Ethical Issues from Decolonial Practices
in Knowledge Organization:
The Case of Indigenous Collections
in Världskulturmuseet

Admeire da Silva Santos Sundström

Linnaeus University – Vaxjo Campus – Cultural Sciences universitetesplatsen 1,
Box 451 Växjö Vaxjo 351 95, Sweden, <admeire.dasilvasantossundstrom@lnu.se>

Admeire is a Senior Lecturer in Library and Information Science (LIS) at the Department of Cultural Sciences, Linnaeus University.

Abstract: The Museum of World Culture (*Världskulturmuseet*) has been implementing some decolonial practices in its indigenous collection. Therefore, the museum started migrating its collection to a new platform, and as part of this project, the museum needs to review its knowledge organization system, as some problems related to classification and terminology were identified in the current database called Carlotta. The next step is to create a controlled vocabulary specific to the indigenous group, however, dealing with a sensitive collection requires identifying the ethical issues. Then, we question what ethical issues can be raised in organizing and representing Knowledge of Indigenous Collections in the Världskulturmuseet? This is a case study that employed an interview and content analysis of the Carlotta database. As a result, we point to the growth of research in the indigenous librarianship field. The museum uses inappropriate and obsolete terms to describe some of the collection objects. We conclude that indigenous self-determination in cultural institutions can guide the ethical issues related to the creation of a knowledge organization system in a museum.

1.0 Introduction

This article covers the first discussion of a research project which has raised some issues considering the case of indigenous collection in The Museums of World Culture (*Världskulturmuseet*). It aims to promote a discussion around knowledge organization and representation and its contribution to the decolonization of the Latin American Indigenous collections held in this museum.

Since the creation of The Museums of World Culture (MWC), some researchers have been approaching the issues regarding cultural artifacts from other countries under the custody of the museum's Laws (2015). Based on the decolonial practices, the museum published the document "Decolonising ethnographic databases" reporting some actions that have been taken in this process, which include: data migration to a new database; and the museum's current situation, which highlighted some issues regarding the collection's organization, and the advantage of using a new platform, especially regarding the potential participation of the indigenous group in the organization and representation process.

The database migration, from Carlotta to a free open-source software called Tainacan, is still a pilot test, and the only collection available is from the *Wai Wai* indigenous group [1], which consists of 350 objects. The main goal of the database is to represent the museum's collection openly and flexibly, considering the particularities of the cultural institution. It will function as a communication channel between the museum and the indigenous community, in view

440

Knowl. Org. 50(2023)No.6
A. da Silva Santos Sundström. Ethical Issues from Decolonial Practices In Knowledge Organization

of the need for information to be translated as well. The Tainacan main features are Metadata and Filters, Faceted Search, Taxonomies, Themes, API and Interoperability, Gutenberg blocks (Muñoz et al. 2022, 9).

After trying different search strategies, Laws (2015) pointed to the problem of how the museum has been approaching different cultures in its collections and focuses especially on how this also reflects during a search on the museum website. According to the author, the search function on the website was useful for researchers who knew exactly what they were looking for but was not user-friendly for those who wanted suggestions on what could be interesting in the collection, and this caused the website to be less accessible to a wider audience (Laws 2015, 125).

Golub et al. (2022), through an investigation on subject searching and retrieval in Swedish online museums, based on 21 desirable features, also analyzed the Carlotta database following 21 criteria as a parameter, and identified some gaps regarding knowledge organization. Some of the issues related to knowledge organization identified by Laws (2015) and Golub et al. (2022) are also mentioned in Muñoz's report (2022), such as the terminology/retrieval problem of exhaustivity and specificity, the few options in the search field, and homonyms. Additionally, the report pointed out the language barriers, since 75% of the collection is from Latin America but is available only in Swedish. Muñoz (2022) and emphasized the challenge of modifying the indexed terms as this process is done under IT staff sanction on the Carlotta database.

After the migration of the system, the museum approached the *Wai Wai* representatives and asked them to contextualize the cataloged collections. According to the report, this action enhances the institution's decolonial goal. For this reason, the museum administration considers the need to create a knowledge organization system that represents the indigenous knowledge in its database. This could involve incorporating indigenous classification systems, new terminology, and their worldviews into the organization of the collection. (Muñoz 2022).

Our question here is: What ethical issues can be raised in organizing and representing knowledge of indigenous collections? And what path should be taken in constructing a new KOS for the museum that considers the ethical issue? The main purpose of this article is to identify the current issues in the museum's indigenous collections and to outline the first points that ought to be considered when approaching the knowledge organization system of indigenous collections from an ethical point of view. Considering that the collection will be migrated to the new platform when ethical issues are mapped the new system built in the Carlotta database should take into consideration a new ethical perspective.

The method is a case study, and the data was collected through interviews, analyses of the document "Decolonising ethnographic databases" (2022), and a content analysis of the Carlotta database, which holds the Latina American Indigenous collections. The ethical framework for analyzing the knowledge organization system in the collection was based on Olson and Schlegl (2001), Beghtol (2003), and Zhitomirsky-Geffet and Hajibayova (2020).

This article is divided as follows: first, we present the results of the state-of-the-art research in GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives, and museums) related to indigenous collection organizations published in the last 10 years. The databases used for this research were Web of Science, LISA (Library and Information Science Abstracts) and LISTA (Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts). The searched terms included indigenous knowledge, indigenization, sensitive collections, and decolonial in **GLAM**. Second, we discuss the complexity of organizing and representing indigenous collections. Finally, we present the theoretical discussion on ethics in the knowledge organization system, along with the framework adapted and used to analyze the given database.

As a result, we present the current situation of the Carlotta database in the *Världskulturmuseet* based on the analysis of the report, interview with the curator responsible for the collection, and the analysis of the database itself. Our findings indicate that despite being aware of the terminological misrepresentation, the museum continues to use the terms. In response, the alternative to those who work directly with the collection and understand the issue was to use the *Tainacan* platform to create the contextualization of its objects with the indigenous community and give them autonomy so that they can contribute to their materials' organization and representation.

2.0 Indigenous Collections in GLAM: An Overview

There is an urgent need for librarianship to prioritize cultural aspects and management of culturally sensitive collections in its practices. The knowledge organization system within the field has been reviewed through decolonial approaches, leading to the emergence of a new paradigm. When working with marginalized communities whose existence is often overlooked, it is crucial to consider various dimensions within this process.

