Edgardo Civallero

Chronicles of a librarian in Galapagos and nearby

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A Medium's blog

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Text published in Medium (www.medium.com) in 2021

Libraries on the margins

I call them "libraries on the margins."

Margins are very interesting spaces. I was born and spent a good part of my life in them, so I know them first hand. They are those "roads to the side of the world" of which the old Argentinean rock song spoke: those that fall a little outside the radars of the hegemonic powers and of the dominant sectors, and from where counter-hegemonic proposals can be launched (although it is not always that simple). Or, at least, where one can move with a little independence and freedom. And, also, with a lot of instability.

But the latter is part of the game's rules. Traveling those paths implies accepting them and assuming all the (many) risks.

Moving and working on the margins gives us some room to flap our wings: there are fewer chains, fewer barriers, fewer fences... And it also gives room to fall precipitously, to get back up, and to learn from our falls (whenever that's possible at all). They allow us to embark on activities, projects and services that are both unusual and inspiring, and that probably would not be possible in other spaces, in other contexts. There, we can handle crazy, new and risky ideas, because, in general, there is nothing to lose: a lot has already been lost. Or everything.

Moving on the margins is tough. The lack of resources and opportunities is the daily bread in those marginal territories. Effort and sacrifice are non-stop. Perhaps that is why each victory seems multiplied by a thousand. Every defeat as well. Luckily, whatever the outcome, everything is shared. Because on the margins, the marginalized ones tend to have strong links between them. Community links. They know well that they have each other, and little else.

Libraries that operate on the margins are countless in Latin America. Those spaces have become (sometimes unwittingly or without realizing it, others fully aware of it) into havens that allow resistance, activism, struggle, solidarity, and even militancy: militancy for social and environmental justice, for equality, for inclusion, for memory, for one's own and others' rights...

And for freedom, for happiness, for tranquility and peace, for endless leisure...

And also, for the right to build all the castles in the air that we want, and for the right to dream that those castles can get real foundations. Although sometimes —most of them— those constructions fall apart between the hands that raised them. However, in a few occasions the objectives are reached and the militancy is successful. The important thing, though, is to keep trying, keep walking, keep joining forces and intentions, keep fighting.

Libraries on the margins are trenches and barricades. They are rebellious spaces. Their rebellion is the natural response to the enormous number of unfair situations that the

societies they serve (and themselves) must endure day after day, with no signs of a solution on the part of those powers and those hegemonic systems that care little for the general well-being.

The practices of those libraries are little known: they do not usually appear in LIS handbooks, or in major international conferences, or in specialized seminars. But those practices keep the library heart of an entire continent beating. They are innovative, creative, dreamy, poetic practices. Quixotic and utopian even, why not? They are experiences of commitment, of social and political action. They can be very planned or very improvised, and on very few occasions they are systematized. Sometimes they are angry bites that seek to defend themselves, to protect themselves, to show that there is no fear or hopelessness. Others, they are challenging hits against those who still believe and maintain that *it cannot be done*. And others, they are desperate yells, angry tantrums, and even uncontrolled crying. Because failure and despair are also part of the adventure.

Those libraries appear in the most unsuspected places, like flowers that make their way through concrete. Like marks of hope. And they present themselves as meeting places that have their doors always open, always attentive.

I call them "libraries on the margins." They call themselves popular, community, rural, school, indigenous, peasant libraries... I have spent a good part of my two decades as a librarian following their trail, or being part of them. Or part of their environments, which are my own.

Now, it is time to tell their stories, as I know them, as I remember them, as they are told to me, as I find them. So that other librarians know that they are not alone. So many librarians are encouraged to walk those trails that are drawn by hand outside the official maps.

Yes, it's time to tell their stories. Mainly, to honor the bravery, rebellion and commitment (and a certain scoundrel beauty, of course) of all those places —with and without walls— that have been fighting their fights for decades, and that inspire us (me and many others) to continue walking the walk on the social borders of the world.

Libraries. Places of knowledge?

One of the popular definitions of "library" is that it is "a place of knowledge." Some academic definitions are close, in one way or another, to this opinion, indicating that they are centers "of culture" or spaces "of knowledge."

I will hasten to point out that the one above is not one of my favorite statements about those corners that we have come to call "libraries." But, for the sake of argument, I will assume it as correct.

The statement leads me to wonder: a place of *what* knowledge?

In very general lines - and I recognize that generalizing is a mistake, but entering into particularities would extend this text to unsuspected limits -, libraries in Latin America have been and, on many occasions, continue to be considered as spaces of "high culture", of "authentic" knowledge - one of those places where "truth" and "purity" are treasured, serving as a reference and a beacon for what is real and what is not, what is true and what is not, what is correct and what is not, what is proven and what is not.

In many countries of our continent, the library was implanted as a "tool of civilization" to combat the so-called "barbarism" symbolized by the peasants, the "Indians", the "blacks", the poor, the workers… It was not just about an instrument of education: it was, also and above all, one for acculturation. Its function, back in the day (so distant,

so alien?), was to educate / civilize an uneducated populace who allegedly did not distinguish superstition or custom from "truth", who knew nothing about Art (with a capital letter), much less science or technology.

I'm talking about nineteenth-century policies that should be understood in their context. Unfortunately, many of those ideas survived, nested in some Latin American collective mentalities, and in many current public policies.

"The" knowledge continues to be the written, the official, the academic one… "The" literature continues to be the one published by the great editors, or the one worthy of prizes… "The" knowledge is what is transmitted in the official language (minority languages are curiosities included in the collections, in general, as an exoticism), "the" memories are those that do not contradict the hegemonic discourses too much, "the" materials are the usual ones (bound paper?), and "the" innovation, the most interesting and groundbreaking one, is usually the one that comes from the global North.

Orality is valid as long as it can be written. Customs, beliefs, habits and "Other's" knowledge are reflected in sympathetic storybooks with which a cosmetic statement is made that we live in a plural continent. The voices reflecting "otherness" - those produced at the bottom on the left, you know - appear in compilations wisely interpreted and translated by professionals who apparently know better than us what we should read. Pictorial supports and knowledge materials that are not books, photos, multimedia or similar standard elements are not welcome, and are even looked at with

suspicion. Because how a mural or a graffiti is meant to be a document!? A haircut, a facial painting or a basket, how could they be expressions of knowledge!?

Thus, a good part of the knowledge of our continent is left outside libraries, which continue to be a colonized and colonizing institution, which continues to give visibility and voice and space to the usual ones (while ignoring and making the rest invisible). Indigenous languages continue to appear just in children's stories and grammars, Afro-Latino memoirs appear only in academic research papers and doctoral theses, films and other audiovisual documents (a way of expressing memory and tradition by many communities) are elements that belong to a cinematheque (or they are considered "special" materials, following the very Eurocentric library model applied in Latin America), tridimensional artifacts that contain information - that is, documents - are things that a museum should deal with, oral tradition is something to be stored in an archive (if there are archives taking care of that), and so on.

What knowledge is managed by our libraries, then? What stories, what memories? What services can be provided with those materials, what spaces can be opened, what encounters can be fostered, what paths can be traveled from there?

And above all, *why*? Why that particular knowledge? Why do we continue to apply those structures, after more than three decades of decolonial discourse in Latin America, after Boaventura de Sousa's Epistemologies of the South and the works of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, among many others?

Places of knowledge? They may be. They should be. Of a plural knowledge, contained in a plethora of different materials, expressed in a lot of codes, with a thousand roots and a thousand origins, and a single goal: to open our eyes to new and enriched futures.

Libraries can be "places of knowledge", indeed. But I think they are not there. Not yet. At least they are not managing all the knowledge we produce and need.

Libraries of the future?

It is already common for me to find, in professional networks, photo selections of glittering buildings displaying a modernist architecture, labeled "the libraries of the future": multimillion-dollar investments in immense spaces, with dazzling aesthetics...

Are those the libraries of the future? Is that the future we want for our libraries?

In a world that has already exceeded a number of limits —including those of its finite resources—, where degrowth should be an obligation rather than an option, and where goods have increasingly high costs at all levels, we shouldn't keep thinking about pharaonic buildings. Have we ever wondered what is left out when huge budgets are invested in these monstrous works? What projects are abandoned, what salaries are not being paid? What consequences do they have?

In a world where access to information continues to represent a huge problem for many, where digital divides continue to exist despite the *wishful thinkers'* opinions —the Covid-19 put in front of our eyes a stark reality— and where public libraries receive less and less support or are just closed... do we really want investment to focus on those "palaces"?

Is that the model we support? The one we applaud? Is that what we decide to turn into a trending topic, what we make visible in our social media, what we celebrate in our professional papers, what we place as priority in our policies?

Have we ever wondered whom these libraries are for? (And I mean the *real* "for whom", not the manipulated political speeches saying that they are "for everyone" when we all know this to be false). Have we wondered "what for"? Are they tourist attractions, a praise to the hegemonic powers, pawns on a yet-to-be-known international knowledge scenario, parts of a national exaltation speech... or libraries?

By putting on the front page these "white elephants", these arrogant monuments to wastefulness, we downplay the hundreds and hundreds of small (and not so small) libraries that, one way or another, heroically resist all attacks, surviving despite everyone and despite everything. We make invisible those hundreds —or thousands— which are barely able to keep their doors open and which, in doing so, provide the basic foundations of literacy, reading and access to information throughout the world. Will those that are presented to us as the "libraries of the future" do that? Or will they just show off their magnificent walls to the herds of tourists who will visit them to take their selfies?

