avoid the risks of making public claims that could divert attention away from the much-needed scrutiny of wider investigations going on within the University. We wanted to create a collaborative and continuing forum, and a place to share our efforts, rather than to claim any victories.

Following the workshop, we sent recommendations to the University's Cataloguing Advisory Group detailing our aims to update the terminology and organisation of different subject areas for those using in-house classification schemes; to collaborate on proposals to change subjects in international schemes, for those using Library of Congress Classification (LCC), Universal Decimal Classification (UDC), Dewey, Bliss and Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH); to explore ways in which we might adapt resource description to acknowledge interdisciplinarity and decolonise the categories and terminology of STEMM (science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine) subjects; to address language barriers and offer advice on cataloguing translations; and to consider the challenges of expressing diacritics and non-Roman alphabets in the library management system as a political problem as well as a technical hitch.

This chapter details case studies of practical progress made so far: reorienting from a geographic to thematic classification scheme to suit the collection at the African Studies Library; challenging bibliographic standards when cataloguing *cartoneras* at the University Library; and using collaborative and critical information literacy to decolonise classification at the Polar Library.

The case studies

Moving from UDC to LCC at the African Studies Library

The African Studies Library

The Centre of African Studies, Cambridge and its library were founded in 1965 by leading anthropologist Audrey Richards (first director of the East African Institute of Social Research, Makerere College, Uganda). The African Studies Library supports the research and teaching needs of the MPhil in African Studies programme, as well as those of the wider University, across all disciplines and at all levels of study and research (from undergraduate to senior academic). Our particular focus is on Africa south of the Sahara. The Library also supports the work of the Centre, and that of the Centre's constituent departments in the University, in promoting research from and on, and engagement with, Africa.

The main library collection holds 20,000 accessible items on the open shelf, including language grammars and dictionaries; audio-visual materials; and 304 (18 current) periodicals. In addition to the main collection, the Library holds a largely uncatalogued archive in closed stacks of approximately 18,000 items, consisting of posters, pamphlets and brochures produced by political parties and non-governmental organisations; official publications; newspapers; maps; photographs and film donated by families with relatives in the Colonial Service and ex-Colonial Service Officers; microform; and research paper

collections donated by researchers mostly affiliated to Cambridge and the Centre. Much of the closed stacks material has strong ties to the colonial period, with a focus on development studies and anthropology – very much treating Africa and Africans as an object, or a problem to be solved. In recent decades, especially since the establishment of the interdisciplinary MPhil in African Studies programme in 2010, the focus of the open-shelf material has shifted from this elite archive perspective to contemporary collecting. Where possible, material published by African scholars and African presses is prioritised, with a focus on archaeology, art, gender studies, law, literature, philosophy, politics, sociology and the African diaspora.

Transition from UDC to LCC

The African Studies Library is in the process of transitioning from UDC to LCC. This change was prompted by a large, dated and underused development studies section (broadly speaking at 33- *Economics*), which sat separately from the rest of a collection that was otherwise classed by region or country. Its separation into a dedicated space had justified retaining many more books than were used or necessary, including duplicating material held at other libraries. The process of reintegrating the (useful) books into the main body of the collection was a chance to tackle reclassification, which was in turn an opportunity to reappraise the collection and do some long-overdue weeding.

The LCC scheme is far from perfect. The ideal solution would have been to create a bespoke scheme with the freedom to adapt and expand. But time was a pressing factor, as the complications of UDC had contributed to a backlog of books that were not accessible on the open shelf. Students were struggling to locate material in UDC, where it was difficult to fathom the main subject amid the varying divisions of region and country. The challenges of using UDC for library staff were also reducing accessibility and discoverability, simply by extending the amount of time a book spent in the office before it reached the shelves.

There was also a vast range of interpretations of the endless potentials of UDC, and it was possible to identify the different classifying styles of previous librarians. For example, at the simplest level, in large classes such as *African literature* (6):82, many titles had been grouped with no subsections (poetry, drama, fiction, novels, speeches, etc.), until a new librarian had begun to drill down to more specific subject areas, but without applying these subjective specificities retrospectively. These varying styles caused confusion over the degree to which a book had been classified, leading to limited browsing benefit and discoverability: a novel by a Zimbabwean author could be found under general *African literature* (6):82, *Southern African fiction* (68):82–3, *Rhodesian literature* (689):820 (820=old class for literature in UDC) or *Zimbabwean novels* (689.1):82–31, depending on the cataloguer.

