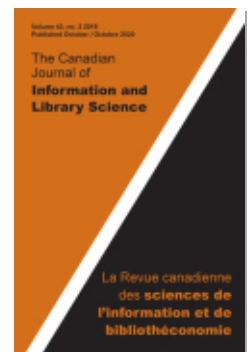No Faith in the Library: Challenging Secularism and
Neutrality in Librarianship / Neutralité, laïcité,
éthique en bibliothéconomie, éthique de l'information

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No Faith in the Library: Challenging Secularism and Neutrality in Librarianship

Neutralité, laïcité, éthique en bibliothéconomie, éthique de l'information

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Abstract: The objective of this article is to examine contemporary debates about the role of religion in public spaces, public discourse, and workplaces and the ideology of secularism at the heart of these debates. The article demonstrates the relevance of such debates for library workers and library patrons and the need to challenge the assumed neutrality of secularist ideologies to ensure libraries do not marginalize or exclude religious perspectives and minorities.

Keywords: neutrality, secularism, ethics in librarianship, information ethics

Resume : L'objectif de cet article est d'examiner les débats contemporains sur le rôle de la religion dans les espaces publics, le discours public et les lieux de travail, ainsi que l'idéologie du sécularisme au cœur de ces débats. Le document démontre la pertinence de tels débats pour les bibliothécaires et les usagers des bibliothèques et la nécessité de remettre en question la neutralité présumée des idéologies séculières pour assurer que les bibliothèques ne marginalisent pas ou n'excluent pas de perspectives religieuses et de minorités.

Mots-cles : neutralité, laïcité, éthique en bibliothéconomie, éthique de l'information

During the Canadian federal election in 2015, Stephen Harper and the Conservative Party candidates promised that they would introduce legislation to ban federal public servants from wearing a niqab, a head-and-face covering worn by Muslim women. Conservatives defended this proposal by arguing that the niqab was contrary to Canadian values and women's rights. The proposed legislation was intended to apply to women who work for the federal government, which would include library workers in government libraries. According to spokespersons from the union representing federal public servants, there were no federal public employees who wore the niqab (*CBC News* 2015). The Conservative Party did not win the election and, therefore, did not introduce the legislation on the niqab. There are, however, other similar proposals in Canada: the Conservative proposal was in part inspired by the Parti Québécois's proposed "secular charter"—namely, the 2013 Charter Affirming the Values of State Secularism and Religious Neutrality and of Equality between Women and Men, and Providing a Framework for Accommodation Requests.[1] The charter proposed to ban public servants in the province of Quebec from wearing

"conspicuous religious symbols" (Fitz-Morris 2015). Examples of the religious attire that would be banned included Sikh turbans, Muslim headscarves, and large Christian crosses. The secular charter did not become law, but the province of Quebec has since introduced two other similar forms of legislation, with the most recent Act Respecting the Laicity of the State, which is commonly referred to as Bill 21, being passed in Quebec in June 2019.[2]

These varying proposals for new legislation address the space for religious symbols and attire in the workplace and the public sphere. The proposed legislation would apply to library workers and library patrons to varying degrees and therefore challenges library workers to think through questions of secularism and religion in the workplace. The Quebec secular charter, also known as Bill 60, for example, was to apply to all public servants and quasi-public servants. This meant that the secular charter, if it had been approved, would have applied not only to individuals employed directly by the province but also to those working in public institutions funded by the province; public, academic, provincial government, and school library workers all work directly for the province or in institutions funded by the provincial government. The secular charter or Quebec Charter of Values was tabled by the Parti Québécois in 2013, but it died on the order papers before the spring election of 2014.

In 2017, the ruling Liberal Party in Quebec passed new legislation (Bill 62) titled An Act to Foster Adherence to State Religious Neutrality and sought, in particular, to provide a framework for religious accommodation requests.[3] This legislation was a broader piece of legislation about religious accommodation, but it contained articles that specifically targeted face coverings. The legislation, as proposed, stipulated that anyone working for a provincial public body, as well as anyone receiving services from a public body, must do so with their face uncovered. This legislation would have applied to any library workers in publicly funded institutions and, for example, women wearing face veils seeking services in affected libraries. Quebec Superior Court Justice Marc-André Blanchard ruled in June 2018 that the face covering ban be suspended because it appeared to violate freedom of conscience and religion, as set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedom.[4] The issue was revisited again in 2019. The ruling Coalition Avenir Quebec introduced and passed the most recent iteration of the legislation, Bill 21: An Act Respecting the Laicity of the State.[5] This bill includes similar provisions requiring people seeking services in provincial public institutions to have their face uncovered but limits the requirement to instances where identifying oneself is necessary for security purposes. The legislation also sets out a list of provincial public employees who are prohibited from wearing any religious symbol in the workplace. Public, government, and academic librarians are not included in this list, but teachers in public schools are banned from wearing religious symbols and, by implication, teacher librarians. Quebec's proposed legislation has taken different forms, but, in each version of the legislation, it is the principles of secularism and state religious neutrality that are cited as justifications for the legislation. Given the ongoing debates about religion in the workplace and the public

sphere, the secular and neutral nature of the library and the librarian is a timely topic.

