

## Exile and return: libraries and national identity

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### ABSTRACT

Libraries play a major role in the formation and maintenance of national identity. In some cases that identity may be synonymous with the identity accepted and celebrated by the state and may reflect its historical and linguistic traditions. In others it might represent only one national identity among several. The process of identity formation can be particularly important and challenging in the face of cultural dislocation especially in countries such as Timor Leste and Cambodia which have suffered invasion and cultural domination. Such experiences represent domains of exile - physical, psychological, linguistic, cultural – which have very serious consequences for the countries and their peoples. This paper traverses some of those domains to explore the roles that libraries can (and should) play in helping us to understand and deal with the consequences. It goes on to consider the influence that libraries and library associations can have in the world.

I feel very honoured to have been invited to speak at the LIASA conference in this tenth anniversary year. With many around the world, I have followed the creation of the new South Africa with great interest and admiration. It has been and continues to be inspiring to observe the way in which you and your peoples have looked forward bravely while interrogating your history in a tremendous spirit of reconciliation. I am too ignorant to speak of South Africa and it would be impertinent to do so as a visitor. However, in preparing my paper, I have been prompted to think further about some of the dimensions of national identity and its creation and maintenance, processes in which libraries contribute. In particular, I have been considering some of the domains of exile - physical, psychological, linguistic, cultural, etc - and the important role that identity and its loss plays in strengthening democracy. Through this we can begin to explore the parts that libraries can (and, I would think, should) play in helping us to understand and deal with those issues.

### National identity

The shorthand term “national identity” is, of course, problematic, multiple and contested. Superficially, it can be equated with “nationality” or “citizenship” - that which we write on

the landing card for the immigration officers to consider. But even that usage can be multiple when many people have multiple citizenship and are able to select identification documents which best suit the circumstances they are facing. It can also be multilayered as in the European Union where the citizens of member countries obtain privileged entry, access to employment and other benefits in other member countries. Within countries it can also be multidimensional when citizens have both a national and a provincial identity as in the United Kingdom where there has been substantial devolution to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, this nationality provides a potent sense of identity which is strongly manifested when the nation-state is at risk, as we saw with the 2004 Madrid railway bombings, or when citizens compete under the national banner in the Paralympics, as they do this week, or at other sporting events.

For many there is a deeper sense of nationhood, the identification with the people, the *volk*, who remain members of the nation whatever their citizenship. This sense of identity which is underpinned by shared culture, language and religion and fed by legend and myth can be independent of place as in the identity of the Jewish people, which is perhaps the most marked example of a 'nation' in this sense (leaving aside distinctions such as those between Ashkenazim and Sephardim). Whatever their appearance, whatever their daily language, however pious they might or might not be, wherever they live, there is a strong sense of Jewishness which transcends the citizenship which Jews in Israel can claim. For others, especially members of the First Nations, the Indigenous peoples of many regions, identity is strongly linked to country, to an identification with and sense of custodianship for country, culture and language, even if an individual might no longer be able or willing to live in her or his country or if the country might be fractured by state or proprietorial borders.

These feelings of identity are powerful and transcend the borders and limits of the nation-state. They progress identity into a frame of transnationality in which multiple identities coexist in a constantly changing dynamic which becomes a multifarious identity. This identity is fluid: it layers and mixes citizenships, identification with peoples and localities, and cultural expression to create certain but not fixed identity. It embodies a sense of belonging which is expressed contingently, contextualised by circumstance, culture and event.

### **Libraries and national identity**

Because of their responsibility to transmit the record of humanity, libraries and other heritage institutions, including archives, museums and galleries, have a major role in identity formation. They help to transmit the narratives of identity through the documentation they preserve and make available including original documents or copies of them, histories and imaginative works.

