
Postwar Politics and Postcolonial Approaches: Rebuilding a Library and Information Science Program for Kosovo

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ABSTRACT

This article lays out the mechanics of a complex partnership between large, research-oriented, U.S.-based universities and the National Library of Kosovo, the nation's largest public library that is also charged with establishing nationwide library policies. The goal of this partnership is to create two interconnected but distinct programs: the nation's first bachelor's program in library studies at the University of Pristina and a National Library Training Program intended to train current professionals and provide continuing education opportunities. This partnership case highlights the complex positionality of the library as a public institution, both as an educational entity with responsibilities to disseminate information and teach literacies, but also as an institution that is political in position, as a cultural producer and modeler of social discourse. The project highlights the inherent dangers involved when U.S.-based institutions enter foreign lands to develop library infrastructure from potentially univocal standpoints. The article then proposes critical and postcolonial theoretical approaches as a way to interrogate the power imbalances that might arise from library partnerships of this type. The hope is that this case highlights the problematic nature of partnerships between academic institutions and public library spaces, whether they be international or domestic in nature.

INTRODUCTION

Between February 1998 and June 1999, an armed conflict between Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Liberation Army decimated what was to become the yet fully recognized Republic of Kosovo (Independent International Commission on Kosovo 2000, 2). Due to bombing, national cultural heri-

tage of all sorts was damaged or destroyed. Kosovar public libraries were at the forefront of this conflict. The once-vibrant Kosovo library system and staff were now limited to a few unmaintained buildings and a handful of trained professionals among a dedicated group of employees. Adding to this trained staffing shortage was the reality that Kosovo also had no countrywide, coordinated librarian education program to reformat the profession in both the short and long term.

This article examines recent efforts (2018 onward) to rebuild the once-vibrant nationwide library training program and to create a new, associated Library Studies BA program at the University of Pristina and discusses the ethical and postwar political complications of this endeavor. The academic and public library entities involved in this project are the author (Montroya); the faculty at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB), the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the UCLA Department of Information Studies, and California State University, Northridge (CSUN); the U.S. Embassy, Kosovo; and the National Library of Kosovo (NLK). Supported by the Fulbright Program, NLK, IUB, and Robert Montroya visited Kosovo over a period of approximately three months, gathering data and interviewing library staff, administrators, university officials, and government leaders across the country to inform the production of two independent but coordinated library professional education programs: (1) a bachelor of arts program housed within the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Pristina and (2) a National Library Training Program (NLTP) for current librarians administered by NLK. The projects are meant to both train future library professionals within the context of a rigorous university setting and provide ongoing, continuing education programs for librarians that can more flexibly meet the contemporary needs of the profession. The result of this study is an in-depth look into a valuable partnership between academia and the public library sector for library development. The formal outcomes of these programs show the potential capacities for international and community sites to bridge the research-driven theoretical work of the university with the practical and embedded realities of public institutions.

While this article outlines each program, more details are conveyed for the NLTP program; given the sheer number of public libraries in Kosovo, public librarians will constitute the vast majority of participants. Furthermore, NLK is the country's main public library entity. Second, the NLTP will serve as the primary case through which we examine the political problematics of this collaboration. While there are multiple benefits of this academic/public partnership, one must also acknowledge the ethical implications of this kind of intervention and developmental activity. In order for these programs to succeed in the long term, one needs to acutely attend to local cultural, social, and community conditions. Yet accomplishing a locally specific curriculum is difficult given the inherent power dy-

dynamic present between the institutions in this collaboration. Given this challenge, I employ a postcolonial critique of my activities as an avenue to contextualize this work. The goals are both to advocate for these kinds of partnerships and to inform and situate them within a critical and multi-community framework.

Many subtle yet significant political and ethical questions arise due to Kosovo's continuing unstable relationship with nearby Serbia as well as its dependence on international entities such as the United States. What is the mandate of the library system given the social inequities present in communities dispersed across a nation still very much healing from conflict? And how do we make sense of the partnership between a national public library and a U.S. educational institution? The intent of this article, then, is to illustrate the problematics and potentiality of partnerships between academic institutions and public libraries throughout the world and in particular to highlight

- the potential imbalances of power and privilege inherent in the collaboration between public libraries and the academic LIS sector;
- the central role of libraries to public participation and democratic actions;
- the reality that libraries are intertwined with governmental political activities;
- the importance of libraries to the efficacy of, especially, early K–12 educational institutions;
- the importance of situated developmental approaches to library services that prioritize community needs within the context of the local.

The practice-oriented nature of information studies programs situates instructors in this discipline to bridge their research interests within the realm of real-world applications. The hope is that more academics and professionals can engage in this type of work in a nuanced and sensitive fashion.

PARTNERSHIPS, POWER, AND POSTCOLONIALITY

Before proceeding through the details of *one* particular public/academic library partnership, a central purpose of this article is to posit a theoretical framework by which we can understand the problematics of these partnership activities—especially as it pertains to the imbalances of power inherent in collaborations of this nature. The themes introduced in this section will be returned to in a broader discussion on libraries and politics after introducing the case study at the heart of this article.

As noted by this *Library Trends* special issue's editors, the gap between the realms of the public library and academic LIS sector have grown wider in recent years, fostering an increasing disjuncture between how each sector can build upon the strength of the other (American Library Associa-

tion [ALA] 2019). The result of this separation is that, on the one hand, professional and academic curriculums in library programs may not fully attend to the suite of required and newly emerging skills necessary to work in a public library environment. On the other hand, the expertise and programming existing in libraries—skilled public sector librarians, community-centric initiatives, radical and critical interventions into large-scale social issues, and experiences with diverse constituencies—are not fully integrated into the landscape of higher education. Unless this gulf between the domains is narrowed, the discipline, authority, and importance of librarianship writ large will grow weaker over time, and the public will be the poorer for it.

Yet as we push to foster new partnerships, it should be acknowledged that the long-standing and widening metaphorical rift between the public and academic domains brings about new challenges perhaps implicit in, but not directly referenced in, the ALA ALISE/Public Library Discussion report (ALA 2019): that of the imbalance of resources, institutional support, power, and privilege that exists between any two or more partnering libraries and the impact it has on project outcomes. A concern here is that if we promote partnerships that do not attend to these imbalances, then we will see a “narrowing” of this rift *in practice*, while the gulf between the political and social economies implicit in these relationships will *continue to widen* and exacerbate the broader social, political, and cultural inequalities that already exist between them. The result will likely be that any programming, collection development, assessments, strategic planning, policies, and community engagements will privilege one institution’s needs over another. On the other hand, partnerships that attend to these inequalities early on in planning can and will produce outcomes more equitable to all participants and the communities that each serve (even if implementation can *never* attain *perfect* altruism in practice). This imbalance of power will be strikingly apparent in the case presented in this article, given that a well-funded and established U.S. academic institution is partnering with an international, underfunded, and underdeveloped public library system. A fine line must be straddled between developing and promoting library ideals from a U.S.-based point of view and attending to the local library and community needs that may contradict or face altogether different challenges.