Various forms of legislation have been proposed, and some have become law, but no law as of yet has come into effect without being challenged for violating individual rights. The proposed legislation enjoins library workers and, in particular, library administrators to ask themselves what role they would play in advocating for their own religious freedoms, for religious minorities in their workplace, or for policing what library workers and library patrons wear. Legislation has been proposed and drafted that would affect many different types of libraries, so the debates are important for public, academic, school, and government library workers, who have an opportune time to examine the way secular principles of neutrality are mobilized to specifically marginalize and exclude religious perspectives from public discourse, services, and workplaces. This article does not unpack the Quebec legislation in detail but, rather, challenges the ideology that lies at the heart of this type legislation: secularism and its purported neutrality.

This article calls for the critique of neutrality in the library to be extended to include a critique of secularism. The critique of neutrality in librarianship embodies many similar themes as the critiques of secularism. It is typically social justice commitments that inspire library workers and library advocates to challenge neutrality (Bales 2018; Gibson et al. 2017; Samek 2007). Many of the arguments against political and economic neutrality in the library can easily be applied to secularism too. Moreover, a fuller understanding of the different meanings of the terms "secular," "secularity," "secularism," and "neutrality" as well as their implications will permit library workers to be cautious that their principles are not mobilized to inadvertently undermine certain world-views, faith-based practices, and, particularly, the rights of religious minorities.

Neutrality

Neutrality in librarianship is an unspoken standard (Joyce 2008, 33). The principle of neutrality is not specifically codified by the Canadian Federation of Library Associations or even in the much-referenced American Library Association's (ALA) (2014) Library Bill of Rights. As John Wenzler (2019) points out, there is very little library studies literature that explicitly defends library neutrality—a limitation he endeavours to correct with his essay. The principle is codified in the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions's (2016) Code of Ethics for Librarians and Other Information Workers. The principle is also regularly mobilized around intellectual freedom controversies or in order to critique library workers' involvement in political action (Burgess 2019, 25; Wenzler 2019, 58).

Neutrality is seen within librarianship as a "hallmark of professionalism" (Lewis 2008, 1). Tracing the roots back to the work of Melville Dewey in the 1870s, Henry Blanke (1989, 39) argues that librarians' efforts to establish themselves as professionals and be recognized as such were seen by Dewey and others as requiring librarians to be "politically value-free." Similarly, Charles Cutter

described librarians as professionals "of no political party" (quoted in Birdsall 1988, 75). Librarian neutrality has also been tied to patrons' intellectual freedom rights, which are a cornerstone of librarianship and embedded in many library statements of principles, ethics, or rights (Burgess 2019, 28; Gorman 2015, 111). Library workers are called to remain unbiased and objective; they are thereby presumably able to ensure that library services are available to all regardless of their world-view and that reference assistance is not driven by the library workers' agendas (Foskett 1962).

Supporters of library neutrality acknowledge that the principle of neutrality is not value neutral (Foskett 1962, 11; Wenzler 2019, 70). Library neutrality is intended to ensure that library collections are diverse and that library workers' political and moral positions are not imposed on users. Neutrality as a principle is at times also circumscribed: library workers should advocate for library issues, but they remain neutral at the library on all other moral and political issues (Joyce 2008, 35). With the principle of neutrality, library workers can advocate against censorship of their collections but not against war, to use Toni Samek's (2007, 7) example.

Critique of neutrality

The library literature problematizing the principle of neutrality covers a wide range of topics, from the history of the ALA's Social Responsibility Round Table (SRRT) (Joyce 2008) to the paradoxes of American liberalism (Birdsall 1988) and its potential to be deployed to maintain racist policies (Gibson et al. 2017, 753). There are three core themes within the librarian critique of neutrality: (1) ideology and the legitimation of knowledge; (2) neutrality and power relations; and (3) moral responsibility. Parallel themes can be found within critiques of secularism. It is therefore possible to extend librarian critiques of neutrality to also problematize secularism.

Ideology and the legitimation of knowledge

Librarian critiques of the principle of neutrality suggest that neutrality is not neutral at all but, rather, a specific world-view, though it presents the existing system as natural and given. Critics suggest that the debates about intellectual freedom and information access take place within an existing neoliberal system that is not questioned (Bales 2018, 14; Birdsall 1988; Samek 2007). Libraries that are based on a model of neutrality help to reproduce this ideology. Samek (2007, 8) further contends that "the myth of library neutrality . . . divorces library and information work from participation in social struggle, and makes the profession vulnerable to control networks such as economic and political regimes."

Neutrality can be deployed as a means to intentionally or unwittingly take the current political or economic system as a given. Robert Jensen (2008) notes that libraries that accept the political and economic system are characterized as neutral, but librarians that disagree with it are labelled political. This situation plays out in the workplace (92). For example, a display of business material

would go unnoticed, but a display of Marxist theory is considered biased and political (94–95). Library workers' concerns and challenges are articulated within a "neutral" framework that belies the political, social, and secular assumptions upon which they are founded. Peter McDonald, for example, notes the simplicity of intellectual freedom discussions around censorship and the banning of books. Book banning is typically framed in a discussion of intractable debates between various parties, such as "Gays vs. the Christian Right" (McDonald 2008, 9). According to McDonald, these freedom-of-speech debates are framed in a dialogue of "choice," yet they mask the corporate hegemony of the publishing industry. The corporate control over what we read is hidden, and yet it makes it increasingly difficult to read outside the logic of the marketplace.

Neutrality and power relations

Quoting Desmond Tutu, Jensen (2008, 92) suggests that by choosing neutrality librarians are choosing the side of the oppressor. Following from the argument that neutrality is ideological, critical librarianship demonstrates how the principle of neutrality is a means to maintain the status quo and existing power structures. Neutrality works to mask and uphold the existing class structure, knowledge elites, and systemic racism (Farkas 2017; Gibson et al. 2017, 253). Blanke (1989, 43) notes, for example, that "neutrality serves to further the interests of a wealthy and influential elite at the expense of society as a whole."