The concept of decolonization has been influencing research and approaches in LIS. It has been shaping evaluation and improvement processes, and rethinking the colonial method of knowledge organization and representation, collection exhibition, and the principle of provenance. As Ariese et al (2022, 125) claim "decolonization is denormalization", since "decolonization involves the destabilization of reigning perceptions and established narratives of colonial

pasts and legacies." The authors also consider that decolonization means a shifting in authority, and it implies a disruption to the structure established in the colonialism viewpoint. Walsh (2018) also discussed the decolonization from praxis, that is, from thoughts, actions, and reflections that have been shaping our understanding of coloniality. "Decoloniality denotes ways of thinking, knowing, being, and doing that began with, but also precede, the colonial enterprise and invasions" (Walsh 2018, 17).

The results from different databases showed a growth in studies related to indigenous collections in the last 10 years. From LISA (Library and Information Science Abstracts) and LISTA (Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts), the term "indigenous knowledge" retrieved 192 results from 2013 to 2023. After applying the same search criteria on Web of Science, we also noticed this growth as shown in Figure 1.

Doyle et al. (2015) argue that we must indigenize KO principles and values. This involves recognizing that we are approaching indigenous knowledge encompassing its concepts, methodologies, and framework. Understanding the existence of new knowledge becomes a crucial initial consideration in this context because only then can we have a KOS that serves indigenous interests. However, the indigenizing of KO principles should be continuously critically analyzed by all those involved. It is imperative to take precautions and ensure that Indigenous knowledge is not positioned in an inferior manner during this process.

The authors also claim that the KOS should be based on the indigenous literary warrant, a principle that centralizes indigenous knowledge in the KOS creation. The indigenous literary warrant considers the indigenous worldview, concepts, and cultural practices. As the authors asserted: "Indigenous literary warrant serves as evidence for the classificatory structure and as a source of terminology and is based on Indigenous-authored or Indigenous-informed literature guided by the primary principle of Indigenous authority" (Doyle 2013 cited in Doyle et al. 2015, 115). Beghtol (2002) understands literary warrant as the classification system based on the literature that exists in a specific area and the division is built from there. Perhaps one potential challenge in this perspective may lie in the fact that many groups only possess oral knowledge, and transcribing their knowledge into written form can also be perceived as an imposition from the external sources.

The authors introduce another warrant in their discussion: Indigenous cultural warrant used, for example, in "identifying Indigenous self-representation of names of nations, tribal councils and other forms of governance, as well as contemporary terminology for issues and movements." (Doyle et al. 2015, 115). The Indigenous cultural warrant then legitimizes the Indigenous viewpoint, including their beliefs and their way of perceiving knowledge.

Sandy and Bossaller (2017) also return to the concept of indigenous warrant, but their central point is to advocate the necessity of cognitive justice in indigenous knowledge organization. Their argument lies in the fact that indigenous knowledge requires an organization that considers its worldview, and since the existent KOS are based on positivism, we need to reconsider our old Western practices. The authors also emphasize that the central issue on traditional KOS is that they were built from the literary warrant perspective, and although Dewey decimal classification has a certain flexibility, it is still a hierarchical system based on Western existent and published knowledge. The authors (2017, 141) identified the patterns in such projects and started by identifying a problem, creating a KOS that allows collaboration with indigenous community members, and implementing the resources.
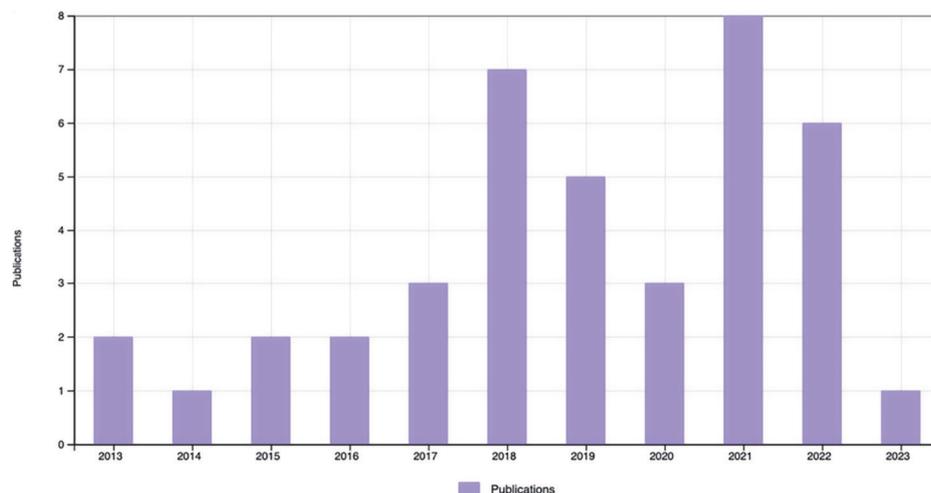

Figure 1: Results in Web of Science, 2023.

442

Knowl. Org. 50(2023)No.6

A. da Silva Santos Sundström. Ethical Issues from Decolonial Practices In Knowledge Organization

In 2021, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) published a special issue on Indigenous Librarianship. Some points discussed in the publications are noteworthy. Gosart (2021) offers a framework to support indigenous librarianship that embraces new ideas and practices in the field; furthermore, the author offers reflections on the concept of knowledge since, in certain communities, the correct is to approach it as living knowledge. The concept of living knowledge embraces languages, rituals, and diverse practices in an indigenous community, which leads to knowledge beyond representation.

The current standards and tools of knowledge organization and representation are unable to comprise living knowledge, and Gosart defines the current Library of Congress and Dewey Decimal classification systems as "irrelevant and/or inappropriate for describing indigenous intellectual and cultural legacies" (Gosart 2021, 297). These systems are based on inflexible categories, which sometimes explicitly and implicitly reinforce stereotypes, discrimination, and inappropriate terms. "The indigenous notion of knowledge suggests the possibility of organising content by focusing on the contexts of meaning-making (rather than depending on a predetermined set of terms)." (Gosart 2021, 297).

Lilley (2021) draws attention to the concept of indigenization [2], which the author considers as the most appropriate term to address the community. Lilley (2021) also proposes some reflections on indigenous materials held in nonindigenous communities and how problematic it is when you do not have the consent of the community represented in the collection. Fullmer (2021) discusses the issue regarding indigenous collections displayed on different systems, since the way we interpret sensitive collections will reflect how they are displayed. In this sense, it is important to understand how indigenous librarianship should intersect with visual literacy and consider the fact that some communities also face digital poverty.