With all this in mind, there are far broader concerns embedded in this analysis that exceed the specificities of the U.S./Kosovo case presented here. For one, it can be generalized that all library partnerships need to acknowledge the power and privilege imbalances that exist between participants, especially when thinking about international development or the development of underrepresented and minoritized communities by large-scale normative academic institutions. As Ilan Kapoor notes in *Celebrity Humanitarianism: The Ideology of Global Charity* (2012, 1) with respect

to celebrity humanitarian and global charity work: “Far from being altruistic, [celebrity humanitarianism] is significantly contaminated and ideological . . . it is most often self-serving, helping to promote institutional aggrandizement and the celebrity ‘brand’; it advances consumerism and corporate capitalism, and rationalizes the very global inequality it seeks to redress; it is fundamentally depoliticizing, despite its pretensions to ‘activism’; and it contributes to a ‘postdemocratic’ political landscape, which appears outwardly open and consensual, but it is in fact managed by unaccountable elites.” Though in this article we are not speaking about celebrity international interventions per se, the pitfalls that Kapoor notes are equally applicable to some library partnerships, especially those involving large institutions that seek to develop services or skills or programming in public spaces, marginalized communities, and foreign countries. U.S.-based universities have their own capitalist-leaning and political encumbrances as well as a vested interest in maintaining their own optics and brands just as much as any one individual. No intervention or partnership is ever neutral, and so as we look to outline solutions for the widening gap between public and academic spaces, we should take care to also delineate and explicitly acknowledge where imbalances exist in those same proposed mechanisms and interventions.

As such, in the final section of this article it is proposed that scholarship in postcolonial, decolonial, and critical development studies provide good theoretical models to interrogate the power imbalances present in *all* library partnerships. Perhaps by framing more studies within a framework of power, we can strengthen the partnerships that we forge *even more* and produce more just and fair outcomes. As institutions dedicated to equality, justice, fairness, and openness, libraries are of central importance to many communities and individuals in dire need of our teaching, collections, spaces, and programming. The more we can offset inequalities between institutions, the more effective our interventions will be in the communities we strive to impact.

THE LIBRARY CONTEXT IN KOSOVO

Kosovo libraries are in dire need of national support networks to facilitate ongoing professional training in cutting-edge library practices, standards, and approaches to literacy. The profession within the country is lagging in terms of adhering to global standards and internal cooperation, and as such the epistemic possibilities of the country are unnecessarily being limited. By “epistemic” here I mean that libraries are integrally involved in knowledge work as part of the educational domain, and because libraries are underdeveloped, so too are the educational and knowledge capacities of the country.

In order to understand the full magnitude of this partnership and to best understand why Kosovo is in the unique situation it is, we must briefly

address some of the more immediate historical circumstances that led to the country's present-day status. The 1998–99 Kosovo War was between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Liberation Army (Riedlmayer 2000b). The area now constituting the state of Kosovo represented the Albanian majority of Yugoslavia. But long before the war was ignited, Kosovo had undergone a decades-long period where Serbia suppressed their economic, educational, and political activity (Independent International Commission on Kosovo 2000; Siani-Davies 2003). The result is that Kosovo's institutions had grown anemic from these sanctions. The war ultimately led to a split between Kosovo and what is now Serbia. Incalculable universal devastation was inflicted upon Kosovo, which says nothing of the horrible genocide and human casualties that also took place.

As Andrés Riedlmayer and Andrew Herscher have carefully documented, both the nation's soft and physical library infrastructure was devastated (Herscher and Riedlmayer 2000, 2001; Riedlmayer 2000a, 2000b, 2007, 2014). Due to Serbian bombing and numerous targeted attacks, national cultural heritage sites of all sorts were damaged or destroyed—religious sites, museums, archives, and libraries were all prime targets for annihilation. Sadly, as Rebecca Knuth (2003) notes, such attacks were common occurrences by Serbia during the Yugoslav Wars. Books and other documentary materials are important cultural products that “simply by existing, [confirm] the history of Muslim residency in Bosnia” and beyond—and to destroy them represents a kind of “cultural cleansing” of the worst order (Knuth 2003, 125, 130). As Milan Kundera says in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1999), “You begin to liquidate a people by taking away its memory. You destroy its books, its culture, its history. And then others write other books for it, give another culture to it, invent another history for it. Then the people slowly begin to forget what it is and what it was.” And indeed it is this destruction of cultural memory that was a core war tactic during this conflict. Kosovar public libraries were at the forefront of this destruction due to their prominent standing as community citadels of knowledge. Libraries were often attached to religious sites, which were another prime target, making libraries both an intended and an unintended causality of war. During this period Albanians were barred from utilizing library recourses. “Albanian professionals were summarily dismissed from their positions at the libraries” (Tejgeler 2006, 15) and replaced by Serbian loyalists, including those librarians at the National and University Libraries of Kosovo—the nation's largest library institutions (Herscher 2010). During that period very little, if any, Albanian material was collected, especially by local authors and publishers—only 22,000 items were collected from 1990 to the end of the conflict, most of which was Serbian-related (Tejgeler 2006, 15). The National Library was used as a bunker for the Serbian army for part of that period, meaning it quickly fell into disrepair. Yet thankfully the National Library remained standing

after the conflict. The NLK collections, however, were left in shambles, and hundreds of thousands of documents were destroyed in bulk.

After the war, when Serbia retreated from Kosovo's borders, the amount of *trained* library staff was now limited to a few professionals who ventured to return to the country after the conflict. The long-term reality was that many librarians were never to return. The once-vibrant library staff was now limited to a few highly trained professionals among a dedicated group of employees. The result is that Kosovo has had to rebuild even the most basic social services, and chief among them are library services within all sectors, including the National Library, university libraries, and public libraries (Herscher and Riedlmayer 2000, 112). Given that public libraries, especially those in smaller towns, served as *both* school and public libraries, the impact on the public sector was enormous (Frederiksen and Bakken 2000, sec. 4.4; Riedlmayer 2007, 124).

The repercussions of this damage remain today. Kosovo's library infrastructure is far from being able to meet community needs. No national library training program has existed since the war, and the training that has been implemented has been ad hoc and limited, if useful, and is usually offered or supported by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Past programs have allowed select librarians to train in the United States in intensive library science courses. One such example is when the Simmons Graduate School of Library and Information Science and the Institute for Training and Development jointly sponsored a highly successful Kosovo Librarian grant paid by the U.S. State Department in 2006. The program's goals were to "familiarize the Kosovar participants to the policies and procedures of contemporary librarianship so that they may serve effectively as librarians in a new University Library Center at the University of Pristina in Kosovo" (Simmons SLIS 2006). The repercussions of this program still reverberate positively today, further exemplifying why these kinds of education interventions are necessary. Yet, as noted by Besim Kokollari (2008, 38), these training "efforts have been irregular and not sustained. There is much to do as there is no library school in the country." Developing a professional development and training program for librarians and library staff was also one of the key recommendations by Carsten Frederiksen and Frode Bakken's development plan for libraries in Kosovo (2000, sec. 5.3.6).