The African Literature Book Club run by the Library benefits from the new organisation system, as readers can encounter books by authors from across the continent

and diaspora, now subcategorised in classification *P* under *PN*, *PQ*, *PR*, *PS*, rather than focusing on one national literature. This means that users no longer need to explore more than 50 potential locations within the collection when looking to browse African literature. Previously, under UDC, our largest collections of literature from South African, Kenyan, and Nigerian authors would be bays apart at (68:01):82, (676.2):82 and (669):82, respectively; they now sit comfortably on adjoining shelves. This has also meant that Francophone and Lusophone authors, and literature of authors from the African diaspora, are now within easy browsing reach, providing users a dedicated area to consult within the collection.

Classification by geography or theme

The move from UDC to LCC was a move from sorting geographically to sorting thematically. Arranging the collection by subject was a much more useful starting point for most research enquiries, and LCC lent itself to that system more easily. The inherited UDC system, which had prioritised regional or country facets, had become increasingly challenging as the collection developed with the discipline to include more international collaboration and comparative studies. The decolonising potential of sorting by theme or subject as opposed to nations became particularly apparent when articulating the taxonomies of material that crossed colonial borders, expressed Pan-Africanist thought, recorded local history or represented migratory or itinerant groups living between and across recognised national boundaries.

We began the process by classifying all newly received books in LCC; we then addressed the backlog, followed by donations, then core material on reading lists and any high-use titles. Library staff will continue to work through the remainder of the open-shelf collection systematically. Published material of an older, more fragile nature is stored separately within our closed stacks and will remain in UDC for the moment. This will be examined as part of a larger and more long-term project to identify, scope and catalogue our ephemera, grey literature and official publications. We recognise that the classification of these materials should be considered in terms of discoverability as part of the long-term project. However, as staff are currently required to retrieve these items from the closed stacks on behalf of students and researchers, they do not pose the same urgent cataloguing need or practical problems of user retrieval and effective browsing as open-shelf material.

In an elite university in the Global North, the African Studies Library faces extra challenges to cultivate research and collections by, with and from, and not only on, Africa and Africans. Cataloguing and classification processes can reinforce bias, and the over-representation of outdated development studies books was symptomatic of the historical disciplinary roots of the Centre and its collections. A thematic organisation of material can take the location of these studies for granted and allow the discipline a broad range of expression, as opposed to being defined primarily by its geographic area and national boundaries. What would be expressed in a silo if catalogued in a less specialist collection

should in this space be located primarily by the subject. As articulated by the current director of our Centre in relation to the issues surrounding decolonisation and the African Studies Centre as a British institution, we must organise our library in a way that insists ‘on the fact that African political thought is political thought, in addition to being African Studies; African economic history is economic history and African literature is literature in addition to being African Studies’ (Branch, 2018, 85).

These inherent challenges of African studies as a discipline, and area studies more broadly, will continue to inform classification at the Library, which often must limit purchasing to the geographically classed confines of its collection development policy. This risks the under-representation of interdisciplinary subjects, or those with a broader global focus. For example, a course reading list ‘Africa and Africans in the Atlantic World’ highlighted the collection’s limitations in terms of the history of the Caribbean and the Americas; a theme-based taxonomy allows for an easier articulation of shared histories and the incorporation of collections that are not primarily based in Africa.

Cataloguing cartoneras

Origins of cartonera publishing

Cartonera publishing has its roots in Argentina’s economic crisis of the late 1990s and early 2000s. By December 2001, when the country’s government defaulted on its public debt and froze citizens’ bank accounts, tens of thousands of Argentinians were unemployed and homeless. Many resorted to waste picking to survive, with huge numbers of *cartoneros* collecting cardboard to sell to recycling plants. By 2003 books were not being sold, bookshops and publishers were shutting down and authors could not publish. A group of artists (Washington Cucurto, Javier Barilaro and Fernanda Laguna) started creating artistic books using discarded cardboard and photocopied paper, and funded a publishing co-operative called Eloísa Cartonera. In solidarity with the waste pickers, they bought cardboard directly from them at five times the market price and employed them to create the hand-painted covers (Eloísa Cartonera, 2020).