For Australia, for example, key documents include those that are employed to establish the origins and legitimacy of the nation-state, such as Cook's *Voyages* which records his 'discovery' (from a European perspective) of the east coast of Australia among other places. Or they can be important memoirs and histories which describe the nation-state to its citizens and help fix a conception of it, as the record of Australian involvement in World War I was instrumental in establishing the myth of Australia's coming to independence through participation in the failed attack on Turkish positions at Gallipoli (even though the Australian and New Zealand ANZAC Corps were participating as Imperial troops in a British commanded action). Or they can be the literature through which we understand ourselves in

particular ways as such works a *We of the Never Never* (Gunn nd) placed a mythology of conquering an inhospitable land at the core of our understanding of Australian-ness (ignoring the fact that Indigenous Australians had been living across the continent for 60,000 years or more).

These records are always fragmentary and observed from particular perspectives, as Clendinnen has reminded us through her work on first contacts between the British invaders and the first Australians (Clendinnen 2003). Nevertheless, these narratives of identity transmitted by libraries and archives play a key role in establishing the “storied site” of the state and offering meta-narratives for popular culture as well as in determining political and policy processes (Schram and Neisser 1997).

The role of libraries in identity formation is closely associated with the state because most libraries are, at least in part, an expression of the nation-state. A very high proportion of libraries has been established or at least sponsored by various levels of government. In most countries, the state establishes and resources national and provincial libraries, indirectly sponsors libraries in public universities, creates its own special and parliamentary libraries, and assists the public libraries established by local government. Of course there are many corporate libraries, libraries in private universities and research institutes, private school libraries, and those in foundations, museums, seminaries and so on. But these too are a manifestation of the particular nation-state because their prevalence and character reflect the nature of the specific nation-state in which they are located. A country with a very strong private sector, such as the United States, will have a greater proportion of privately sponsored libraries than would be found where there has been a tradition of greater dependence on government funding as in Australia. Whatever the funding base, the character of the libraries will also, to a degree, reflect the character of the nation-state largely because they are established and must operate within the bounds of law, culture and custom (although it must be noted that professional discourse in the field demonstrates great commonalities in the methods and aspirations of libraries across the world).

The consonance with the nation-state is of course most marked in the case of national libraries due to their establishment and support by government. They feed into projects to invent nation-states in a conceptual sense (Nairn 1981). From contributing to revolutionary struggle to creating great collections of national heritage housed in symbolic buildings, such as the recent Bibliothèque Nationale at site François Mitterrand in Paris, national libraries are considered to both strengthen and represent the nation. Along with parliaments, courts and museums they collectively signal the substance of a nation-state. Their agency provides documentary support for the history and legitimacy of the nation-state but also, and most significantly, offers symbolic legitimation as a tangible representation of the state as the Soviet Union required of the Lenin Library (State Lenin Library of the USSR 1987).

Nevertheless, despite that consonance, national libraries tend rather to identify and be identified with the historical and linguistic traditions of the dominant national identity. The identity expressed through a national library may be synonymous with the identity accepted and celebrated by the state. Or it might represent only one national identity in a plural state, generally either the dominant or the aspirational identity. Other national identities in a plural state may seek their expression through other libraries which better represent their traditions and are often the major regional or university library in the region in which that nation may be dominant. In some countries, notably Canada/Canada and Aotearoa New Zealand, special efforts have been made by national libraries to express and, to a degree seek to reconcile,

parallel or competing national identities. In this they play a part in the continuing process of identity formation in which identity is constructed and contingent, contested and polymorphic (Lapid and Kratochwil 1996, p. 8).

Generally the library staff members take their cue from accepted understandings of national identity and seek to reflect the complexity of those understandings through conscientious collection of publications, appropriate meta-representation via bibliographic description and promotion of aspects of the identity in displays, reading guides and other initiatives. But, too frequently, others intervene by imposing guidance in the form of rules or guidelines. Frequently the control is subtle but too often it is overt and brutal as it was under Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile (Budnik 2004), in Franco's Spain and many other places where a rigid state morality has been imposed.

Presentation of an undesired identity can also lead to retribution. Such motives stimulated the decade long harassment of librarians, removal of library materials and eventual destruction of collections in Kosova (Frederiksen and Bakken 2001). The justification of territorial claims demanded that Albanian and Serbian identity be distinguished from each other and the Albanian extinguished through what might be termed 'cultural cleansing'. Less immediately homicidal and violent than the ethnic cleansing which was being prosecuted in the Balkans at the same time, cultural cleansing is no less destructive in its intent to expunge culture, language and memory.