The question here becomes how to properly and responsibly rebuild a strong professional education program that is not supported by ad hoc mechanisms mediated by external entities. How do we provide a sustainable model for library training that is both locally situated and fiscally self-sustainable? The current context for development, while vastly improved from the immediate postwar period, is still riddled with administrative, political, and practical hurdles that must be negotiated. For one, it is important to note that Kosovo is still not fully recognized as a state, which

essentially shuts Kosovo out of a great deal of economic and professional sources that require United Nations recognition. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), for example, uses official UN country codes to distribute aid and collect data and thus cannot invest in resources to document the state of librarianship in Kosovo—neither a rote counting of how many libraries exist nor a more in-depth examination of their services. One of the largest data resources on the state of libraries around the globe is the IFLA's Map of the World, which has yet to include Kosovo statistics in their database. The result of this contemporary situation is that very little is known about the state of the library profession in Kosovo, and as a result of this reality the training and professionalization of librarians has stagnated and is in dire need of support. The hope is that a carefully orchestrated training initiative can serve as a vehicle for adequate data collection that can be used in tandem with the Map of the World.

A TWO-PRONGED APPROACH LIBRARY TRAINING MODEL IN KOSOVO

The proposed dual training structure currently being implemented involves (1) the founding of a bachelor of arts program at the University of Pristina based in the Faculty of Philosophy and (2) an annual certificate-based NLTP series maintained by NLK for current professionals that cannot otherwise participate in the BA program, in addition to providing an avenue for continuing training possibilities. These two programs, while administratively distinct, will need to coordinate content to a certain degree to ensure that professional aims are coincident with one another. With tandem planning of these programs, participants hope this can be coordinated.

Additionally, it is essential for the BA program to partner with the NLTP to harness the benefits of and provide access to the more practically oriented curricular emphasis catered to current and shifting professional standards. In thinking about how these programs might relate to one another, one can look to the highly successful and expanding model of the UCLA Department of Information Studies MLIS program and its relationship to the Californian Rare Book School (CalRBS 2020). While the UCLA MLIS program provides for a comprehensive library education that attends to both the theoretical and practical concerns of the professions, by virtue of its modular, compressed course offerings, CalRBS offers instruction in highly specific topics that might otherwise be difficult to examine in any great depth in a traditional program. Additionally, CalRBS attracts far more currently practicing professionals as a kind of continuing education program. Thus, by having both the MLIS and CalRBS components, UCLA has been able to amply cover the needs of a broad range of professionals.

Methodology

This project features a partnership between a public academic institution in the United States—IUB, Department of Information and Library Science—and a public library institution in Kosovo—NLK. Faculty at both UCLA and CSUN—Gregory H. Leazer and Sean E. Pessin, respectively—have also joined Montoya as core faculty in the NLTP program. The root of this project arises from an invitation of the U.S. Embassy of Kosovo, which originally invited Montoya to represent the United States between April 8 and April 14, 2018, as part of the country's Library Week. The theme for the week was "Library Education and Training," and the weeklong agenda included public lectures outlining a possible nationwide training program that consisted of tiered levels of support, including at the national, regional, and individual institutional levels, as well as a number of smaller workshops, exhibits, and roundtables. The goals of the lectures by Montoya were multifold:

- To convey the basic foundation requirements of the typical information and library science curriculum as represented in the United States
- To articulate avenues by which these courses can possibly be bent in ways that support the cultural and social specificities of Kosovo
- To promote a modularized course structure whereby smaller modules can facilitate short, intensive courses that are suited to accommodate the schedules of working professionals
- To support synchronous and asynchronous course offerings throughout the country while ensuring the content remains consistent
- To articulate a possible tiered system of accountability for a proposed library certificate that includes certification, training assignments, and funding from the national level, administrated by NLK; data collection and reporting functions at the municipal level for program assessment and coordination; on-the-ground training, data collection, and course metrics at the local level that can be used at the national level for certification and program evaluation

Subsequent to this visit, Montoya was awarded a Fulbright Grant to continue the project early in 2019. The goal of this next visit was to work with NLK to begin articulating a possible suite of courses that might be used in a Kosovar context. Focus groups and interviews were conducted with librarians and staff throughout the National Library over a nearly three-week period. Data collected included feedback from each sector of the library including administration, conservation, public services, rare books, cataloguing, special libraries, and many others. What emerged from this second visit was a preliminary set of syllabi documents that were to form the core courses recommended to the University of Pristina for inclusion in their new BA in library studies. Courses included expected founda-

tional courses such as organization of knowledge, public services and access models, bibliography, and conservation and preservation.

Since these initial visits, Montoya has traveled to Kosovo on numerous occasions, adding up to over three months of intensive fieldwork, supported by the continuing generosity of IUB, NLK, and the U.S. State Department. Montoya visited a number of public, private, and university-affiliated libraries throughout the country, including in Pristina, Mitrovica, Prizren, Gjakova, Peja, Gjilan, and Dragash. By viewing a wide range of libraries, both urban and rural, and interviewing professionals at these multiple sites, he obtained a strong sense of the kinds of community needs a potential training program would be required to meet. In all, this field work represents over thirty individual and group focus interviews and subsequently helped articulate the core content of the Kosovo NLTP, which is described in more detail below.

Project Partners

Indiana University, Bloomington. The primary academic partner is IUB's Department of Information and Library Science (ILS). IUB ILS has been continuously granting residential master of library science (MLS) degrees since 1930 and has been fully accredited by ALA since 1951–52. The MLS degree offers a diverse series of program specialization, including archives and records management, art librarianship, children's and young adult services, digital libraries, rare books and manuscript librarianship, digital curation, and music librarianship, among others. Given these offerings, IUB ILS has a range of curricular and pedagogical expertise, content, and documentation that can help institutions around the world articulate their specific ILS needs given contemporary political, social, cultural, and community-centered conditions.

U.S. Embassy of Kosovo and American Corners. The U.S. Embassy, Pristina, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs has been one of the primary partners in this collaboration. It was the embassy that provided funding for Montoya's first visit to Kosovo to represent the United States during Library Week. Further, the bureau also houses the Fulbright Specialist program, which has been an enormous agent for change within the sector of librarianship. Of special note is that the embassy's Public Affairs Section also funds and supports special libraries called American Corner libraries.

American Corner libraries are spaces within existing libraries that serve to bridge Kosovar interests with U.S. culture. "The mission of the American Corner program is to promote mutual understanding between the people of Kosovo and the people of the United States. American Corners (AC) provide access to current, reliable information about the United States through book collections, the Internet, and local programming" (U.S. Embassy, Kosovo 2020). American Corners can be found in Pristina, Mitrovica, and Prizren—three of the largest cities in Kosovo that have rela-

tively well-established library programming that can benefit from a U.S. embassy partnership. The American Corner in Pristina, for example, “is a section within the National Library of Kosovo established to build and strengthen relationships between the U.S. and Kosovo, showcase American culture and values, promote English-language learning, encourage study in the United States, and foster goodwill and mutual understanding” (American Corner Pristina 2019). The overall goals include the following:

- provide accurate, compelling, timely, and audience-appropriate *information about the United States*—its history, culture, society, and values
- facilitate *English-language learning* through access to English-language speakers, resources, computers, and the Internet
- promote U.S. higher education through *EducationalUSA* advising by providing international students with accurate, comprehensive, and current guidance on applying to U.S. colleges and universities
- foster people-to-people connections, increase understanding, and build respect with host-country audiences through *cultural programs*

And while the libraries, funded as they are by the U.S. State Department, rightly focus on the U.S. cultural foundation, their existence within NLK presents certain cultural and epistemological challenges that merit examination. In terms of cultural clashes, the AC libraries bring a slate of American-style programming that both is more community-oriented than traditional Kosovo literacy projects but also covers topics that are politically and culturally difficult to discuss in open forums. Issues such as domestic violence, misinformation, and LGBTQ+ communities are just a few of the culturally sensitive topics the AC has broached in the last few years. Of course saying this does not mean that traditional library services *do not* discuss these issues, only that Kosovo libraries are much more focused on information access and literacy issues given their intense need within the country at large and the limited staffing to engage in these activities. Kosovo is also, by and large, a fairly conservative state, which has historically exhibited a strong backlash against the LGBTQ+ population in general, for example. Annual pride parades, for example, manifest strong anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment despite being fairly peaceful in nature. Circumstances such as these make it difficult for libraries to face issues such as these directly.