In the special issue the particularities of Latin America are also discussed. Civallero (2021) and Komeiji et al (2021) describe the case of the Native Hawaiian librarians and clarify the application of indigenous management practices in a library. Thorpe (2021), in approaching indigenous collections from an Australian perspective in libraries and archives, emphasizes a set of conflicts that arise while accessing collections in these institutions. Thorpe explains that from the indigenous perspective, archives and libraries are distrustful places, although they intend to save cultural and language revitalization. In this sense, the institution itself leads to the emergence of feelings of being silenced, distressed, and traumatized, among others.

The articles from IFLA (2021) elucidate some challenges in dealing with indigenous collections. The first point is the concept of knowledge itself because these researchers have shown that indigenous knowledge cannot be reduced to existing tools for organizing and representing information, and even the identification of this knowledge and the construction of tools must be done in partnership with the group so that they have the autonomy to centralize their point of view. Once the collection is already under the custody of an institution, it is necessary to reflect on the reasons for the permanence of the indigenous collection there, what it represents for the institution that maintains it, and what feelings are provoked in the community from which the collection came from.

White (2018) presented some considerations based on the case of libraries in Thailand. In the given case, the librarians promoted a multicultural/lingual system to the patrons aiming at enriching access to information. However, the author categorizes this as a micro-level solution since it adapted a previous system to a local requirement. Additionally, the article also analyzed the limitations of the Dewey classification system in covering materials with cultural specificities. Further, the author argues that even if a new classification system is created, and a new controlled vocabulary considers the specificities of the local community, the existence of universal systems is still necessary at a macrolevel, such as DDC and the Library of Congress Subject Headings.

The main issue is that even when a system can be improved to a micro-level condition, it still depends on colonial and biased systems. White (2018) stands for a shift in librarians' focus, instead of changing the micro-level, it is important to change the macro-level. Since "all cultures should be represented equally within the systems we create and the voice of librarians from the cultures themselves need to be present from creation through revision." (White 2018, 8).

Reijerkerk and Nyitray (2023) provide an overview of studies related to decolonization methodologies in libraries and archives regarding indigenous collections. After approaching the current research on the field and analyzing how education in LIS has been addressing this issue, the authors conclude that the current traditional bibliographic sources and tools are not considered suitable for describing indigenous collections. "We should consider the participation of the representatives from indigenous communities during their collections' treatment, as well as the tribal institutions to establish the partnerships and provide access to their collections about them and to them" (2023, 38). They also noticed that the literature is increasingly related to the theme, and it has been approaching the need for new policies, procedures, and processes in managing sensitive collections.

Related to the knowledge organization system, the authors emphasize that recognizing the plurality in organizing and representing knowledge is crucial. Moreover, the indigenous collections require an "alternative cataloguing/metadata practice for the description" (Reijerkerk and Nyitray 2023, 38). One way of balancing the problem is creating local head-

Knowl. Org. 50(2023)No.6
A. da Silva Santos Sundström. Ethical Issues from Decolonial Practices In Knowledge Organization

443

ings and custom thesauri, considering the indigenous meaning and culture (2023). They also cover the concept of virtual repatriation and how these practices can seem like a solution to accessibility issues. Moreover, several ethical issues are raised regarding the ownership or copyright of digital material and the cultural sensitivity that many of them carry. In addition, there is also the issue of digital poverty that some indigenous communities may face.

From the archival science perspective, Gilliland (2012) highlighted points that should be considered during indigenous collections' descriptions. She mentions the principles of Provenance and the Sanctity of Original Order once the first one provides the tools to understand the owner's perspective and how a given collection can have access points based on the collector's identity. The description of information should change over time, including new perspectives. She suggested protocols that should be constructed for each collection.

Turner (2020) asserted that the history of indigenous collections in museums is entwined with the idea of something possible to collect because it has been seen as part of "natural" ethnographic specimens. When the indigenous knowledge was interpreted as such, the whole process of approaching these collections was considered a source of research, since they were specimens or evidence serving someone else's needs. Once objects are collected and cataloged, in Tuner's words, "they became scientifically meaningful and formed the basis of future ethnological research." (Turner 2020, 18). For Turner (2020), it is possible to understand that while pragmatic solutions have been taken in GLAM, the reasons why the collection is part of the institution remain unchanged and might be based on colonial practices.

As noticed in this primary analysis, the way indigenous collections have been addressed in LIS starts with the identification of misrepresentation in a system, then the necessity of creating appropriate terms to describe those resources, since creating such a tool requires knowledge about the given community. After that, a council can be created or at least contact with an indigenous community or representative groups can be established. Some problems with metadata can also be raised, but generally, the points on the field have been driven by paradigmatic solutions. However, as White (2018) points out, we are still dealing with these issues from a Micro-level perspective.

3.0 The Complexity Involved in Organizing Indigenous Knowledge

Returning to Thorpe (2019, 4), the author brings to the fore a crucial aspect related to the ethical consideration in managing an indigenous collection in Australia:

Indigenous people are often dealing with ethical decisions made by colonisers on how our family's lives were recorded, kept, and accessed. This runs counter to Indigenous Australian ethical considerations around the ways in which our family's records, histories or cultural materials should be handled.

The author also highlights an entanglement in organizing indigenous collections since the idea behind the concept of cultural safety implies a colonial perception about how to save, what to save, and to whom to save. Moreover, it requires recontextualization of the following concepts: "culture", "safety", and "cultural safety".

"Indigenous voices are rarely heard through the records, instead the records document the experiences of public servants working with Aboriginal communities in fulfilling their roles as managers and matrons, and ultimately as instruments of government control" (Thorpe 2019, 8). Even focused on archives and libraries, Thorpe brings some questions to investigate what constitutes a colonized organization and what should be done to consider a decolonizing approach. Based on an ethical framework, the questions investigate whether the heritage institutions enhance the documentation by receiving descriptions from the indigenous community; whether they can contribute to occurrence in the historical documentation by providing further documentation or narratives, and whether the institutions rely on the power of decision-related to holding their images to them and not to the institutions. The idea of ethics in Thorpe (2019) is based on the concept of Indigenous self-determination in cultural heritage institutions.

We have been recurrently discussing the conflict between the universalism of Western tools and standards in organizing indigenous knowledge and the local requirement to access this information. Morphy (2019) addresses this topic and points out that the process of silencing the collection started during the colonial time. "As now we begin to look at these collections, reflecting from a decolonial perspective, this began a dual process of discovery and meaningful reconnection" (Morphy 2019, 77).