Analysis of the principle of neutrality shows how it has been mobilized to justify passivity in the face of racism in libraries (Gibson et al. 2017, 253; Iverson 2008, 27). Fights for racial equality and civil rights have even resulted in loss of employment, such as in the case of Ruth Brown, a library director in Oklahoma in 1951 (Sparanese 2008, 76). Furthermore, Blanke (1989, 29) argues that librarians' neutrality has unwittingly made the profession complicit with existing political and economic structures: "Librarianship's reluctance to define its values in political terms and to cultivate a sense of social responsibility may allow it to drift into an uncritical accommodation with society's dominant political and economic powers." Early champions of the public library saw it as a means to integrate immigrants and the working class into society, but this integration was ultimately intended to support the existing class structure (Rosenzweig 2008, 6).

The manner in which the principle of neutrality supports the status quo can be seen in the times when the principle of neutrality mobilized to require that library workers be apolitical. For example, the SRRT was created as a space where issues of race, violence, war and peace, inequality, and justice could be discussed, and this spurred a heated debate about the place of social justice in a library association (Joyce 2008, 37). David Berninghausen, a vocal opponent of the SRRT, saw librarian advocacy as wholly incompatible with the foundational library principle of intellectual freedom (quoted in Wenzler 2019, 59). Similar criticisms were launched at the ALA's Gay and Lesbian Task Force (Joyce 2008, 33). Wenzler (2019, 59) defends library neutrality, arguing that Berninghausen's "intransigence" led him to falsely conclude that political activism was

inconsistent with the principle of open debate. For Wenzler, library neutrality is worth defending, but it need not stand in the way of open-minded debate or social justice work.

Neutrality and moral responsibility

Critics of the principle of neutrality have also expressed deep concern that "neutrality" is an abdication of moral responsibility: "This is no time to be neutral. The time to act with integrity is now" (Parker 1958, 364). As Joseph Good (2008, 144) notes, librarians developing library standards is not enough: "There is abundant discussion of professional standards and competencies, but little mention of the ethical basis for these standards. Without an ethical basis, these standards are fundamentally two-dimensional." Critics are concerned that neutrality leads to moral relativism or goes as far as calling it an "immoral act" because it implies that librarians should not stand up against oppression (Good 2008; Jensen 2008, 91). Stephen Bales (2018, 172) argues that library neutrality is "irresponsible," and Samek (2007, 7) suggests that it limits library workers' abilities to advocate for social justice.

Secularism

Scholars who have challenged the hegemony of the neutrality principle in librarianship have been cognizant of the manner in which "neutrality" can be mobilized to support the status quo and are concerned about the manner in which neutrality is not neutral at all but, rather, used to justify the priority given to certain ideologies and the delegitimization of other world-views. Similarly, secularism is presented as neutral. Quebec's proposed "secular charter," for example, reflected a secularist position that holds that religion is an exclusively private matter and has no place in the public sphere. This is not a neutral position but, rather, works from the premise that it is actually possible to have public space that is separate from the sacred and that this separation is necessary for society to function.

Secularism has also been critiqued as a form of ideology, which presents itself as neutral and masks the manner in which it delegitimizes certain worldviews. There are different schemes to distinguish between a variety of meanings of the secular (Casanova 2011, 54; Taylor 2007, 15–20). José Casanova's (2011) typology is used in this article because he explicitly distinguishes between empirical/historical forces of secularization and the ideological. Casanova employs the analytic categories of the secular, secularization, and secularism. The "secular," for Casanova, is the other of the sacred. The secular in Western Christianity originally had a theological meaning that was part of a binary of secular/profane versus religious/sacred. Casanova uses the example of the religious priest who withdraws from the world into a monastery (56). In Western Christendom, the monastic priest was differentiated from the secular priest who preached to the laity. The distinction presupposed, though, that the secular was intertwined with the sacred; both were a part of religious practice. The secular/religious binary is the means by which we can classify or make sense of reality

(62)—hence, the reason why Casanova refers to it as an epistemic category (55). Over time, the secular has come to encompass the majority of the world, with the religious as a "residual category," and, increasingly, we fail to acknowledge the manner in which the two concepts are linked (55).

The term "secularization" points to the empirical and historical process of the world becoming increasingly secular (Casanova 2011, 55). Secularization includes such changes as the separation of church and state, the privatization of religion, and changes in individual belief and practices. The separation of church and state uses the secular/religious binary to limit religious authorities from roles in the governance of the nation-state. Secularization also refers to the privatization of religion, where religion is characterized as a matter of private belief and does not make up part of public and political discourse. The separation of church and state and the privatization of religion happen together in varying degrees, depending on the country. There are countries, like the United States, that have enshrined the separation of church and state within the Constitution, though religious belief and commitment make up a part of the political discourse. Canada does not explicitly refer to the separation of church and state, but religious belief is less acceptable publicly within political debate. Secularization also refers to decreasing personal belief in religion and people's decreasing participation in religious practices, be it attendance at religious services, membership within religious institutions, or the practice of religion, such as ceremony, prayer, and meditation.