Because of their active slate of programs and effective community outreach mechanisms, American Corners play an integral role in the articulation of the NLTP program. They have served as a kind of bridge between one established model of librarianship and the rest of the country’s infrastructure, which must find ways to best adapt those activities to their local sites given any fiscal, staff-related, or cultural issues that each location might be experiencing. The facilities of the American Corners are

also well developed, meaning that makerspace courses, for example, can benefit from their technology.

The National Library of Kosovo. NLK is the central library institution and national library information center that collects, processes, and preserves library materials of documentary value for culture, art, and science. As the main institution dedicated to the preservation of memory and national heritage, NLK is the organizational and administrative center of

- the collections, storage, and maintenance of the national catalog of data and documents, including books, newspapers, serials, online databases, rare books, ephemera, and other archival and material objects of import to the cultural memory of Kosovo;
- a national online digital library collection;
- the organization, description, and provisioning of access of said material;
- the publication of texts, monographs, and other materials regarding the collection of, or activities being undertaken within, the National Library and within the field of librarianship (special attention is also given to the publication of national bibliographies as a mechanism to catalogue the literary and intellectual history of Kosovo);
- the study, training, and continuing education in the field of librarianship, bibliography, and information;
- the coordination of the Kosovo national libraries network intended to facilitate communication and advancement of the profession;
- the restoration and conservation of all collected material in accordance with international standards.

The National and University Library of Kosovo also manages the international registration and identification of all acquired material; activities in this domain include the Cataloging for Publication (CIP) program as well as the granting of International Standard Number (ISBN), International Standard Number for Monographic Publishing, and International Standard Number for Music (ISMN) identifiers.

Integrally, as a core function of solidifying a Kosovo national library network, the National Library is constitutionally charged with developing vocational training and training programs for library staff throughout the country, applicable to libraries of all types and levels, including public, private, municipal, school, and special libraries. These responsibilities are laid out clearly in the fully articulated Law on Library Activities and Libraries in the Kosovo Constitution (Frederiksen and Bakken 2000, annex. 4). While the law governs all libraries, the emphasis is on public or general libraries (Frederiksen and Bakken 2000, sec. 3.3). In addition, library education, services, assessment, and inter-communication are overseen by the National Library. Interestingly, the National Library is housed within the same building as the University Library of Pristina. Not long ago, the na-

tional and university libraries were merged within the same administrative unit, meaning that employees from both organizations occupy various and intermingled positions in the larger unit. This intermingling creates some imbalances with regard to funding and makes it difficult to distinguish between the responsibilities to the university (as an educational library) and to the community (as a public, national entity).

In examining the U.S. sociological foundations necessary for the success of a public library system, Sidney Herbert Ditzion (1947, 190) identified the following elements conducive to their success: “the ability for communities to provide support to libraries, the necessity for a population sufficiently dense (rural libraries came upon the scene only after urban ones had been successful) to make service economical, a climate sympathetic to public support of education in general, and a favorable cultural *milieu*.” In the case of Kosovo, a developing country by definition, more than a few of these elements are lacking to a greater or lesser degree. While the education and training of the country’s librarians are within the purview of the National Library, the budgeting and allocation of funds to Kosovo’s public library system are handled at the municipal level. What often arises in this case is a general imbalance in library monetary allocations between different areas of the country. Larger, more populous, and more affluent municipalities, such as Prizren, are allotted far more resources than less affluent areas, such as Dragash. And in this case while Dragash has a small population in relation to Prizren, the municipality’s communities are arguably in more need of resources given its rural nature and lack of sophisticated library infrastructure.

These imbalances pose a variety of problems when the National Library attempts to articulate a countrywide library training policy, for example, when certain municipalities are fiscally unable to meet the established threshold. What emerges is a situation where the most underprivileged areas of the country are left without adequate mechanisms to move themselves forward. Of course, this kind of imbalance is not rare. Hector Maymí-Sugrañes (2017, 193) similarly notes how many UNESCO library development projects in the post–World War II period faced similar and far more wide-ranging complexities. UNESCO was often constructing extensive libraries and library systems in “countries that did not have the financial resources to sustain them.” The key is not to replicate these mistakes in the current project.

ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL LIBRARY TRAINING PROGRAM

Participants in the NLTP will be required to take a slate of core courses that ensure a working knowledge of each division of the library operations (from administration to preservation to circulation) as well as complete courses within a given emphasis, if required for their particular positions. The first stage of this program will commence in 2020–21 with a suite of

six courses over a six-week period. The theme for these initial offerings is “Libraries Supporting Kosovo’s Communities.” The reasoning behind this is multifold. In order for these short courses to succeed, they need to attend to the *local* need of libraries and attend to the unique requests of users. Given this, these educational interventions must be framed to meet *specific* epistemic needs of communities and attend to some of the social realities that they are experiencing. The NLTP, then, serves as a flexible program that can attend to emerging and fast-moving community issues.

The content of these courses was dictated by recommendations of the National Library, the thematic content and participant recommendations that emerged from Montroya’s numerous interviews and focus groups, while also considering the best standards articulated by entities such as the American Library Association and the IFLA. For example, in focus groups some issues and communities were highlighted as needing special attention in the first round of training courses: reiterating the ethical responsibilities of libraries and librarianship; helping those currently experiencing and who have survived domestic violence, an issue that has intensified under COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders (Bami et al. 2020; UN News 2020); the LGBTQ+ population, especially for youth; disabled communities, especially those of the blind and deaf; sexual harassment in the workplace; children’s and youth librarianship, in general; dwindling literacy rates and the importance of partnering with the struggling educational sector; and attending to the urgent needs of the often underserved rural public libraries across the nation (see Montroya and Leazer 2020). The NLTP has thus been designed to take a community-centric approach to its initial courses, emphasizing the ethical foundations of librarianship and the unique needs of Kosovo communities, while also bringing that into dialogue with Kosovo’s unique and turbulent recent history.

Libraries Supporting Kosovo’s Communities

The goal of the Libraries Supporting Kosovo’s Communities (LSKC) project is to formally establish the country’s first internal professional training network for librarians. The courses are designed to train librarians throughout the country on how to best support vulnerable communities—particularly children and young adults—through innovative programming, outreach, and library work. The program specifically caters to library staff who show exceptional promise in their area of work and have the institutional capacity to engage in practical and actual change within their institution and surrounding communities. These trained librarians then act as central influencers and future decision makers in many social arenas, including librarianship, education, policy, and technical domains. The program is intended to recenter libraries as institutions with the primary social functions that include supporting educational institutions and to offer literacy services to communities in an effort to advance individual

professional, educational, technical, and economic potentialities. The program curriculum focuses on providing information services to youth, young adults, individuals in transition from incarceration, the disabled, and other communities in need of social and educational support.

