Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice in the Information Context: Global South Perspectives

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Editorial

This special issue of *The International Journal of Information, Diversity, & Inclusion* is being released at a momentous time in the history of the world—2020 will go down in world history as the year that saw global epistemic calls to disrupt dominant cultures, knowledge systems, and epistemologies that perpetuate societal inequalities, following the brutal killing of George Floyd at the hands of police in the U.S. on May 25, 2020. This incident coincided with the global challenge of containing the catastrophic spread of the COVID-19 virus which impacted all levels of society, but once again, as a global phenomenon, exposed epistemic fault-lines and inequities in societies across the globe. In such a smouldering global social context that is grappling with issues such as Black pain and dehumanization; institutional and systemic racism; structural inequality; unconscious bias; inhumane 'othering'; and, determined calls for decolonization, indigenization, and a recognition of multiple ways of knowing in the face of dominant cultures and intellectual traditions, the need to centre social justice in information-related scholarly conversations is critical. Hence the relevance of the collection of papers carried in this special issue which was a response to a call for 'global south perspectives' on 'diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the information context'.

In a world so dominated by voices from the hegemonic global North, resulting from historical societal evolution that reified Western dominant culture and knowledge systems, it is important to create space (as this special issue does) for Global South[1] voices representing the less advantaged citizenry and doing so in a spirit of promoting decolonizing and transformative activism for the marginalized in a world dominated by Western power and privilege.

As Guest Editor for this special issue, in curating received submissions, the review process and eventual acceptance of papers for publication, I too, felt the impact of an 'an inequitable world' in my engagement with authors and reviewers from different parts of the world (Global North and South), and it took a decolonialized humanizing positionality on my part as an editor to ensure that scholarly 'stories' from the Global South, often constrained by global North scholarly communication norms and systems, eventually emerged as published content in this issue. As an editor from the Global South, I am elated, in a spirit of 'ubuntu' (African philosophy of compassion and humanity), that 50% of the contributions to this issue emanate from the African continent, with case studies on diversity and inclusion from Global South information environments.

Having reflected in this editorial on the concepts of 'social justice' and 'global south', it remains to engage with the nomenclature of 'diversity' and 'inclusion' in the information context, in order to complete clarification of the point of reference for this special issue. While 'diversity' refers to a range of potentially disadvantaging socio-economic and cultural differentials such as disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, language, literacy practices, educational background, geographic location, race, ethnicity, culture, and religion (Jaeger et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2015), 'inclusion' together with 'equity' are essential and integral to advancing diversity in information professional practice, research, and education (Chu & Raju, 2020). This special issue targeted Global South perspectives engaging diversity and inclusion in information-related fields for the promotion of social justice relating to equitable access to information. Information, which serves as a foundational core of cultural heritage institutions, such as libraries, museums, and archives, as well as a range of other information environments, "is not neutral" (Garcia, 2015, n. p.) and is too often disengaged for the communities they serve. The curation of information by information professionals in diverse sites of practice, as reported herein, can play a critical role in promoting social justice practices where information professionals "add meaning and context" (Garcia, 2015, n. p.) for users. Such services encourage critical interrogation of socio-political and cultural forces that interact with local knowledge systems. It is in such an analytical context that the research articles, case studies, and reports from the field in this special issue offer primarily Global South narratives on diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the information environment.

The issue opens with Rachel Fischer and Erin Klazar's research article addressing social justice in the information environment within the post-truth context. Their paper on "Facts, Truth, and Post-Truth: Access to Cognitively and Socially Just Information" focuses on the effect of disinformation on social justice challenges in Global South countries such as South Africa, Iraq, and Trinidad and Tobago; and makes recommendations for locally contextualized and international initiatives ensuring access to cognitively and socially just information.

Mª-Carmen Agustín-Lacruz and Julia Saurin-Parra in their research article, "Library Services and Minorities in Europe: The Roma Case in Spain", use 'observation and analysis', and the 'design of practical proposals' to study the role of public library services as informal education and as a social work endeavour directed at 'traditionally excluded' minority groups in Europe, with particular reference to the Roma minority in Spain. They focus on analysing existing library services in the European Union directed to the Roma people and on the need for revision of library regulations and their adaptation to this marginalized minority group.