The result was a truly decolonial act: literature by peripheral authors with no access to mainstream publishers, as well as by established authors who donated their rights for free, all sold at cheap prices through alternative distribution paths. The model was incredibly successful. *Cartonera* publishers are present worldwide, not only in Latin America but also in Africa, China and Europe (University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2013). It is difficult to give a precise number, as new imprints are constantly emerging, and some have only limited lifespans, but the latest estimate puts the number of *cartonera* publishers at 250 (Bell and O’Hare, 2019, 3). Publishers are very heterogeneous, in the sense that they all adapt to their own local needs and social structures. Some focus on women’s work, others give a voice to Indigenous communities, or LGBTQ+ groups, or refugees, or prisoners.

In 2017, Cambridge University Library became a partner in the two-year Arts and Humanities Research Council project ‘Cartonera Publishing: Relations, Meaning and

Community in Movement', with the British Library, Senate House Library and Surrey and Durham Universities as partners (Cartonera Publishing, 2020). Cambridge University Library's main contribution to the project is a collection of 200 items bought in situ in Mexico, Brazil and Argentina by researchers from the universities involved in the project. One could argue that institutions in the Global North collecting and publicising books published in Latin America and Portuguese-speaking Africa is a way of broadening access to marginalised knowledge. However, Latin American publishing realities show us that, in fact, many voices are still lost to the demands of a global publishing market that is managed from Europe and the USA. Limitations on who can publish and what is published are more and more frequently dictated by these external forces. The phenomenon of *cartonera* books shows us that diverse models of independent publishing are leading the way in giving a platform to many of these missing voices.

Curatorial decisions about the collection

For an academic library, the collection presents many implications and dilemmas in terms of decolonisation: one of the main questions raised by a collection like this is the relative importance of conservation versus engagement. Cambridge University Library must balance its heritage preservation duty to conserve these publications with its responsibility to their creators' original intent and target audience, resisting the temptation to shut these books away in the 'ivory tower'. Consequently, workshops and active displays were organised, where the books could be handled as their creators intended and where visitors could engage with the process and create their own *cartonera* book.

Another important question is how much to collect. Collecting *libros cartoneros* may diversify our collections, but we must also bear in mind that these books have very short print-runs and too few libraries hold them in the places where they are produced. We have therefore decided that, after the end of this project, our library will no longer purchase *cartonera* items. The researchers involved in the project have also donated a *cartonera* collection to a local library in Mexico (El informador, 2019).

Decolonising bibliographic records

The Cartonera Collection also poses challenges to standard bibliographic records and demands a decolonised approach to cataloguing. How can we enhance accessibility? How far can we go? Can we be fair to all the agents involved in the creation of a book, regardless of their place in the 'canon'? Can we reflect the nature of a publication through its bibliographic record? How can the vocabularies we use influence accessibility and representation? Figures 12.1 and 12.2 on the following page are excerpts from a basic record for a *cartonera* book published in Paraguay, *Tatu ha jaguarete* by Miguelangel Meza. As is standard, the record displays information on the author, title and publication details.

100	1		\$a Meza, Miguelángel, \$d 1955- \$e author.
245	1	0	\$a Tatu ha jaguarete / \$c Miguelángel Meza.
250			\$a Primera Edision.
264		1	\$a Luque : \$b Mburukujarami Kartonéra, \$c 2009.

Figure 12.1 *Basic cartonera record*

The record also contains information on the book's language, series, physical description and subject matter (Figure 12.2).

546			\$a Guaraní text; parallel Spanish translation.
650		0	\$a Small presses \$z Paraguay \$z Luque \$v Specimens.
650		0	\$a Cartonera books \$z Paraguay \$z Luque \$v Specimens.
650		4	\$a Editoriales cartoneras \$z Paraguay \$z Luque.
655		7	\$a Cartón ondulado. \$2 embne
655		7	\$a Corrugated board bindings (Binding) \$2 rbbin
710	2		\$a MBurukujarami Kartonéra, \$e issuing body.
830		0	\$a Koleysione de Poésia, narrativa, dramaturgia y koléyta de la oralida Sudáka-transfronterisa "Tupi'aveve"; \$v 68.

Figure 12.2 *Basic cartonera record, continuation*

In Figure 12.3, instead, we propose a record that goes beyond our standard cataloguing approach and aims to offer broadened access to the same book. The addition of richer bibliographical notes, taken from the book's preliminaries, not only allows for broader searches but also illustrates the intentions of the publishers and creators.