Up until now librarianship in Kosovo has lacked access to continuing education and avenues for professionalization. The responsibility to bridge this gap in library services falls upon NLK, which is charged with facilitating and maintaining an ongoing training program for librarians that is attuned to national and international standards and best practices. To this end, this LSKC project intends to rekindle this library training infrastructure that is essential to the educational system of Kosovo.

As indicated above, libraries suffered greatly in the Kosovo War, and to add to this difficulty Kosovar educational attainment goals are low with respect to other global countries (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2019). Kosovo ranks near the bottom of educational attainment in almost all respects globally. This lack of proper educational grounding has drastic ramifications on an individual's ability to find promising and lucrative professional roles within all sectors of society. Numerous promising research studies show a direct correlation between the presence of school libraries, and of libraries in general, and the educational attainment of K–12 students (Hand 2018; Lee et al. 2013; Zervas, Stavrou, and Kounoudes 2019). Knowing this, the LSKC program will emphasize the importance of educational partnerships as an integral aspect of library work. The assumption here is that by more deeply engraining the librarian as part of educational, research, and literacy-related national discourse, the profession can gain long-term stability and recognition.

In light of these articulated problems, the NLTP LSKC courses will fill this gap by creating a viable and *sustainable model* of librarian training that can bring library services back to the citizens of Kosovo *on their own terms*.

National Library Training Program Goals. The project is intended to be only the start of what the NLK will continue as an annual suite of courses. The LSKC project itself has integrated core learning and achievement goals as articulated by IFLA and ALA—organizations that disseminate the leading guidelines for continuing education for library professionals.

Goal 1: Develop and deliver a sustainable librarian training program with NLK

More specifically, though, this LSKC project is designed to train librarians as leaders in the educational and public sector, not only as passive purveyors of information and documents, but as *active, engaged, and skilled* professionals who play an active role in the collection, production, and dissemination of Kosovo cultural values and as a crucial social conduit supporting a more democratic Kosovar society. Librarianship has a deep and long history advocating for social justice, democracy, and vulnerable members of the community. Librarians support this aim in many ways: collect-

ing and curating culturally relevant information, providing easy, *fair*, and *equal* access to said information, and coordinating programming in communities to support and celebrate cultural and social histories and futures. The LSKC program, then, will create a suite of courses, programming, and media-ready documents that fosters an approach to librarianship that is prepared to meet the crucial needs of a uniquely Kosovar society.

Goal 2: Develop the knowledge, skills, and values of current and future Kosovar librarians, positioning them as key actors in the educational and civil sectors of Kosovo, particularly in relation to the provision of information and cultural services

The LSKC project is designed to frame librarians as a crucial actor in promoting social and community inclusion, supporting individual and community expression of Kosovo values, and in preparing Kosovo's vulnerable, youth, and young adult populations for entry into competitive professional and educational spaces. To this end, LSKC courses will train librarians to mediate hands-on community involvement with library materials, to enhance information and cultural literacies to these communities, and to practice information and document collection and description as an active intervention into Kosovo's ongoing expression of its unique culture. Courses will emphasize inclusion as a foundation of all information practices; focus on fourteen- to eighteen-year-old and eighteen- to twenty-three-year-old demographics and other at-risk communities; and focus on providing critical literacies necessary for success in a multitude of professional fields and academic disciplines.

In light of this, the specific objectives for the LSKC program have been articulated as follows:

- Objective 1: Articulate the first annual offering of the NLTP that integrates the specific cultural, historical, and social conditions in Kosovo and tightly integrate the unique cultural heritage of *local communities and cultures*;
- Objective 2: Create a library continuing training program that is attentive to the pressing needs to *vulnerable populations*, including, but not limited to, young adult populations; graduate and youth transitional services; foundational critical reading and literacy skills necessary to negotiate employment challenges in a range of occupations;
- Objective 3: Integrate *community-centered learning* with other national and international educational activities;
- Objective 4: Define library services to include *diversity, ethics, and inclusion* as essential professional activities that are integral to all aspects of library operations, including information organization, literacy services, outreach services, collection management, and collection development practices (such as rare book, manuscript, and bibliographical collections);

Objective 5: Promote libraries as an integral part of Kosovo's educational foundation by *facilitating partnerships with local schools, youth organizations, and universities*;

Objective 6: Better *inform the general public* about the library's role in national educational aims, cultural awareness, and community identity building.

Program activities have been designed to support these goals through actionable and practical activities that can make concrete impacts in Kosovo communities.

Training-the-Trainers Model for Sustainability. The "training-the-trainers" approach to the curriculum is the second mechanism by which the LSKC program goals will be met. The intention of this program is to provide a sustainable program model that can be *continued without external, internal support mechanisms*. Continually depending on external actors is costly and, in the end, difficult to maintain. The program itself will identify librarian participants through a number of mechanisms, ensuring a broad and diverse representation of Kosovo library culture. Selection criteria will include the following:

- Individuals will be directly recommended by administration at particular library sites.
- Participation will be ensured from a range of library sites, including national, university, public, school, and special library sites;
- An open application process will attract energetic staff invested in the future of Kosovo's cultural and educational landscape and will support entry of individuals perhaps not otherwise identified by administrative contacts.
- The program will ensure that courses support individuals just entering the library field to promote long-term investment in libraries and librarianship.
- Finally, the LSKC cohort will ensure professional representation from throughout the country, especially considering smaller cities and towns that are most in need of integrated library support mechanisms.

Core Courses. Core courses will tightly integrate Kosovo's main community needs in that they will deliver content and design structured activities that show how library collections, organizational practices, literacy activities, and the profession of librarianship itself are centrally engaged with Kosovo history, culture, and society. The courses are meant to train librarians who will subsequently enact similar pedagogical aims, thereby creating a sustainable program. The courses focus on the individual and local level using interactive project-oriented assignments that bridge our local experiences with broader national and international contexts. The aim is to show how local cultures significantly contribute what it means to be "Kosovar" in a broader sense. *We* create culture and thus are responsible

for engaging with libraries to improve our participation in its future. The initial core faculty includes experts from IUB, UCLA, and CSUN.

The content of the courses has been constructed around the vulnerable and in-need populations that were identified in fieldwork, thus ensuring that programs have a direct and positive impact on local spaces. These courses will also provide literacy training and critical thinking skills to support advancement in educational and occupational professions, support understanding of Kosovo's diverse cultures and communities to the betterment of a more inclusive society, and support educational institutions (elementary schools, secondary education, and graduate education) as well as continuing education for adults and vulnerable populations unable to enroll in graduate studies. To this end, we emphasize public librarians in these initial courses, as they have more contact with these target communities. Public libraries have always been best situated to assist community members on issues related to job seeking and continuing education. Public libraries, however, are often underfunded, and so our courses show librarians how to engage with information and library resources critically with minimal material investment. We emphasize *partnerships* between library institutions as a crucial element in best delivering information literacies effectively.

