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In this International Year for the World's Indigenous People I suggest that we focus not only on what we in our libraries should be doing to contribute to the Year but also on what we can learn.

The great and simple truths our society seems to have forgotten, and which we can learn again from indigenous peoples, are sensitivity and respect. These truths demand an acknowledgment that cultural, social, and spiritual dimensions deserve at least the same consideration as material dimensions.

Independent of ideological, racial and political differences, Western business, science and technology is spreading across the globe.

Donald Heyneman's Presidential Address to the American Society of Parasitology contains an excellent description of this process:

The essence of preindustrial indigenous societies is their variety and local adaptation. Each is tied to a specific habitat and has evolved its own cultural and behavioural expression. The wide variety of resulting human social forms is a response to an equal variety of habitats, each with a set of distinctive environmental constraints.

In almost diametric opposition, industrial technological development is characterised by a controlled, relatively uniform and highly simplified environment, typically with a widespread reduction in the number of species to a few domesticated forms, including humans... widely distributed homogenisation characterise[s] industrialised societies in all political and economic systems of the world.'

If you substitute the word 'libraries' for 'preindustrial indigenous societies' this statement describes the current rationalistic changes that are sweeping through libraries.

Two ideas have been used to confer respectability on this encroaching uniformity—the idea of Objectivity and the idea of Reason.

To say that a procedure or point of view is objective[ly true] is to claim that it is valid irrespective of human expectations, ideas, attitudes, and wishes. The idea of objectivity, older than science and independent of it, arose whenever a tribe or nation or civilisation identified its ways of life with the laws of the [physical and moral] universe and it became apparent when different cultures with different objective views confronted each other. This again can be directly applied to the Australian library scene.

In Senegal they say that God is not a person. By this they mean that they never know what He's going to do. So each time they have a good harvest they put as much as possible aside, knowing that the lean years will one day come. One never knows what next year will bring. In other words they know what economic rationalists apparently do not. Deterministic chaos is a fact.

Much of the business writing we have inflicted on us, and which is increasingly being applied to libraries, is crippled by being based on the work of economists who thought it proper to ignore chaotic reality in the attempt to put their discipline on a 'scientific basis' even though there is plenty of evidence that chaos and catastrophe can overtake businesses and economies.

The Mossi tribe's proverb 'When the ants unite their mouths, they can carry an elephant.' means that great things can be accomplished when people really work together.

We regard ourselves as the cooperating profession. Individual librarians cooperate with other individual librarians, and libraries cooperate with other libraries. Yet we have much to learn about cooperation. It is perfectly possible to cooperate without either party having the least concern about the other's 'humanity within'. This is demonstrated when libraries cooperate in the interlibrary loan network for example, yet, not to be too subtle, claw at each other, often in quite a public way, over

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service principles. There is a world of difference between helping another satisfy his desires, and regarding that other as part of oneself. It is the difference between a utilitarian ethics of want-satisfaction and the ethics based on human relationship.

From indigenous peoples we can learn the effectiveness of cooperative measures born of and reflecting our own culture. To truly co-operate, to achieve real success in providing relevant services from well-managed libraries does not require uniformity. Let us unite our mouths, and speak up for libraries with a single voice, a voice which supports the diversity which is an essential survival tool.

The words of Halidou Sawadogo, a peasant leader in Burkina Faso, hold an essential lesson for our profession:

'Above all, we must start from what we are—we have to know who we are, and then we can improve what our parents did. Then we shall rise on our own. Our development will not be copied [from] elsewhere. We must value what is in our house, our village, our region, our country. Only if we appreciate the value of these things will we be able to relate correctly to the things that come from abroad, some of which are very worthwhile for our country. *But all must come from our own roots.*' ■

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**INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**



**'A NEW PARTNERSHIP'**