The interest in indigenous communities comes together with the current discussion of environmental preservation (Agrawal, 2002). The idea behind preserving and displaying indigenous knowledge is underpinned by the idea of making that knowledge available to that community. However, the requirements of the knowledge organization system encounter a global interest rather than a local need. Likewise, to create a system to preserve their knowledge also implies that their knowledge is not preserved, and once it is inside a system it means that piece of knowledge is validated to someone outside the community. "Cataloguing of knowledge in a database only prepares it for generalisation" (Agrawal 2002, 291). The author brings to discussion the concept of scientization,

444

Knowl. Org. 50(2023)No.6
A. da Silva Santos Sundström. Ethical Issues from Decolonial Practices In Knowledge Organization

and it refers to a process of three stages: "particularisation, validation, and generalisation" (291).

The scientization starts by selecting part of indigenous knowledge excluding those who do not fit into a colonised database. Then, those which are selected are validated as knowledge, which also includes the process of abstraction. Finally, generalisation means to filtrate indigenous knowledge on the keywords and other mechanisms of patronization, forcing them into the same system of organization. All these nuances are explained by Agrawal (2002) from practical, epistemological, and political dimensions.

Nonetheless, the practical dimension addresses the complexity and versatility of indigenous knowledge, and how databases foster discrimination during the selection of specific knowledge, ignoring, in this process, the other forms that have no practical use to the colonized perspective. The epistemological approach adopts the concept of distancing to understand the existent relation in locating indigenous knowledge. The political dimension involves the asymmetrical relation of power in these processes, from the time when indigenous knowledge is settled on databases, they tend to be refined and privatized. Besides, the limited conditions in accessing the collection, whether due to information poverty or language barrier, reinforce the colonization ideal (Agrawal, 2002).

We noted that the idea of organizing comes together with the idea of the power of culture over the other since organizing requires naming the document to create surrogates, as Olson (2002) described. Consequently, we create a new identity for these documents, which might seem conflicting in different cultures, or a sense of misrepresentation can emerge. However, reviewing the whole system is essential, since the divergence starts from what knowledge means in different cultures, to the definition of basic concepts as Thorpe (2019) described.

The idea that universal knowledge exists is not something new, as well as its organization being possible by creating a universal system. This view permeates all knowledge organization systems, especially those concerning classifications. This principle of universalism ignores the nuances of human perception, and that embraces what knowledge means, and cultural diversity. This principle keeps a philosophical root and has interoperability among systems as its main advantage (Mai 2014). This justification is based on the view derived from the economic factors in saving the cataloguer's time when sharing data about materials, prioritizing, as we believe, the capitalist logic.

Nevertheless, as we have observed so far, organizing indigenous knowledge goes against universalist logic because it requires rethinking the entire structure of existing systems, as they may not make sense in another culture.

Although codes of ethics do not constitute the primary focus of this article, it is pertinent to analyze five points

from the ICOM code of ethics given the complexity of indigenous collections. The first point is related to *Documentation of collections*. According to the Code, it is ethically accepted that the documentation process is done according to accepted professional standards, which includes "a full identification and description of each item, its associations, provenance, condition, treatment and present location. Such data should be kept in a secure environment and be supported by retrieval systems providing access to the information by the museum personnel and other legitimate users." (ICOM 2006, 14). As the literature review showed, the indigenous documentation process requires the participation of the community members and an organization process built for each community, which should occur through cooperation. Even though cooperation is also part of the code of ethics, the recommendation is "to promote the sharing of documentation with other museums and cultural organization" (33). As seen so far as well, some communities do not have a space called museum or a place to gather their artifacts, and when a place does exist, the organization shared cannot make sense to them, either because of a lack of technical support or because of a different view of the conceptual world.

The third point highlighted from the ICOM code *Interpretation of Exhibitions*: "Museums should ensure that the information they present in displays and exhibitions is well-founded, accurate and gives appropriate consideration to represented groups or beliefs." (ICOM 2006, 25). As exemplified in the case of the Yanomamis, a Brazilian indigenous group, one way to show respect for Yanomami's beliefs is not to share images of deceased community members, in this way, a display and exhibition should consider the consent of the exposed group. This point also brings to the fore the fourth point, *Publication*, which states: "Information published by museums, by whatever means, should be well-founded, accurate and give responsible consideration to the academic disciplines, societies, or beliefs presented. Museum publications should not compromise the standards of the institution" (ICOM 2006, 26).

The last point highlighted here refers to contemporary communities. The ICOM code does not focus on a specific culture or community, however, states that:

> Museum usage of collections from contemporary communities requires respect for human dignity and the traditions and cultures that use such material. Such collections should be used to promote human well-being, social development, tolerance, and respect by advocating multisocial, multicultural and multilingual expression (see 4.3)" (2006, 34).

Returning to Morphy (2019), the author argues that displaying a collection online may raise a lot of conflicts from a global

and local point of view. Global access allows anyone to access the collections, even those who will use them as a source of knowledge. Conversely, a local implies control of information access by the members of the community to the given collections. The author brings to the fore the real role of a database in this process. This is why we believe that reflecting on this issue from an ethical point of view can provide ways to address possible reflections for the collection.

4.0 Ethical Requirements in Knowledge Organization Systems

Knowledge organization as a field has been addressing the ethical issues in its practices. Guimarães et al. (2008) conducted a literature review that identified the state of the art of the field at that point, and how ethical issues had been addressed based on the used terminology. Within the implications, the authors highlighted that when representing information in a system, it is important for those who use it to see themselves represented and respected, otherwise, the system might seem to lack ethical principles. Once considered as such, the system can create a sense of exclusion resulting in users questioning the system's reliability (Guimarães et al. 2008). The feeling of exclusion arises when the system harms users in relation to their identity, culture, social, political views, or other aspects.

Guimaráess et al. (2016) brought some important ethical views to knowledge organization from Garcia-Gutierrez, Hudon, and Beghtol. Garcia-Gutierrez criticizes positivism based on the field and stands for a new perspective that overcomes the dominant perspective. Hudon stands for a multilingual system, and ethics is based on equality during the treatment of different languages which occurs across systems. Beghtol discussed cultural warrants and hospitality in classification systems instead of being based on literature warrants (the existent literature in a field). Beghtol argued the need to find support for cultural diversity in a classification system, advocating hospitality as a negotiation among different cultures through the system. Olson addressed the biased view and its consequence of naming information in a system. As noticed, ethical issues addressed in knowledge organizations have different nuances, since adapting or constructing a system that prioritizes diversity requires several reflections regarding ethics.