Initial Course Curriculum: Supporting Kosovo's Communities. The initial curriculum for the NLTP's first set of courses focuses on outreach, access, and literacy training, such that these activities are the most beneficial vulnerable communities, youth, and young adult communities. The following courses will be offered:

- Kosovo Librarianship, Ethics, and the Profession
- Services to Underrepresented and Vulnerable Populations in Public Libraries
- Access and Outreach Services for Academic Libraries
- Teaching Information Literacy and Critical Reading Skills
- Information Organization
- Special Collections, Rare Books, and Bibliography

The courses offer a balanced pedagogical approach that is not only theoretically based but also hands-on and project-oriented. For example, the Access and Outreach Services for Academic Libraries course takes a creative makerspace and user-oriented approach to library sources and literacies. Zine creation and creative activities promote active engagement with library resources and provide a vehicle for individual and community expression. In this way, NLTP participants—and eventually the community members librarians work with—can reflexively examine how their community experience in Kosovo is relevant to the broader cultural Kosovar discourse and history. Second, the Services to Underrepresented and Vulnerable Populations in Public Libraries course positions children and

young adults as vulnerable communities who require timely interventions in language and literacy instruction, leading into the development of information-related skills such as the seeking and ethical use of information. The “vulnerable populations” concept is also used to identify other pockets within the national community, for example the rural poor, with unmet yet identifiable information needs. Courses will also be held in multiple locations in Kosovo to attend to these rural spaces.

Parallel with these interactive courses, course content such as that represented in Kosovo Librarianship, Ethics, and the Profession conveys to participants how library work is both a collector and *producer* of cultural memory documentation. We examine how building library collections, describing objects, and organizing documents in ways that are accessible and understandable to vulnerable and youth communities is the first step to building a sense of national Kosovo identity and cultural memory. You cannot have interactive outreach activities unless you have a collection that is relevant to the constituents at hand. In this way, the LSKC project comprehensively looks at library and librarian work as a central component to any national attempt to create positive civic attachments to Kosovo as a sense of place.

Finally, given all of these curricular components, the courses also emphasize the importance of critical thinking as an avenue to advancing literacies. By actively and critically interacting with library materials; by partnering with elementary, secondary, undergraduate, and graduate courses; and by investing in local communities, libraries and librarians have a major role in providing extended educational spaces that prepare individuals to embark on competitive professional and educational careers. With the overall schematic of the NLTP in place, let us now turn our attention to some of the problematics that define this academic/public partnership.

Libraries and Politics

Returning now to the power imbalances inherent in this project as well as the postcolonial themes that elucidate them, there are two pressing questions at the heart of this work that will be interrogated, acknowledging the imbalanced power dynamic between U.S. universities and the public library system in locations such as Kosovo:

- What does it mean to develop in this context, and how is that development happening in a just fashion in relation to local communities?
- How can we reimagine this power dynamic in ways that, if they do not solve colonial issues, at least reckon with their overt effects and imaginative realities?

To think that “merely” educating Kosovo librarians on international library standards, such as those for metadata, classification, and archival description, is somehow agnostic to the problems of colonial imbalances

would be a gravely mistaken approach to this type of international education. The purported universality of standards of this nature has been vigorously pushed against for some time. One need look only to work such as Olson (2002) and Adler (2017) to see how feminist interventions into this space have proven fruitful in dispelling the universal ideal. We also see this critique in indigenous spaces, such as in the work of Duarte and Belarde-Lewis (2015), Montenegro (2019), and Littletree, Belarde-Lewis, and Duarte (2020), where the disjuncture between the Western ontological orientations and indigenous forms of relating and describing the world are in conflict with one another. Different cultures describe and connect the world differently, and thus our approach to organization, description, and curation must differ accordingly.

Even setting standards aside, the library as institution stands as a complex, if not socially problematic and powerful, emblem of Western ideals and imperialistic history. As Ilan Kapoor notes (2008, 19), institutional policy and development is often seen as separate from the discourse of culture, but this view cannot be further from the truth. Library discourses, services, and activities have drastic epistemic influence on surrounding communities and national consciousness. *The library has the capacity to change minds and lives*. Laden with the democratic principles couched primarily within the context of the United States, “development” proper in the sense described above treads murky water with regard to one’s ability to balance the needs of local culture with that of the norms and expectation in which Montoya’s training and education is embedded within and inseparable from. The danger—and usual circumstance—is for these kinds of activities to be essentialist and normative in their effects.

Libraries have always been powerful spaces for communities, whether they provide access to books, newspapers, or the internet; serve as gathering spaces in times of social turmoil (Klinenberg 2018); or provide basic literacy skills programming. The political role of libraries extends far beyond issues of censorship, though censorship is certainly an integral part of the political equation (Knox 2015). Even past these more “typically” assumed activities, libraries have increasingly been attending to social issues that extend far beyond their role as information and knowledge providers. As an example, programming related to anthropocentric concerns, climate change, greening libraries, and food shortages has become quite popular today (Lenstra and D’Arpa 2019; Hauke, Charney, and Sahavirta 2018; Denton 2015; Antonelli and McCullough 2012; Tansey and Montoya 2020). Creeping into domains such as climate change unavoidably requires libraries to enter discourses that are highly contested on the political stage. So while libraries certainly attend to these more educational and community-centric issues, they are also sites of global information exchange, which invariably puts them at the crossroads of politics and broader social conditions.

Acknowledgment of these issues while designing a curriculum is certainly not enough, especially if it serves to only sideline or obfuscate the active and present imbalances of power that exist within this U.S.- and Kosovo-based project. The key is not to look back to move the present out of sight, but to superimpose that historical context onto our contemporary reality such that its lessons can be taken into account while planning present activities. As noted by Bashota and Kokollari (2010, 12), the space of the library is a space that is full of political matters: "In the end, we would like to emphasize that the National and University Library of Kosova, as the premier library of the country, is always ready for constructive cooperation of any nature. However, it will never hesitate to react and respond to any untruths launched against it or other libraries in Kosova. Lastly, the Library and the whole library community of Kosova hopes to overcome political and technical obstacles in fully joining the community of world libraries, that is becoming full member of IFLA." NLK explicitly evokes its connection to the Kosovo state. Let me remind the reader of the constitutional bases for the National Library as the library intended to coordinate all the nation's subsidiary institutions. During one of Montoya's field site visits to NLK, rows of duplicate Serbian-language books, covered in a black tarp protecting them from moisture, were unable to be deaccessioned due to the possibility that such activity would spur political tension. Working in libraries in Kosovo makes the politics of libraries acutely visible. If we recall, during the Serbian dictatorship in Kosovo, 22,000 books were added to the NLK, all in the Serbian language, while only 125,981 library materials in Albanian were sent to the recycling plant in Lipjan (Olluri 2015, 699). Of course the National Library has no intention of deaccessioning *unique* Serbian items, only to responsibly balance space and collections. As Bashota and Kokollari make note, Kosovar librarians "aim to stop once and forever all those claims and unscrupulous speculations that 'there is no European nation nowadays whose libraries . . . are more endangered than the collections of Serbian books in Kosovo'" (2010, 8). Yet even the presence of such concerns signals that libraries are far more than inert repositories of knowledge.

