



Revisionism and Professional Ethic II

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The library of the Alliance israelite Universelle, placed in the center of Paris, is known as a very welcoming place for searchers. One day a notorious revisionist who didn't hide his ideological identity, came to our library. His presence disrupted our regular functionality and set numerous questions regarding professional ethics in this kind of situation.

Should a library specialized in Jewish history and studies tolerates the presence of an active revisionist?

Can the Professional Code of Ethics guide librarians in this particular situation?

Can it clarify subtle dilemmas and ethical conflicts that occur at the workplace?

In this article I'll try to show the imperfection of the Code in a specific situation.

I'll try to expose the problem of a dilemma between the ethical code and ethical questions I have experienced as a librarian. Then I will try to point out the moral responsibility librarians have toward History and libraries' collections.

Ethical Codes are supposed to guide professionals and provide solutions for potential problematic situations. The Code of Ethics expresses a diversity of values and tendencies; its aim is to help professionals on a rational or irrational level. In France, the Ethical Code that has been developed covers a large rang of the librarianship profession. It deals with the User, the collections, guardianship and the profession itself. Without getting into a comparative study of ethical values in various types of Codes, we can name some of the essential values expressed:

Giving access to information, respect for Patron privacy, respecting users' intellectual freedom, no discrimination and no censorship etc.

Values have been internalized by librarians they are certainly integrated into the professional behavior.

The professional codes of ethics response to democratic rules and values and it guaranties tolerance toward users.

But what can we do when the ideal of democracy is destabilized?

What can we do when citizens with destructive political positions come into the library?

What kind of ethics can there be?

Presentation

The library of the Alliance Israelite Universelle is a private library depending on the institution which carries the same name. The Alliance was created in 1860 and the library too. Its collections were acquired partly by knowledgeable books donations and by acquisitions. The type of the library is not religious but rather studies on Judaism and Jewish history developed by modern new disciplines that resulted from the European Enlightenment period in Germany, Britain and France.

The Alliance's library reflects Jewish emancipation and intellectual mentalities in Western Europe.

By the time World War II broke up the library of the Alliance was one of the most well-known libraries for its Judaica and Hebraica collections. When the Nazis invaded Paris in 1940, they immediately invested the Alliance library, looted its funds and deported them to Germany. The Nazis moved nearly 700 cases of books, manuscripts periodicals and archives to Germany.

All the books and the main part of the archives were taken to the Nazi institute for the study of the Jewish question in Frankfurt am Main and to the library of the Nazi party university in Berlin. Part of the collections had started to be treated by the Nazi administration; hundreds of the books were marked by the Frankfurt Institute. Today, the stamps are still visible on the books like sealed Nazi tattoos.

In spring 1945, the Alliance library's collections were found by the American Army in Germany. They were stored in different places and were found in Offenbach from where they came back to Paris. Our collections were not destroyed by the Nazis on the contrary, they were carefully gathered together and so it was easy to identify them. The restitution started in 1946 and it took years and a lot of effort to re-establish the library collections and its catalogues.

The case:

Three years ago, a person who came to the library for the first time asked to consult an old edition of "The protocols of the Wise men of Zion", an anti-Semitic forgery text which aim was to unfold the existence of international

Jewish conspiracies bent on world power. An hour later the man came to the desk asking to produce an entire copy of this pamphlet that was one of the first translations into French from the Russian. I happened to be at the desk at that moment and told him it was impossible to reproduce it for the simple reason it was old and in a bad shape. He insisted so I asked for what purpose he needed the reproduction, he said it was for a reprint project. I asked for the name of the publisher, he said he intended to publish it in a journal and gave me its name. The publication name had a meaning that worried me.

The revisionist identity

The man kept insisting manifesting stubbornness and refusal to accept instructions. At that point I felt something was wrong. I was intrigued and annoyed and I had to know more about his identity so I googled his name, and got the whole picture. I was submerged by information concerning revisionism and anti-Semitism. His holocaust denier identity was quickly revealed with the help of World Wide Web and I was very rapidly informed that he had been condemned and spent time in prison for having spread anti-Semitic materials. He was not only expressing his ideas on his web site, but I also found he was actually defined as a revisionist by the French law and condemned as such by the justice.

The Dilemma

I immediately went up to inform my superior that we were having a revisionist in our reading room. The library director knew straight away who this man was and hoped it would be his single visit to the library, but whether he was going to come back again or not the problem was already there and everybody in the team was bothered and made different assumptions about the resolution we were supposed to make. Most of the staff members thought we didn't have any legal right to prevent him from consulting documents in our library. In France every citizen has the right to enter public libraries and consult books... My position at that stage was in a way fatalist, I felt as if there was nothing we could do against his visits, and thought that democracy protected every user even the most problematic ones, but still we hoped he wouldn't show up again. We all felt it was an intrusion and a provocation to come to the library of the Alliance Israelite for documents one can find in other Parisian libraries such as French National library BNF or the library of Oriental languages INALCO.