The term "secularism" signifies the ideological world-view. According to Casanova (2011, 67), there are two main secularist ideologies: the first ideology hypothesizes that over time religion will be superseded; the second ideology asserts that religion is irrational and should be banned from the public sphere. Secularism becomes an ideology when it develops into a theory about what religion is and what it does (66). It is possible, from Casanova's view, that a society accept the statecraft doctrine and not the ideology: there would be a separation of religious and political authority, with the state neutral in relation to religion (that is, not requiring or endorsing a specific religion) without the ideological viewpoint that the secular is the natural, given reality to which superfluous and irrational religions have been added.

The secularization thesis, which was championed by a number of sociological thinkers such as Émile Durkheim and Max Weber, maintained that science would increasingly provide the answers to humans' concerns and questions. The secularization thesis has been mobilized by some scholars to suggest that religion would become increasingly irrelevant or even disappear (Bruce 2011), although scholars have seriously challenged this thesis (Berger 2008; Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and Antwerpen 2011). Secularism goes further and is an ideological world-view that posits the material world described by scientists as the natural and given and religion as superfluous. On this account, the spiritual realm is presumed not to exist. Secularism therefore is not neutral; it makes specific ontological claims and derives political ambitions from it.

Critique of neutrality and implications for secularism

Critical librarianship, which has already articulated concerns about the ideology of neutrality and the underlying political framework, could further problematize secularism for its false claims to neutrality. The library could take a different approach and remain secular in so far as it does not impose or endorse any one form of religion without making claims that public space is naturally devoid of the sacred. There is no need then to ban library employees from wearing attire that has religious significance or is a part of a religious practice. The use of the principle of neutrality to explicitly support secularism in the library is infrequent, but Mike Wessells's (2003) use of neutrality demonstrates how it can be used to support secularist ideology. Wessells tells the story of a young patron asking a fascinating reference question: "Is God real?" The question inspired him to refer to the "bulwark of neutrality" that would assist him in serving this patron without religious bias (42). The term "bulwark" implies that neutrality is a form of defence. Wessells argues that neutrality is protecting us against religious conflict because "blood has regularly been spilled over differences in faith" (42). He argues that we have learned from history "that spiritual certitude and governmental power make an explosive mix" (42). Wessells's comments are not necessarily representative or emblematic of librarianship as a whole, but they do reflect common myths about religion and the need for a secular state/space and neutrality.

Neutrality and coercion

As noted above, the separation of church and state is one amongst many definitions of secularization. The neutrality of the state with regard to religion speaks specifically to forms of governmentality: state power will not be connected to any specific religious authority. State neutrality further ensures that all citizens may participate in democratic institutions regardless of their religious commitments and that the government will not play a role in dictating religious commitment (individuals will be free to practice and have the faith of their choice). State neutrality with respect to religion is a very specific political and ethical commitment. Charles Taylor (2001, 35) claims that the foundation for governance should be the principles of liberty, equality, and harmony. Neutrality, in this instance, is not apolitical or lacking in ethical commitments; there are very specific principles at the heart of government neutrality on the question of religion. State neutrality is neutral towards religion, but it is not value neutral. According to Taylor, the goals of neutrality are threefold:

- no one is coerced in the domain of religion;
- people of all different faiths are equal; and
- all spiritual families must be heard (35).

Taylor argues that government neutrality towards religion should be circumscribed by a very specific set of values. Government neutrality, therefore, is also not neutral but, rather, the articulation of a specific set of values that ensures that not only is there no coercion in the area of faith but also that people are not silenced or excluded regardless of their belief system.

We cannot conclude from state neutrality that library workers themselves as individuals must be neutral or that secular libraries cannot include or refer to any religious faith. Kenneth Peterson (1965, 299) makes this mistake when he uses the concept of "the separation of church and state" to launch an examination of the appropriateness of religious texts in state university libraries. In his article, the phrase "separation of church and state" is not examined. He simply takes the separation as given by referring to the American Constitution.[6] He creates a false problem with this phrase by assuming he has to defend the inclusion of religious texts for secular reasons in a state-funded university. There is a significant difference between the state being neutral on the question of people's faith and library workers and collections excluding religion. Furthermore, if library workers need to leave their position on religion out of their profession, this may actually violate the third goal that all faiths should be heard. The problem is equating the separation of religion and state with the privatization of religion, which is a different definition of secularity and not necessarily implied in the first.

Chris Kertesz (2001, 34) claims that the "separation of church and state is a thorny issue for public librarians." One of the "tricky" parts, according to Kertesz, for public librarians comes not from reference books on religion that are "objective" but, rather, from being able to "justify the expenditure of public funds for the gray areas of inspirational fiction, spiritual self-help books, accounts of encounters with angels or other metaphysical beings, child rearing in specific religious traditions, or essays on sin and morality" (34). Objective reference books are not defined, but the list of tricky topics is inspired by a concern about including texts that advocate a specific religious or spiritual belief or practice in the public arena. Finding the right balance of religious materials in a library collection is a challenge, but, again, state neutrality need not imply that texts from a specific religious or spiritual perspective are problematic for a publicly funded library.

Library workers should be cautious that the principle of the "separation of church and state" is not deployed as a means to justify excluding material from the library. There are also good reasons to be cautious about the way that the principle of the "privatization of religion" is deployed. The privatization of religion is another way of understanding secularity. One premise of secularism (the ideology that makes claims about what religion should do) is that the privatization of religion is necessary for the functioning of a democratic state. The argument is that citizens in a democratic state are free to have their own private beliefs and practices but that those beliefs should not enter debates over policy in a democratic public sphere. This thesis has been extensively critiqued. Taylor (2001) notes that the goal of government neutrality is to ensure that all voices are heard and considered, whether they are religious or non-religious. The privatization of religion violates this goal and silences a large number of people.