Ayanda Agnes Lebele, in a case study report, examines "How the Botswana International University of Science and Technology [BIUST] Library Engages its Stakeholders in Connecting Information Resources, Services, and Space". This case study paper is premised on 'key values of facilitating access to information and demand-driven inclusive library services'. It contextualizes the operations of the BIUST Library and critically analyses how this academic library engages relevant stakeholders toward the development of 'multiple and flexible opportunities to access and use information'.

In another case study, Matseliso 'Mamahlape Moshoeshoe-Chadzingwa presents a report from Africa, entitled, "Diversity, Inclusivity, Social Responsibility Aspects, and Outcomes of a Mobile Digital Library and Information Service Model for a Developing Country: The Case for Lesotho". She argues that the approach of separate academic, public, school, and special libraries does not work in a developing context that lacks strong socio-economic, cultural, educational, and

political resources. Moshoeshoe-Chadzingwa proceeds to report on outcomes and impacts of the UNESCO-funded project, *Distance and Rural Learner-Teacher Support through a Mobile Digital Library* (DRULETSMODIL) in Lesotho. Initiated by the National University of Lesotho (NUL), the DRULETSMODIL project's initial objective was to reach out to NUL's distant teachers and learners, but later expanded its scope to 'include the disadvantaged, excluded, rural, poor, and marginalized communities' of Lesotho.

As a special section publication in the form of a report from the field, Laurie Kutner in her paper, "Bridging Information Worlds: Talking to Northern Students and Southern Scholars About Global Inequities in Scholarly Communication", addresses the complex topic of inherent inequalities of current scholarly communication from both global North and Global South perspectives. She reflects on her experiences in facilitating discussions on this topic at the Monteverde Institute (MVI) in Costa Rica, which supports education abroad students undertaking community engaged scholarship as well as international and locally based researchers who focus their research enquiries in the developing region.

This issue appropriately closes with yet another special section publication in the form of a conceptual analysis of the two coinciding major challenges confronting the global community in 2020, and which were made reference to at the beginning of this editorial in setting the social justice context for this special issue. Madeleine Schachter, in her paper on "Black Lives Matter and COVID: Lessons in Coincidence, Confluence, and Compassion" employs the coincidental convergence of these two major challenges to signal a social justice message: 'The preservation of oneself depends upon the preservation of all people', including the most vulnerable in society.

It is my hope that the contributions in this issue stimulate further scholarly engagement on diversity, inclusion, and social justice in the information environment, particularly from Global South perspectives. I wish to thank the authors for their valuable contributions to this special issue and for working with me to bring their papers to the stage of acceptance for publication in a high quality and internationally reputable journal. My deepest gratitude to the reviewers who made a major contribution to the development of the shape and relevance of the papers to align with the journal's focus on information, diversity, and inclusion. Last but not least, I wish to thank the *IJIDI* Editor-in-Chief (Vanessa Irvin) and her Editorial Team (particularly Leah Brochu) for the support, expert guidance, and for the opportunity to work on a truly valued publication.

Endnote

[1] An emerging term used to refer to lower-income and socio-politically and culturally isolated regions of the world; generally viewed to be a term that is a more open alternative to 'third world' or 'developing' regions of the world.

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She was Editor-in-Chief of the *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science* from 2012 to 2018; serves on the Editorial Advisory Boards of the *African Journal of Libraries, Archives and Information Science; International Journal of Information, Diversity & Inclusion; Open Information Science; Libri: International Journal of Libraries and Information Studies; African Journal of Communication & Information Science; Information Research*; is co-editor of the ALISE (Association for Library and Information Science Education) Book Series on LIS education and research; and, is co-editor of the International Insights Column of *College & Research Libraries News*.

Jaya Raju is currently Co-Chair of IFLA's Building Strong LIS Education (BSLISE), an active global network of LIS educators and researchers. She is an NRF (South African National Research Foundation) rated researcher. Since 2018 she has been Subject Chair (LIS and multi-disciplinary journals) on the Scopus Content Selection & Advisory Board—an international group of scientists and researchers representing major scientific disciplines and tasked with evaluating journals applying for inclusion on the Scopus indexing list.