

Lee, Deborah and Mahalakshmi Kumaran. **Aboriginal and Visible Minority Librarians: Oral Histories from Canada**. Toronto and New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. Print. 231 pp. 65.00 USD. ISBN: 978-1-4422-3681-3 (pbk.); 978-1-4422-3682-0 (ebook).

"Librarianship is such a white profession."

This observation (made years ago by one of editor Deborah Lee's MLIS professors), underscores the need for—and importance of—**Aboriginal and Visible Minority Librarians: Oral Histories from Canada**. For a profession that ostensibly places a public premium on diversity, librarianship is still, overwhelmingly, a haven for white privilege, particularly in Canada.

This contradiction is especially acute as it pertains to Canada's troublingly few Indigenous librarians and was a major focus of the September 2014 meeting of the Council of Prairie and Pacific University Libraries at MacEwan University in Edmonton, Alberta. In attendance were most of the Indigenous librarian/authors featured in editors Lee and Kumaran's new book, including Camille Callison (Tahltan, University of Manitoba), Jessie Loyer (Cree-Metis, Mount Royal University), Kim Lawson (Heiltsuk-Kitasoo, University of British Columbia), and Mary Weasel Fat (Blood, Red Crow Community College), as well as Lee herself (Cree-Mohawk-Metis, Indigenous Studies Librarian, University of Saskatchewan).

Most of the participants at that event—myself included—were non-Indigenous Canadians. Few First Nation children, we were told, have easy access to libraries or librarians, or think of librarianship as a career, and as a consequence retain (as one speaker put it) an "unconscious suspicion" of libraries, seeing them as just another form of Western infrastructure intended "for the public good" but one that nevertheless overlooks Indigenous world views.

Other visible minority groups, too, are underrepresented in the profession: a 2005 report on the state of human resources in Canadian libraries found that their presence as professionals may be half of their actual demographic profile in Canadian society (8Rs Research Team 44-45).

For all these inequities, however, too little attention has been paid in the Canadian library literature to this apparent lack of diversity in the profession. Not so in the United States: for many decades now, the American library literature has devoted considerable attention to visible minority professionals, mostly African-American and Hispanic librarians. By contrast, the Canadian literature is rather meagre, mostly of recent vintage, and largely concerned with improving diversity in general rather than on exploring the experiences of professionals from identifiable racial and ethnic groups. Even the Canadian Library

Association's 2008 (rather brief) *Statement on Diversity and Inclusion* refers only to patrons but makes no reference to the profession itself.

With this new edited collection, Kumaran (originally from India) and Lee have done a tremendous service to the profession in filling this gap. They present a mix of personal narrative, scholarship, and career advice that will both empower and encourage aspiring Aboriginal and visible minority librarians and enlighten Euro-Canadian professionals as to the struggles they face. In fact, the diverse pathways to satisfying careers offered here would be of value to any library school student or new professional, regardless of racial or ethnic background.

Beyond their previous publications in the professional literature, Lee and Kumaran (also from the University of Saskatchewan) have both made other noteworthy contributions: Lee as project leader since 2007 on the University's invaluable Indigenous Studies Portal (iPortal) and "Our Legacy" archive, and Kumaran on founding the Visible Minority Librarians of Canada (ViMLOC) Network through the Canadian Library Association.

On offer in their new book is a selection of eighteen essays, nine from Aboriginal librarians and nine from librarians representing various immigrant groups from the Indian subcontinent, China, the Philippines, and Jamaica. Representing both Aboriginal and immigrant professionals themselves, the editors each supplied their own contributions. For the most part, the chapters summarize the authors' respective career trajectories, highlighting the many challenges they overcame and the strategies they employed (and the sometimes fortuitous opportunities they were given) to do so. The chapters are preceded by a useful introduction in which Lee and Kumaran outline the purpose of the book and the process behind it, as well as some of the common themes which emerged from their culturally diverse contributors.

The book reflects no particular structure—the chapters are not even presented alphabetically by author (although the editors' own come near the end). This results in a good distribution throughout between represented international and Aboriginal cultures. While this was undoubtedly a decision born of equity, it does have the sometimes jarring—and perhaps intentional—effect of forcing the reader to adjust mentally to different world views from chapter to chapter.

It should be stressed that the book's subtitle is a bit inaccurate: while some entries qualify as oral histories, many would more properly be described as essays, complete with arguments on the state of diversity in Canadian libraries and broader demographic trends, supported by sometimes substantial references to the literature. Allan Cho, for example, in his "Diversity Pathways in Librarianship" (pp. 89-102), contextualizes his personal reflections with a literature review, while Arvind Shrivatsava's "Observations of a New Immigrant Library Professional" (pp. 103-116) offers only a few pages of personal narrative, devoting the remaining ten pages to discussions on diversity, the ViMLOC Network, and tips for new professionals. Kelly Lau's chapter (pp. 123-134) is a rather fascinating theoretical application of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's

"rhizome" metaphor, stressing multiplicity and lateral, cross-cultural relationships. Lau also offers the book's most explicit Settler acknowledgement, thanking the Dene, Tsuu T'ina, Cree, and Blackfoot, as well as the Coast Salish peoples, for her presence on their unceded territory.