By clapping at these proposals, we are celebrating, approving and giving wings to a savage capitalism that does not really care about opening doors to knowledge, but about the artificial monumentality of "more is better" and the exhibitionism of resources and wealth (in an impoverishing world). We are blessing a technological model based on the

rapture of natural resources, on programmed obsolescence, and on the generation of tons of e-waste. We are accepting and normalizing a consumerism that should already be alien to us or, at least, suspicious.

We let ourselves to be carried away by that silly admiration for what is "great" and "luxurious", and we let ourselves to be infected by a longing for something that we will never have — because we cannot pay for it, or maintain it, and we probably don't even need it. And, in that journey, we damage our vision of the world and our scale of values, we neglect our own success —those tailor-made, socially responsible projects adapted to local needs and possibilities— and we set unrealistic goals and expectations, giving importance to what is superfluous and taking it away from the truly relevant, valuable and innovative things.

Libraries of the future? I hope they are not. I do expect a libraries' future to be more open, responsible, realistic, supportive and committed. And, above all, I expect libraries totally rooted in its territories and linked to the communities inhabiting them.

Writing from an angry place

Analía was a girl from the Qom people, an indigenous society in northeastern Argentina with whom I lived and worked for some years, back there, so long ago that I lost count.

Analía died of dehydration at the age of three, during one of the many cholera epidemics that struck her region, a place whose name I prefer not to remember.

I know this happened because she died in my arms.

This experience was one of the many scars that life took care of tattooing in my memory throughout the almost five decades that I have been walking. If I bring it up here, it is because a week after what happened, when passing by the public library closest to the place where Analía and her family lived, I came across a pile of pamphlets informing the population about how to treat symptoms of dehydration. It was all that girl would have needed to survive.

That's when I understood that phrase so repeated and until then so empty of real meaning for me: "information is power."

When I asked why those pamphlets were uselessly sitting on a shelf there instead of being in the Qom community to which Analía belonged, they answered me, haughtily,

that "why would they bother to go there to give them those pamphlets if those fucking Indians didn't even know how to read."

That was when I understood —without any halftones or restrictions— what is racism, classism, discrimination, oblivion, social exclusion, ignorance, and invisibility... Cruel words with dramatic consequences, so widespread in my country as in the rest of my continent and, as I later learned, the world.

And then I began to think about my profession and write about it from an angry place. That is, using anger, frustration, sadness, grief, and disappointment as my "engine".

I was then writing on a now abandoned blog, "Bitácora de un bibliotecario", and I did so with a vehemence, despair and indignation that never diminished: my experiences in the bosom of the reality that surrounded me did nothing but feed and increase those feelings. I consulted library handbooks, international guidelines, public policies, academic articles and institutional conferences on the world of libraries, and compared that with what I was experiencing in neighborhoods, villages, towns and communities of my land… and I discovered so many contradictions, so many voids, so much ignorance about "the others" and so much shamelessness, that my anger only increased. I felt helpless. I saw myself lacking the tools to give coherent answers to what was happening before my eyes. I felt like those texts were talking about things that were worth absolutely nothing. I felt surrounded by colleagues who lived in a bubble, because apparently, they did not see what I saw.

Then I began to glimpse hints of the social insensitivity and the disconnection with reality that certain disciplines suffer, and the "ivory tower" in which certain academic cohorts inhabit.

For a long time, I felt guilty: I was convinced that I was wrong, totally out of place, dominated by a childish tantrum, allowing myself to be hurt by unnecessary pain and stupid radicalism... I was trying to convince myself —because that's what I was told— that if I wanted to do something to change what filled me with frustration, I had to act based on reason, theoretical development, and good arguments, despite the fact that the driving force behind me was still anger and sadness. Yes, they still were. Because the episode that I have taken the enormous liberty of using as the opening of this text was only one of a long, very long list that never stopped scoring points. And I was still unarmed by a disheartening prospect.

Reality challenged me, and it did so by beating the keys of all my emotions. And I continued reacting and acting from that "angry place", from my many emotions. It was from there, precisely, that I decided to commit myself, assume responsibilities, become an activist, risk many things, explore roads on the margins, put myself on the frontline... I did it hand in hand with many other people equally driven by everything that they were provoked by the events that we had to live. I did it hand in hand with many librarians with more knowledge and experience than me, who did not need to construct theory or compile references to get started, to act, always from a grass-roots position, always from a critical standpoint. And always from their feelings.

Over the years I found that way of acting (from the feelings) again. In feminism. In the *sentipensamiento*. In many Latin American (and the rest of the global South) social movements. In radical empathy. In concepts such as emotional responsibility. I found male and female authors building theory, methods and new practices from their emotions: joy, hope, disappointment, sadness... I found them in libraries, archives, museums, schools. In sociology. In cultural studies.

Somewhat relieved, and with the calm that the years give, I understood that this is a component that we should not despise. The emotions that overwhelm us are a part of us that we have to include in our way of seeing the world, thinking about it, acting in it, influencing it, accepting it. Because we are not machines, nor inert pieces of flesh, nor neutral monsters, nor pure reason. Because putting our emotions aside is equivalent to giving up what pushes us, what inspires us, what motivates us, what keeps us awake, what makes us stand up.

Emotions are very powerful mechanisms for the production of ideas, the construction of proposals, the generation of knowledge and memories. And we have to add them to our professions, to our disciplines. They have to continue to be the driving force behind what we do: that energy that shakes some internal gears that, we know, nothing else can move.

If we intend to generate and sustain a library thought from the global South, one of the starting positions that we must explore when it comes to appropriating the reality that surrounds us is that of emotions, that of feelings. I believe that we must give ourselves

the opportunity, at least once, to think, reflect, debate and build from happiness, from misery, from disappointment, from frustration, from hope...

...and, why not, also from anger. That which, unfortunately, I still feel when I travel some of the many roads of my big homeland.

On true commitments and false rebellions

- I -

> The system empties our memory, or fills our memory with garbage, and thus teaches us to repeat history instead of doing it.
>
> Eduardo Galeano (Uruguayan writer). "Divorcios" ("Divorces"). In *El Libro de los Abrazos* ("The Book of Hugs"), 1989.

To sustain our current labor and professional practices, immersed in a reality marked by "crises" of different categories and a common origin, and to overcome the growing number of problems and inconveniences that such "crises" bring and which we inevitably have to face at different levels (as workers, as professionals, as citizens, as members of a community, as providers of a service), we librarians need a set of ideas, a theoretical framework, a number of structures, methods and, ultimately, responses that Library & Information Sciences (LIS) —as an academic discipline— and LIS schools —as official transmitters and reproducers of that discipline— rarely provide.

The reason? Within the profession's academic and official structures, such elements are not abundant: theoretical / practical development and policies advance slowly and, generally, in directions that are not always close to what is urgent or what is truly important. Librarians may be able to count on an extensive bibliography, a battery of

regulatory guidelines and well-meaning statements, complex computer and digital tools, (inter)national conferences and committees in which fashionable mantras are tirelessly repeated, huge amounts of words written in all languages and, above all, neutrality and novelty / innovation as our "flags". But, nevertheless, we continue to face many of the daily difficulties and practically all the theoretical, ethical and ideological problems that already plagued us ten, thirty or fifty years ago. And, to a large extent, we continue to despair in front of them, orphans of solutions, and still depending on what our own individual ingenuity and our collective common sense and solidarity may offer us.

Such a panorama leads us to suspect that many of the things that are shown to us as "achievements", "advances" or "tools" available to the entire professional community seem to be somewhat hollow and serve rather for little. The suspicion that we are nothing more than giants with clay feet is accentuated when librarians (especially those working "in the trench": popular, public, municipal, school, rural...) attend conferences or classes, read articles or textbooks, or participate in LIS seminars or workshops hoping to get at least a handful of basic ideas (real, recognizable, intelligible, and applicable) that will help us overcome the pitfalls we struggle with on a daily basis — and we end up exiting those events or putting the texts aside as empty as we got to them, perhaps a little confused, frustrated and / or angry, sometimes feeling that we know a lot more about reality than the experts and gurus on duty, and wondering if the loss of time was worth the effort (or why did we lose it in the first place).

In its developments, studies and research, librarianship (the "science that studies libraries in all their aspects") seems to have settled for a somehow generic or superficial

"what is a library" and, above all, in a "how to manage it" totally adapted to the current commercialist / consumerist hegemonic socio-economic model (which, in practice, usually turns the latter question into a "how to exploit a library and extract from it the greatest possible amount of direct and indirect benefits").

Issues such as "why and what for does a library exist" or "what is the meaning and what are the limits of our work" have not been covered in all their depth and breadth, going beyond the obvious answers. Nor do they usually address issues such as "how to manage the library... when we don't have all the resources that, ideally, we should have (which is almost always the case)" or "how to interact with a community of users full of problems... and not wash our hands and avoid responsibilities and commitments in the attempt". In fact, the initial question, "what is a library", has yet to be addressed from a critical and social perspective.

Perhaps because they do not like to get into quagmire or in fields that they will surely find full of thorns, LIS have chosen to follow other paths (currently, a career forward prioritizing the technological aspects of the discipline) and have left the answer to such issues —which it has tried to minimize and ignore by all means at its disposal— in the hands of the few who wish to deal with them. This role has generally been assumed by certain LIS currents of thought and action (encompassed under the label of "critical," "social" or "progressive" librarianship) that purists do not even deign to consider as "librarianship" but rather as a diffuse, heterogeneous and somewhat picturesque mixture of theories, methods, commitments and positions "external" to the discipline. A mixture that tends to provoke suspicion (or rejection) due to its high political,

philosophical and social contents, and due to its way of critically analyzing reality, committing to it and trying to act accordingly.