## Exile

These processes and issues can be considered through the prism of 'exile'. From the experience of a prisoner sent out of the country to the psychological exile of not being permitted to use one's own language, exile challenges and sharpens perceptions of identity. They can thus be used to understand the identity from which a person has been removed. That which is wanting, especially that which is missed most, is likely to be the features which most essentially constructs an individual's identity.

Experiences of exile have been often described in literature. The poems of the Roman writer Ovid relate his experience of being sent to the other side of the Black Sea to live among speakers of strange languages in a foreign climate. His hurt has been portrayed by an Australian writer David Malouf's *An imaginary life*. In possibly the first novel in the English language, Defoe writes of Robinson Crusoe, marooned alone on a remote island after a shipwreck (Defoe 1935). His depiction of Crusoe's aloneness, his later companionship with Friday and his rescue provided an absorbing narrative in which he could comment on the mores of his own country, England. Solzhenitsyn's *A day in the life of Ivan Denisovich* tells us of the pains of internal exile in the Gulag of Soviet Russia while Levi writes of the horror's of Nazi concentration camps and the insights he derived from his sufferings (Levi 2000). Others have written of the pain of being removed from one's culture and language including many indigenous writers. Novels such *My love must wait*, the moving story of the great navigator, Matthew Flinders, who was imprisoned on the Ile-de-France during the Napoleonic wars, can help us feel the pain of those separated by exile from those they love (Hill 1945). Some of the stories of the asylum seekers shamefully imprisoned in recent years in camps in the Australian desert are told very movingly in *Another country* (Scott and Keneally 2004). Even more distressing are the frightening shadow world into which people are thrust by

childhood abuse and the scars suffered by them. They are exiled into that world by the abuse perpetrated by powerful men (Biggs 2004).

This brief selection of writing demonstrates the multiplicity of ways in which authors have treated the theme of exile, in a broad sense, and also the varieties of experience which could be labelled as exile. There are, however, certain common elements including the social isolation of those who are cut off from their families and companions through imprisonment or social oppression and the psychological exile of those cut off from language and culture.

Libraries bring these stories to readers through time and across geography. They enable readers to experience vicariously, through imaginative literature, the suffering of others and to develop some understanding of that pain and of its causes and consequences. They also enable us to put events in context, to perceive the links between experiences and their origins. Our reading of *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, is enriched by knowing that Defoe's tale was based on the experience of Alexander Selkirk who was marooned on a far from tropical island off the coast of modern day Chile. We can read of Selkirk's life on the island and rescue but we can also place it within the history of European voyages and the processes and pains of colonisation. Returning to *Robinson Crusoe*, we can interpret his perceptions of himself, his fate and his companion, Friday, through the lens of European beliefs in the mastery of the world and its peoples. Our understanding of other, more harrowing, experiences can also be broadened through knowledge of their origins and effects.

### **Libraries and narratives of identity**

Libraries bring these narratives and issues to the attention of readers. They help readers to not only structure their own identity but also explore other identities – which, in turn, shapes their own. But libraries go further by assisting individuals and communities to create meta-narratives from these tales.

They thus help us create meaning for ourselves, our communities and our nations. By founding national institutions like libraries and universities it is possible to assemble a nation out of exile as it has been for Jews and Palestinians in the twentieth century (Said 1984, p. 169). Together with such projects as constructing a national history or reviving an ancient language, the institutions offer a concrete realisation of national identity. Offering a graphic illustration, a banner over the entrance to the national museum of Afghanistan proclaimed within days of the expulsion of the Taliban regime from Kabul: "A nation stays alive when its culture stays alive" (Steen 2001).