Moreover, if we rely on a binary between a secular public and private religion, as Casanova (2011, 63) notes, the problem remains: "How, where, and by whom the proper boundaries between the religious and the secular ought to be

drawn." The proposed legislation to ban religious symbols in the workplace, cited above, offers an example of how a dominant secular group ends up policing this boundary but regulating the behaviour of religious minorities in the public sphere who wear religious symbols or religious attire. Critics of the legislation have noted that there will be serious challenges in deciding when clothing is just clothing and when it is religious (Berger 2019). Moreover, the way that the legislation is framed, it targets religious minorities, such as Muslim women who wear a headscarf or face veil, the most. It is the self-identified secularists who are given the power to police religious minorities. Library workers, if they are required to police the attire of fellow library workers or patrons, are not being neutral but, instead, imposing a particular world-view on others and ultimately silencing religious voices. This is not neutrality but, rather, coercion in the realm of religion. As Jensen (2008) has argued, neutrality is problematic when it is siding with the oppressor.

As noted above, there are only a few scholars who have defended library neutrality explicitly, and, very often, it is taken for granted. Those who have, though, have made arguments similar to Taylor (2001): neutrality is not without a set of values. Rather, neutrality in the library is similar to state neutrality in so far as the issue is about coercion. Library workers should not use their position to coerce others into any one world-view; hence, they should remain neutral. Wenzler (2019) argues that library neutrality is not valueless but is founded in political liberalism and seeks social justice. Library neutrality is not ahistorical or apolitical (70). Librarians, when asked to be neutral, are being asked not to use their position to impose their views on others: "The purpose of neutrality is precisely to protect the opinions of the minority against the tyranny of the majority" (69). Douglas Foskett (1962, 11) similarly makes a commitment to neutrality precisely to ensure that librarians are inclusive: "If he has no politics, no religion, and no morals, he can have all politics, all religions and all morals."[7] He is clear that library commitment to objectivity is based on a set of values, particularly "sympathy" and "understanding" (11). The value of this view of neutrality is that it encourages librarians to know and pass along an understanding of multiple viewpoints (McMenemy 2007, 180). Foskett (1962) acknowledges that it may appear to be an inherent contradiction to advocate for impartiality and strong convictions, but it is precisely those commitments to impartiality that drive librarians to meet patron needs.

Similar to Taylor (2001), Wenzler (2019) and Foskett (1962) argue for neutrality in order to avoid the possibility of coercion, but, in their case, it is in the provision of library services so that librarians do not impose their world-view on patrons. There are two issues with this version of library neutrality: (1) what constitutes neutrality is interpreted from a normative viewpoint and (2) neutrality also requires that a multiplicity of voices be heard.

The first challenge for defenders of library neutrality is whether it is possible to be truly neutral. Critics of neutrality have noted that impartiality is impossible to achieve (Bales 2018, 172; Eckert 2016). Mark Lester (2010) expresses similar misgivings and notes that there is fear that there are ulterior motives for

decisions on religious issues in academic libraries, such as the use of academic library space for prayer and fairly balancing religious studies collections. He declares that he has arrived at "philosophical skepticism" because "the ultimate, and perhaps unarticulated, world view of the librarian or academic administrator grounds and conditions the judgments he or she makes, even as he or she consciously strives for impartiality" (46). The issue is that library workers, regardless of their political or religious beliefs, are always necessarily speaking from a particular perspective. What is more problematic is when a particular world-view is naturalized at the expense of others. The troubling assumption that is made in the Quebec legislation is that public servants wearing religious symbols are incapable of providing state services without imposing their religion, whereas those that dress according to the norms of North American culture are capable of neutrality. Non-religious positions are assumed to be neutral, but individuals wearing religious attire are assumed not to be. Advocates of library neutrality may not necessarily agree with this interpretation, but it is a lesson to library workers to be cautious about the principle of neutrality. Positions are put forward as neutral that are in fact normative.

The second challenge for defenders of library neutrality is not only to protect against coercion in the realm of thought, information access, and religion but also to advocate for a multiplicity of voices. A multiplicity of voices can be achieved in part through collection development, but it is also important to examine questions of library policy development and employment. In library policy decisions, it might be best for library workers to admit what position they speak from and to seek out multiple perspectives where possible. Moreover, seeking out voices from those with less power permits library workers to question world-views that are taken for granted. For example, in addressing the issue of using library space for a prayer room, it would be important not only to hear from a secularist who wants to exclude religion from public spaces but also from religious individuals and groups that claim that no part of the world is devoid of the divine or spirit. It is not the case that we need library workers to be unbiased in these instances but, rather, to be cautious because (1) excluding religion from the public sphere is not unbiased or neutral and (2) every librarian comes to the table with a particular world-view (not just those with religious views), and a multiplicity of views, particularly from the margins, gives us a better understanding.

