What's so Radical About Librarianship? 
Social Justice in the Information Professions

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(Image credit: A stormy afternoon on Hilo Bay by Lindley Ashline is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.)
Follow along...

Slides: https://goo.gl/YdwrMs
Handout: https://goo.gl/HqkNtD

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Some key points for a brief definition of critical/radical/progressive/socially responsible librarianship.

Critical librarianship…

● Starts with the understanding that libraries are *not neutral*
● Asks two key questions about all our work:
  ○ Whose perspectives and voices are represented?
  ○ Who benefits from this work?

Importantly, this work has a long, international history. [See our digital handout for more information, including a few informative histories of critical librarianship.]
There are very many aspects of critical librarianship -- including many that we don’t have time to address in detail during this panel. (For example: critical pedagogy, radical cataloging, building and maintaining diverse collections. In many of these areas, critical librarians’ activities are outward facing: empowering students, building community collections, etc. However, I’d like to start off our panel by turning inwardly and exploring some of the issues around librarian labor.

All critical librarianship requires an element of self-reflection and self-critique. And it would be hypocritical to discuss the impact that librarianship can have on social justice without some critical reflection on the state of affairs in our own professional communities. Our critical work starts with helping to foster safe, equitable work environments and building solidarity with one another.

I only have a few minutes, so I’ll just barely be able to point at a few of many interconnected issues on the theme of librarian labor. If you want to know more, all of the sources I cite, plus a number of additional resources, are linked in our digital handout.
The barriers to diversity in librarianship are structural.

In talking about labor issues in libraries, one issue is immediately obvious: The library profession in North America does not reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.

As Jennifer Vinopal points out in a recent article about diversity in library staffing: “We are starkly lacking in diversity based on race and ethnicity (we are overwhelmingly white), age (librarianship is an aging profession), disability, economic status, educational background, gender identity, sexual orientation, and other demographic and identity markers of difference. This lack of diversity should be seen as a signal, an invitation to us to look critically at our culture, our practices, and our assumptions, and investigate what it is about ourselves and our profession that is preventing underrepresented people from being able to, or even wanting to, enter and stay.”

In Hawai‘i, where the library profession is more racially diverse than on much of the continent, we still must question, e.g., the lack of indigenous representation in librarianship.

As Vinopal and others have rightly pointed out, building a diverse library staff does not stop at recruitment. Librarians from underrepresented groups are much more likely to leave the profession upon encountering hostile work environments and constant micro- (and macro-) aggressions. [See the LIS Microaggressions tumblr and zine for a primer.]
A reminder of how representation doesn’t necessarily equal agency: librarianship is a majority female profession, but men are statistically overrepresented in library administration -- and male library directors earn higher average salaries.

A critical look at library labor must entail a reflection on how colonialism, racism, sexism, and other forms of structural oppression shape our profession and our organizational cultures.
Precarity is harmful.

Precarious employment is very common in our field today. It goes by several names, depending on the context: casual hires, adjunct librarians, contract workers, on-call librarians, visiting librarians, temporary librarians, substitute librarians, etc. These are positions that offer minimal compensation, no job security, and rarely accrue benefits.

In a fantastic essay about the impact of precarity on the profession (seriously - go read it!), Canadian librarian Myron Groover, outlines some of the very human impacts of precarious employment, as shared by individuals on Twitter. Here are just a couple of those examples:

- Precarity is: can’t afford to get sick because you don’t get paid if you don’t work. What’s a “sick day”?
- Precarity is: hustling for stability as an indigenous woman and being judged for my hustle by old white dudes who have fallen into jobs.
- Precarity is: I’ve been working in libraries for 14+ yrs. As of Sunday, I will have health benefits for the 1st time ever…for 5 months.

The image on the slide is from The On-Call Waltz -- a great zine about precarity authored by two public librarians, Anna Ferri and Meghan Whyte, in Vancouver, Canada -- where precarious employment is pretty much the default scenario for entry level public librarians. The zine is great primer on auxiliary librarianship: personal narratives interwoven with definitions and structural critique.

On page 10, Ferri and Whyte outline some of the various names for precarious library work and the emotional responses that those names generate. This takes the form of
a table with three columns: “What our positions are called” “What it means” and “What it feels like”. For example:

Position title: “On-call librarian” - Means: “???” - Feels like: “Don’t call us, we’ll call you.’ ‘We like, ‘yes’ people.”
OR Position title: “Casual librarian” - Means “See above” or “???” - Feels like “You work as a pseudo-librarian and are valued as such.”