It is an all too common challenge faced by nations and states to re-establish culture, language and history after war, domination and destruction. The destruction of libraries in Laos, Cambodia (Sturges and Rosenberg 1999) and Kosova/Kosovo (Frederiksen and Bakken 2000) symbolically destroyed national cultures. In Kosova it started with the harassment of library staff. In Cambodia, it was an element of 'Year Zero' marking the beginning of the age of creation of a new social order through the total transformation of society (Glover 2001, pp. 303-305). The reconstruction of libraries in those states conversely represents both a return to order and also the construction of a new state based on a conception of national identity. That conception will be designed to support the new regime's aims and may draw selectively on the national heritage. The processes of restitution and cultural recognition can powerfully restore identity and foster reconciliation between previous antagonists (Barkan 2000). Barkan

notes that the emphasis in restitution rests on consent and inclusion that creates a new social reality which aims to improve on existing social injustice rather than achieve equality (p. 348).

Another example can be found in the new nation of Timor Leste (East Timor) which is rising from the ashes of the militarily controlled, and destroyed, Indonesian province of Timor Timur. A national identity is being constructed around the almost 500 year narrative from the location by Portuguese seafarers of an island famous for its sandalwood. The emphasis on the Portuguese colonial history and scant mention of the earlier Javanese and Chinese references to the island and its early sandalwood trade links the new nation to European roots rather than its geographical embeddedness (Gunn 1999). This 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) draws on documentary support in the records of explorers, ethnographers and colonial administrators as well as the language and traditions of the people. Thus an essential element of creating and reinforcing that narrative will involve the construction of national institutions including a national library. Its creation, however, will have to draw on resources in libraries in other nations since the limited libraries provide by the Portuguese and Indonesian administrations were destroyed in the outrage of September 1999 (Blood 2001). Earlier examples of these processes include the universities and libraries established in the process of decolonisation during the twentieth century.

Similar process operate in relation to the other examples of 'exile' touched upon above. We can help people use their language. We can help them deal with trauma and suffering. Through developing understanding we can take an inclusive approach which brings people together rather than denying them their humanity by excluding them as we used to do with those suffering from Hansen's Disease and now do with the victims of the HIV/AIDS pandemic - a contemporary and urgent example of how individuals and communities can find themselves isolated with horrific consequences.. Thus libraries go further than just presenting narratives by providing the means to expand our comprehension of experience and to develop personal and community responses to it. They enable us to understand humanity and the good and evil we can perpetrate and to think great thoughts such as those which inspired the framers of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That Declaration offers perhaps the ultimate statement of humanity's aspirations to treat each other fairly and with understanding.

### **Libraries and indigenous peoples**

The example of Indigenous peoples, an area of professional practice in which I have done considerable work, illustrates the roles and responsibilities of libraries and information services and how they can work for the peoples of the world.

Indigenous peoples are generally the most marginalised inhabitants of states. They too often suffer many social and individual ills which can be traced back to loss of self esteem and autonomy. They face dimensions of exile including loss of land, loss of culture, loss of language. In the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols for libraries, archives and information services* (Byrne, Garwood et al. 1994), some colleagues and I identified eleven areas in which information organisations may need to address issues if they are to respond to the concerns and needs of Australian Indigenous peoples:

1. Content and Perspectives
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Intellectual Property Issues

3. Accessibility and Use
4. Subject Headings/Classification of Materials
5. Secret or Sacred Materials
6. Offensive Materials
7. Governance and Management
8. Staffing
9. Education and Training for Professional Practice
10. Awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and Issues
11. Copying and Repatriation of Records to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

It is likely that many of these issues will also be relevant to Indigenous peoples in other parts of the world.

Another team of colleagues and I are currently undertaking a research project to determine whether the ten year old *Protocols* are still relevant and if their formulation and publication provided a useful strategy for highlighting the issues and promoting responses to them (Nakata, Byrne et al. 2004). This work has not yet been completed but it is already evident that the *Protocols* formed a most important contribution to the professional literature and advancement of the interests of Indigenous peoples in Australia and that they should be reinvigorated. Our preliminary findings are that the published *Protocols* are still relevant and that most of the topics covered by them need little revision. However, there are a number of areas which have emerged since their publication which need to be addressed including, especially, issues relating to access to electronic information and the digitisation of records and other information.