Three days later he showed up again and asked for documents in the field of Jewish history. The first documents were given to him for consultation but after a while I felt that the cooperation between a librarian in such a library and a dynamic Holocaust denier was very problematic. I decided, at that moment, to take a personal arbitrary attitude to limit him and the access we gave to our documents under the pretext they were not available or that they were being kept by the bookbinding service. My colleagues and superior approved my decision and backed me. It was necessary to make this man understand that we were not going to satisfy all his requests like automats.

But he persisted coming and appeared twice a week in our reading room.

At the same time I started questioning jurists and specialists who had dealt with the problem of Holocaust denial in libraries. I contacted various institutions for example; the Holocaust Memorial in Paris and was told that some years ago they had been confronted with a similar situation. Their library was a private one like ours and the solution they had chosen could have been available for us too.

From questioning to taking position

Meanwhile our Holocaust denier, who was, by then, coming regularly to the library, asked to see a book from the Zadok Kahn collection. Zadok Kahn was not only France's chief Rabbi from 1889 to 1905 but was also a leading scholar in Jewish studies. His personal library rich of 2600 books was given as a donation to the Alliance's library after his death.

This entire collection was deported by the Nazis and many of the books were stamped by the Frankfurt institute stamp.

When the book arrived to the desk that day, I immediately recognized its origin, and felt a strong unwillingness to provide this survivor book bearing the Nazi stamp to a person who denies the existence of the Holocaust and the murder of six million Jews.

In this particular situation I was in a conflict within the ethical field, a conflict between normative professional behaviour and moral responsibilities. The book I was holding in my hands acted like a witness from the war period, like a survivor giving its testimony on dramatic realities this revisionist was denying. It was a shock to be confronted with this tragic past throughout the mark of the stamp on the yellowish page of this old book. At that moment my consciousness crystallized and I was rebelled against the idea of providing documents to this person. I froze facing this Holocaust denying phenomena that is so unmoral and

pervert. How could I provide a rescued book which had returned from the Nazis to a revisionist?

I was actually acting according to the French law we call “Droit de retrait”, which means the right to retreat, in some cases, from one’s professional obligations.

For me it was unbearable and absurd to keep giving services to a person denying the existence of the Holocaust.

What kind of ethics can be expected in this kind of situation?

The psychological crystallisation that led me to refusal and rejection of this unwelcome person were probably the result of a maturation process within ethical parameters that I was experiencing.

I told him the book was not available, went up to the direction offices and declared I was no longer going to serve this man and that I did not accept his presence in our library. Thankfully the directors approved my position and it was agreed that the next time he’d come we would tell him to leave the place and not come back again.

The institution adopts the librarian position

The exclusion from the Alliance reading room took place a week later at closing time. The director of the library asked him to leave, signifying he forbid him to come again. The denier protested arguing we were a public library obliged to receive all publics. The director reminded him we were a private library that had the right to define the conditions for admission of our readers. The revisionist left the place without any violence but on his Web site he described the exclusion in insulting terms.

Then we had another chapter in this affair. He sent a letter to the general director of the Alliance asking him for authorization to use the library.

Finally the Alliance attorney sent him an official letter confirming the refusal to enter the library explaining that in consideration of his personal position and those expressed in his journal for which he was condemned for the violation of legal decision he was not authorized to come to the library.

The attorney quoted article n° 6 from the status of international military court annexed to the London agreement from August 1945 precisng that a person who contests by writing or by speech ... “the existence of crimes against Humanity is to be condemned to prison with an fine of 45000 € Being specified that such crimes recover the deportation and extermination of European Jews in countries under Nazi occupation during the Second World War.”

“You must understand”, wrote the attorney, “that the Alliance Israelite Universelle cannot give in any case any kind of help for doubtful and illegal projects by welcoming you in its centre. More than that, the library of the Alliance which is entirely orientated toward history, education, and in particular the history of the Jewish people, cannot tolerate within its centre a person whose ideas and activities express the absolute denial of the values it stands for.”

We should differentiate between the sense of responsibility I had towards our special books collections and the Ethical Dilemma created by my identity and the perverse positions of the denier. The Professional Code of Ethics that claims for supplying services to all users and for which censorship is not really admitted clashed with an absolute ethical position of respect towards History. Ethics results from Human Rights, whereas memory of dead people is respected and the memory of the process of their assassination represents an historical importance. Professional Ethics is based, among other Principles, on human rights values, but in this case, the respect of human rights was needed more to the librarian than to the user. The librarian was in distress as a result of her confronting the inhuman lie of Holocaust denying. Our intercourse with this revisionist inside the Alliance Israelite universelle library created a confrontation between two values systems which are completely in contradiction.

The denial of the methodological massacre of European Jews is a new form of Anti-Semitism which one of its aims is to contest the existence of Jews in History while the project of the Alliance library is to develop and enrich the historical knowledge on Jewish communities around the world.

No cooperation could have been found for those two opposite system of values. Therefore it was impossible to admit this holocaust denier in our reading room.