Neutrality as protection from conflict

Neutrality in the library literature has also been characterized as a form of protection from religious violence. Wessells (2003, 42) proposes that neutrality is a bulwark against religious violence. Matthew Harris and Gregory Crawford (2002) place a similar emphasis on the dangers of religious violence in considering library religion collections. They begin their discussion of religious studies collections in libraries by noting the importance of respecting diversity. Despite this commitment to respecting diversity, they make an assumption about religion that is not substantiated or relevant to collection development in libraries: "Religion has

caused wars and is still causing conflict around the world simply because of different spiritual viewpoints" (451).[8]

The discursive practice of aligning religion and violence is problematic but extremely common. William Cavanaugh (2009) offers an analysis of the extensive scholarly literature on religious violence. A common retort from those defending religion is that aggressors are merely using religion as a cover for other political, economic, or territorial aspirations (that is, religious violence is not really religious). Cavanaugh offers an even more compelling argument about violence: he challenges the many theses that have been put forward that trace the connection between religion and violence and is able to demonstrate the insufficiency of the evidence from scholars who argue that there is something inherently violent about religion. Moreover, he argues against the "myth of religious violence," noting that secular arguments against religion assume religious violence is irrational and fanatical, whereas liberal-secular violence is postulated as rational and peace making. Central to his argument is the way in which we legitimate violence. If violence is done for religious reasons, it is irrational and dangerous. Violence in the name of the secular state, on the other hand, is sanctioned and rational. Moreover, Cavanaugh shows how difficult it is to separate out so-called religious reasons from economic and political reasons in order to justify the claim that it is religion that is violent and irrational. Part of the problem arises because it is hard to clearly delineate between religious, economic, and political rationales. There is also a problem with the very category of religion itself. Claims that religious commitments lead to violence require theorists to be able to coherently explain what precisely belongs in the category "religion."

Religious studies scholars have long acknowledged the serious problem of clearly defining religion and deciding what belongs in the category (see Smith 1978). Defining religion on the basis of a belief in God or gods ends up being too exclusive because it excludes Buddhism, for example, which is often included in the category of religion. If religion is defined more broadly according to belief systems, ideologies, and ritual practices, it then becomes so large that the category is meaningless. As Cavanaugh (2009) notes, this is not merely semantic nitpicking. If we are to support the thesis that religion leads to violence, then we need to be clear what phenomena are encompassed by our claim. In his analysis of theories of religious violence, Cavanaugh notes that the Unabomber, for example, is included in Mark Juergensmeyer's analysis of religious symbolic violence. This happens despite the fact that the Unabomber did not have any affiliation to any group or any set of ideas that fits Juergensmeyer's definition of religion. This is just one example of how easy it is to include individuals or groups in the category of religion to justify the thesis of religious violence.

The problem for library workers rests in the idea of a bulwark of neutrality— the presumption that neutrality is necessary to protect us from religious conflict and violence. Neutrality is mobilized in these arguments to support state neutrality to religion and also rests on what Casanova (2011) calls secularism as a normative-ideological project. One common secular ideology is that religion is irrational

and should not be permitted in the democratic public sphere (67). The problem is that the ideology works from an unsubstantiated claim about the nature of religious violence and irrationality that then justifies the exclusion of religion. One reason for carefully analyzing the notion of secularism is because library collections and services should not be assessed based on unsubstantiated claims about religious violence and conflict.

The point is not to dismiss claims that differing religious viewpoints can lead to conflict; rather, it is the presumption that religion is more inherently problematic than other political or secular positions that is the problem. There are certainly documented instances where various religious individuals or groups have challenged library services collection development decisions (Gorman 2015, 113). There is also counterevidence that needs to be acknowledged. A survey of religious versus secular libraries in California suggests that religious libraries are more likely to have multiple viewpoints on controversial subjects than secular libraries (Harmeyer 1995). Another study shows that secular college libraries are much more likely to carry books about progressive Christianity than about evangelical Christianity (Ingolfsland 2009). The assumption that secular institutions are necessarily more neutral and that religious groups are more likely to be absolutist and thereby create conflict is not supported by evidence. The discourse of neutrality relies on a secularist ideology and conflates the library worker with the state; both premises need to be further critiqued. Library workers need to be cautious because the exclusion of religion from the public sphere and workplaces requires policing of the boundary of the secular. Library workers also need to examine how intimately tied the library is to the secular state and its forms of legitimation.

Moral responsibility in the library

Blanke (1989, 42) observes that a fundamental piece is missing in a profession whose ethical framework is neutrality: "Without a clear and vital set of philosophical and political ideals acting as a guiding beacon, the library profession will not remain neutral, but will drift aimlessly with the currents of power and privilege." There is plenty of evidence that library workers are not morally neutral. Library workers take moral positions in their codes of ethics and mission statements that emanate from libraries or library associations, for example. There are instances where secularism is, perhaps unintentionally, embedded in these codes.

The Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) has developed a set of "Guiding Principles": "The Association supports and promotes the right of all individuals to have access to all expressions of knowledge, creativity and intellectual activity" (CARL 1995). There are six key principles: access to information, creating knowledgeable information users, research libraries, a strategic national resource, resource sharing, and scholarly communication for greater certainty. In the CARL statement on freedom of expression, the principle of access to information is further defended on the basis of Canadian law: "All persons in Canada have a fundamental right, as embodied in the Charter of Rights and

Freedoms and the Bill of Rights, to have access to all expressions of knowledge, creativity and intellectual activity" (CARL 1987).

The Guiding Principles are articulated in terms of liberal humanist values. In critical librarianship, human rights are one key principle from which neutrality has been critiqued (Samek 2007; Sparanese 2008, 77). Human rights can be defended on a variety of bases, though one of the most common ways that human rights are understood is with reference to national and international law: the right to freedom of movement, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion (Jaefer, Gorman, and Taylor 2019, 17). These human rights exist as creatures of legal frameworks. If human rights are only legal creations, though, then they are contingent on enactment by the state and relative to the law at the time. There are very good reasons to want to establish the existence of rights beyond what is codified in law; otherwise, we have no basis to challenge unjust laws.