But despite their continuing relevance and importance, the implementation of the *Protocols* had very limited effects on the practice of libraries, archives and information services because they were inadequately communicated and promoted. They were published, taken up by a number of libraries and archives and are frequently cited as a key reference. But there is limited evidence of changed practice. It is clear that some gains have been made over the decade in relation to the areas identified in the *Protocols* including the publication of a thesaurus, some changes to Library of Congress Subject Headings, more sensitive handling of both offensive and secret/sacred materials in many organisations. Some gains have been made in relation to the employment of Indigenous library and archive workers and some of the organisations have instituted mechanisms to consult with Indigenous communities, and especially elders. But ignorance of Indigenous peoples' concerns and needs continues and the issues are clearly considered to be peripheral to the operations of most information organisations.

Leadership has been crucial in those organisations in which the *Protocols* have had a significant and continuing effect. Where there has been effective and ongoing leadership, continuing gains have been made and strategy is evident. Unfortunately, some of the early adopters of the *Protocols* have fallen back, apparently after a change of leadership. The stimulus imposed by government policies has also been important particularly through the imposition of targets for the employment of Indigenous staff members.

To have a major and continuing effect, it is becoming evident that the *Protocols* will need an ongoing implementation strategy which must be supported by an organisation, or number of organisations, which are committed to their application and use and prepared to supply the

necessary resources. Their implementation will need a communication program to ensure that all students of archives and information studies and all current practitioners and their organisations are aware of them, their importance and how they can be applied. The researchers will raise these issues when we report later this year. We will then seek to discuss the relevance of the Protocols beyond Australia and how related issues might be raised in an global context through IFLA so that we might go beyond the current IFLA *Statement on indigenous traditional knowledge* (IFLA 2003).

## **The World Summit on the Information Society**

IFLA's engagement with the World Summit on the Information Society offers another example of how libraries and information services, and their associations, can be an influence for the good.

Promoted by the United Nations and its agencies, the World Summit on the Information Society was initiated to interrogate the global issues and challenges resulting from the widespread use of ICTs and the growth of the information economy. It is the latest in a series of United Nations sponsored summits and conferences to highlight major global issues. It followed such other events as the World Conference on Women (Beijing, China – September 1995), Millennium Summit: "The role of the United Nations in the 21st century" (New York, 6-8 September 2000), World Conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (Durban, South Africa, 31 August - 7 September 2001), World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August - 4 September 2002).

The Summit's first phase, held in Geneva in December 2003, brought together 16,000 delegates and was directed towards the adoption of a Declaration of Principles (World Summit on the Information Society 2003) and an Action Plan (World Summit on the Information Society 2003). The second phase, planned for Tunis in November 2005, is focussed on implementing the Action Plan.

As with other UN sponsored Summits, the actual three day Summit is the culmination of several years of negotiations and consists of set piece speeches by leaders of government and United Nations agencies together with an exhibition and a multitude of presentations by governments, international agencies and advocacy groups. It followed a series of formal preparatory committee meetings (PrepComs) which were supported by regional meetings held in Africa, Latin America and other regions of the world and focal meetings held by agencies such as UNESCO.

The World Summit on the Information Society differed from previous summits in that its planners explicitly and formally recognised three groups of stakeholders: governments, civil society and business entities. In fact there was a fourth which the UN agencies were perhaps too polite to mention – or which was perhaps too obvious to them – the international governmental organisations themselves. In the event the hierarchy of influence was governments first, international governmental agencies a close second, civil society a distant third with business entities bringing up the rear. The governments were certainly 'more equal' than the other groups but, thanks largely to the insistence and facilitation of M Adama Samassékou, the President of the PrepComs, civil society organisations were given a limited voice. Together with the business entities, they were allowed 15 minutes on the floor of a

three hour or longer meeting, perhaps 3 minutes each for 5 organisations. The slots were hard to obtain and led to some competition between civil society organisations. Their brevity contrasted dramatically with the filibustering indulged in by many governmental delegations.