LIBRARY INTERVENTIONS AND POSTCOLONIALISM

The kind of international and global library development seen in this case can be interpreted as a long extension to the exercise of imperialistic motives. This view has deep roots in the scholarship covering the colonial expansion period for libraries that amplified just after the end of World War I (Laugesen 2019). In this era, as Laugesen notes, libraries were seen as ideal spaces to form democratic networks abroad and shape civil participation in ways that benefit these spaces: "From the period between the two world wars, libraries were seen as a key means of distributing information and culture across the globe. Much of this activity was motivated

by foreign policy concerns—to inform people overseas about the values character, and ideologies not to mention economic products and industry, of a given nation and to forge better relations between nations. It is difficult to disentangle international library development work undertaken as foreign policy with that undertaken as ‘internationalist.’ . . . Much of [this library] work described . . . also served to buttress the (nationalist) aims of the state” (2019, 118). Much of the international library interventions during this period were couched in “modernist” discourses that, as Héctor J. Maymí-Sugrañes shows, reflects a “coherence of purpose implicit in a positivist conception of progress and modern civilization across the divide between Anglo-America and Iberian-America” (2017, 205). Libraries of all types, but especially public libraries, “[serve] as a link and junction point between the local and the global. It’s anchorage in the local network enables it to play its public role in cultural and social mediation, and in the shaping and transmission of knowledge in its diversity” (Bindé and Matsuura 2005, 65). This interconnectivity is emphasized in UNESCO’s 1954 seminar on the development of African libraries (UNESCO 1954, 14): “It is fairly agreed that library services and education should be linked everywhere; it is particularly important that public library services be closely associated with the mass education in Africa.” Libraries, books, and other print sources were (and certainly still are) seen as persistent and pervasive tools that readily promoted the U.S. ideal, bringing U.S. thought and “progressive” ambitions to the world at large (Maymí-Sugrañes 2017, 188–90). Laugesen (2019) also reiterates the persistent ideological foundations of libraries in this period—and the ramifications for such thought still, in some ways, persist in activities that take place today.

The influence of the American Corner libraries is an example of how ideological foundations are still maintained in library developmental models. The American Corner model has roots in the U.S. Information Agency (USIA, the functions of which were handed over to the U.S. Department of State after its dissolution in 1999) and is modeled similarly to the British Council Libraries, which were founded in 1934 (Laugesen 2019, chap. 5). A Council Library, for example, was charged with maintaining “book stock [that] should highlight British arts and science and British institutions, with value placed on classic works of English Literature” (Laugesen 2019, 120). As noted by Laugesen, the success of USIA international libraries varied, and they occasionally were seen with suspicion (2019, 134). And while the American Corner is not seen as suspicious in practice (as far as Montoya can note), Nicolas Lemay-Hébert (2009) does emphasize the extent to which these space *are* foreign, in terms of both their collections and their possible programs, which leads to what they call a “legitimacy paradox.”

And foreign the American Corners are—by design. The influence of American Corner Library in Prishtina, Prizren, and Mitrovica is impressive

given their popularity, especially with the middle school to high school age contingency. Much of this is due to the innovative programming coordinated by a deeply dedicated and talented staff. Cutting-edge programming coupled with Kosovo community-centric concerns have been incredibly successful. The program themes are also timely and designed around socially sensitive and pressing issues such as misinformation, and acutely illustrates how libraries have a stake in broader social concerns which circulate in political discourses.

The collections representing U.S. literature in American Corner spaces, however, could use some diversification to more fully represent the mélange of cultures that represent the country. Prominent among the shelves of the American Corner Pristina is a robust collection of the Library of America series with their characteristic black covers and calligraphic white font. More equal representation of women and individuals of color would be a welcome and necessary addition to these titles. These details aside, one cannot overlook the reality that politics *is* indeed central to how these libraries function as both a physical space and an imaginative, epistemic one—they are *U.S.* entities meant to disseminate the culture of a decidedly foreign land. In areas such as Mitrovica, a predominantly Serbian area in the northern reaches of Kosovo, ethnic tensions run particularly high, and the American Corner finds itself squarely within this politically juxtaposed space. Libraries embedded within these contested areas have to try their best to balance the competing needs of the area—an order that is not always easy to meet.

So while many of the beliefs and values that American Corners are advocating for are reasonable—such as democratic ideals, freedom of speech, intellectual freedom, and diversity—there is a danger that these ideals are imported en bloc without enough regard for the local populations and how their beliefs and values intersect with Kosovo's own social, cultural, and civic norms. A good question to ask here is, how are democracy and capitalism expressed differently in Kosovo than in the United States? The same dangers are inherent in the NLTP, poised as it is at the juncture of U.S. and Western traditions within a country struggling to redefine its own cultural, intellectual, and social identity. The issue now becomes how we can define frameworks by which to understand this complexity, such that we can critique our development in a grounded fashion, while also doing our best to keep the local communicatees at the core of our motivations and recommendations.

POSTCOLONIAL APPROACHES

In all senses the country of Kosovo is still very much in development, still rebuilding from the disastrous cultural and infrastructural effects of the Kosovo War. Development is also a fraught word in any context, and cer-

tainly no less so when thinking about international library development. How do we think about *development* as it is linked to libraries in a way that overtly acknowledges the imbalanced power structures inherent in international developmental affairs? And then how much of the problematics of this developmental mind-set is activated within the context of library programming and professional training? For one, any individual entering an international space in an intervention capacity should acknowledge the explicit colonial roots of this work.

Discourses about “library colonialism” have always been part of what amounts to the “power politics” between local communities and colonial entities (Amadi 1981, 39). As Stephen Sampson (2003, 136) makes clear in relation to the international interventions to boost Balkan civil society, such insertions of international actors create “both internal tensions within Balkan societies and tensions between the various local and international actors.” Sampson even goes so far as to categorize these interventions as a kind of colonialism: “The most precise concept with which to describe the mission of these internationals [NGOs, foreign governments, private businesses, etc.] is ‘benevolent colonialism.’ ‘Colonialism’ because, despite the rhetoric of ‘partnership’ with local actors, there is an unequal relationship between the foreign donor and the local supplicant. Colonialism also, because the project is to intervene in these societies to make them more amenable for Western interests” (2003, 146–47). Historically, the “modernization” and development of libraries has always been on the terms of those coming in, with benchmarks conceived before beginning collaboration. The key is to best produce a library structure that is successful on the terms set by local communities.

UNESCO’s Ibadan Seminar strategizing the best approach to development of public libraries and library education in Africa (UNESCO 1954), for example, gathered twenty-nine African participants, but only eight were African—the other twenty-one were Europeans working in Africa. Surely the result of this imbalance would not and cannot be fully indicative of African societies. And though literacy is of paramount importance in any endeavor of this kind, it is important to conceptualize how language, local culture, and historical experiences should be used to develop these skills. Importing English-language books and documents to meet these core educational aims is counterproductive to a nuanced and ethical approach to international assistance. In terms of the NLTP, cooperation with local communities, librarians, and political entities was paramount in all contextual and content-related decisions. The choice of language delivery for these courses was left in the hands of Albanian Kosovars, within both the University Library and the National Library. These are just not decisions to be made by intervening individuals. It was agreed that if selected “core” training documents were originally in English, the National Library

would pay professional translators to translate them into Albanian and provide marginalia to connect concepts to Albanian-centric historical discourses and practice.

