

Bringing Middle East Librarianship into the Classroom: Towards Meaningful Diversity

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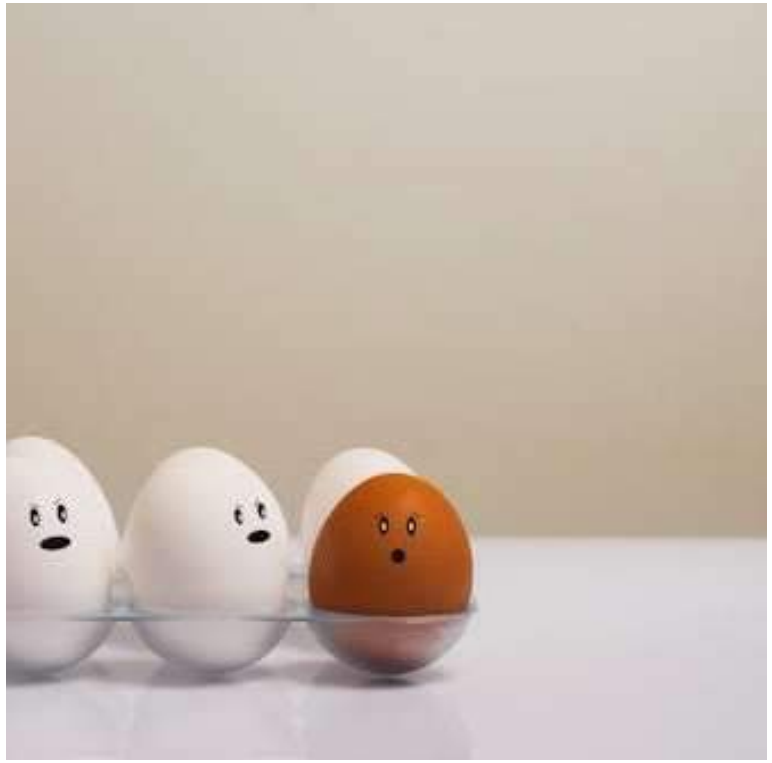
Like many librarians, I like to go to the library, and I visited several as I traveled through [the Philippines]… All…revealed something about US global power in their physical arrangement: portions of the circulating collections were held in marked collections called Filipiniana. Books in these sections were either written by Filipino authors, or were about the Philippines, the big, broad strokes of a special collection built around a geographic destination. How helpful, I thought, to have the Filipino books separated from the regular books! But then, as my American palate adjusted to pork and rice for breakfast and San Miguel with dinner, the othering of a domestic collection made less and less sense. It would be like housing books by US authors in the United States section in a US library. We don't mark the ordinary; what is marked is different. What does it mean that Philippine collections must collect their own materials as special?

[…] Seeing Filipiniana in the Philippines told me something I hadn't known before about the global violence of dominant knowledge formations. Something clicked in me. That clicking matters. It determines what happens next, what other worlds are possible.

Emily Drabinski, *The Politics of Theory and the Practice of Critical Librarianship*

Towards Diversity

- Need to address diversity, structural barriers, effects of colonization
- Recurring themes: racism, gender, Indigenous reconciliation
- Issues: superficiality, inclusion of viewpoints from more communities



Main Inquiry

- **Question**: How can we, as information professionals with expertise in the Middle East, contribute to diversifying viewpoints presented to LIS students?
- **Basis**: “Comparative Information Traditions: Islamic Civilization”
  - Offered at University of Toronto (fall 2023, fall 2024)
  - Alternate views of knowledge, libraries, archives, etc.

Knowledge

- Importance of orality in Muslim knowledge tradition:
  - Quran, reading texts to a teacher
- How can librarians better represent concepts of knowledge that differ from the American-European paradigm?



Knowledge

- Ways of knowing:
  - Shared: logic, empirical methods
  - Divine guidance, esoteric knowledge
- What should be considered “information”?
- Issues with treating minorities as a monolith



Libraries and Book Culture

- Long legacy of libraries in Muslim world
- Nature of texts and authorship
  - Culture of copying
  - Lack of textual fixity





Archives

- Abandon search for physical archive, switch to examining archival practices
- Modern community-based archives

Image: Konrad Hirschler, *A Monument to Medieval Syrian Book Culture*

Best Practices

- Don’t underestimate your students
- Policy of open communication
- Explain key concepts required as background
- Use both LIS literature and Islamic studies scholarship
- Hands-on activities

Conclusion

- What can **you** contribute?
- Thank you to MELCom for grant