500			\$a "Vilíngue du Pópuli ton nunga."
500			\$a "Tápa écha kon karton xuntádo i/o komprádo en la vía púvlika de Lúke, Asunsion y por dónde séa, (Paraguái) a Gs. 1000 y pintáda a máno por Domadóra de Mainumby; Arami, 'Amor pasaxéro', S. T. F., Súni Veníte i demás pupilos en el Veráno del 2009 nel taller de MBurukujami Kartonéra, en Kurelándia a ful"—Page facing title page.
500			\$a "Kómy de la páxina 22: José María Benítez"—Page facing title page.
500			\$a "Tiráda: Inkalkulávle"—Page facing title page.
500			\$a "Máde in Lukelándia, Paraguái. Agradesémo al autor su kooperasion, autorisándo la puvlikasion de éste lívro"—Page facing title page.

Figure 12.3 *Expanded cartonera record*

Interestingly, as Spanish speakers will notice, the added notes and series title reflect how standard Spanish orthographical rules have been subverted, reflecting spoken language in Paraguay and taking a clear stance in relation to the language imposed on the country by its colonisers. Cambridge University Library's standard cataloguing procedure is to produce English-language cataloguing records, using authorised LCSH, access points and controlled vocabulary. This is a system created by and for White English-language speakers in the Global North, so using it to deal with material created and consumed by non-English-speaking communities in the Global South reinforces White supremacist colonial structures and narratives.

Figure 12.4 is part of the record for another *cartonera* book, *O caçador de mariposas* by Wellington de Melo, published by Mariposa Cartonera in Recife (Brazil), where the addition of more representative notes helps to identify other relevant creative agents for whom we then assigned access points. We chose not to be limited by which agents were authorised or by the prohibitive workloads that authorising them would involve, and therefore we accepted a 'minimal encoding level' in the record's Leader field.

500			\$a "Mariposa Cartonera integra a rede de cartoneras com Dulcinéia Catadora e Severina Catadora (Brasil), Eloísa Cartonera (Argentina), Sarita Cartonera (Perú), La Cartonera (México), Cephisa Cartonera (França) entre outras"—Title page verso.
500			\$a "Em outubro de 2015, usando fontes Absara, do designer francês Xavier Dupré, nos espaçamentos 12/17.5, Patrícia Cruz Lima criou o projeto gráfico desta publicação, com capas em papelão confeccionadas inteiramente à mão pela Liga Cartonera, no Recife"—Colophon.
500			\$a "Mariposa Cartonera é um selo editorial que confecciona livros com capas de papelão a partir de uma proposta editorial independente, fundado com a intenção de difundir a literatura de forma sustentável e alternativa. Todo papelão utilizado na confecção dos livros é coletado nas ruas, cortado e pintado artesanalmente pelo editor ou dentro do projeto das oficinas oferecidas em comunidades"—Page [42].
650		0	\$a Cartonera books \$z Brazil \$z Recife \$v Specimens.
650		0	\$a Small presses \$z Brazil \$z Recife \$v Specimens.
650		4	\$a Editoras catadoras \$z Brasil \$z Recife.
655		7	\$a Papelão. \$2 larpcal
655		7	\$a Corrugated board bindings (Binding) \$2 rbbin
700	1		\$a Cruz Lima, Patrícia, \$e book designer.
710	2		\$a Mariposa Cartonera, \$e issuing body.

Figure 12.4 Expanded cartonera record, continuation

We chose to catalogue our *cartonera* collection by adding subject headings in the language chiefly spoken in the place of publication (Portuguese in the example above), referring to the most commonly used controlled vocabularies in each country (for Brazilian material we use the Brazilian LARPCAL [Lista de Assuntos Referente Ao Programa de Cadastramento Automatizado de Livros], but we found the most commonly used controlled vocabulary in Spanish was the ‘Manual de indización de Encabezamientos de Materia Biblioteca Nacional de España’). We also chose to be geographically specific, recording \$z information, where possible, to a local level. A further step towards presenting decolonised records would be the incorporation of free-text descriptive and interpretative notes which, together with the additions already mentioned, could allow for broader and more meaningful searches, legitimising a wider range of access points and keywords, in an attempt to decolonise the standard language of the catalogue.