Olson (2002) highlights the neutrality of the catalog and presents several key points. Naming and classifying information is not just a neutral process. It involves reflecting and reinforcing the social values and norms of the institution or environment from which the information is generated. This is because the labels and categories we create for documents and data serve as surrogates for that reality and help define its identity. In this way, the controlled vocabulary works as the system's language, with terms that redefine the infor-

mation and, therefore, can include or further marginalize certain groups.

Fox (2016) also addresses this topic and brings up the following argument: "Intersectionality is related to any concept complexity with which knowledge organization struggles; however, because of the sensitivity of classing human groups it holds not only the potential to misrepresent but also to marginalize them." (2016, 374). The multifaceted nature of knowledge may not be accurately captured within traditional knowledge organization systems, which often rely on limited and hierarchical categories.

It is noteworthy that various authors question the use of the term ethics when trying to address problems of misrepresentation within the knowledge organization, as an example we mention Watson (2021), who questioned the usage of the term ethics in addressing the problem related to misrepresentation in KOS, arguing that the correct term should be equity.

The usage of the term ethics in knowledge organization and representation systems was also addressed by Beghtol (2005) when she presented *Framework for Assessing Ethicality and Establishing Policies*, arguing that, regardless of a special position taken by philosophers or theorists of morality or ethicality, the concept of ethics in KO is a multidisciplinary investigation which concerns finding an ethical path in decision-making in KOS.

4.1 The Ethical Framework

Beghtol's framework for assessing a knowledge organization and representation system from an ethical viewpoint considers a global environment in the process. Although her framework focuses on developing "policies and procedures that would be incorporated in ethically acceptable knowledge representation and organization systems" (Beghtol 2005, 910), the author based on previous models created considering the disclosure and application levels.

The framework is divided into two parts; the first is: 1. *Assessment of Each System at Each Level*, which consists in evaluating a system considering theoretical, disclosure, and application levels. The theoretical level relies on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the Global Information Justice (GIJ). The second part: 2. *Establishment of Ethical Policies and Procedures*, which are also based on previous models, aimed at the development of ethical policies and procedures to ensure that different positions are included, among other equity principles in the knowledge organization and representation (Beghtol 2005).

According to Zhitomirsky and Hajibayova (2020), two possibilities can be taken into consideration when a multi-perspective KOS is built; first, by including the minority voices during the KOS creation, in this way, the system will comprise different viewpoints; second, diversity could be

446

Knowl. Org. 50(2023)No.6
A. da Silva Santos Sundström. Ethical Issues from Decolonial Practices In Knowledge Organization

achieved by a variety of literature, consequently by the incorporation of a vast source of information. Furthermore, they also emphasize that the KOS is created considering the local and global environment.

The authors present an ethical framework for building a multi-perspective knowledge organization system, selecting a set of ethical criteria that should be considered when a KOS is created or assessed. Table 1 is adapted of Zhitomirsky and Hajibayova's (2020, 1465) framework and will support our analysis of the Carlotta database.

As observed, **C1** stands for access to information as social justice. Accessing information is not just being in a specific place, but various factors prevent individuals from accessing information, including technological gaps, inaccessible language, or even knowledge misrepresentation. Regarding **C2,** in addition to ensuring that different voices are represented in a system, it is also vital to ensure that the different morality has respected each other. This point may be connected with the concept of hospitality in Beghtol (2002). In **C3,** in case of misrepresentation of insufficient tools to describe and organize information, then it is important to question the traditional organization system. As for **C4,** when one group is prioritized in a system, then the other tends to be marginalized. For example, in Dewey's decimal classification and its hierarchical division, Christianism is overrepresented compared to other religions. In **C5,** in a KOS, social, historical, and cultural factors have an impact and shape its creation.

Through the five principles covered in the framework, it is possible to assess the organization of an indigenous collection within a museum repository. This assessment allows for verifying how a museum has organized and represented different cultures in its database. According to Zhitomirsky et al. (2023), when different cultures are respected, made

visible, and accessible within a system, the database presents an ethical standard for the knowledge organization system.

5.0 Results and Analysis

In 1862, the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg was established, and at that time, the museum reported some changes in the ownership of its collections, as well as its purpose which was also called the Museum of Ethnography of Gothenburg (GEM). At the end of World War II, the museum dedicated efforts to catalog the objects, and Murdoch's system of culture classification was used and only reviewed in the 1980s. According to Muñoz et al. (2022), during the 1990s, despite the government having invested resources in the digitization project of the museum collections, the classification system remained the same.

Since 1996, the museum has been known as the *Världskulturmuseet*, or The Museum of World Culture (MWC), in English translation. The museum uses the Carlotta software as a collection management system, which was created in 2008 for use in the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm and adopted in other Swedish institutions, totalizing four institutions: the *Ethnographic Museum, the World Culture Museum, the East Asian Museum,* and the *Mediterranean Museum.* Carlotta faces organizational challenges since four institutions with different structures and organizations use the same database. Furthermore, the collections have been defined differently in the system using categories such as art, ethnography, archaeology, and classic archaeology. This situation is challenging to the museum database since it needs to address different classification systems and collections with different purposes. (Muñoz et al. 2022).

It is worth highlighting that "Carlotta was chosen to stress an integration of systems between the four museums

	Ethical Criteria	What questions can be raised?
C1	attend and meet the information needs of groups and individuals, taking responsibility for their rights to access knowledge regardless of their background, race, culture and beliefs.	Is the information available and accessible to everyone? How can GLAM ensure they effectively provide information to groups while respecting their diversity?
C2	understand what would be legitimate and morally best according to universal human rights in the provision of representation, organization and discoverability of the knowledge	Are the moral conflicts of different cultures respected during representing and organizing information?
C3	call into question the universalistic and mainstream views by making moral judgments to respect and advocate for representation, organization and accessibility of knowledge of various communities.	What system has been used? Does this system represent or misrepresent knowledge in each community? Does the system use prioritize a global or local view?
C4	address moral issues arising in relation to unequal power distribution in representation, organization, accessibility, and discoverability of knowledge associated with one's gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and culture.	Is the diversity of a group respected within the knowledge organization system?
C5	consider the relational nature of a specified view and take responsibility to demonstrate its embeddedness in social, historical, or other relevant contexts.	Are cultural, temporal, and geographic nuances considered when a KOS is analyzed or created?