Precarious employment has a lot of negative impacts on librarians in these positions:

- Instability and lack of job security; loss of potential earnings (which exacerbates income inequality)
- Negative health impacts (being uninsured or underinsured; not to mention, the terrible health impacts of stress); negative personal life impacts (eg. putting off having kids for lack of stability)
- Lack of support to engage in “extracurricular” library advocacy and professional development
- The impact of precarious labor is not equally felt: as Melissa Cardenas-Dow points out, in academia “most underrepresented individuals, minorities, and women inordinately make up the ranks of adjunct faculty hired.”

It also has negative impacts on our profession:

- As Groover points out, precarity “undermines the ability of staff to form bonds with the communities they serve” -- which ultimately hurts library budget because those relationships lead to community advocacy in support of libraries.
- We lose a lot of talented people to other fields where they can find better compensated, more sustainable employment

Precarious employment is entangled with other structural barriers to diversity in the profession, including the high cost of library school and the catch-22 of entry levels jobs that require years of experience -- experience that is often only attainable through unpaid or drastically underpaid internships.
Librarians are workers.

(Image credit: Northern exposure: Striking a labor pose by Jon Rieley-Goddard is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.)

[Image on the slide is from 2012 Toronto Librarians’ strike.]

One solution to some of these issues is to begin seeing ourselves as workers:

In a recent book chapter, Geraci (2016) points to the invisibility of academic librarians’ instructional labor in national data about higher ed teaching. Without better data, we can’t accurately track changes in the number of teaching librarians over time or effectively issues like workload imbalance and burnout. Geraci advocates for academic teaching librarians to start by collecting better data locally, regionally, and nationally -- and use assessment as a tool to define a sustainable instruction workload in a field where burnout is a significant issue.

In general, Geraci points to the fragmented nature of academic librarians’ labor activities -- scattered here and there in local actions and pockets of the American Library Association such as the ALA-APA’s Salary and Status of Library Workers committee -- and advocates for librarians’ self-understanding as a part of the academic labor force, an identity particularly relevant to an industry where labor struggles are becoming increasingly common.

One poignant example if these struggles is the recent lockout of the faculty at Long Island University-Brooklyn during unsuccessful contract negotiations. A few days
before the start of the fall semester, the faculty were notified that they would not longer be allowed in their offices. Classes proceeded on the first day -- taught by replacement workers and, in some cases, administrative employees. The lockout, which lasted for 12 days, was unprecedented in its scale and, notably, LIU Brooklyn librarians were one of the best organized units on campus. This event garnered a fair amount of media attention, including a statement in support of the faculty from ALA-APA. While the lockout is over, contract negotiations continue (and LIUB faculty can still use your support).

In 2014, art historian Miya Tokumitsu wrote a fantastic article arguing against the prevalent cultural rhetoric of “do what you love.” Do what you love, she argues, too closely aligns our sense of self with our work. While thinking of our work in this way is occasionally fulfilling, it often leads to our self-exploitation. We take unpaid internships, put in uncompensated overtime, and accept substandard work environments -- all “in the name of love.” (Not to mention, this disposition devalues the labor of so many individuals doing, quote “unlovable” jobs.) Tokumitsu refers specifically to academics and creative professionals, but while reading this essay, I identified many parallels with librarianship. In general, we love our work and are very invested in it -- and that love enables us to do a lot of great things.

However, I think it is worth it to step back and think about how this love sometimes clouds our critical faculties: What attitudes towards work does it normalize? What barriers to entry to the profession does it create? How might it limit the impact of our externally-facing social justice work?
Homelessness and Libraries
By Kealiʻi MacKenzie

Part of: “What’s So Radical About Librarianship?” with Koa Luke & Sveta Stoytcheva
HLA 2016 - Hilo, Hawaiʻi

Image credit: Blech Panda Biscuit by Mark Dumont is licensed under (CC BY-NC 2.0)
Situating Myself

Addressing Public Libraries

My experiences:

Marlborough Public Library (2008 - 2010)

Hawai‘i State Library (2016/present)
What is homelessness?

Defined 3 ways according to Ellyn Ruhlman:

Situational

Episodic

Chronic

Role of libraries and librarians

A place for everyone

- last free public space
- Safer than the streets

- However “library staff members, especially in urban areas, have a complicated relationship with homeless patrons” (Kelleher 2013, 19)
- Still provide information and access to materials
Behaviors

Policy targeting behavior -
Are they fair? Are they proportional?
Example: odor and fines
Solutions?

Image credit: Red Panda by Dan Davison is licensed under CC BY 2.0
Questions

Are librarians and libraries equipped to adequately serve homeless patrons?

Do library policies create a welcome space? Do library policies serve our patrons or just staff? Is there a medium?

What role should the library have in providing support services to homeless patrons? (taken from the #critlib discussion on homelessness)

Who benefits from library policy? Who is harmed?