Decolonising classification at the Polar Library

A unique classification scheme

The library of the Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI) supports multidisciplinary research on the polar regions carried out by research staff and PhD, Master’s and undergraduate students at the University of Cambridge, as well as the general public and visiting scholars from the global polar research community. Polar Library holdings cover diverse topics from glaciology to anthropology of the North and from climate science to polar geopolitics. The reference collection has been developed since the Institute’s foundation in 1920 and includes over 50,000 monographs, 1,000 serial titles and 18,000 maps, as well as pamphlets, audio-visual material and theses. The collection comprises material in over 90 different languages, with extensive Russian-language holdings.

Like many other libraries across Cambridge, the Polar Library utilises a unique classification scheme to organise these resources. In 1945 it was decided to adapt UDC to better cater to material on the polar regions and the study of snow and ice, with major additions and revisions made to the Arctic and Antarctic geographic headings and subjects relating to glaciology. Unlike other libraries, SPRI also uses this unique controlled vocabulary for subject cataloguing. In the catalogue shared with other libraries across Cambridge, local Polar UDC subject headings sit alongside LCSH in Polar Library catalogue records, meaning the scheme is used for both cataloguing and classification purposes: doubly visible.

Alongside his work developing the Antarctic Treaty System, Brian Birley Roberts was instrumental in devising this unique scheme for organising polar libraries. Writing about the practical experience of cataloguing and classification at SPRI, he starts from the principle that ‘collected material which cannot easily be found is of little use’ (Roberts, 1960, 1). It is a familiar sentiment for cataloguers, and reverberates 60 years on, but the system that Roberts developed falls short today, especially when examined through a decolonial lens.

Coloniality of the classification system

SPRI was founded 100 years ago, at a time when geography as a discipline was being institutionalised under British imperialism; the Arctic and Antarctic in particular were seen as 'blank spaces' ripe for exploration, enhancing Western knowledge production and geopolitical formation. The tools of geography have often been used for colonial purposes, and this colonial presence endures at SPRI, not least in the library, whose space, collections and cataloguing systems reflect the Whiteness and imperial history of the Institute.

Polar UDC was seen as a collaborative, co-operative endeavour that was most productive when used by other participating libraries (Roberts, 1960, 5). But this aim for and assumption of universality – in perspective, language and priorities – at a polar library situated in the UK, whose involvement in the polar regions has almost always related to its imperial projects, demonstrates the inherent coloniality of the library classification system developed at SPRI.

Colonial attitudes are encoded in the classification scheme. For example, *Ethnography* is the only form of anthropology offered in Polar UDC. There are also numerous examples of subject categories that carry offensive connotations for Indigenous communities in the Arctic. Although ethnographic labels have been updated, with changes made going forwards, there are plenty of examples of offensive terminology, such as *Eskimo* and *Lapp*, that remain in the online catalogue and, more prominently, on the spines of the books themselves. With no better alternative available, *Traditional Ecological Knowledge* is crudely passed off as *Attitudes to nature*, and headings in the *Religion* and *Social Science* categories betray negative stereotypes and mischaracterisations of Indigenous culture, for instance, 392.123 – *Infanticide* is a subdivision of *Social customs* rather than *Criminal law* and 398 – *Native peoples, folk beliefs and tales* is the best option for describing Inuit cosmology. Headings such as 325.3 – *Native policy*, used to describe governmental relationships with Indigenous populations, make it clear that the assumed perspective in the classification system is non-Indigenous.

Polar UDC has tried to keep pace with shifting geographical boundaries and place-name changes that often relate to Indigenous self-determination in the Arctic. However, the results in the library catalogue do not always mirror the real-world decolonial catalysts for these classification revisions. For example, in 1999 the political map of Canada was redrawn to create Nunavut; 'through political activism and long-term negotiations, a small, marginalised Indigenous group overcame many obstacles to peacefully establish a government that they controlled within the Canadian state, thereby gaining control of their land, their resources and their future' (Kikkert, 2020). Yet in Polar UDC, (*440.2) – *Nunavut* sits as a subheading of (*440) – *Northwest Territories*, now a distinct Canadian territory that included Nunavut when it was originally transferred to Canada from the British Empire in the 19th century. Hierarchical nuances betray lingering colonial attitudes. In another example of the deficiencies of Polar UDC, there is no geographical place name in the scheme that accurately describes Sápmi, the homeland region of the

Sámi people, which spans northern Finland, Sweden, Norway and part of Russia. Classification based on neat national borders in fact results in books on the same subject being scattered across the Library, and assigned classmarks according to the best guess of various librarians over several decades.