- II -

> Unlike his colleagues in other fields of social activity, the librarian is strangely disinterested in the theoretical aspects of his profession. ... Apparently, the librarian is left alone in the simplicity of his pragmatism.
> Lee Pierce Butler. In *An Introduction to Library Science*, 1933.

It is undeniable that librarians continually use the tools and processes designed by Library & information Sciences (LIS) and transmitted through the curricula of LIS schools (although most libraries throughout the world work without many of them and yet, they continue to function and fulfill their mission and objectives — sometimes even more committed to their reality than the others).

Equally undeniable is the fact that, just as we use these tools and processes, we need a series of elements (both theoretical and empirical) that act as a secure basis for our work: methods, concepts, values, reflections and reasoning that serve as a compass to position ourselves in our local and global personal, labor, social and political context, and as a point of reference to advance at all times but, above all, in uncertain times. However, such items are not always easily found. To expose it graphically, the current

library practice would resemble a building endowed with the most complex advances, but built with a weak foundation; the first gale or the slightest earthquake will turn this magnificent structure into something unusable or, at least, into something severely damaged, which will not be able to fulfill its functions as intended.

Curiously, LIS do not usually (pre)occupy themselves too much about / in the design and elaboration of those foundations that have been included in the reflections and proposals of those LIS "alternative" currents of thought an action (labelled "critical" or "social" librarianship) that are so little considered.

How many times, in LIS schools, professors talk about how to react to an unemployed person who goes to the library to find solutions? Or to one who is about to lose her house because the bank plans to evict her? Or to one that is forced to browse the garbage containers if he wants to eat? How many times professors explain what to do in the face of an empty shelf of books, exhausted budgets, or a decreasing demand for reading? Or in the face of a falling roof, a computer network that does not work, or a warehouse of books soaked or eaten by insects — problems which no one with power seems to be willing to solve? Do we know how to lead a team of workers with no idea of what a library is? Have we ever been told how to proceed if the government censors us, if the authority puts pressure on us or someone puts our civil rights or those of our users at risk? Do professors mention how to involve the community in library activities and services (and no, I'm not talking about "libraries 2.0")? Have we ever been informed that being a librarian is almost never an idyllic "being among books", but that there is much more, and that it can be quite hard and involve a lot of effort and personal

sacrifice? Have we ever discussed how to handle such hardness? Do we pronounce words like "commitment", "solidarity" or "responsibility"? Actually... without going to questions so... "extreme": Do we know how to build a library out of nothing? How to design services from scratch taking into account the needs of the community? Do we know how to detect those needs? Would we be able to provide a good service with the internet or electricity service cut off due to non-payment, or with broken computers?

These situations are some —just some— of those that make up the daily reality of tens of thousands of librarians around the world. And although magazines, blogs and professional conferences sell them to us as "rarities" or "limits that are rarely reached", they are not: they are more common than they seem. If we refer to percentages, they would be the majority, the norm. It is enough to travel a continent —let's say South America— to find library users displaced by armed conflicts, hit by hunger or epidemics, terrified by expectations for the future that plunge them to the bottom of a hole with no exit stairs. Or libraries falling apart, or stretching the last coins of their budget, or progressively running out of staff and books... Or librarians as desperate as their visitors, because in addition to being professionals with a responsibility, they are workers about to lose their jobs, citizens with diminished rights and restricted freedoms, parents with children who are not educated and grandparents who are not cared for, and, ultimately, human beings affected by the same problems that hit the rest of their community.

Placed at such crossroads, many librarians look desperately back at their recent or past years of education or training (if they have any, which is not always and should not be the case), and rewind everything they have learned, searching unsuccessfully for some

tip that allows them to get out of the hole. Or they review texts and books on the art and science of managing a library. But, among so many guidelines and regulations, techniques and stories, they don't always find references to help them deal with the situations they face. They don't usually find even one burning nail to hold onto.

So, they have no choice but to build their own solutions. To their own measure. At their own pace. Improvising, if necessary. Or looking for inspiration in the experiences of their neighbors.

Today (although we could go back several decades) the vast majority of librarians are forced to invent our day-to-day work and professional practice; to re-invent it if necessary, and to re-re-invent it, if we are forced to. Some of us are more imaginative, others are not so much. But we do the best we can, because we don't have another choice. Because we cannot afford to be neutral or indifferent, or to stay on the sidelines, or to sit back and wait for a miracle, or to trust that some Ministry or the librarian guru on duty will come to save us. Because the world does not stop to wait for us, and crises do not forgive us, neither our libraries, nor our users. And because we were not educated or trained to do it in a different way.

- III –

Time taught me that over the years
one learns less than one ignores (...)

Time taught me to distrust
of what time itself has taught me.
That's why sometimes I hope
that Time could be wrong.

Tabaré Cardozo. "What time taught me."

Time has shown me that, despite everything and everyone, headwinds and sticks in the wheel, librarians and their libraries often come through the many difficult and conflictive situations they face. Sometimes with more than original solutions; others, not so much. And, in general, with a lot of sacrifice and effort.

I have seen libraries turn into dining rooms and cultural centers, and others publish their own homemade books, made with recycled cardboard. I have seen them organize raffles to raise funds, or rely on local artists for concerts, exhibitions or auctions for the same purpose. I have seen them join community and citizen associations to enrich their activities and be more useful to their people, and involve their patrons (not "clients") in the reconstruction of a wall or in the painting of a ceiling. I have seen them come out to stand up for their community in very serious conflicts, and serve as a shelter in difficult times. I have seen them rise like beacons, and plunge into the trenches of citizen resistance.

None of this is written in academic manuals, none of it is in action guidelines and international recommendations. That has not been something to talk about, that has

not been something to worry about, because, apparently, it has not been libraries' business (that probably has something to do with the so-called "neutrality", or with that "ivory tower" so often mentioned and so rarely challenged). Or because it is said that such situations are rarely reached.

Until they are.

I have seen libraries that did not resign themselves to die and became a backpack that traveled from door to door or from school to school, on the shoulders of a librarian without a place of her own (and without a salary). I have seen a thousand and one ways to overcome crises, to face issues and challenges, to stand up to them and, in many cases, to turn them around and come out stronger. I've seen it in small libraries. And in very large ones. Because size, big names, and major sponsoring institutions save no one from the downfall. They may just delay it.

The curious thing is that today's librarians have not invented anything new. All we have to do is sit down and talk with an elderly colleague to hear all kinds of survival stories: for example, anecdotes of handwritten catalog cards on cardboard cut out of shoe boxes and books repaired with flour and water paste to survive one more read... They, in turn, had already heard similar stories from their predecessors (and learned their lessons). All these experiences show us that, for decades, there has been a huge gap between daily librarianship and the one taught by professors, articles, conferences and books. Academic, technical and administrative librarianship provides us with some tools (valid and valuable, of course); the rest, which is usually the most necessary, we have to learn

it at our own risk. Or invent it, if it doesn't already exist. Or receive it from others who have already created and tested it, through "informal" channels.

At this point, the big question arises: if librarianship and other disciplines related to knowledge and heritage teach us little about the daily practice of a librarian, because we are the ones who "walk the walk", the ones who share ideas and experiences, and the ones developing new possibilities... what are they for?

Wouldn't it be time to start to change them, to deconstruct and rebuild them or, at least, to seriously debate them, to enrich them, to twist their course towards different horizons? Wouldn't it be time to put certain positions and statements in check, to challenge current definitions, to build theory and methods from our own perspectives and experiences, to turn our learning (successes and defeats alike) into more-or-less solid and coherent structures — structures that allow future generations not to find themselves so orphan of categories and ideas when they are at the forefront of any knowledge and memory management institution?

As much common sense as such questions seem to harbor, I doubt that they will receive any kind of answer in the near future. I detect an inveterate rigidity in the current schemes of our disciplines, protected by certain specialized academicism, by certain statuses that do not resign themselves to giving up their place... And, why not say it, by certain ideological tendencies that prefer to persist and take refuge in a handful of stagnant statements instead to open themselves to what is happening around them:

events that speak loudly of the need for change, of the urgency to rethink what we do and, above all, of how, why and what for we do it.

Despite such a notorious lack of flexibility in our small, great professional and academic universe, I know that there are currents of thought and action that have been set in motion. Many times, they do it in what I call "the margins": that wonderful and inspiring network of roads "on the side of the world" where it is allowed to experiment, fall and get back up a thousand times, and create new perspectives (or retake the old ones with another look, innovating). I firmly believe that, in this context, it would not hurt to record, organize, make visible and disseminate our experiences. Because, after all, that is the information we need the most: the one that is most difficult for us to learn and the one that is least accessible.

We need to know, then, that beyond the next manifesto, the next roundtable, the future "recommendations for..." or the top-ten digital tools for the next month, we have a lot to do. To learn more than we ignore.

And, as the old Argentinean song said, so as not to give time the opportunity to pass in vain.

- IV -

> People's struggles against exclusion will continue — with or without public library services. Official public libraries can fulfill a new role as information providers to people's forces in their search for inclusion, provided there is a conscious decision on the part of information workers and decision-makers in local and central governments to support people's liberation struggles. A cultural revolution is needed for this to happen. How to become involved on the side of the people's struggle is the real challenge to information workers and local and central governments throughout the world.
>
> Shiraz Durrani. Returning a stare: People's struggles for political and social inclusion. In *Progressive Librarian*, 2000.