All of which leads to an important recognition: it would be a mistake to characterize this book and its contributors according to binaries, i.e., Aboriginals and Settler/immigrants. Just as the visible minority librarians represent diverse global cultures, so too do the Indigenous authors. In addition to those mentioned in the second paragraph above, other Indigenous cultural perspectives include Metis (Jim Bruce), Euro-Inuit (Dale Blake), and Cree-Salteaux (Suzy Bear), each of which offers the reader a different insight into encounters with Euro-dominated institutions like universities, government and libraries.

Callison and Blake reflect on the inability of Western classification systems to organize and represent Indigenous knowledge, while Lawson stresses that libraries not only misrepresent Aboriginal knowledge systems but are unsuited to documenting suppressed knowledge and trauma of the kind revealed in the Truth and Reconciliation process. Structural barriers need to be overcome: Suzy Bear writes about waiving fines of low-income families to maintain their access to services, and the need for more distance MLIS education for Aboriginal students. Tribal college libraries present particular resource and staffing challenges, according to Weasel Fat, as they are subject to a governance crack between provincial and federal jurisdictions. Lee notes that universities in general have resisted accepting Aboriginal epistemologies and research, frustrating efforts at the hiring, acceptance, and tenure applications of Aboriginal candidates. Jessie Loyer criticizes academic recruitment strategies for failing to recognize the complexity of Indigenous identities, instead assuming a monolithic (and often pathologized) Aboriginal identity among potential students. Deepening this complexity, according to Blake, Loyer, and Bruce, are the privileges and tensions arising with being able to "pass for white"—not only dealing with ignorance and racist jokes from whites but struggling for acceptance among Aboriginal colleagues.

Distinctions between knowledge systems and world views are not as apparent in the essays by the visible minority authors, but these librarians too face the intersections of race, gender, and class and must deal with discrimination, stereotypes, and isolation. At the same time, some recognize the powerful and welcoming impact a diverse staff can have on the public as Erie Maestro reports of her enthusiastic welcome from Vancouver's large Filipino community. Ganga Dakshinamurti describes facing discrimination head-on and volunteering for committees and other leadership opportunities while learning not to assume negative perceptions on the part of others. Kumaran, however, found that fitting in at her workplace involved socializing by invitation—one she never received. Arvind Shrivatsava learned that many immigrants face the prospect of having to go back to school as their credentials aren't recognized, yet there is no will nor resources to initiate a review of foreign credentials. On the other hand, Lillian Li,

a Chinese-Canadian, reports a very positive experience in her career path, and welcoming, multicultural working environments. Suzanne Fernando speaks in her chapter of the Toronto Public Library's laudatory efforts to create such an environment, yet encountering negative attitudes towards "affirmative action" (AA) on the part of some of her colleagues. Norda Majekodunmi's own experience with AA was, in her words, a "double-edged sword" because she felt compelled to work extra hard under a cloud of self-doubt to prove she wasn't just hired to fill a quota (p. 202). In Lau's experience, such attitudes are compounded by the "overwhelming" silence on the part of the profession towards the underrepresentation of visible minorities, and colonialism and discrimination generally (p. 126).

Overarching themes raised in the essays include the immense value of mentorship programs, capacity-building through organizations such as ViMLOC, enhancing library collections with diversity-related content, integrating Indigenous world views and diversity in MLIS education, and including public libraries as a federal responsibility towards First Nations.

While the essays themselves are uniformly excellent and engaging, the book's index is rather problematic. At thirteen pages it is not only too long and overly detailed for a 211-page book, it also contains a number of entries which can only be described as bemusing ("Marcos dictatorship as library studies motivator", "security system as proud moment", "reconstruction after fire destruction"), while others concerning the book's major themes—notably "librarianship" and "discrimination"—are mysteriously brief. In general, the index needed better editing: not only does it suffer from heading inconsistencies and typos but several entries in the "c" section are repeated.

These editorial quibbles aside, **Aboriginal and Visible Minority Librarians** is a significant milestone in the professional literature that should be required reading for all library professionals, administrators, and students, and rewards repeated reading. While of obvious benefit to aspiring Aboriginal and visible minority library professionals, its greatest value may be in what it can teach Euro-Canadian librarians about their role in eliminating barriers, creating a culture of inclusion, and becoming compassionate and enthusiastic allies.

Lau's adoption of the "rhizome" metaphor in her essay aptly describes the entire project: their experiences and pathways may vary, but the intersectional nature of the authors' career experiences, and the cross-cultural connections and alliances they propose and promote, offer the profession a rich basis on which to engage in a deeper conversation about race, diversity, and inclusion in Canadian libraries.

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