Nevertheless, the civil society organisations showed remarkable unanimity, putting aside their differences and specific concerns in the shared interest of emphasising the big issues. They achieved considerable success but were often frustrated by the attitudes of most government delegations who clearly felt that it was their sand patch and resented the involvement of such other parties. Their concerns and frustrations are expressed in an alternative civil society declaration which was agreed and issued during the Summit (WSIS Civil Society Plenary 2003).

Reflecting the role of libraries and information services at the heart of the information society, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), strove to highlight the sector's concerns including freedom of access to information and the digital divide. IFLA sought to influence the outcomes of the Geneva phase. IFLA representatives communicated with cognate peak professional bodies such as the International Publishers' Association (IPA), participated in consultative meetings hosted by UNESCO, formed a delegation to the preparatory committee meetings for the Summit, and organised a pre-Summit conference. A number of documents were produced including a booklet of library success stories and formal submissions to the Summit (IFLA 2003).

These interventions, which began in 2002, demanded an intense period of focussed activity by IFLA staff, members of the Governing Board and other colleagues, notably the team of Swiss librarians and students in Geneva who represented IFLA, organised the Libraries@the Heart Pre-Summit Conference and supported delegates. Their work was crucial to the whole project. The campaign was exhausting and stretched our resources considerably. It demonstrated the need for IFLA to establish an effective advocacy capability while still drawing on the knowledge, persuasiveness and contacts of our members.

Also important was the strong support provided by a number of national delegations, especially the delegation from New Zealand, which articulated our concerns in preparatory meetings in which civil society representatives, including those from IFLA, were not permitted to speak. Those interventions from the floor of the meetings were echoed by initiatives taken by a number of national library associations within their own countries. For example, the participation of IFLA President Kay Raseroka in a meeting organised by the Danish Library Association and other Danish NGO's led to the inclusion of library views in the Danish government position which was presented at PrepCom3.

The Libraries@the Heart Pre-Summit Conference (IFLA 2003), which was held in the Hall of the General Assembly in the Palais des Nations in Geneva a month before the Summit, was crucial in providing an opportunity for librarians to come together in the Geneva home of the United Nations to highlight the centrality of library and information services to the information society and to meet with members of their governments' delegations to the PrepComs and the Summit. More than 70 countries were represented at the Conference and discussions continued in national capitals. Delegates called upon the nations of the world to:

Support and extend the existing global network of library and information services to make available and preserve knowledge and cultural heritage, to provide information access points and to develop the twenty-first century literacies which

are essential to the realisation of the information society. High quality library and information services provide access to the information required by the communities they serve: a modest investment in them would quickly return significant dividends.

This exhortation summarised the arguments tendered by IFLA and its members. We expressed a shared vision of an inclusive Information Society in which everyone can create, access, use and share information and knowledge and which is based on the fundamental right of human beings to both access and express information without restriction. We noted that libraries and information services provide access to information, ideas and works of imagination in any medium and regardless of frontiers; they serve as gateways to knowledge, thought and culture, offering essential support for independent decision-making, cultural development, research and lifelong learning by both individuals and groups; they assist people to develop lifelong literacy -the range of competencies necessary to engage fully with the Information Society; they contribute to the development and maintenance of intellectual freedom and help to safeguard democratic values and universal civil rights; and, consequently, they are committed to offering their clients access to relevant resources and services without restriction. We went on to assert that international understanding and dialogue is supported through access to information and knowledge from other nations and cultures. We added that IFLA and its members are committed to addressing the digital divide and the resulting information inequality. This might all seem obvious to those of us in the library and information game but many of the participants in the Summit processes were oblivious to it.

### **What IFLA achieved**

The important role of libraries, information services and archives in the Information Society is recognised in the Declaration and Action Plan of the World Summit. However, even more significant, is the recognition of many of the issues of concern to the library and information sector and our clients, the peoples of the world. They include:

- An inclusive vision of an Information Society in which everyone can create, access, use and share information and knowledge
- Freedom of access to information and freedom of expression
- Cultural and linguistic diversity
- Lifelong literacy
- Support for the disadvantaged and disabled
- Protection of the public domain and balance in intellectual property legislation
- Open access to knowledge, including scientific and technical knowledge
- Preservation of cultural heritage
- Standards to ensure interoperability
- Capacity building and enabling provisions
- Equitable access to the Internet and ICTs

Thanks to our interventions and those of others, not only are libraries and archives explicitly mentioned in the Declaration and Action Plan but the big issues of concern to us are identified as important and as areas in which results need to be achieved. This agenda consequently provides a foundation for action in the next phase, up to the November 2005 Summit meeting in Tunis.