My commitment is with a librarianship that offers comprehensive and humanistic training, teaching to think critically and independently (something essential, since librarians will be evaluators of information sources for third parties, and information is one of the elements that supports the most biases), and that it is not oriented to a market, a particular technology, the capitalist / neoliberal model, or an outsourced activity (although it recognizes all of them and, as far as necessary, takes them into account). A training - whatever its level - that is based on content with solid foundations,

and not on empty texts, on elitist fashions, on useless technologies, on old tales and siren songs…

It is with a librarianship that offers a cohesive organization. A defender of the rights - and a vigilant of the duties - of all its professionals, without any distinction. A librarianship that enforces librarians' capacities and that provides continuous opportunities to expand the comprehensive training mentioned above (and not only the technical or administrative training necessary to obtain a specific job).

It is with a librarianship that recognizes that the objective of the library's internal work (design, structuring, organization, and dissemination of documents) is to respond to the needs of an external user; that the techniques, therefore, are a means, not an end in themselves, and that concentrating on them without taking into account the final function that they will fulfill or to whom they are directed is a self-indulgent mistake - one unfortunately encouraged by many modern gurus belonging to certain "elites" with vested interests (or a massive ignorance that is meant to be covered by their expertise on these techniques), which often force users to swallow the latest fashion (whatever it may be) for the mere fact that it is precisely the latest fashion, thus feeding an absolutely hollow and unbalanced system.

It is with a librarianship that does not feed that sick system. One that ignores those elites (concerned about their own interests) or those gurus (concerned about their own egos, their own followers, and their own academic careers), but rather deal with analyzing

library needs and looking for realistic solutions to problems and useful, sustainable and long-term projects.

It is with a librarianship that takes care of knowing well those to whom library services are aimed at. That "outside world", those communities, are vast, complex and full of facets and edges. A good diagnosis (and, from there, the success of missions, functions, goals, activities, and services) will depend on good knowledge about patrons and their lives. A magnificent, brand-new library that fails to connect with its community is a magnificent dead library. In this sense, it should be noted that statistics are neither the community nor its problems: they are a very schematic representation (and, depending on who made them and how they were made, highly skewed) of reality. They can guide us in a preliminary stage, but they are not and cannot substitute for reality. Reality has to be learned - little by little, step by step - from within, by experiencing it, and not from minimal data that supposedly summarizes it.

It is with a librarianship that, in order to get to know the community it serves and its many realities, establishes strong links with it and asks it to tell its story and to name its needs and problems. There is no better source for analysis than a story told in the first person by the community itself, or information gathered first hand. The creation and design of library services must be based precisely on those stories and that information, those characteristics and those needs; not those that are imposed by the authorities, elites, gurus and / or fashions. It is necessary to understand that many declarations, guidelines, policies, and handbooks that today direct and mark the design of library services have been written by people totally disconnected from reality and, at times,

without any real experience in the topics they are writing about (the reasons these people join committees, roundtables, and working groups would be hard to describe in simple words). If policies laugh at common sense, they don't deserve respect; if they coincide with the common sense of any librarian, they are not necessary (a "policy" is not required to "make official" what general common-sense dictates); it is useful only when it brings something new to the table.

It is with a librarianship that, when building and developing services and activities, does it with common sense, realism, and practicality, and from an active position committed to the local, regional, national and global reality, at a cultural, educational, social, environmental, economic and political level.

The commitment, then, is with this way of doing library science.

There are others.

But since libraries are the repository of the actions, memories, and knowledge of all previous generations, and since they have the power to change things or, at least, to support processes aiming for the better, I commit myself to a form of librarianship committed to that vision. A vision of positive change.

The road is proposed. Now, it's time to walk it.

The traces of memory

Memory has its own rules of operation. It is clearer the closer it is in time. Going backwards it becomes blurred, hazy, even perplexing. But, in spite of that confusion, it still stands there, rooted in a place. In a moment. In some people.

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—This ceremonial staff from the Embera people, in Colombia, could be classified as belonging to the Songo people, in Africa. This Noanama staff could be classified as Ovimbundo. And this Kuna staff could be classified as Congo.

October, 2001. On the screen, a set of slides presenting cultural artifacts from the Colombian Pacific area: ritual staffs or canes adorned with two human figures displayed in profile, back against back, closely resembling staffs from the other side of the Atlantic, in Africa. On the stage, the anthropologist Maria do Rosario Martinez, curator of the Museum of Anthropology of the University of Coimbra, in Portugal, pointing out the similarities between the art of the indigenous peoples of the western coast of Colombia and those of the equatorial zone of the African continent, the obvious "African traces", and the potential connections and influences between both human groups, already suggested in 1935 by the Swedish Henry Wassen.

And before her, an audience in absolute amazement. And wondering who the hell that Wassen guy was.

***

Further back in memory...

That tall, blond man wearing those forever-dirty glasses had been prying around the area for a long time. He said that his name was Enrique, Enrique Guasén, and that he had been born in a place called Gotemburgo. Nobody knew where that was, although by the faded color of his skin, his eyes and his hair, surely far away, and far north, in those lands where the sun barely peeked out from behind the clouds.

These are the first years of the recently inaugurated fourth decade of the 20th century. In the Wounaan villages of the upper Docordó River —a tributary of the San Juan, south of the Chocó Intendency, in the Colombian Pacific region—, under the conical roofs of the *dichardi* huts, women weaving *guérregue* palm leaves sarcastically comment on the comings and goings of that stranger. They say that he has spent long hours talking with the *jaibaná*, the shamans of the territory, asking them, insisting and begging them to show him their ceremonial staffs, those that in the Wounmeu language are called *chi k'arapan*. They do not understand what interest a guy from the other side of the world may have in such artifacts, which, on the other hand, are sacred, and should not be touched except by the *jaibaná* themselves. Much less do they understand why he spends so much time looking at the anthropomorphic figures that adorn those staffs,

and muttering to himself in a language that nobody understands, and scribbling in that little notebook that he carries on him everywhere.

Although, all things considered... who would be able to decipher what goes through the heads of those crazy white men?

***

Even further back in memory.

The nineteenth century is ending, although in the Wounaan —or Noanamá— villages such time-measuring schemes were always irrelevant.

The *jaibaná* interprets the Song of the Night. In the middle of the room that occupies most of the *dichardi* or communal house, surrounded by ornaments made of *iraca* palm, garlands of lianas and bouquets of flowers, the altar is placed. The *jaibaná* designed it after dreaming it, in full detail, several times the previous nights. The old shaman wears a *cháquiras* necklace, a crown of colorful fibers and feathers, and his usual rumpled clothes. He sings, he sings in his language, *a-a-a-a-añ*, calling the *jai*, the ancient spirits... Their help is needed to heal that boy lying on the ground, who has been suffering from high fever and bloody vomits for several days.

He holds his sacred staff in his hand. He moves it to the rhythm of the song. Sometimes horizontally, side to side. Others vertically, gently, pretending to be floating. And others, he makes it vibrate rapidly, in the midst of a shudder.

The *jaibaná* of other areas use a *biao* leaf. But this one, and his neighbors, use a staff. A carved staff, with two human figures displayed in profile, back against back. Few remember where this tradition of carving the staffs came from.

Not even that old man, who continues to sing rhythmically.

A-a-a-a-a-añ...

***

Iscuandé. Or La Paz del Espíritu Santo del Río Iscuandé, in the province of Santa Bárbara, south of the Government of Popayán. It is the year of our Lord of 1749. Much further back in memory.

That territory is all jungle, pure greenery. One can only advance through it in boats, and very slowly. Moving through the waters of the Iscuandé River, it takes at least three days to get from La Paz to the squalid village of San José. Despite being very hard, the journey is necessary: upstream there is good gold mining. All the more reason to make the devilish journey upstream, despite the mosquitoes, the humidity, the suffocating heat

and the risk of the thousand diseases that lurk like invisible shadows at every turn of the river.

The barges and canoes, pushed by the rods of the *bogas*, carry black slaves brought from Cartagena to move the trays and wash the sand in the mines. The Indians *encomendados* in that area, those Embera from the Siapidara tribe that are simply called "chocóes", are few. They are also weak — they are not suitable for mining work. Many, in fact, have escaped from the hands of the few white men and creoles settled in the region, and have gone up the mountain, to hide at the headwaters of the rivers, in the cloud forests. To further complicate the scenario, the Hispanic Crown has placed many restrictions on their use as cheap labor force, not to say "slaves."

So, the African slaves arriving from the northern harbors —or, sometimes, from Santa María del Puerto de las Barbacoas itself— were more than necessary.

And they were many: a third of the local population. A good part of them were "bozales", that is, born in Africa. Ewe, Akan, Mande, Gur or Kru men for whom 300 silver pesos were paid in that lost corner of New Granada's Pacific coast. The rest were Creoles, black people born in Cartagena, already in slavery, children of "congas" and "angolas" slaves.

Nobody cares about the few "chocóes" *encomendados* anymore. Not the government, not the friars and priests, not even the inquisitors. No one. They work on the few farms and *haciendas* surviving in the region, but nobody doubts that they will flee as soon as

they can. And truth be told, no one will bother looking for them, as long as the African traffic continues to flow as it does.

It is those Indians —actually, the Indian women— who are in charge of bringing some food to the black slaves who spend their days and their lives in the gold pits.

