

Borders & Belonging: Critical Examinations of Library Approaches Toward Immigrants, edited by Ana Ndumu

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Book Review: *Borders & Belonging: Critical Examinations on Library Approaches Towards Immigrants*

Ndumu, Ana, ed. *Borders & Belonging: Critical Examinations on Library Approaches Towards Immigrants*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2021, 318pp, \$35.00.

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Since the late nineteenth century, libraries in the US and Canada have engaged in outreach to immigrants with the goal of acclimatizing them to the dominant culture. In doing so, libraries have, intentionally or unintentionally, perpetuated stereotypes of immigrants as monolithic groups in need. In *Borders & Belonging: Critical Examinations of Library Approaches Toward Immigrants*, Ana Ndumu, Assistant Professor in the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland, argues that libraries continue to underestimate the capacity of immigrants, undervalue their lived experiences, and create library outreach initiatives that serve to assimilate immigrants instead of supporting their needs.

Borders & Belonging is organized into three parts. The first section uncovers the problematic paradigms within library practices. In the chapter "Libraries and the Americanization Crusade: A Biographical and Critical Study of John Foster Carr," Ndumu and C. Kimmie Ramnine examine Carr's leadership in the American Library Association in the early twentieth century. Despite the rhetoric around library outreach to immigrants that would be considered racist by today's standards, Carr shaped policies and practices that persist today. In their chapter "We See You: Increasing Inclusion and Empowerment of Immigrants by Liberating Library Workflows from Institutional Biases Rooted in Colonial Frameworks," May Chan and Jorge Cardenas describe recent examples of initiatives to diversify collections and community development in Canadian public libraries. They uncover unconscious bias within their library teams, rooted in assumptions of Western universality.

The second section features the voices of immigrant librarians who describe



their migration journeys and their pathways through libraries as professionals. In the chapter “Having Our Say: A Collaborative Dialogue on the Complexities of Being Black Immigrant Librarians,” contributors Simone Clunie, Kelsa Bartley Quan Hem, and Pearl Adzei-Stonnes, all self-identified Black immigrant librarians, demonstrate how Black immigrants are reminded of their skin color above all other attributes. Assumptions are made about language proficiency and the quality of their non-American education and library experience outside North America. Similarly, in Anita Kazmierczak-Hoffman’s chapter “Through Hardships to the Stars: Libraries as Personal Refuge and Professional Calling,” Kazmierczak-Hoffman, who immigrated from Poland as a professional linguist, experiences challenges moving to North America and starting a second career as a librarian. Michelle P. Green and Kristina A. Clement, in their chapter “Library Services to Immigrants who Identify as LGBTQ+: An Exploratory and Critical Study,” discuss the lack of services for immigrants who identify as LGBTQ+. Libraries may have programs for immigrant groups and programs for LGBTQ+ groups, but many do not acknowledge the impact of intersectionality on people who belong to both groups. Green and Clement discuss how LGBTQ+ immigrants may face homophobia both within their ethnic communities and in the broader society.

The third section showcases library initiatives that seek to disrupt the status quo and make meaningful change to support immigrant communities. In the chapter “Sorrow, Fury, Helplessness, and Cynicism: An Account of the Library of Congress Subject Heading ‘Illegal Aliens,’” Jill Baron and Tina Gross examine the challenges faced in attempting to change the Library of Congress subject headings. Sophia Rodriguez, Homa Naficy, and Mary Beth Russo’s chapter “‘The Library is a Hub for Democracy’: How a Public Library Increases Belonging for Newcomer Youth” examines public library supports for newcomer youth. A common theme among these initiatives is the role of immigrant communities as partners in library outreach.

The value of *Borders & Belonging* lies in its candor. This book peels back the veil of romanticized librarianship and critically examines the roots of vocational awe in the profession. As a field, we must acknowledge our role in perpetuating harmful stereotypes, recognize our unconscious bias in supporting some groups of immigrants while neglecting others, and take ownership of our contribution to upholding colonial systems. *Borders & Belonging* also highlights a valuable resource within libraries: librarians who have migrated to the US and Canada. In the chapter “Having Our Say,” contributors Clunie, Quan Hem, and Adzei-Stonnes call for diversifying the profession beyond diversity residencies. They emphasize the importance of communication and deep engagement to “reduce the foreignness of each other” (p. 123).

While there is work to be done across various types of libraries, academic librarians are well positioned to lead the charge, as research and service are key components of their profession. Academic librarians can investigate the barriers faced by fellow librarians whose library degrees are from non-American Library Association-accredited institutions. They can also amplify the voices of colleagues whose lived experiences differ from the mainstream. In recent years, many libraries and library associations have developed solidarity statements, committing to diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism. With this commitment comes the responsibility of learning the history of libraries – the good, the bad, and the ugly. Ndumu advocates that libraries and librarians must acknowledge and recognize the issues surrounding how libraries approach outreach to immigrants, seek to understand the experiences of immigrants themselves to better appreciate the unique gifts they bring and challenges they face in their journey, and then act to critically examine library programs, services, and workflows to better serve immigrants. This shift moves away from a needs-based approach for library outreach for immigrants towards a more asset-based community development approach. The participatory solutions highlighted in the third section of *Borders & Belonging* demonstrate this shift in direction. *Borders & Belonging* is a valuable first step for library professionals who want to create meaningful library outreach to immigrants.