As Indigenous librarians Littletree and Metoyer point out, 'Words are powerful. The way we name and classify the world around us is indicative of our values and beliefs. The words we choose to identify elements in our world can illuminate, educate, and elucidate, or they can perpetuate stereotypes and misinformation' (Littletree and Metoyer, 2015, 654). It is important that the Polar Library does not preserve inaccurate and offensive terminology, or make northern Indigenous peoples feel 'othered' or unwelcome when they see the colonialist, outdated terminology that librarians chose to use. Controlled vocabularies may be a necessary feature of libraries, but, as Vowel points out, naming is tricky because it is so intimately tied up with the issue of identity: fluid and often self-defined (Vowel, 2016, 8). The intellectual task of updating the classification scheme and the manual labour of recataloguing thousands of records and relabelling items is huge, and all the more daunting because it is clear that decolonising work with the classification scheme can never be perfect.

Critical information literacy

Thus education, rather than mere correction, offered a compelling way of dealing with the flaws of Polar UDC. As Drabinski suggests, changing the language or structure of a classification scheme cannot deal with its fundamental limitations, its inherent universalising nature, but we can transform our users' relationship to the system through radical pedagogical work (Drabinski, 2008, 202–3). After discussion with teaching and research staff at SPRI, it became clear that there was enthusiasm for this educational approach to set about decolonising the classification scheme. Critical information literacy, with its focus on power dynamics and the political and social aspects of information, offered a particularly useful blueprint for the design of the workshop offered to undergraduate students who use the library for their Geographies of the Arctic course and, separately, to research staff and students at the SPRI Polar Humanities and Social Sciences seminar.

We put participants in the position of cataloguer and asked them how they would encapsulate a book of Sakha epic tales in a few keywords. As expected, everyone made different suggestions, and so the activity led us to discuss the practice of categorising knowledge, the contingency of language and the different biases and ways of thinking about the world that our categorisations reveal. Next in the workshop, we showed how different editions and translations of the same text in the library had been catalogued with different subject headings over time. We talked about the political context of using the autonym 'Sakha' over the Russian term 'Yakut' and the implications of 'folktale' over 'myth' or 'literature' in the subject headings.

The second half of the workshop was used to present the history of Polar UDC at SPRI and how it is used to organise the library, focusing in particular on its more problematic sections: an authentic problem with students and librarians as ‘co-investigators’ (Freire, 1996, 62). We asked the participants to critique sections of the classification scheme, with reflective prompts about what they found surprising, whose perspective takes precedence, the way the hierarchy works and the terminology itself. Students and researchers brought their prior knowledge but also their lived experiences to critique the classification scheme. Many were surprised to see the Library presented as a non-neutral force, with the workshop revealing the constructed nature of the ostensibly static and objective classification scheme and the people involved in creating and applying it.

In his experience of organising knowledge at the Polar Library, Roberts learned that ‘some things need to be done and other things are impractical or unnecessary’ (Roberts, 1960, 13). Overhauling the Polar Library classification scheme with a decolonial approach is logistically impractical; the time and labour involved in reclassifying is compounded by the need to first update the thesaurus itself and edit the subject headings in the catalogue. Yet this work is absolutely necessary to avoid the violence of reproducing colonial terminology. Workshopping a way forwards with students and researchers has not only promoted a deeper, critical understanding of the flawed information systems they work with and the implications this has for research, it has also helped the Library to make progress in thinking through its priorities for updating Polar UDC.

Crowe and Elzi envisage a “meeting in the middle” for cataloguers, reference archivists and instruction librarians’ to acknowledge the inherently problematic catalogue and use it as a valuable teaching tool, but also making sure not to shy away from the necessary work to address overt injustice in cataloguing practice (Crowe and Elzi, 2017, 271). Last updated in full in 1994, revision of the Polar UDC classification scheme is long overdue. The process will be labour intensive for a small team with no dedicated cataloguers. But for lasting, visible change, recataloguing work must take place. Our collaborative and critical pedagogical approach to decolonising the Library can help us to do so.

