# Wikimedia through the prisms of critical librarianship: Keynote Address
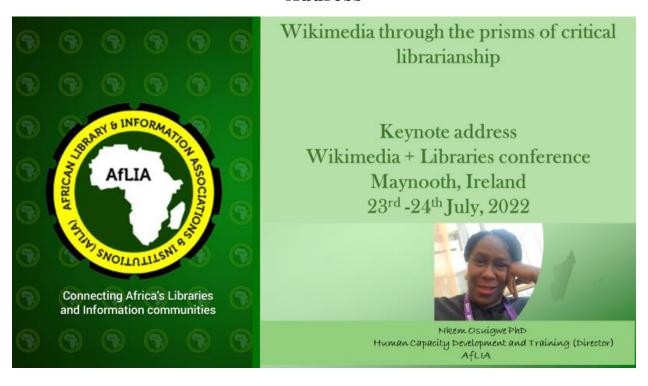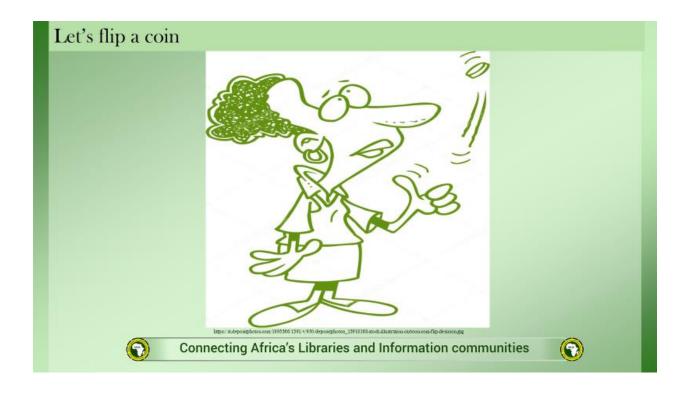
**Traditionally,** libraries build **gateways into knowledge** as they collect, organize, make accessible, and preserve materials for use.

The library from one side of the coin is an **institution of power** as there are **interconnections between knowledge production, access, consumption, freedom and power.**

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The other side…

**Building connections** between actual **people** (communities) that walk through their doors or use their library websites/apps on one side

and

**knowledge,** ideas, stories, opportunities to excel and become more, opportunities to feed mentally, psychologically and emotionally from the intellectual outpourings of others in different information resources formats on the other side.

**Libraries** exist to meet the **information needs** of their user communities and they have been **places of power.**

They are meant to **bridge gaps** between the haves and have-nots as they throw their **doors open to all** within their specific user communities to access all the information available.

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Multilayered nexus between librarianship and critical theory

**Libraries** do not operate in a vacuum.

**Interrogation** of resources, processes and services

Find out what **hinders users from enjoying full access to knowledge**, especially **knowledge that mirrors their realities**, that they can **identify with and that does not criminalize or marginalize** who they are and/or stand for **through categorization and labeling.**

Critiquing a system one belongs to is difficult but is possible through **Critical Theory.**

## Critical Theory

Examines what exists in society/particular field and,

Challenges assumptions and practices,

Asks questions about historical, economic, social and cultural issues underpinning practice;

Interrogates whose perspective is being heard/seen and promoted in existing structures and systems,

Views how the frameworks and standards of existing structures and systems came to be, and

configures in social justice.

## Importantly, Critical Theory

Is employed to;

- explain what is wrong with current realities of praxis,

- identify those who can think through critically to suggest and drive change, and

- provide practical pathways for social transformation as well as more criticism.

## Critical librarianship

The infusion of critical theory in library and information science.

It offers pathways for;
- reflective assessment and

- examination of the 'historical, cultural, social, economic, political and other forces that affect information' (Gregory and Higgins, 2013)

## Critical librarianship?

self-critique roles in upholding information systems that allow some to access information; that allows the views, perceptions and ideologies of some to be what is represented in information available on the shelves and in the databases,

while

disregarding and/or suppressing contrary ideologies, stories, inclinations and opinions thus unwittingly promoting oppression, discriminator and social exclusion.

Also,

- **inequities** within the system

- libraries and **'institutionalization of information'**,

- the complex workings of **information bias and marginalization,** stereotyping and misconceptions in information resources

- the **power structures**

- who is **represented** or **underrepresented** or **misrepresented** in **controlled vocabularies**

*What are the implications for human rights of forgotten, buried and contaminated memories of individuals, societies and institutions; of a flattened cultural record?* (Samek, 2007)

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Two major objectives

-To create a *better understanding of inbred, nuanced discrimination/oppression* and *inequality* mirrored in the provision of *information services through libraries*

- To identify possible *avenues for ameliorative action* through the prism of *social justice* that ensures that user communities whether they are students, teachers, or mothers, politicians or jobseekers, understand *'how information works... the moral, economic, and political context of knowledge.'*

Neutrality?

## The **default setting of libraries is 'Open'!**

A core aspect of **critical librarianship** is that **librarians are activists** by calling as they **defend intellectual freedom** and **promote cultural resistance** irrespective of prevailing political, economic and social attitudes that promote the 'caging of knowledge'

Librarians advocate for and **widen people's access to information,** and find ways to **contribute to the well-being of communities through a commitment to social responsibility**, and always stand their ground that **libraries are one of the last holdouts in a society where "sharing" and "free" are becoming endangered terms**.

## i. Voices are power

The Power of ... Power
Nearly a century later,
what are we fighting for?
Which voices must still be heard?
Who must still be counted?

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## ii. How many voices are unheard?

**Wikimedia** encourages the *plurality of voices* that gives libraries the *leverage to access multifarious knowledge.*

Social justice
Fundamental human rights,
Freedom of expression,
Access to information
Values of multiculturalism

*Right? I ask, right?*

My kinsman Chinua Achebe had said in his book "Things Fall Apart' said that 'until the lions have their own historians, the history of the **hunt** will always glorify the **hunter'**.

Estimated 6909 languages in the world (Anderson, 2010). In the African continent alone, there are between 1500-2000 local and 'living' languages with Nigeria taking the lead with 522 (Statista, 2022).

Wikipedia is in 325 languages at the last count. How many voices are still not being heard?

## iii 1Lib1Ref – one side of the coin



https://www.business2community.com/marketing/market
ing-selling-two-sides-coin-0832912

## Conclusion

Samek (2007) had also asked *'how can opportunities provided by information and communication technologies, interconnectivity and the global digital network be applied to ameliorate discriminatory knowledge practices?'*



https://www.thedcv.com/two-sides-of-the-same-coin-whats-trending-in-cryptocurrency/

**Connecting Africa's Libraries and Information communities**