It is those enslaved men, those with a strange culture, unknown beliefs and "stuck" speech, who, to the scandal of their masters or not, were "daming" with those women who have the color and the smell of the land in which they were born.

It is those couples who, as soon as they see an opportunity, escape into the mountains.

And it is those men, strong and dark as a moonless night, who tell their inherited traditions. Their dances, their songs, their stories, their riddles, their old words, their medicines, their healing rituals...

...their carved staffs...

Nobody would notice this transmission of knowledge from Africa to America. Because, unlike what happened with those black devils, full of tricks and worshipers of who knows what idols and what magic and what *orichás* and what *changóes*, the inquisitors did not persecute the "chocóes". Nobody cared about them.

***

A huge leap back in memory. 1650, maybe?

In the open field between the slave huts, in a farm near the very colonial and very gallant Cartagena de Indias —or is it Santa Cruz de Mompox? —, a song resonates, full of flavors and memories of ancestors and old roots. The words that arrived from the other side of the ocean are sang in a funeral ceremony called *lumbalú*, a word that once meant "melancholy."

And "memory."

And "remembrance."

For nine days and nine nights, they honor the soul of the deceased — who returns twice a day to his house and is received with those chants...

Eee Kalunga lunga ma quisé
Gombe manciale
Yansú me la cóo

The words mix Bantu languages from the heart of Africa with that Castilian half-learned by force in the New World... They recall *Kalunga*, the Supreme Being, also called *Nsambi* by some.

Kalunga lunga manquisé

Elée eló negro congo
Elée negro congo, chimbumbe

There, there are the sounds, there are the words, there are the memories...

And there are the fetishes brought from Congo and Angola. Those pieces of wood carved with silhouettes of people back against back. Those that are also used in hidden ceremonies, in secret cures, in forbidden rituals...

***

Further back still, deeper into the fog of time and of almost lost memories...

Late 16th century, probably. The huge galleon is dozing in the middle of a storm — one that has found and hit it in the middle of the Atlantic and that has been bucking it between huge waves for the last two days. The sailors, a heterogeneous mixture of Portuguese, Spanish and Moors, fill the air with their most nasty curses, and hardly care about the cargo that cram their holds: 400 *piezas de Indias* shipped in Luanda three weeks ago, and of which they had already had to throw thirty overboard.

Below, the prisoners are all naked, chained six by six by rings around their necks, and two by two by their feet. They can hardly move: the space for each *fardo prieto* is equivalent to that of a corpse in a coffin. They are sick of all imaginable diseases, dirty to the point of nausea, and not a few go mad.

In that pestilential darkness, a man from the Bakongo people —which the Portuguese call "congo", without major distinctions of language or origin— is muttering something incomprehensible.

And his fingers are tracing a figure in the wood tanned with vomit, excrement and urine on which he leans, lives, sleeps and raves. He traces a figure with two opposite faces.

"*Nkhi kavvaangaangá?*" "What is he doing?" asks his chain neighbor in Kikongo to the next in line, while, in the uncertain gloom, he watches those feverish fingers tracing the strange figure over, and over, and over again. The other shrugs.

"*Kizeeyeko kana*", he mutters. "I do not know".

Memories can be elusive, sometimes.

***

Back, way back in time.

An effigy of an all-powerful being, one who rules the lives of the community. *Kalunga*? It displays two anthropomorphic profiles joined from behind, back against back, with a hole in the skull to pour healing potions into it.

The village priest has it. Hidden, for it is sacred: it can disturb prosperity or attract well-being. It is a *nkisi*, one of those vessels that can hold the art and power of healing. There, the spirits of the ancestors are incarnated — as intermediaries between the Creator and human beings.

Shouts, and races, and arquebus shots sound far away. It's probably another attack from the damn slavers...

***

Memory has its own rules of operation. It is clearer the closer it is, and it becomes confusing when it goes back. But, despite everything, it is still there. Well rooted.

And it always, always leaves traces.

***

Note

To write this text, I got inspiration in the article *Un rastro del África central en el Pacífico colombiano: tallas sagradas entre los indígenas Chocó y su legado africano (Congo y Angola)*, by Martha L. Machado Caicedo, included in *Afro-reparaciones: memorias de la esclavitud y justicia reparativa para negros, afrocolombianos y raizales* (Bogotá: UNC, CES, 2007). Additionally, I used, among many other sources, *Vocabulario ilustrado*

wounmeu-español-epena pedee by Binder, Harms & Ismare (Bogotá: ILV, 1995); the book *El Canto del Jai* by Vasco Uribe (*Maguaré*, 2, 1983), and the homonimous documentary film by Gabriel Vieira; the article *Dialectología, historia social y sociología lingüística en Iscuandé (departamento de Nariño, Colombia)* by Germán de Granda (*Thesaurus: Boletín del Instituto Caro y Cuervo*, 28 (3), 1973); the article *Significado del lumbalú, ritual funerario del Palenque de San Basilio*, by Aquiles Escalante (*Huellas: Revista de la Universidad del Norte*, 26, 1989); the course of Kikongo language *Maloongi makikoongo* by H. Carter and J. Makoondekwa (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1987); the article *El comercio y mercado de negros esclavos en Cartagena de Indias (1533-1850)*, by Ildefonso Gutiérrez Azopardo (*Quinto Centenario*, 12, 1987); and other minor sources, which helped me define specific details.

Picture: African American smiling girl floating in the water. Gabriel Bucataru.

A library where many libraries fit

Libraries under decolonization. Looking for a library model from Abya Yala

Impositions

Originally, the contemporary library is a foreign structure, external to Abya Yala (Latin America) and its traditional cultures. As much as the "book" format or the "writing" system can be, to some extent.

It goes without saying that we are in a historical moment in which that institution, that format —and so many others— and that system have been assimilated by a good part of Latin American societies. However, something is not completely "closed" in such assimilation: there are gaps, empty spaces, absences...

In a way, Latin American societies have adapted (or have been forced to adapt) to the library, its structures, its collections and its services. However, the library has not always done the same. Quite the contrary: in not a few cases it has behaved like a transplant that has not fully adjusted to the reality of the land it occupies or its users, their characteristics and their needs. Perhaps because such a thing was never thought to be necessary: after all, the library is a kind of "high culture tool". One that does not need to adapt to anything or anyone. One that has been and continues to be used to "educate" certain populations.

But also to acculturate them, to "civilize" them: a little addressed chapter of the even less widespread oppressed and oppressive history of the library — parallel to that of other institutions, like the school.

Far from accommodating and adjusting to the universe in which it is situated, the library has tended to implant and implement —or directly impose— a model that has given a strong preponderance to certain knowledge, forms, formats, responses, ideas, beliefs, powers, languages, policies, images, epistemes, methodologies, uses of knowledge and legislation.

And in doing so, it has left out many others.

Manipulation and voids

Although libraries play a role of undeniable relevance, sometimes even functioning as authentic trenches for resistance, activism and socio-cultural militancy in Latin America, they also make countless mistakes, include in their structures a significant number of fallacies and contradictions, and suffer from many shortcomings. Whether they are aware of that fact or not, libraries exclude, omit, silence, ignore and / or discriminate certain realities, discourses, identities and stories on a daily basis.

Traditionally, libraries have based their work on a model that favored the victors, the dominant narratives, the "stronger" gender / sex, and the upper class. In many cases,

they continue to do so. Additionally, the modern librarian paradigm is based, by default, on written documents – writing being a system that, in turn, has historically favored certain groups: those who have literary skills and use official languages.

Both writing and the more "traditional / standard" library model discriminate knowledges / epistemes: some of them, for different reasons and criteria, deserve to be preserved, while the rest are potentially disposable. In this way, a hegemonic voice and vision is perpetuated (male, white, rich, "cultured", written in official / dominant languages) and stratification within the production of knowledge is reinforced (academic or "famous / recognized" authors above all the rest).

In this way, libraries support a system of legitimation of "correct" knowledge and of exclusion, denial, silencing or invisibility of "other" knowledges.

Colonizations

In Latin America, we may speak of colonized and, at the same time, colonizing libraries.

Because they are rarely aware of either of the two processes –being occupied and colonized spaces, and acting as the executing arms of this colonization process within its community–, libraries urgently need a radical paradigm shift: a deep revision of their structures and a rudder stroke that urgently changes their course. Their objectives, missions, and visions may not be changed, but the categories on which they are based

should be reviewed: most of them are biased, limited, manipulated… For example, libraries usually respond to the requirements of "patrons" who are defined according to well-determined conveniences - such "patrons" are ideal, average citizens who fit into a certain number of stereotypes or fallacious statistics.

A part of the Latin American librarian collective is capable of detecting, in current libraries, a remarkable lack of response, on their part, to many local situations, needs, and problems. And, in general terms, they can identify the absence of a basic and intimate link with cultures and regional identities.

There are an enormous amount of Latin American knowledge, discourses, and identities that are not represented in the continent's libraries - elements that make Latin America what it is, and nothing else. There are needs yet to be answered. Taking into account those gaps that libraries and LIS maintain and sustain in Latin America, it is necessary to think about libraries from a different angle. From on free of colonization.

Paraphrasing the famous Zapatista sentence, it is necessary to create "a library where many libraries can fit".

Libraries from Abya Yala

There is an urgent need to create a library proposal that takes Abya Yala as a reference. Abya Yala understood as a space —Latin America— occupied by everyone and in which

we all fit, with all our stories and ideas, past and present. Abya Yala, hence, as a container of all our words and experiences, of all our paths. Of the written and the spoken stories. Of all our levels of reality and thought.