## **What IFLA learned**

The advocacy campaign was exhausting and put all involved under pressure. It became clear that we needed to start preparing early, have key policy documents always at hand, have a strong and focussed delegation and have high level expertise in advocacy which can be dedicated to the project. Well prepared and consistent logistical support coupled with strong representation on the ground in key locations are essential, as the Swiss librarians and students provided for us in Geneva. Our experience also emphasised the need to work in partnership with other organisations with similar or related goals including, especially for IFLA, national library associations and major institutions, particularly national libraries. And we learned the need to develop relationships with sympathetic and influential governments. And finally it was clear that we had to do all this from the earliest possible date, if not sooner!

## **Robust geopolitical discourse**

These lessons might relate to any intervention at this level but there is another, more sobering, lesson from the Geneva phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. It is a lesson which is not surprising to any student of politics whether at the national level or in international relations. It is that governments and their representatives run multiple agendas and often sacrifice principle for pragmatism in order to achieve another goal.

There were three key issues which derailed the preparatory process and raised fears that the Summit meeting might have been cancelled. They were unqualified recognition of human rights, Internet governance and funding to ameliorate the digital divide. The depth of the division on those issues caused PrepCom3, held in September 2003, to break up in disarray. That PrepCom was intended to produce final versions of the Declaration of Principles and Plan of Action for endorsement by governments. After intensive lobbying, a PrepCom3A was held on the eve of the Summit (literally) to patch over the differences in order to prepare final documents which could be adopted at the Summit. The endeavours were successful but the failure of many heads of state or government to attend, especially those from the richer nations, signalled the lack of confidence in the Summit's resolutions or importance.

Several governments, including the Cuban, Chinese and Arab governments did not want the inclusion of unqualified support for human rights in the Summit's documents. They were particularly concerned that any reference to the Article 19 rights of freedom of expression or freedom of information should be qualified by a phrase such as 'subject to national law' or 'culturally appropriate'. Any such qualification would, of course, have nullified the acknowledgement of the universal right. Fortunately the acknowledgement of human rights was not qualified but recognition of governmental prerogatives was included elsewhere.

The second issue which split the negotiations was the question of Internet governance and the related question of control of the Internet. These issues brought together an alliance among which the United States of America, China and the Arab states were prominent. Internet governance is currently in the hands of ICANN, a not for profit company registered with the US Department of Commerce. It administers the Internet with a light hand and is minimally interventionist. Some governments of developing nations and some civil society organisations would like to change this arrangement to give those in the 'South' more

influence, perhaps by placing it under the control of the International Telecommunication Union or another UN agency. Other civil society organisations fear greater governmental influence or even control. The question of trying to resolve issues relating to international governance of the Internet was referred to the Secretary-General of the United Nations to set up a working group which should report by 2005. In other words, it was postponed as too difficult to resolve at the time which was probably sensible in the last minute context of the negotiations but raises concerns about the likelihood of retaining an open and benignly controlled Internet.

The third issue which provoked deep division was a proposal by the President of Senegal to establish a “Digital Solidarity Fund” which would help reduce the digital divide. This proposal was soundly condemned by the richer nations, led by the EU with Italy in the chair. They argued that there were many other international sources of funding that should be tried first and stated their absolute opposition to the creation of such a fund. Representatives from developing nations and many from civil society interpreted this position as an unwillingness to take urgent and decisive action to reduce inequality and it is difficult to see it in any other terms. IFLA is very conscious of the need to take urgent and decisive action to bridge the digital divide. Library and information specialists are in the frontline in trying to counter the growing information inequality which drives from the imbalance in ICTs and is multiplied by the problems of language, literacy and poverty. We see an urgent need for investment in infrastructure, technical support, initiatives to develop local content, and training and support for users, especially in developing countries. We argue that investment in the existing library and information network will provide a multiplier effect, hastening and maximising the return on investment.

