

The Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science
La Revue canadienne des sciences de l'information et de
bibliothéconomie



Knowledge Organization and Nation Building
L'organisation des connaissances et la construction de nations

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Volume 47, Number 3, 2024

Special Issue on Knowledge Organization and Nations
Numéro spécial sur l'organisation des connaissances et les nations

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1116018ar>
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5206/cjils-rcsib.v47i3.22444>

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Publisher(s)

Canadian Association for Information Science - Association canadienne des sciences de l'information

ISSN

1195-096X (print)
1920-7239 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Bullard, J. & Turner, H. (2024). Knowledge Organization and Nation Building. *The Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science / La Revue canadienne des sciences de l'information et de bibliothéconomie*, 47(3), 83–85.
<https://doi.org/10.5206/cjils-rcsib.v47i3.22444>

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Knowledge Organization and Nation Building

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Introduction

Changes in borders and governance are changes in classifications. National library systems, the management of educational standards, and the need to articulate a nation's vision of society through shared heritage all play a role in the proliferation of knowledge organization (KO) systems. Historical work on KO systems has shaped our understanding of how standardized documentation and classification systems are entangled with the establishment of national consciousness (Anderson 1991; Adler, 2020; Carra, 2021; Higgins, 2012). Further, studies of Indigenous knowledge organization schemes reveal the reciprocal influence between systems and sovereign worldviews (Bardenheier et al., 2015; Cherry & Mukunda, 2015; Duarte & Belarde-Lewis, 2015). While methods of studying these systems differ, they share an understanding of the interplay between the imagined nation and its conceptual information infrastructure. This special issue brings together scholars who examine the standards and classifications that set borders and build nations. How and when did these normalized systems arise, and how did they lend to the formation of national boundaries today? The submissions in this issue are from researchers at all stages working on histories of the development of organization systems alongside the nation state. Understanding these histories, we believe, is necessary for plotting a path forward from settler, oppressive systems.

Locating ourselves in the Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science

This special issue arose out of a workshop at the International Society for Knowledge Organization Conference in 2022, where we worked with a group of scholars to understand distinct case studies from around the world. Two contrasting ideas became core to our understanding of the phenomenon of nations and classifications: borders are made up and borders are real. First, borders are human inventions imposed on lands and peoples, dividing waters from their sources and setting seemingly arbitrary lines between kin. Second, these lines have tangible power we enact through political and economic

processes. This twinned perspective is common among those of us who study, critique, and build knowledge organization systems: we know our work is ultimately subjective and its imposition on reality will have felt effects beyond some convenience in information retrieval.

Choosing the Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science (CJILS) is an apt embrace of the (un)reality of national borders. CJILS is a Canadian project supported by Canadian cultural heritage and academic initiatives, and housing this collection here ties us to a theory of nationhood with an uncomfortable fit to the theme of this research. Thanks in large part to those same supports, CJILS is a truly open access journal, setting no institutional or financial barriers to authors or readers. We hope that those reading this collection and those supporting the sustainability of the diamond open access model appreciate both the intent and inherent irony of this relation. In this issue, you will read three papers with a North American framework and locality—we continue to welcome conversations and explorations of research on this theme from outside this locale. Recognizing that diversity in nation building and classification building examples are required, we hope readers use this special issue as a starting point for more dialogue and theory development.

A Border is a Classification/ A Classification is a Border

The papers in this collection illuminate long histories of nations built around intentional tactics of setting borders, defining difference, labelling, and classifying. The methods of history and archival research exemplified here show us, in detail, the intent and labour behind effects we continue to feel today through the direct use and ripple effects of the systems explored. In viewing these histories together, we see interplays between nation/world building and nation/world destroying. We see projects where asserting a category for the self is inextricable from refuting an existing claim to another's belonging or identity. Making such a definitive statement of a category or a nation truly existing means hiding what does not fit neatly within or without the border. What things are "miscellaneous," liminal, or left unnamed? These analyses echo current issues in labelling and classifying: who gets a country; who gets to be a woman; who gets to be a citizen; who gets to be a human. Those facing and resisting fascism see these mechanisms in action once again. Following the work of Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star (1999), we see great potential in the work that draws out the specifics

of how these categories are constructed, reified through systems, and go on to subtly but effectively shape our actions and imaginations.

We would also like to draw our borders for the context of this issue. We are unable to provide a fulsome literature review of the history of borders, border making, and nation building—despite how important and necessary this continues to be for political action now. There is extant literature that captures these phenomena across anthropology, geography, library and information studies, border studies, and settler colonial studies. In this issue, we offer the perspectives of these three authors and our own thinking about the patterns we have seen among the KO tools we have been working with—mostly in libraries and museums.

For Julia, the relationship between nation building and knowledge organization systems has crystallized through teaching. One of the closing activities for her introductory course on information organization has the students creating a massive collaborative timeline of the original publication dates of all the extant systems covered over the previous 13 weeks. These include longstanding and commonplace systems such as the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) and MARC21 as well as comparative systems from around the world and contemporary alternatives such as the Homosaurus thesaurus. Seeing all these systems (50-something as of the 2024 iteration) on the whiteboard, correspondence between classification systems and the histories of the countries publishing them emerges—DDC and the Library of Congress Classification following the American Civil War, the Korean Decimal Classification following the Korean Civil War, and the New Classification Scheme for Chinese Libraries after the Republic of China's (re)establishment in Taiwan. For many students, this inquiry ends at Julia's half-joking hypothesis that classifications are caused by civil wars; others choose to dig deeper and explore the reciprocal relationships among national crises, nation-building initiatives, national library systems, and the expression of national identity through classification systems.