This idea of "containing all the identity and cultural aspects of the continent" should become the basis of a Latin American library model, especially for public, popular, school, rural, and community libraries.

In all cultures on the planet, the "houses of knowledge" tend to be selective by nature. Tradition —both oral and written— uses a decantation process that rescues from oblivion only a handful of voices, authorized by the group itself for some reason or by following some criteria (status, power, truth, solidity over time, utility). Libraries have been, in some way, the "houses of knowledge" of certain social sectors throughout history, even in Latin America. Nowadays, societies are plural: more or less heterogeneous mixtures of many groups and sectors. And they need "houses of knowledge" that represent all realities equally, and that accommodate all voices (of all times, from all corners) and all criteria.

A library from the South, from Abya Yala, should ask who its users are and why those users would want a library. What would they want it for, what needs would they want the library to respond to? And it should respond to those needs while respecting the characteristics and capabilities of those users in a sustainable way. In most cases, this would imply the abandonment of certain clearly Eurocentric structures and their adaptation and / or replacement by others that are more "friendly" from a local and

regional cultural perspective. Features such as orality and other information transmission systems, or native classifications and categories of knowledge, or the sense of community and network, need to be urgently and consciously included within Latin American library planning.

The steps to follow to achieve this goal are complex, as is any action that proposes a paradigm shift (no matter how slow and progressive it may be). Whatever we do, we need to set standards and come up with compelling reasons.

For starters, it is necessary to evaluate / identify / find which are the "gaps" and why they are there. Although we feel absences (of answers, of materials, of voices, of forms) and shortcomings, it is necessary to clearly identify them. To name them.

In addition to those we "feel", it is necessary to find all the others, all the rest. To do this, it would be necessary to establish criteria to analyze what libraries do not do, or where they fail.

And, from that point on, it is necessary to establish a series of actions to counteract all that. It will take a lot of time and a lot of dialogue. And many decisions, to be made critically and thoughtfully. And all that must be done as soon as possible. So that others do not give us the things already decided, without any possibility of debate, just "because it suits us."

At all times, it is convenient to speak of "libraries in decolonization" as a process. It will be a process of action-research and grassroots development, based on a rebellious, libertarian and anti-system discourse (and on critical and social librarianship). The result should be an institution that does not try to impose a way of knowing or learning, but a plural space open to many materials, many formats, many knowledges and many identities (because that is precisely Abya Yala today: a melting pot). A space in which all voices and all speeches are consciously recovered. The result should be a librarianship that provides adequate tools to deal with this "new" reality. Such an outcome should allow other classifications of knowledge, other measures of time, other formats beyond the book.

The result should be a place where there are no hierarchies, where there is no "higher" and "lesser" knowledge, but rather one unique, plural, multifaceted, rich knowledge.

Reasons

To implement any library-related system within a community, preliminary studies are usually carried out to determine what the response of that particular community will be, what the strengths and opportunities are, and what the weaknesses. Curiously, such kind of questions are scarcely asked: it is usually assumed, from the very beginning, that libraries will be useful and well received. The actual answer may be (to the surprise of many) quite different.

Why should we think about libraries from a regional and a local perspective? Because it is necessary to propose libraries that are relevant to their patrons, that are close to them in all senses. Libraries with which users can connect. Libraries that are not strange implants, but that are well received and intimately assimilated.

Why should we? To respond to the needs and expectations of those patrons in more pertinent ways and, therefore, to achieve better outcomes.

In order to think about a library project for Latin America, it is necessary to take into account the particular characteristics of the continent in terms of knowledge production and management.

Local knowledge, languages, identities and cultural traits must be considered as the main collection of any library, and not as small "special collections" – a folkloric or anthropological curiosity. If necessary, library programs should be established for the (re)collection and organization of that local type of material, and for collaboration with other actors (from universities to publishing houses) for its publication and dissemination.

It is necessary to consider the traditional modes of transmission of information, still in force. For this, both traditional storytellers and new multimedia technologies can be used. The effort in this regard must be sustained by a serious and consistent attitude.

It is necessary to understand that Latin America is a diverse land, with its own codes, its own ideas, its own ways of understanding the world. And that all this does not belong to a far pre-Hispanic past, nor has it been hidden in "indigenous" corners. We live in that reality – a reality permeated by a thousand stories and nurtured by a thousand roots. Stories and roots that are not "inferior" to any other.

Libraries must be linked to society and its movements. Let them abandon their ivory tower of neutrality and be part of the community, of its movements, of its popular educational spaces, of its collective actions. Let's create critical libraries!

Finally, it is time to put an end to certain active neo-colonialisms, which tend to give preponderance to what comes from outside and abroad. A kind of "Curse of Malinche" that, in the case of librarians, pushes them to admire and prefer foreign models of action rather than betting on local production and entrepreneurship. Many of the ideas that are sold from outside are absolutely inapplicable, in the medium or long term, in Latin America. Many of the ideas produced in here would be enormously successful if a small percentage of the interest, outreach, and budget received by ideas from outside were devoted to them.

I believe that the first step in this construction of a Latin American library model begins precisely here: by shedding the respect and admiration for external models, and beginning to work with and respect ours. And by recovering our own words, our own nouns, instead of using hegemonic and Eurocentric ones.

Some Notes on Libraries and Epistemologies of the South

Living in Latin America —actually, living anywhere in what has been called "the global South"— implies facing, on a daily basis, a long series of political, social, economic and cultural problems. Problems that affect us as individuals, as groups and as societies, both on a personal and a professional level.

The librarian community is no stranger to such barriers, gaps, setbacks and difficulties. The (fortunately increasingly obsolete) notion of "library neutrality" does not protect us from a reality that, whether we like it or not, surrounds us, affects us directly, intimidates us, leaves us without work, censors us, closes doors for us... Many libraries have decided to face these problems and have become spaces of resistance, activism and socio-cultural (and even political) militancy — spaces for identity recovery and community strengthening through the use of information and knowledge.

In that resistance and that struggle, the Epistemologies of the South can become a useful tool when dealing with the aforementioned problems.

The Epistemologies of the South (Epistemologías del Sur) are an attempt to understand the world in a different way. They suggest that, underlying the political, socio-cultural, etc. crises, there is an epistemological problem: we need new ways of knowing and understanding the reality that surrounds us.

The Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, the mind behind the "Epistemologies", comments that, contrary to what Marx indicated in 1845 in his *Thesis on Feuerbach* # 11 ("Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it"), perhaps what is really needed is to acquire a new knowledge of the world: a new conception of our environment that allows to transform it.

Broadly speaking, until recent times we have used knowledge and epistemes —including forms of critical thought— produced in Europe, generally by avant-garde elites. At present, it is necessary to reorient the attention to begin to listen to other voices: for example, those belonging to groups which, even today, are still considered "the Others". Especially those "Others" who struggle, who claim for their rights, who defend their territories, their lives and their positions.

An epistemological break necessary in the "global South" is to stop "giving a voice" to those who struggle and start listening to them. Those communities produce knowledge, which is sometimes the knowledge that they fight for. It is not the knowledge that is produced after a confrontation or resistance, of whatever type (these are usually produced and organized by the victors), but rather those generated with and during the struggle. The Epistemologies of the South are concerned with identifying and validating, above all, that particular type of knowledge.

According to the proposals of Sousa Santos, the hegemonic system exercises its domination through three mechanisms: capitalism, colonialism (different from the

"coloniality" proposed by Aníbal Quijano) and patriarchy. Such a system of domination produces an ontological degradation of the people (that is, it creates humans who are considered invisible or non-existent) and, being an articulated domination, it achieves a fragmented resistance (a resistance that is opposed to only one of the mechanisms mentioned above —for example, feminism, as opposed to patriarchy— while the other two continue to act).

The invisibility of certain human groups demonstrates the existence of *abyssal lines*: imaginary lines beyond which people are not. On the other side of those abysses one is invisible, one is absent.

To speak of the absentees located on the other side of the abyss, and their constant accumulation of dispossession, exclusion and discrimination, the *sociology of absences* is used. Such sociology (which, although it tends to use alternative methodologies, can use the traditional ones, albeit in a counter-hegemonic way) allows us to see, think and value everything that is missing, everything that is "on the other side" of the abyssal line. It also allows us to understand that "universalisms" are false, because in practice they never consider this invisible reality.

Those located on the other side of the abyssal line are not victims (despite the fact that they are often presented like that): they are resistant. In their struggle they organize themselves —even though they are not clearly visible— and in the process they produce knowledge. In this context, a *sociology of emergencies* is used, which allows us to see what types of knowledge arise from these movements, from the practices from which

they are abysmally excluded. The sociology of emergencies uses collaborative methodologies, since it is about knowing *with*, not knowing *about*. The latter, common in hegemonic disciplines, turns the studied people into objects and ends up being *extractivist*.

By collecting all the information produced by a community, an *ecology of knowledge* is composed — a mixture of diverse knowledge (including scientific, if necessary), all oriented towards struggle. In the ecology of knowledge there is usually a certain degree of intercultural translation and generation of hybrid knowledge, although it is necessary to understand that *not everything can be translated*. Understanding that not everything can be communicated between cultures helps us to realize and discover limits, and to understand that there will always be an incompleteness of knowledge, a kind of *clarified ignorance*. Sousa Santos comments that we do not need to create or have complete knowledge, but we do need to be aware of the incompleteness: the gaps that exist.