His presence in our reading room created an absurd situation where a revisionist who usually doesn't recognize the Genocide of the Jews, appears in a celebrated

patrimonial Jewish library trying to benefice from the culture of those he denies the History. The absurd set of circumstances created a humiliating situation that we were not obliged to accept. Leaving him working on his research in our library would have meant a certain acceptance and tolerance concerning his statements. If we had left him using our library, it would have signified that we, a Jewish organization, were weak and helpless in front of him and that our historical and intellectual existence was disregarded. The clash between what he represents and what we represent didn't leave us any place for tolerance.

Revisionism and the juridical combat against it?

Towards the end of the 70's statements denying the historical facts of European Jews destruction started to be heard in France. A number of Holocaust deniers published pseudo historical research denying the existence of the Death Concentration Camps and the systematic massacre of the Jews.

Revisionists minimize the number of Jews murdered during Second World War.

They say that only around one hundred to two hundred thousand Jews were dead during the Second World War, dead from diseases in the concentration camps and not by a systematic assassination realized in an industrial process. Revisionists deny the use of Cyklon B by the Nazis for extermination of human beings.

During the Seventies Holocaust Revisionists were fortified and got stronger enjoying from the right of Freedom of expression, they were claiming for intellectual and juridical immunity that Democracy was supposed to supply.

The French historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet had précised in his book "Les assassins de la Memoire" (page 7) that Revisionism doesn't express any interest for other human groups that had been exterminated by the Nazis during the Second World War; the Gypsies, mental handicaps or the Soviets War prisoners. They only focus on Jews; all their theories are on Jews, because in fact Revisionism is anti-Semitism. It consists in having anti-Semitic positions and declarations which aim is to rehabilitate the Nazis. They are extremists who act in order to raise racism and hatred dissemination.

France, a country that was occupied by the Nazis and that a quarter of its Jewish population was exterminated, had a juridical vacuum in this field.

After a period where Revisionism gained ground and after Jewish graves were profaned in Carpantra's cemetery, a new law was voted, The Gayssot Law enacted on July 13, 1990. It was one of the first Holocaust denial prohibiting

laws in Europe. Its intention was to restrict and punish those who published and pronounced against the realistic dimensions of Crimes against Humanity as defined in the London Charter in 1945. The Gayssot Law was voted in order to prevent the diffusion of Holocaust denial ideas in French society. More, it permitted to bring revisionists to court and penalize them.

In Europe only seven countries amongst forty four members of the European Union, possess laws concerning the problem of Holocaust Denial. The voting took place during the Nineties by Germany, Austria, Belgium, Spain, Luxembourg and Switzerland. Some of those countries had active responsibilities for what had happened in the Holocaust period, while some other countries stayed passive and watched the crimes silently. It would be interesting to realize that countries who have established laws against Denial are mostly situated in Western Europe and that countries from Northern Europe, like Scandinavia and England do not relate any attention to this problem. Indeed the struggle against racism and anti-Semitism is an important juridical field in countries like Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway, but there isn't any concern there to the phenomena of Holocaust Denial; and the reason for that is probably their deep commitment to the principle of Freedom of expression. (Martine Valdès-Boulouque, in "La lutte contre le négationnisme", 2003)

To my opinion, the existence of the Loi Gayssot in France had protected us directly or indirectly or rather permitted us to protect ourselves from this kind of provocation. The revisionist in this case knows that the Alliance is acquainted with his juridical past; that he was condemned and spent time in prison after he had been taken to court in effect of the Gayssot Law. He knows he is limited by the Law and that he cannot pretend for juridical immunity resulted by Freedom of Speech. Hopefully, Democracy is able to protect itself from its own laxities.

Beyond the Dilemma

Back to the French Code of Ethics, this case teaches us something interesting in librarianship. As I have mentioned before, in the third part of the French Code there is a development around the notion of "La tutelle". This element has been mentioned by Professor Paul Sturges in his article "Information Ethics in the Twenty First Century" published in 2009.

As a citation of the French Code;

3. The administrative responsibility (civil or private community)

- *the librarian takes part in the definition of the culture policy of his responsibility*

- *the librarian enforces the policy of his responsibility as long as this one does not go against the general laws, the specific and perennial missions of the library, as well as against the values defined in this code*

From the case I have exposed we can observe that the librarian independent position is adopted by the establishment for which she works.

More explicitly, the Head Office supports the librarian position and adopts it into the official institutional position.

Does this case illustrate the relevance to what the French Code says in article 3?

Although the librarian can take part and enforce the policy of his guardianship; it must stay coherent with the code's values. That brings us again to the aspect of values.

The professional Ethic Code is usually understood as a serial of functional regulations that librarians had already integrated into their professional way of working, but in my case facing the revisionist, it was impossible to; *“provide the users with all the documents necessary to their full and autonomous comprehension of the public debates, of the current events, of the great historical and philosophical issues.”* (French Code)

The reality of the workplace might provide delicate and unusual situations handled by librarians and in this regard, the Ethical Professional Code as a whole misses some problematic aspects detected within Dilemmas' experiences.

As I said at the beginning of the article, Codes of Ethics are very democratic, they are almost idealistic, which is normal since we deal here with an optimal manifest for libraries. But if the Code is unsatisfying in particular situations, the librarian must search for solutions outside the Code and see what the Law and juridical legislations can offer him as a support in a democratic society.

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