For Hannah, these themes became evident in conducting research on the origins of museum classifications. The development of museums is directly tied to the development of national identity and in some cases the establishment of nations themselves; all of which is directly tied to how museums name and classify collections (Turner 2020). For example, North American museums established categories of objects and belongings to take and amass in large collections, requiring a systematic approach to naming these objects. One cluster of these understudied systems is composed of the Cross Cultural Survey, the Outline of Cultural Materials (OCM) and the Outline of World Cultures (OWC); all were developed at Yale in the Human Relation Area Files (HRAF) project (Ford 1970; Murdock 1935). These classifications were also used for naming things, people, and geo-localities or geographic places by many museums in the 20th century and, to some

extent, today. The history of the OWC and OCM, developed by Lt. George P. Murdock, is one directly tied to American expansionism and imperialism, and the search for commercial opportunities via conquest in the Philippines and beyond. Specifically, the Cross-Cultural Survey System was used by the United States military and foreign intelligence following the United States entering WWII to organise information on Japanese-controlled islands in the Pacific (Ford 1970; Price 2012). The *Outline of World Cultures* is an ethnographic manual that results from the work of the HRAF, and which “presents a preliminary inventory and classification of all the world's cultures known to history and ethnography” (Lagacé 1974, 24). It is primarily used by those researching in the social sciences and is endorsed for use as a cataloging system in Canadian museums (Department of Canadian Heritage Information Network 2022). The OCM “consists of over 700 distinct subject categories, with each category briefly defined and designated by a unique number code” (Lagacé 1974). It is organized into eight major geographical regions, each region is subdivided on a political basis, and within each subregion is divided further by unique “cultural units,” which can be cross-referenced across and within cultural groups (Lagacé 1974). Examples like this demonstrate that the historical connection between national imperialism and naming is particularly strong, and has lasting effects in cultural institutions that deserve more scholarly attention.

The collection

The papers in this issue attend to the historical aspects of classification and world building, putting North American and settler nations in focus. This historical contextualization is necessary as these three papers document times and cases occurring precisely when library and museum logics were being established in bureaucracies and universal systems. The three papers in this issue are historical, taking collections usually presented as inevitable or independent and putting them into the human context of their construction. This approach has the effect of demystifying the often invisible work of border-building in classification systems. The papers exist in a tightly overlapping historical period—the 19th to early 20th centuries—where the issues present in each study are interdependent and exist at the nexus between land and control. These classifications effectively control a kind of unknown or uncontrollable territory; a theme that can be read between the lines in catalogues, indexes, and in documentation.

Sorensen's paper takes a historical approach to understanding how KO systems operated in early state politics, and uses the case study of place naming in museum records as an example of an ontological naming and world building practice. Sorensen's case, of the Smithsonian's United States National Museum, provides a compelling case that documentation forms like ledgers and catalogue cards, serve as “nation-building tools that contribute to the development of a

US national identity” (Sorenson, 2024: 51). Aton, Dansereau and Nugent explore how records act as a tools of colonialism that ultimately serve to dispossess Indigenous peoples from their lands by asserting settler presence through appeals to the land. Through a detailed look at the Collection des archives du Collège Sainte-Marie (CACSM), they trace the development of Jesuit archives and records that built a coherent narrative and wielded settler-colonial power. Importantly, these records show how Indigenous agency was often revoked from this documentation. Adler’s paper takes us again to the development of American classification in the early 19th century through the naming, classifying, and display of one animal as a signifier of early American national identity. Naming and classifying the “American antelope” and mounting it for display was part of an American worldview that saw an idealised natural world ready for the claiming. As Adler details, the settler colonial scientific practices rendered the wild “antelope” into a document, which effectively drew a border between the human and non-human world and instantiated this worldview into early America. Despite these efforts, ultimately the American antelope is not an antelope at all, and resists strict classification.

All three of these historical papers describe moments of border-making that have visible influence today. They show how critical classification work was to early nationalist identity politics, whether through place naming in museum documentation, through Jesuit archives and the construction of settler-colonial power, or through other-than-human taxonomic resistance and ontologies of refusal.

Looking Forward and Looking Back

We hope that this collection inspires further historical and archival work on national, colonial, and anti-colonial contexts of knowledge organization design. Given the North American focus of these papers, we see great potential in histories and analysis from elsewhere in the world. Comparative work can build on such analyses by examining how different or converging development models among national libraries and national museums are reflected in their corresponding classification systems.

We would like to close this introduction by expressing our deep appreciation for our colleagues who make this work possible. Our thanks to the participants of our ISKO 2022 workshop for their insightful contributions and thoughtful engagement: Arianna Alcaraz, Melissa Adler, Stacy Allison-Cassin, Eva Jansen, Alexandria Rayburn, Amanda Sorenson, Natalia Tognoli, Justine Withers, and Yejun Wu. We are also indebted to Philippe Mongeon’s support as Editor-in-Chief

and for CJILS as a whole for being hospitable to this issue.

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