Working from the Epistemologies of the South's framework serves, in a special way, to support the activity of social movements (including, for example, librarians, archivists, those promoting reading, those defending open access to knowledge...). Those movements have two obligations: (a) to articulate with other movements, and (b) to "radicalize", that is, not to be satisfied with a victory. In this last process, it is necessary to apply the sociology of absences to discover those who still remain on the other side of the abyssal line.

To mesh all the elements mentioned so far, it is necessary to apply a kind of *craftsmanship of practices*: to reinvent ways of knowing and doing. For knowledges are heterogeneous, and it is necessary to unite them in a practically artisanal way.

The Epistemologies of the South are widely applicable to many aspects of library science, both theoretical and practical. I have been working with them for years — and the ideas presented in this post are just a small approach to what I have learnt from them.

Spiders

Chronicles of a librarian in Colombia (I)

Breakfast time. I drink my *tinto* —that's how they call "black coffee" in these lands— leaning out of the kitchen window. Shreds of mist drift down the mountainside, licking the deep green grass, and then falling apart. Those shreds replicate those that come out of my cup, which in the morning cold does not stop exhaling dense, whitish and aromatic wisps. It dawns at these heights, and only the last croaks of the frogs of the neighboring reed beds can be heard, the barking of one of the house dogs, or the meowing of the cat that demands his pampering to start the day as it should.

In the foreground, a spider weaves its web in the upper corner of the window. I stare at their comings and goings, almost hypnotized. This house is full of spiders. I have counted about a dozen different species: the green ones, and the yellow ones, and the small reddish ones, and those other dark and huge ones that hunt in the corners... I have never been afraid of them: in fact, they produce a curiosity that oscillates between the scientific and the artistic, so I let them go their own way and, whenever I can, I stare at them for long periods of time. Like this one, who still weaves his web on the window. I read recently that webs should be considered part of the minds of spiders; minds, by the way, of prodigious intelligence [1]. My 8-legged friend continues undaunted by her work, oblivious to my thoughts. Behind it, beyond the glass, the flock of mists continues to parade. And further on, in the distance, I can see that patch of Andean rainforest that I know so well: the one whose trunks are carpeted with ferns, bromeliads, orchids,

mosses and lichens, and among whose branches I have seen toucans fly and a lot of hummingbirds. I live in the mountainous foothills near Bogotá, in the middle of the Colombian Andean Mountain range, near Chingaza National Park. These are the ancient lands of the Muisca people, which some called "Chibcha".

And here, spiders —like the one that works at my window— were respected. It wasn't the only place they were, by the way. The Argentine writer Ana María Shua —to quote a Latin American author— has compiled, in one of her books, numerous stories about Anansi, Brother Spider, a semi-deity of the African Akan peoples and their Caribbean descendants, who was in charge of protecting the stories and sometimes played the role of a trickster. Here, in the highlands of the Cundinamarca department, spiders were also important in the past. But for a different reason. And a very curious one. I try to remember where I read that. My librarian instinct begins to review citations that I didn't know I had stored in some corner of my head. Finally, I find it: it was in the *Grammar, vocabulary, catechism and confessional of the Chibcha language* by Ezequiel Uricoechea. One of the few grammars of *muysk kubun* —the "language of the people"— that survived the near-disappearance of the Muisca people.

This is how Uricoechea mentions spiders:

> [The Muisca] perhaps believed in another material world after death, better than the one in which they lived, where they would find their farms and houses, and would continue in the same tasks of this life, because for them the idea of leisure was not linked to that of bliss. They believed that after death they would go to

> that world through some ravines and roads of yellow and black earth, before passing through a great river in rafts made of spider web (which in their language they call *sospcua zine*, spider raft), for which reason it was not allowed to kill these insects [2].

That is a Beyond that I would like to be in, I tell myself: I would put a library there, and in my spare time I would build bamboo flutes and violins, I would play with all the cats that I came across, I would tell stories to whoever wanted to listen to me, or I would make puppets with the woods, leaves and vines that I would find in the forests full of ferns and mosses and hummingbirds that would surely be there as well.

I smile thinking of all the twists and turns that those eight weaving legs on my window made my thoughts take during the time I had my coffee for breakfast. The spider finally finishes her web. That web which perhaps one day I will use to make my raft — to cross to the other side of a river that I imagine mighty and full of foam, as are all the rivers in these mountainous Muisca lands. These green and misty lands that, for now, are my home.

Notes

[1] Robson, David (2020). Spider smarts. *New Scientist International*, February 8, pp. 42-45.

[2] Quoted from *Gramática, vocabulario, catecismo i confesionario de la lengua chibcha según antiguos manuscritos anónimos e inéditos, aumentados i correjidos*, by Ezequiel Uricoechea (París: Maisonnneuve & Cia., 1871), p. xxvii.

The insect-bird with a thousand names

Chronicles of a librarian in Colombia (II)

It passes like an exhalation, almost without being seen. You have to try to follow it with your eyes, be lucky that it stops floating under the petals of a flower, and observe it carefully to understand that it is a bird. Its colors recall the rambunctious palette of an expressionist painter, all of it trapped inside a small, feathery flake that would fit loosely into the hollow of my fist if it were caught, and that threatens to fall apart at the slightest blow. I see it every day. And I'm never tired of following its almost acrobatic displays, its goings and comings, its twists and turns. Around here there are several species: with long or short beaks and tails, blood-red breasts, backs of an almost phosphorescent turquoise green... They hide in the bushes, and sometimes they seem to compete to see which one of them risks getting closer to the windows of my house, or to the door. In his first *Memoria del fuego*, Eduardo Galeano wrote about one of them:

> At dawn it greets the sun. Night falls, and it still works. It goes buzzing from branch to branch, from flower to flower, swift and necessary as light. Sometimes it hesitates and remains motionless in the air, suspended; sometimes it flies backwards, like no one else can. Sometimes it is drunk, from drinking the honeys of the corollas so much. When flying, it shoots colored lightning bolts.
>
> It brings the messages of the gods, becomes lightning to execute their revenges and blows the prophecies into the ears of the augurs. When a Guaraní child dies, it rescues his soul, which lies in the chalice of a flower, and carries it, in its long

> needle-like beak, to the Land without Evil. It has known that path since the beginning of time. Before the world was born, it already existed: it refreshed the First Father's mouth with drops of dew and calmed his hunger with the nectar of flowers [1].

Quynza or *quincha*, they were called by the Muisca, that old people in whose mountains I live today. I call them *colibríes*. Hummingbirds. Although throughout my life I have heard them named in so many ways that I can no longer decide on any.

There where I was born, on the banks of the Río de la Plata, they are called *picaflores*. "Flower-pickers". But in that area, they are usually nothing more than illustrations in a natural science book: the child I was only heard of hummingbirds, never saw one. They told us native legends at school: stories and narratives such as those rescued by Alfredo Mires [2], among many others. Many years later I saw my first hummingbird, nested in a gigantic monkey-fern that gave life to a patio in the province of Chaco, in the northeastern corner of Argentina. By then I already called them *colibríes* (a word, *colibrí*, which apparently does not come from the Caribbean or the Taíno, as many believe, but from the French), although in those hot lands they are usually known as *pájaro mosca* ("fly bird") or as *mainumby*, their name in avá-ñe'é or Guaraní. My astonishment at seeing it was enormous, and I still remember the idiotic smile that lit up my face all that day. And the following ones.

I discovered that there were hummingbirds in the central mountains of the province of Córdoba, my home for years in the heart of Argentina. There, they used a word from the

runasimi or Quechua language to name them: *qinti*. Or *quenti*. In the south of the country, by the Patagonian horizons, the Mapuche call them *pinda* or *pinza*. And they were called *siwar* in the central Andes – there, the musician I carry inside learned of the indigenous custom of putting stuffed hummingbirds inside the enormous Andean drums: apparently, the magic of those birds gave a special power to the rumbling of the instruments.

That magic of the hummingbirds is reflected —palely— in the many pages that they have motivated. An example? Those of the Benedictine friar Martín Sarmiento, who did not see a hummingbird in his blessed life but who, collecting news from others in Madrid at the end of the 18th century, wrote about the fabulous birds:

> To enhance the beauty of the painting or embroidery with feathers, Aldrovando points out the feathers of the *tominejo* bird in America. Everything that is said about this little bird is wonderful. They are little more than a bee, and Father Acosta, seeing them fly, thought they were bees or butterflies. Gonzalo de Oviedo called them mosquitoes. We weighed one of those little birds and, because it only weighed little more than a tomín (a third of dragma), they called it *tominejo*. Garcilaso (book VIII, chapter 19) deals with those tominejos, whom in Peru Indians call *quenti*. Clusio (on page 96 of his *Exoticas*) paints the tominejo, he says that the Brazilians call it ourissia, which means "ray of sunshine", because when in the sun it shows a complex of all fine colors. Hernández (page 320) places six paintings of various tominejos and names it *hoitzitzil* in Mexican.

> The moderns treat of the tominejo with the name colibrí. Monsieur Brison lists 6 species of hummingbird. He says that in the year 1753, while he was with Monsieur de Reaumur, a Frenchman came from America and gave him a female hummingbird in its own nest. Some have written that the hummingbird sings, but all agree that it is the smallest bird in the entire universe. That only feeds on the flowers of juice, honey and dew. That where there are flowers all year round, there they are kept all year round. Where not, it is cushioned for six months and revives for April. At that time it sticks its little beak, which is like a needle, in a tree, and there it hangs, as if dead, in imitation of flies. Its nibs are unmatched in their delicacy and variety of very fine colors, and they are used for a kind of painting with miniature nibs. I do not know if they have brought those tominejos to Spain [3].