If we are to build on our success in the Geneva phase, we need to take advantage of its outcomes to promote our concerns and solutions during the current phase which will culminate with a Summit meeting in Tunis in November 2005. An IFLA document, *Promoting the global information commons: A commentary on the library and information implications of the WSIS Declaration of Principles* (IFLA and Byrne 2004), relates the clauses in the WSIS Declaration to our concerns and to relevant IFLA programs. We need to identify concrete programs and results which show that libraries and information services know what to do to create an inclusive and just Information Society. The programs might not be enormous but they should return real results so that we can tell the international community what could be achieved with a little more assistance.

We are pursuing an advocacy campaign to try to get IFLA or library association representatives into the offices of every government which will be represented at the Summit in Tunis. Once inside the door, we try to deliver a succinct message: that the global library and information network is the key to achieving the vision of an Information Society. The message is supported by real examples and clear statements of local needs. IFLA supports this campaign by providing draft documents which can be adapted to local needs and by ensuring that our principles are easily available in major statements such as the *Glasgow Declaration* (IFLA 2002). This requires resources and working with partners.

### **Influence of libraries and information services**

These examples of a strategy to respond to the needs of Indigenous peoples in one country and IFLA’s participation in the World Summit on the Information Society illustrate how

libraries can respond to the needs of the world's peoples, including all who have suffered from the traumas of exile, in the broad sense I have used the term in this paper. By applying such strategies, libraries and other information organisations can play a part in 'bringing people home', in helping to create or recreate 'home' and identity, in assisting return. Through this we enable people to be themselves and thus promote democracy.

In fulfilling this responsibility, we need our global organisation, IFLA, to play its part by raising the issues in international contexts including the World Summit on the Information Society and within the deliberations of such organisations as the World Intellectual Property Organisation and World Trade Organisation. In those forums, IFLA goes beyond defending documentary heritage to promote the interests of the world's peoples, especially the 2.4 billion library users, who should be entitled to education, self advancement and cultural expression.

But, as the earlier discussion of the importance of leadership emphasises, we also need our associations and institutions to take up the important challenges in our field. At a personal level, this demands commitment, personal responsibility and contribution. We have to have a strong belief in the desirability and possibility of change and our capacity to effect it. As the experience of IFLA in taking up issues of freedom of access to information and freedom of expression has illustrated, we can make a difference (Byrne 2003) but only if we work at it.

Ours is not the '*j'accuse*' style of media journalism such as the franchised *60 Minutes*, ours is a responsibility for fairness, accuracy and balance. Nor are we social workers or psychologists. Our responsibilities are to collect, make accessible and preserve the records of humanity. It is our duty to help bring understanding, to promote tolerance and reconciliation and to help individuals and communities to come together. As librarians and information specialists, we can help develop understanding by providing the best possible access to information and ensuring that information will remain accessible into the future. By fulfilling that professional responsibility we will help all peoples to reclaim their cultural and other identities.

### **Biographical note**

Dr Alex Byrne is the President-elect 2003-2005 of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA - <http://www.ifla.org>), will be President 2005-2007 and chaired IFLA's Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression 1997-2003. He has led the development of a number of IFLA statements and declarations, including the *IFLA/FAIFE Internet Manifesto*, the *Glasgow Declaration on Libraries, Information Services and Intellectual Freedom* and, recently, the *IFLA Statement on Open Access to Scholarly Literature and Research Documentation* which was approved last December. Alex is the University Librarian and a Deputy Chair of the Academic Board at the University of Technology, Sydney. UTS Library is recognised to be one of the leaders in the development of digital libraries in Australia. The Library launched a digital press, UTSePress, in January this year. He can be contacted on Tel +61 2 9514 3332, Fax +61 2 9514 3331, [alex.byrne@uts.edu.au](mailto:alex.byrne@uts.edu.au).

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