Table 1: The ethical framework for the creation and evaluation of a multi-perspective knowledge organization system.

Knowl. Org. 50(2023)No.6
A. da Silva Santos Sundström. Ethical Issues from Decolonial Practices In Knowledge Organization

447

instead of emphasising a social integration between collections and the public" (Muñoz 2011, 128). For this reason, aspects related to the classification and description of these collections were left in the background.

The idea of world cultures came with the reformulation of the concept of the ethnography museum; however, this discussion remains stagnated when it comes to its organization since the organization in the *Världskulturmuseet* was not properly revised since then. "One of the biggest problems with Carlotta, and with databases more generally, is that they should find universal solutions to particular issues." (Muñoz et al. 2022, 7). The authors (2022, 8) listed some issues reported by the museum:

> The universal solution vs the particular problem. The logic of the database: there is a belief in stable "data", however, museums'. Categories are not stable; they change and need to adapt to new paradigms. The same is valid for the data or content in a database. Old-fashioned system and design. It was an internal tool that became online. Using categories that create otherness. Excluding from history the people who made the objects. Wrong and enough information about the collections. Working and giving information only in Swedish. Eurocentrism.

Based on Muñoz et al. (2022), we can draw some important points from the ethical framework. The first is the failure of the Carlotta database to take responsibility for giving access to information to all since the information is available only in Swedish. Additionally, the description of the documents and the metadata creation were conducted by the museum. The metadata in Carlotta remains controversial. However, the museum has started taking responsibility for that with the migration to the platform and has started contact with the community to describe their objects.

Since the indigenous community plays no role in the organization and representation of their collections in the museum, the institution could be dealing with some moral conflict. According to the framework, in a KOS, we must understand what is legitimate and morally best according to the community for representing their information. "Indigenous peoples and their knowledge have not been allowed to influence how their material and immaterial culture is stored, managed, and represented in museum databases" (Muñoz et al. 2022, 7).

Recently in Brazil, the genocide of the indigenous group Yanomami, as briefly mentioned before, was reported by the media through a lot of images and videos, showing malnourished children and elderly people. One of the elderly women in the images died days later, but her images remained circulated on social media. This situation made members who represented the community post on their social media that everyone should stop publicizing the image of the elderly woman because in the Yanomami culture, after someone dies, all their belongings are burned, all their photos are destroyed, and the name is no longer mentioned [3].

In the museum's database, it is possible to find several photos of different indigenous communities. The example of the Yanomami illustrates the complexity of treating such images as documents in an institution, especially without the sanction of that community or even without awareness of their existence. As Turner (2020) mentions, the very presence of such images and objects already demonstrates a colonized intention. Here, the conflict between the global and local perspectives is also identified, as pointed out by Morphy (2019).

As described in Muñoz et al (2022), Murdoch's system of culture classification is the system used in the MWC. The Murdock theory has been pointed out as "problematic and controversial" in many aspects, especially when it comes to the simplified view of cultural differences. Even though the literature recognizes the importance of Murdock's theory, there are also many criticisms of the methods used to compare cultures (White and Brudner-White, 1988). But as Muñoz et al (2022) mentioned, the MWC recognized the problem and is in the process of changing it because the system has been causing misrepresentation and a biased view of indigenous knowledge.

The problem of misrepresentation was identified by the museum curator, however, since they do not have the autonomy to change, the problem remains on the Carlotta database. In this way, they do not have the power to decide, among other things, "to adapt expressions, translate terms, propose new forms of classification, indexing and even new ways of organizing information." (Muñoz et al. 2022, 12).

When accessing the database, some of these issues are revealed by a warning on the page, as seen in Figure 2. The message clarifies that the museum is aware that the terms are obsolete and offensive, however, they justify their usage since they are outdated, and do not represent the museum's point of view. Nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasize that to ignore the nuances of using classifications and terms out of their time infringes one of the points of the framework from the knowledge organization view, as the institution claims to recognize the problem and, by doing nothing, reaffirms its point of view through KOS in the face of that misrepresented of indigenous culture. As Olson (2002) states, naming information is allied to identity construction.

When we click to read more information, the museum informs us that historical descriptions stand out in relation to misrepresentation [4]:

> Seeing as much of the information entered into our database is quoted directly from historical records and

448

Knowl. Org. 50(2023)No.6

A. da Silva Santos Sundström. Ethical Issues from Decolonial Practices In Knowledge Organization
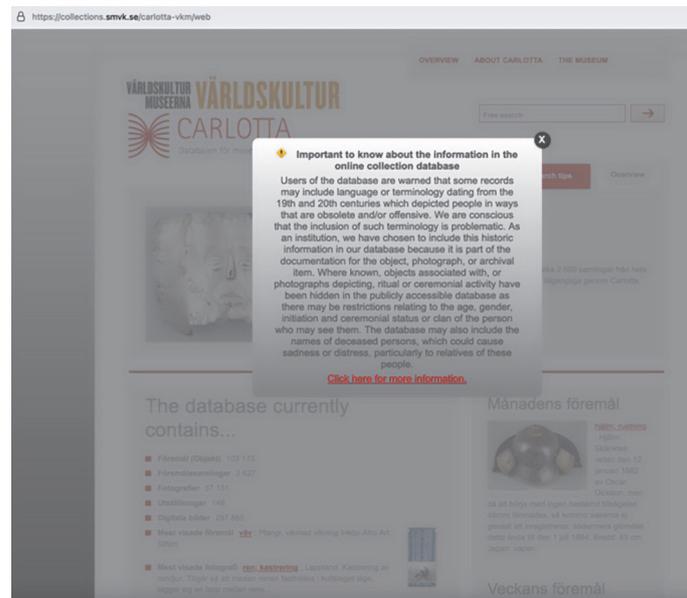

Figure 2: Museum of World Culture website (2023).

documents, the wording may sometimes seem obsolete or even offensive. However, these records and documents constitute an important part of the history of the objects in question and hence, we prefer to publish them as they are.