Conclusion

Each of these case studies demonstrates what can be done with limited time at a local level, and how the subject specialisms and linguistic expertise within a community of library workers can provide templates and workflows through which colleagues might learn by example. They cover collections that concentrate on various areas of the world with different politics and histories in relation to borders and colonialism, but common themes emerge.

Librarians at the African Studies Library and the University Library encountered different ways in which resource description can reinforce biases that impede discoverability: the former’s reclassification project sought to improve upon a slow and

inconsistent application of UDC that was hindering students finding books on shelves, and the latter's addition of extra bibliographic notes for *cartonera* records aimed to make the collection more discoverable to readers using a variety of search terms and local languages.

Each library also tackled the problems that arise when geography is used as the primary facet of classification: African Studies and SPRI both observe that hierarchies based on national borders scatter books on the same subject across a library and reinforce colonial boundaries. Where African Studies found that a more thematic order could accommodate shared histories across the continent, the University Library's Latin American and Iberian collections addressed the prevalence of nationality as the predominant locator with *more* geographical specificity, recording location to as local a level as possible in order to best articulate regional productions.

Language was another facet that appeared across multiple collections: although a linguistic order risks reviving former colonial categories, the African Studies librarian found that it was preferable to sorting books by nation, enhancing user access and allowing readers to browse and compare, for example, Lusophone and Francophone literatures from different countries. Prioritising the local over the national linguistically as well as geographically, the *cartonera* collections include subject headings in the language chiefly spoken in the place of publication, opting for regional accuracy over standard Spanish orthography.

Progressive changes often entailed overlooking certain cataloguing rules or settling for minimal levels of encoding, as the Latin American and Iberian department did in adding unauthorised agents to recognise *cartonera* creators, and as the Polar Library aims to do in challenging the assumed non-Indigenous perspective of Polar UDC subject headings. With support and perseverance, these incremental efforts might affect change at an institutional level, too. By demonstrating the potential for a more flexible and hospitable response to classification, professional networks formed around alterations to local schemes might highlight similar problems in international standards; in 2021 the Cambridge Cataloguing Advisory Group convened an open meeting to plan local treatment of outdated terminology in LCSH and agreed to update the Cambridge catalogue to display 'Undocumented immigrants' in place of 'Illegal aliens' and 'Noncitizens' instead of 'Aliens'.

These case studies demonstrate that cataloguing and classification, so often perceived as discrete, impartial and technical, in fact permeate every other aspect of library management, with particular implications for collection development and information literacy. The African Studies and Polar libraries both found traces of individual librarians' classification styles, suggesting that these practices are neither ahistorical nor neutral, even (or especially) when following mandated guidelines. The work to address inequalities in resource description is slow, boundless and subjective. In addition to the Decolonising through Critical Librarianship staff discussion groups, the Latin American and Iberian department's *cartonera* workshops with children honour the publishers' commitment to access and engagement, the SPRI student workshops invite the Library's

readers to challenge the terms of classification themselves and a recent workshop with six graduate trainees and an intern from libraries across Cambridge marked an opportunity to discuss changes to library practices with new professionals (Decolonising through Critical Librarianship, 2021). Accessible and effective bibliography demands ongoing attention from as broad and critical an audience as possible and, through these case studies, a collaborative pedagogical method developed as the most promising way to maintain the critical engagement necessary for continued change.

A note about the Cambridge University Decolonising Through Critical Librarianship Group

The authors of this chapter, Jennifer Skinner (African Studies Library), Clara Panozzo Zéner and Christopher Greenberg (Latin American and Iberian Collections, Cambridge University Library), Frances Marsh (Polar Library, Scott Polar Research Institute) and Eve Lacey (Newnham College Library), work together as part of the Decolonising Through Critical Librarianship Group. More information on their case studies, resources and events for librarians in Cambridge and elsewhere can be found online: <https://decolonisingthroughcriticallibrarianship.wordpress.com>.

Inspiration for the *cartoneras* cataloguing project came from a workshop held at the LXIII SALALM (Seminar on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials) Conference in 2018 in Mexico City. The workshop was titled ‘Edición cartonera como posible apuesta para descolonizar el mundo editorial y las bibliotecas’, and was facilitated by Paloma Celis Carbajal and Laura Martin (University of Wisconsin), Wendy Pedersen (University of New Mexico), and Marc Delcan and Rosa Serna (Pensaré Cartonera).

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