Image credit: Red Panda by William Warby is licensed under CC BY 2.0
Nānā I Ke Kumu (Look to the Source) Archival Repatriation and Community Centered Practices

ʻUluʻUlu: The Henry Kuʻualoha Giugni Moving Image archive of Hawaiʻi
Koa Luke Cataloger / Assistant Archivist

(Image credit: Lehua, Kilauea by Sean Munson is licensed under NoDerivs 2.0 Generic (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0))
Archival Practices have been colonial and imperial
What and how items are collected and archived
How items are organized and archived
How records and items are accessed

Hanlon 1999
Christen 2011
Archives hold important records that scholars, activists, community members etc use in liberatory and empowering ways

(Image credit: Pele (DSC_3303) by Thomas Tunsch is licensed under 2.0 Generic (CC BY-SA 2.0))
Who benefits? Who matters most?
Whose perspectives and voices are being represented? Who do these materials belong to?

(Image credit: starr-040423-0006-Sida_fallax-flowers-Manawainui-Maui by Forest and Kim Starr is licensed under 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0))
Repatriation

In the United States, the transfer of all legal rights to and physical custody of Native American cultural materials to lineal descendants, culturally affiliated Indian tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations.-From Protocols For Native American Archival Materials

[Repatriation is] “the ‘return’ not only of” “published and unpublished ethnographic writings, but also of the notes...made, the field diaries...kept, the audiovisual recordings...made, as well as any material items that may directly to the work [“collectors”] did.” Access is essential. Jaarsma 2002
Examples of Repatriation and issues

-Hui Malama I Na Kupuna O Hawai‘i Nei works with museums to return ‘iwi and funeral objects
-Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands at UHM
-The Pacific Manuscripts Bureau
- Te Papa Museum returning the mahiole and ‘aha ‘ula of Kalani‘ōpuʻu to Bishop Museum
- Reprinting of hula and mele texts, hula indexes, performance, and song books as repatriation and “deinstitutionalization” of hula.

Amy Kuʻuleialoha Stillman

Examples of Repatriation and issues continued

Community Archives

A People’s Archive of Police Violence in Cleveland-http://www.archivingpoliceviolence.org/
Documenting Ferguson-http://digital.wustl.edu/ferguson/
Hawai’i Peace & Justice Archive Project-www.hawaiipeacearchive.info
Occupy Wall Street Library
Community Centered Approaches and Methods

Aʻohe Pau Ka ‘Ike I Ka Hālau Hoʻokahi
(Not All Knowledge is Learned in One House)

Kupuna playing music, 1982
Victoria Keith Productions
Knowledge exists in kūpuna (elders) about culture, places and historical events.

Crowd sourcing is a technique used by library professionals and is when a community of users is called upon to create metadata and tag records with information such as authority names and subject headings.

ʻUluʻulu recognizes the ʻike (knowledge) that exists in the community and those who come before us. When cataloging cultural or political material we contact community leaders and cultural practitioners who know the content the best and give the records context in which they were created; in turn making our records more important and relevant to the community we serve.
“Crowdsourcing uses social engagement techniques to help a group of people achieve a shared, usually significant, and large goal by working collaboratively together as a group.” Holley 2010
Community members breathe life into the collections by adding their knowledge and memories to the metadata making the collections more socially relevant; and searchable.

Image: ‘Ulu’ulu Archive Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies Collection
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Methods of Gathering Metadata</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Social Media Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal Contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sending Files remotely and using Google</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms (form fillable) to submit information</td>
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‘Ulu‘ulu Data Entry Form

Please use this form to enter information about video footage from ‘Ulu‘ulu’s collections. Your input and knowledge is valuable and will help us enhance our online catalog.

* Required

Video number *
This number can be found beneath the video player window. Example: c3_14776_acc_1

People
Identify people shown in the video and the timecode when they appear. It is OK to list several people. The timecode can be found in the bottom right corner of the video player window. Example: Don Ho 2:31

Location
Identify locations shown in the video and the timecode when they appear. It is OK to list several locations. Example: Aloha Stadium 5:28

Subject
Identify any subjects discussed or shown in the video. It is OK to list several subjects. Example: weddings, education, tourism

Date
Identify the date of the video if known.

Miscellaneous Description
Add any description of the video or its historical significance that does not fit the categories above. Example: This footage shows a campaign ad for Emile K. Hime for mayor on KOMO in 1962.

Submit

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Powered by Google Forms

This form was created inside of University of Hawaii.
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<td>Hawaiian sovereignty</td>
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Let’s discuss!

[Image credit: Public domain image via Pixabay.]