Misrepresentation in the museum can lead not only to misunderstanding the past, but can also obscure the truth and potentially distort users' perception of historical events and, in this case, also distort their perception of indigenous communities. The museum also recognizes the moral conflicts in relation to some collections:

> When searching our database, it is worth knowing that some people regard the information and pictures of objects and ceremonies available as sacred and hence, do not want these in the public domain. Nevertheless, it is our decision to make these available on the public domain as we feel it is important for individuals and groups to know what collections the Museums of World Culture manage (Museum of World Culture 2023).

All these problems identified on the platform were also mentioned during the interview, in which the curator found it impossible to modify the terms due to bureaucratic and technical issues. Consequently, the decolonization process starts with the migration of the collection to a new database.

The new database, Tainacan, allows the indigenous community to tell their history through catalogued objects. According to Muñoz et al. (2022, 10) "Tainacan has been used in experiments and research aimed at exploring its adaptability and flexibility to different documentation models, information organization strategies, and approaches to collection dissemination". In this sense, the platform gives the museum more flexibility in working with the indigenous collections, as well as the possibility of creating methods to listen to the indigenous voices in dealing with their documents.

Reyes et al (2021, 283) describe Tainacan as "a user-friendly software for collection management and the documentation practices of cultural heritage institutions". The platform was created in Brazil, developed by the Network Intelligence Laboratory of the University of Brasilia (UnB), which brought together several institutions, such as Federal University of Goiás (UFG), the Brazilian Institute for Information in Science and Technology (IBICT) and the Brazilian Institute of Museums (IBRAM)[5].

In 2016, the Brazilian Institutions of Museums (IBRAM) adopted the software for different museums in the country (Martins et al. 2021). This free software adapts to the user needs, and allows information cataloging, organizing, storing, preserving, and sharing; it promotes interoperability and provides the institution with the possibility to customize its features considering the museum requirements and particularities.

6.0 Conclusion

Indigenous knowledge has historically been treated without considering the voices of the indigenous people themselves. This can lead to collections that reinforce stereotypes, create misrepresentation, and promote a sense of non-belonging

Knowl. Org. 50(2023)No.6
A. da Silva Santos Sundström. Ethical Issues from Decolonial Practices In Knowledge Organization

449

to the indigenous people about the collection. The literature review demonstrated the complexity of organizing indigenous collections, especially as we are addressing a different kind of knowledge, that requires its own unique ways of being represented.

Considering the discussions outlined in this paper, it is crucial to emphasize three results. The first point is where the objects are located because regardless of the practice that will welcome the community to describe its documents, institutionalizing these documents is a colonial practice, since to some communities, GLAM can be seen as distrust places, where the sense of non-belonging emerges.

The second point is that even if the community agrees to contribute to the description and also wants to have access to the documents, these documents were selected from a colonial point of view because different indigenous communities have different perceptions of what knowledge is, how to document it, and how and why to preserve it. Thorpe (2019) shows that an entire umbrella concept needs to be reviewed and considered in the indigenous definition.

Finally, creating a KOS that considers the ethical issue of the indigenous community should not be driven by minimizing the damage caused by holding such collections. Instead, it is necessary to think that knowledge organization faces a new paradigm in the face of living indigenous knowledge.

Endnotes

1. North of Brazil (Amazonas, Pará, and Roraima), population around 2691. Guiana, population around 170. Source: https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/Quadro_Geral_dos_Povos.
2. We also find some other terms to refer to the indigenous community and their knowledge. Such as "*povos originários*" (in Portuguese, Brazil), "first nations", in Canada, among others. We recognize the importance of the discussion, and this topic will be addressed with more reflection in future research.
3. Associação Urihi Yanomami. www.instagram.com/p/Coc5I7gPKEl/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y%3D.
4. https://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/en/collections/search-the-collections/.
5. https://tainacan.org/en/.

References

Agrawal, Arun. 2002. "Indigenous Knowledge and the Politics of Classification". *International Social Science Journal* 54, no.173: 287-97. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2451.00382.

Ariese, Csilla E, Laura Pozzi, and Joanna Wawrzyniak. 2022. "Curating Colonial Heritage in Amsterdam, Warsaw and Shanghai's Museums". In *Decolonizing Colonial Heritage: New Agendas, Actors and Practices in And Beyond Europe*, edited by Britta Timm Knudsen, John Oldfield, Elizabeth Buettner and Elvan Zabunyan, 125-42. London: Routledge.

Beghtol, Clare. 2002. "A Proposed Ethical Warrant for Global Knowledge Representation and Organization Systems". *Journal of Documentation* 58, no. 5: 507-32. https://doi.org/10.1108/00220410210441.

Beghtol, Clare. 2005. "Ethical Decision-Making for Knowledge Representation and Organization Systems for Global Use". *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 56, no.9: 903-12.

Civallero, Edgardo. 2021. "Library Services and Indigenous Peoples in Latin America: Reviewing Concepts, Gathering Experiences". *IFLA Journal* 47, no.3: 321–330. https://doi.org/10.1177/0340035220987573.

Doyle, Ann M., Kimberly Lawson, and Sarah Dupont. 201. "Indigenization of Knowledge Organization at the Xwi7xwa Library". *Journal of Library and Information Studies* 13, no.2: 107-34. https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0103204.

Fox, M. 2016. "'Priorities of Arrangement' a 'Hierarchy of Oppression?'": Perspectives on Intersectionality in Knowledge Organization. *Knowledge Organization* 43, no.5, 373–83. https://10.5771/0943-7444-2016-5-373.

Fullmer, Millicent. 2021. "Are We There Yet? Visualizing Indigenous Culture in Today's Library". *IFLA Journal* 47, no.3: 313–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/03400352209875.

Gilliland, Anne. J. 2012. "Contemplating Co-Creator Rights in Archival Description". *Knowledge Organization* 39, no.5:340-46. https://doi.org/10.5771/0943-7444-2012-5-340.

Golub, Koraljka, Pawel Michael Ziolkowski, and Goran Zlodi.2022. "Organizing Subject Access to Cultural Heritage in Swedish Online Museums". *Journal of Documentation* 78, no. 7: 211-247. https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-05-2021-0094.

Gosart, Ulia.2021. "Indigenous Librarianship: Theory, Practices, and Means of Social Action". *IFLA Journal* 47, no.3: 293–304. https://doi.org/10.1177/034003522199186.

Guimarães, José Augusto Chaves, Fábio Assis Pinho, and Suellen Oliveira Milani. 2016. "Theoretical Dialogs About Ethical Issues in Knowledge Organization: García Gutiérrez, Hudon, Beghtol, and Olson". *Knowledge Organization* 43, no.5:338–50. https://doi.org/ 10.5771/0943-7444-2016-5-338.