The ultimate challenge is to imagine and interrogate how “library development” and intervention can be shifted conceptually such that Kosovo libraries, the training programs, and the professionals who emerge from these opportunities are seen to be *owned*, *representative of*, and *produced* by Kosovar society, collectively speaking. This has precisely been the aim of both the bachelor’s program at the University of Pristina and the NLTP. Even as imperfect as the outcome may be, and as much as the U.S. participants are unable to extricate themselves from the imbalances of power, a postcolonial framework has proven vital to “checking” and evaluating the ethical conundrums that arise around every decision. Michelle Caswell (2011), for example, has made a similar move in some of her work, especially as it relates to archives and cultural property issues that precipitated from the 2003 invasion of Iraq. As Edward Said noted, discourses disseminated by libraries certainly have a role to play in the culture-building narratives that are so integral to the production of culture (Said 1993, xiii). And in line with this view, Ilan Kapoor asks, how are we *making* this culture what it is (Kapoor 2008, 21) through these interventions? Kapoor also states, “the semiotic construction of culture involves a ‘will to power,’ wherein knowledge is systematized and disseminated. This process includes the deployment of discursive strategies, for example the use of rhetoric or the construction, repetition, and reification of powerful images and stereotypes” (Kapoor 2008, 21). The key is to shift the discourse and framing of this work to emphasize the localities in which we are working.

As Arturo Escobar reminds us in *Territories of Difference*, one should question the applicability and veracity of Western discourse and “pay attention to the epistemic potential of local histories embedded in or arising from the colonial difference” (2008, 21)—*and that it is this very questioning* that, at least *partially*, can check our influence. Building on this, another key is a pedagogical approach such as that advocated by Jonathan Dawson (Kothari et al. 2019, 217) that pushes aside the traditional mode of education that includes “the assumption . . . that there is a fixed body of knowledge to be transmitted in subject-specific silos by the ‘expert’ teacher . . . that learning is an individual and competitive process, in which collaboration is denounced as cheating.” Curricula and professional institutional designs should be seen as the instruments of power that they are. Critical library pedagogy has a great deal to offer in this space as well (Nicholson and Seale 2017; Downey 2016).

Kosovo is a diverse country that must attend to far more than two ethnic and religious majorities. The design of curricula should be equally critical and embrace pluriversality implicitly and explicitly—implicitly in that course content should be driven by a critical model and explicitly in that

planning, conception, and conversation concerning the program should be critical from the start (by declaration). Pluriversality embraces multiplicity, imagining that there are other ways to conceive of design (broadly construed) than those that dominate Western thinking (Escobar 2018). It is reemphasizing the local over the global to conceive and organize in ways counter to a dominant ideology. It is design based on communication, reciprocity, care, and attention to all aspects of the environment (natural, social, cultural). To be pluriversal is to accept diversity as a core mechanism of any and all endeavors. Even if the goal of pluriversal design is elusive with regard to its implementation within information infrastructures, it can certainly be attended to in the discourse behind the design of the bachelor's program, for example. Even still, course content *can* and *should* be rooted in the local, led by the communities that are meant to benefit from them. Justice, ethics, and power can act as central concepts of engagement in tandem with these aims. If we cannot invert a society in whole, then we certainly can invert our way of thinking *in* this world.

These two critical approaches—local historical potentials and critical pedagogy—have been core to how the NLTP has been conceived. And the discourses surrounding its design have always been up front about its methods and Kosovo-centric approach. While standards may be what they are (certainly there are technical processes that make metadata interoperability and collocation within libraries possible, for example), we know that librarianship and libraries are far more than this. Libraries are spaces of social empowerment, liberation, and educational potentials. A public library is a representation of the public *it serves*, not an *imagined* public that we wish to construct. The goal is not to *speak for* any one nation, library, or librarian but to be a conduit for the production of formal structures that can, within their limitations, represent the needs of the local educational and epistemic communities. Enacting what Walter D. Mignolo calls border thinking (2000) is essential in this case—an active push against the universalizing and repressive Western and modern structures, and a reorientation of action acknowledges both the centrality of colonialism to current epistemic realities (the “inside” of the border), as well as an other-epistemic mode of thinking that embraces plurality and new modes of subjective experiences (the “outside” of the border). Action starts with this reorientation.

CONCLUSION

The goal in this article has been to lay out the mechanics of a complex partnership between an academic at a large research-oriented university and a large national and public library in the country of Kosovo. The goal of this partnership is to create two interconnected but distinct programs: the nation's first bachelor's program in library studies at the University of Pristina and an NLTP intended to train current professionals and provide

continuing education opportunities. The narrative focused primarily on the latter and outlines the methods used to collect data with the goal of building a program that was at once attentive to the needs of local communities and cultures, while also current with regard to teaching the global standards for librarianship.

The result of this process highlights the complex positionality of the library, both as an educational institution with responsibilities to disseminate information and resources and teach literacies but also as an institution that is, at base, political in position as a cultural producer and modeler of social discourse. But it also highlights the dangers of a U.S.-based institution entering foreign lands and framing pedagogy on their own terms. The narrative also illustrated the liminal space that libraries inhabit in our society and the potential dangers of importing foreign and U.S. practices of librarianship without regard to the countries we are attempting to assist and promote. Libraries are inherently political in nature, even if some in the profession believe this not to be the case. Given this characteristic, the partnership between academic institutions and public libraries should be seen as actively engaging in political spaces and be aware of the influence we bear on social conditions.

To address this challenge, the article proposed critical and postcolonial theoretical approaches as a way to interrogate the power imbalances that might arise from library partnerships of this type. Given the focus of this *Library Trends* special issue, if we are to promote more academic and public library partnerships (which should unequivocally be the case) and try to narrow the gulf between academia and public library practice, we need to also attend to how institutional imbalances of power can potentially produce outcomes that benefit one institution over another—often the more privileged or wealthy partner. By doing so, we not only produce more fair and equitable outcomes, but also produce programming, collections, resources, and policies that attend to local public library conditions. Altogether, this move helps us generalize the lessons learned from the NLTP to *any and all* partnerships where such inequalities might exist. Libraries shape the way communities think; they provide avenues for social advancement (whatever that may mean at a local level) and individual fulfillment.

In this way, the NLTP, and any program, should be focused on the local and meet the needs of the users it intends to coordinate with. Content for courses should represent the plural nature of any given society. Being critical in this capacity means always questioning the imbalance of power and acknowledging our limitations as foreign actors.

Finally, an essential fact to keep in mind here is that Kosovo, as a country, does see itself as maintaining a Western identity. It is close allies with—and still very much supported by—U.S. ideals and interventions. The goal in these activities has been to be the voice that reiterates the importance of

locality to the production of library services. To ensure that the program is Kosovar-owned, even if using the U.S. model, seems ideal. To merely import an IUB ILS program will be met with no success in Kosovar society. Not only is Kosovo's university and library system not situated to absorb these structures, but by and large the idea that libraries are *integral* to society needs greater purchase within social and political realms. Educational sectors certainly see their importance, but as Sidney Ditzion maintained, a library system's success will depend upon a society that supports and understands their epistemic import. The courses crafted in this experience with Kosovo are meant to train librarians to reflect upon their communities and to keep their needs, discourses, and ambitions at the forefront of project outcomes. Communities then, in turn, will better understand how libraries aid and support their intellectual and cultural freedoms. And is that not the goal of all of this?

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