Library studies have relied on traditional ethical systems from philosophy, grounding human rights in human consensus, rational argumentation, or the sacred (Burgess 2019; Maxwell 2006). There are strengths and weaknesses to all of the arguments, but they demonstrate a strong desire to seek a foundation for human rights beyond historically contingent laws. The language that CARL uses, though, is legalistic: CARL's reference to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms gives a strong political legitimacy to the association's Guiding Principles but not a firm foundation for human rights beyond the contingent. The legitimacy of the nation-state's laws is taken as a given.

Further investigating and debating the foundation for ethics would permit library workers to move beyond the contingent guarantee of human rights to foundational questions about values, their origin, and how they are constructed or mobilized. If we question the primacy of the nation-state and its legal system, we are also able to question the necessity of sidelining religion. The primacy of the nation-state is in part dependent upon secularism and claims about the nature of reality and ethics. One place where religion is explicitly referenced is within diversity statements in librarian ethical codes. For example, the ALA's Library Bill of Rights specifically lists religious belief as a prohibited ground for discrimination or the limiting of intellectual freedom in the library:

> A service philosophy should be promoted that affords equal access to information for all in the academic community with no discrimination on the basis of race, age, values, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, cultural or ethnic background, physical, sensory, cognitive or learning disability, economic status, religious beliefs, or views. (ALA 2014)

The Library Bill of Rights clearly lists a range of prohibited grounds for limiting access to information. Diversity and inclusivity statements mirror legal human rights codes and can be useful, particularly for protecting minorities' access to library materials or libraries collecting material on controversial topics. Diversity statements, though, are insufficient for challenging policies that make religious discourse in the public sphere largely illegitimate or work from the presumption that religion is a private matter.

It is important to place the above diversity statement in the larger context of the Library Bill of Rights. There is an article that deals specifically with religion in libraries and references the American Constitution:

> The First Amendment guarantees the right of individuals to believe and practice their religion or to practice no religion at all, and prohibits government from establishing or endorsing a religion or religions. Thus the freedom of, for and from religion, are similarly guaranteed. The First Amendment also guarantees the corollary right of individuals to receive information on religious topics. Libraries support this right by providing access to diverse religious thought without becoming a proponent of any of them. (ALA 2015–16).

The ALA's statement on religion in libraries also bases its claims on a nation-state's law. It champions access to a diversity of religious material and condemns the imposition of religion. This policy statement makes it clear that libraries are operating within a secular sphere, not merely that there is a separation of church and state or freedom of religion. There are presumptions about the privatization of religion and the existence of a secular sphere and how moral claims can be legitimized. There is a double standard created because library workers who believe access to information is a fundamental human right based in law or policy are not required to remain silent on their moral position. A librarian who believes library services, for example, should prioritize the poor, the marginal, and the imprisoned based on their Christian beliefs is required to keep those beliefs private or articulate them in secular terms. The ALA's statement also presumes it is possible for library workers to remain neutral on the question of religion at work and provide services without being a proponent. There is an unstated assumption about the nature of the world: that there is a secular sphere devoid of the sacred. This would be inconsistent with faith claims, for example, that God or gods are present in this world, that the spiritual and the material cannot be separated, or that the world is "enchanted" by spirits or the Spirit.

By calling for a debate about the ethical foundations of librarianship, critical librarianship is opening the door to considerations that the world is enchanted. Taylor (2007, 25) notes that "enchanted" may not be the best expression because it brings to mind "light and fairies," but he uses it nonetheless as the other of "disenchantment": "The enchanted world . . . is the world of spirits, demons, and moral forces which our ancestors lived in" (26). Taylor is responding to Max Weber, who popularized the term "*dis*enchantment" in the early 1900s and used it to refer to the growth in belief that nature was denuded of the spiritual. Disenchantment emphasized a materialist understanding of the world. Taylor demonstrates that it is only with the arrival of modernity in the West that the disenchantment of the world has come to dominate public life.

One of the consequences of the clash between materialist understandings of the world and the spiritual is demonstrated by Lori Beaman (2012) in her work on Aboriginal spirituality and the limits of Canadian understanding of freedom of religion. Beaman demonstrates that freedom of religion has largely been ignored in the context of cases involving Aboriginal rights. She reviews a series of

Canadian court cases where the courts repeatedly turned their attention to questions about Aboriginal rights to use land, hunt, and fish. She focuses on cases involving rituals and ceremonies and demonstrates that the courts have only ever ruled on the basis of property and treaty rights and have treated the spiritual component as secondary or irrelevant. Beaman notes that the cases repeatedly involve the "desacralizing of Aboriginal life" because the rituals and their sacred nature are ignored, and only questions of property are addressed (241). At the heart of the problem is that rituals and rights cannot be fully understood if the Canadian government approaches the issues from a materialist perspective.