Guimarães, José Augusto Chaves, Juan Carlos Fernández-Molina, Fábio Assis Pinho, and Suellen Oliveira Milani. 2008. "Ethics in the Knowledge Organization Environment: an Overview of Values and Problems in the LIS

Literature". In *Cultural and Identity in Knowledge Organization: Proceedings of the Tenth International ISKO Conference 5-8 August 2008, Montreal, Canadá* edited by Clément Arsenaut and Joseph T. Tennis. Advances Knowledge Organization 11. Canada: Ergon-Verlag, 361-66.

International Council of Museums (ICOM).2006. *Code of Ethics for Museums.* https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf.

Komeiji, Kawena, Keahiahi Long, Shavonn Matsuda, and Annemarie Paikai 2021. "Indigenous Resource Management Systems as Models for Librarianship: I waiwai ka 'āina". *IFLA Journal* 47, no.3: 331–40. https://doi.org/10.1177/0340035221991561.

Laws, Ana Luisa Sánchez. 2015. "The Museum of World Culture (Världskulturmuseet) and the Carlotta Portal". In *Museum Websites and Social Media*. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 121-28.

Lilley, Spencer. 2021. "Transformation of Library and Information Management: Decolonization or Indigenization?" *IFLA Journal* 47, no.3: 305–12. https://doi.org/10.1177/0340035221102307.

Mai, Jens-Erik. 2014. "Ethics, Values and Morality in Contemporary Library Classifications". *Knowledge Organization* 40, no.4: 242-53. https://doi.org/10.5771/0943-7444-2013-4-242.

Martins, Dalton Lopes, Daniela Lucas da Silva Lemos Danielle do Carmo, Joyce Siqueira, and Luís Felipe Rosa de Oliveira. 2021. "Requisitos de Qualidade Para Dados De Agregação Em Museus: O Caso Do Ibram". *Tendências da Pesquisa Brasileira em Ciência da Informação* 14. https://revistas.ancib.org/index.php/tpbci/article/view/548.

Morphy, Howard. 2019. "Open Access Versus the Culture of Protocols". In *Museums, Infinity and the Culture of Protocols: Ethnographic Collections and Source Communities.* London: Routledge, 76-94.

Muñoz, Adriana, Dalton Lopes Martins, and Cinthya Lana. 2022. *Decolonising Ethnographic Database: A Pilot Project of Data Migration From The Swedish National Museum of World Culture's Carlotta to the Open-Source Software Tainacan, version 1.0.* Europeana PRO, 25 August 2022. URL: https://pro.europeana.eu/page/europeana-research-collaborations-the-national-museum-of-world-culture-sweden.

Muñoz, Adriana. 2011. "From Curiosa to World Culture. The History of the Latin American Collections at the Museum of World Culture in Sweden". PhD diss., University of Gothenburg.

Museum of Word Culture. 2023. "The Museum Collections." Accessed October 1, 2023. https://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/en/collections/the-museum-collections/.

Olson, Hope A. 2002. *The Power to Name: Locating the Limits of Subject Representation in Libraries*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Olson, Hope and Rose Schlegl. 2001." Standardization, Objectivity, and User Focus: A Meta-Analysis of Subject Access Critiques". *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 32, no.2: 61-80. https://doi.org/10.1300/J104v32n02_06.

Reijerkerk, Dana and Kristen J. Nyitray. 2023. "(Re) Moving Indigenous Knowledge Boundaries: A Review of Library and Archival Collection Literature since the Enactment of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)". *Collection Management* 48, no.1: 22-47. https://doi.org/10.1080/01462679.2022.2033144.

Reyes, Gloria Donají Velasco, Dalton Lopez Martins, Luciana Conrado Martins, Claudio Molina Salinas, and Pedro Ángeles Jiménez. 2021. "Using the Object ID Standard and Tainacan Software for Museum Documentation: Experiences from Brazil and Mexico". *Intervención* 12, no.23: 258-303. https://doi.org/10.30763/intervencion.247.v1n23.26.2021.

Sandy, Heather Moulaison, and Jenny Bossaller. 2017. "Providing Cognitively Just Subject Access to Indigenous Knowledge Through Knowledge Organization Systems". *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 55, no.3: 129-52. https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2017.1281858.

Thorpe, Kirsten. 2019. "Ethics, Indigenous Cultural Safety and the Archives". *Archifacts*, no.2:33 – 47.

Thorpe, Kirsten. 2021. "The Dangers of Libraries and Archives for Indigenous Australian Workers: Investigating the Question of Indigenous Cultural Safety". *IFLA Journal* 47, no.3:341–50. https://doi.org/10.1177/03400352209875.

Turner, Hanna. (2020). *Cataloguing Culture: Legacies of Colonialism in Museum Documentation*. University of British Columbia Press.

Walsh, Catherine E. 2018. "Decoloniality in /as Praxis". In *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, edited by Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, 15-102. Durham: Duke University Press.

Watson, Brian M. 2021. "Advancing Equitable Cataloging". In *Proceedings of the Eighth North American Symposium on Knowledge Organization Nasko, July 9-11, 2021*, online, 1-28. https://doi.org/10.7152/nasko.v8i1.15887.

White, Douglas R. and Lilyan A. Brudner-White. 1988. "The Murdock Legacy: The Ethnographic Atlas and The Search for A Method". *Cross-Cultural Research* 22, nos. 1/4: 59-81. https://doi.org/10.1177/106939718802200107.

White, Hollie C. 2018. "Decolonizing the Way Libraries Organize". In *Proceedings of the 84th World Library and*

Knowl. Org. 50(2023)No.6
A. da Silva Santos Sundström. Ethical Issues from Decolonial Practices In Knowledge Organization

451

Information Congress IFLA WLIC, 24-30 August 2018, session 207. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: IFLA.

Zhitomirsky-Geffet, Maayan and Lala Hajibayova. 2020. "A New Framework for Ethical Creation and Evaluation of Multi-Perspective Knowledge Organization Systems". *Journal of Documentation* 76, no.6:1459-71. https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-04-2020-0053.

Zhitomirsky-Geffet, Maayan, Inna Kizhner, and Sara Minster. 2023. "What Do They Make Us See: A Comparative Study of Cultural Bias in Online Databases of Two Large Museums". *Journal of Documentation 79*, no.2: 320-40. https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-02-2022-0047.