The limitations of a materialist perspective are not only an issue for individuals committed to spiritual or religious world-views. Values may be expressed from spiritual or faith-based viewpoints, but there are also atheists who maintain that the world is enchanted. For example, Akeel Bilgrami (2010, 155) problematizes the commonly held belief that values originate from humans. Bilgrami maintains that the world is "shot through with value" (161). The good exists ontologically, and it must necessarily be so if we are to be able to act ethically. Moral agency, he argues, is not possible without an outside (that is, something that transcends the human) (153). The world is enchanted in Bilgrami's view, but he does believe that this requires a concept of God or a faith-based position. This view is important if we are to understand the extent of ideas and viewpoints that are delegitimized when we rely on secularism. If we are to assess our values as library workers, we need to welcome everyone to the table, as Taylor (2007) suggests. This means that we must remain open to the possibility that some amongst us do not accept secularist views of the world.

The secularist ideology is supported by other ideologies, such as liberal individualism. Individualism is reflected in the models for library service that are employed. In an effort to move away from the paternalistic and authoritarian models of research service that existed in the 1800s, libraries have shifted to models of research services that emphasize the freedom, agency, and individualism of library patrons. Patrons in academic libraries, for example, are defined as "independent information seekers" (CARL 1995). In his assessment of the liberal ideals driving the library, Birdsall 1988, 77) notes that the intellectual freedoms of the individual have been emphasized because of the importance placed on personal growth, individual initiative, and individual responsibility. According to Burgess (2019, 25), most librarians "take the library position that what is most important is to allow individuals to evaluate information on their own without obstacles or bias." Wenzler's (2019, 75) defence of library neutrality similarly relies on individualism and the "intellectual autonomy of its citizens." Though he acknowledges that the form of liberalism that founds library neutrality is a specific political project, he does not address the assumptions that it makes about the world and who we are; Wenzler takes individualism as a given and does not acknowledge how this world-view can get imposed on others, despite his avowed concern to avoid coercion.

The concept of the autonomous liberal individual has unfortunately been employed as a tool against religious minorities. Talal Asad (2013), writing in the

context of the Muhammad cartoon controversy, argues that Muslim understandings of the self are the reasons why Muslims are characterized in the West as "not fully human." According to Asad, Muslims take seriously the possibility of persuasion and seduction. He is not using the word "seduction" in the sexual sense but, rather, as a means of understanding how individuals, cultures, and God can shape us. This conception of the self as permeable is inconsistent with liberal notions of the autonomous, independent agent. Muslims, from the point of view of Western secularism, are "not fully human because they are not yet morally autonomous and politically disciplined" (50). This drives Asad to wonder whether things would look different if religious discourse was taken more seriously. His work provides one example of the way that liberal individualism supports a secularist ideology (52). Samek (2007, 10) similarly notes that library debates about intellectual freedom tend to emphasize Western perspectives on individual rights at the expense of community values.

Individualism, the myth of religious violence, and the disenchantment of the world are all ideologies that are presented as natural and given. In their most nefarious form, these ideologies can be used to discriminate against religious minorities and silence those who would speak from other viewpoints, including religious viewpoints. Critical librarianship has demonstrated its value in so far as it has challenged ideologies that present as given, challenged the status quo, and pushed library workers to think through their moral responsibility. These critiques in librarianship need to be extended to secularism and the presumptions that follow from it.

Conclusion

Library workers writing in critical librarianship have done extensive work to challenge the reign of neutrality in the profession. The literature in this area demonstrates that neutrality has been deployed as an ideology that treats the existing social, political, and economic system as a given in order to maintain the status quo and the power of knowledge elites. Secularism is also an ideology that treats the existing secular order as natural. Calls to ban the wearing of religious symbols or face veils in public or in publicly funded institutions like the library are a symptom of secularism. In order to challenge this ideology, library workers need to not only champion religious freedom but also confront secularism itself. The world-view that assumes that the world is disenchanted and is more secure with the privatization of religion and the reign of liberal individualism is grounded in a secularist ideology that necessarily delegitimizes many faith-based perspectives and leads to discriminatory government policies. Extensive work has been done in other disciplines that permit us to distinguish between secularism that denies the legitimacy of religious world-views and a secular space where there is no coercion in the realm of religion and where multiple voices are heard. Library workers interested in a truly inclusive library system and in principles of equality need to challenge secularism and the policies that flow from it.

Notes

1 Bill 60, Charter Affirming the Values of State Secularism and Religious Neutrality and of Equality between Women and Men, and Providing a Framework for Accommodation Requests, 40th Leg., 1st Sess., November 7, 2013.

2 Bill 21, Act Respecting the Laicity of the State, 42nd Leg., 1st Sess., March 28, 2019.

3 Bill 62, An Act to Foster Adherence to State Religious Neutrality and, in Particular, to Provide a Framework for Requests for Accommodations on Religious Grounds in Certain Bodies, 41st Leg., 1st Sess., June 10, 2015.

4 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Part 1 of the Constitution Act, 1982, being Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c 11; Charter of Human Rights and Freedom, RSQ, c. 12; *National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) v. Attorney General of Quebec*, 2018 QCCS 2766.

5 Bill 21.

6 Canada does not have the separation of church and state spelled out in the Constitution, yet the example is illustrative of the challenges Canadians face as they negotiate the place of religion in publicly funded libraries, be they public, academic, school, or government.

7 The very use of the male pronoun "he" to represent all librarians is ironic and points to ways in which a librarian may understand his or her position as neutral, when in fact it comes from a very specific perspective or experience, which, in this case, is a male one.

8 Note that neutrality here is intended to protect against violence. In Robert Hauptman's (1976) famous study where he asked librarians for instructions to build a bomb, neutrality ostensibly justified the provision of information without question. There are therefore varying ideological assumptions behind neutrality in different instances, and these need to be unpacked.

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