The tominejos —who are still known that way in the Colombian highlands, although no one knows what a tomín is— continue to wander among the many plants that surround the house where I live. They skillfully dodge the stalking cats, enchant dogs and never cease to amaze me, throwing flashes of color even in the middle of the fog of these mountains in Bogotá.

There they go. Perhaps, as the Mexica of Tenochtitlan used to say in a tradition collected by Fray Bernardino [4], they rush to inspect the flowers to gather the souls of the dead —sheltered among the petals— and take them to the western sky, the last abode of the fair ones. Its flight is, therefore, a promise.

Notes

[1] Eduardo Galeano (1991). *Memoria del fuego. Vol. I. Los nacimientos*. Madrid: Siglo XXI Editores.

[2] Alfredo Mires (2000). *Así en las flores como en el fuego*. Quito: Abya Yala.

[3] Martín Sarmiento (1772/2008). *De historia natural y de todo género de erudición, vol. II*. Santiago de Compostela: CSIC.

[4] Sahagún, Bernardino de (1585/1829). *Historia General de las cosas de la Nueva España*. México: Imprenta de Alejandro Valdés.

Libraries as mycelia

The charm of intertwining

Part 1. Biology

Until 1969, biologists were convinced that fungi were plants. However, a series of evidences led them to understand that they were more like animals. Finally, they ended up coming to the conclusion that, due to their many peculiarities, they needed to have a kingdom of their own, which they called Fungi.

Beyond their chemical composition, their metabolic products, their varied morphologies or their survival mechanisms, all of them unique and special, fungi have developed what, quite possibly, can be considered one of the most fascinating biological structures on our planet: the mycelia.

A mycelium is a vast network of individual microscopic filaments, called hyphae, which are born from fungal spores and progressively intertwine with each other, forming a truly extensive and resistant system / collective, usually located underground. In this regard, scientific citations are astonishing: from networks that have an area equivalent to 1,500 football fields, to others that could have been alive for about 9,000 years [1]. In fact, more than a few biologists consider mycelia to be the largest and longest living structures in the world.

Mycelia (which, when visible, are often called "molds") carry out several functions. On the one hand, they break down organic matter in the soil, creating nutrients for themselves and, incidentally, for the organisms around them. Its degradation and recycling activity allows nutrients to return to the food chain, thus keeping entire ecosystems "fed".

On the other hand, mycelia are linked to plants through symbiotic associations called mycorrhizae. It is believed that 90% of terrestrial plants maintain such relationships, in the framework of which plants provide food for fungi, and these help plants absorb water and minerals and develop chemicals that make them more resistant to pests and diseases.

By connecting with each other and with plants, mycelia form immense networks that link and communicate the inhabitants of a forest (or any other ecosystem) below the surface of the soil: they move water and nutrients where they are needed, they support the edaphic structure, they recycle organic debris and eliminate toxic products...

But mycelia do much more than serve as transportation channels: as connectors, they allow the development of a true community. Suzanne Simard, of the University of British Columbia (Canada), discovered that older trees transfer nutrients to younger trees through the fungal network, to help them grow. Chinese researchers found that trees attacked by noxious fungi can send alarm signals to others, and biologists at the University of Aberdeen (UK) found that the same is true if attacked by aphids.

Mycologist Paul Stamets [2] called mycelia "the planet's natural Internet." In his opinion, they function like a neurological system, actively responding to changes in the environment to try to maintain a certain balance. In an article published in *Discover* [3] he noted:

> Brains and mycelia make new connections, or cut existing ones, in response to environmental stimuli. Both use a wide variety of chemical messengers to transmit signals through a cellular network.

It should be noted that every symbiosis –and this includes fungi– is marked by the possibility of dysbiosis: the conflict inherent in any association of individuals. In *The science of life* (1930), H. G. Wells noted:

> All symbioses are, to the appropriate extent, accompanied by hostility, and only with proper regulation, and often through elaborate adjustments, can the state of mutual benefit be maintained. Even in human relationships, the companionship that seeks mutual benefits is not so easy to maintain, and this even if the situation is handled intelligently, and in this way, we are able to understand what that relationship means.

In *I contain multitudes* (2018), Ed Yong insists on this point:

> The term "symbiosis" has been twisted to give its original neutral meaning – "living together"– a positive meaning and somewhat exaggerated connotations

> of cooperation and harmony. But evolution doesn't work that way. It does not necessarily favor cooperation, not even out of mutual interest. And even the most harmonious relationships are loaded with conflict.

Despite the risks inherent in any association, it can be said that mycelia form the foundation of a healthy ecosystem: a mesh that makes life truly communal. And at the same time, it shows how linked living beings are, and the dire consequences that the disappearance of a part of that tissue can have.

Notes

[1] A colony of *Armillaria solidipes*, with a surface of 900 has., quoted by Ferguson *et al.* in *Canadian Journal of Forest Research* (33 (4), 2003, pp. 612-623.

[2] In his book *Mycelium running: how mushrooms can help save the world* (Potter, 2005), Stamets risked predicting that by harnessing the digestive power of mycelia, toxic wastes and pollutants could be removed (in a process he called *mycodecontamination*), filter pathogens from the water (*mycofiltration*), control insect populations (*mycopesticides*) and improve the health of forests and orchards.

[3] *How Mushrooms Can Save the World*, May 2013.

Part 2. Biomimicry

The imitation, on a social scale, of some of the ideas that underlie the functioning of the mycelia could be beneficial, especially when the possibilities that open patterns of behavior such as symbiosis are valued. In fact, it is something already contemplated from the field of biomimicry: a hybrid discipline between biology and engineering that focuses on replicating biological patterns for the benefit of the human socio-economic universe, and that is still in its dawn (although the imitation of nature by man is as old as the human species itself).

Libraries (and any other information management institution, whatever its name) and, in particular, the professionals who work in them, could imitate mycelia in many aspects, which could be roughly organized on two levels: the ability of several individuals to unite into a single larger collective, and that of that complex entity to interact with other similar entities within the framework of a given ecosystem.

The union of a set of individualities to give rise to something bigger, stronger and more complex is at the base of the behavior of all social species on the planet, including humans. Associationism –the charm of intertwining– has a number of advantages, which in the field of professional library collectives has numerous potential applications.

In the first place, the formation of groups facilitates the use of the diverse experience of their participants (sum of potentialities), the exchange of ideas, the learning of new perspectives, the discussion of problems and doubts and, in general, the construction

and development of fertile spaces for research, cross-disciplinary work and the development of new frameworks for thought and action. In this sense, it should be noted that professional library groups have not always been characterized by the development of research spaces, much less collaborative and participatory (e.g. digital humanities projects), that trans-disciplinary perspectives have usually been absent, and that the development of theoretical structures or the systematization of our own practical methodologies is still a pending matter in many aspects.

Second, group and associative work generates forums for collective feedback, the debate of practices and positions, the recognition of one's own diversity and plurality as exploitable assets, and the appreciation of the many particularities of regional and local cultural contexts. In the library field, these practices are not usually normative: forums are usually unidirectional (chair type), and external inputs (e.g. foreign professionals) are usually given greater importance than those that come from within their own collective.

Third, community activity makes it possible to detect, identify and review a multitude of theoretical and practical interests, relating both to the common activity and to the possibilities beyond the limits of such activity. Exploring these interests allows us to know, on the one hand, where the group is located and what its borders are and, on the other, to know what lies beyond its professional horizons – to know where to go and how to prepare to meet the challenges of the future. In this regard, the library universe tends to be more reactive than proactive, and in terms of teaching activities, it tends to advance in the wake of events and, above all, international fashions.

Finally, associationism allows its members to produce tools and mechanisms that allow the defense of their own position, both professional, social and even political, in favor of the group and looking after its interests. The weak and unprotected position of most library groups shows that association (or unionization / syndication) has not been a very popular strategy, and that some of its instances suffered from planning or joint vision problems.

Addressing the second level of analysis, a complex entity can interact in different ways with other similar entities.

On the one hand, it can act as a whole when facing other organizations, seeking its own benefit. Such is the case of library groups that defend their positions before government agencies and institutions, or before other groups that have competition (fair or not) in their area of action and development. One case, that of collective defense, which has not abounded, at least in Latin America.

On the other hand, it can establish useful symbiosis for both collaborating entities. Close and equal collaboration with the Academy, the world of culture and the arts, the publishing universe, NGOs, civil society groups or other similar groups are among some of the many symbiotic possibilities of library-related groups. Experience shows that although there has been links with such entities, they have rarely been on an equal footing, leaving information professionals in subordinate or auxiliary positions.

And finally, it can generate relationships that benefit an entire ecosystem: in this case, an ecosystem of information and knowledge.

The dangers inherent in all symbiosis –the rise of the so-called "dysbiosis"– must also be considered in the case of the library context. Not all associations are positive for the mere fact of working collectively. Abuses must be regulated and, if they occur, identified and eliminated. And all conflictive elements must be resolved in the most appropriate way, and always considering the well-being of the community as a whole.

The greatest potential of any living organism must be taken into account when copying its structure: its capacity for change, adaptation and evolution. Just as fungal mycelia are multiform networks that react to variations in their environment and respond in a pertinent way to achieve balance within their community, so should library collectives act: linking citizens, organizations and institutions with a delicate weave of subtle threads, made of information and knowledge. A web always adaptable, always evolving, capable of continually rethinking itself, of evaluating its work from an action-research, commitment and grassroots development perspective. Because times change, and with them, the communities and their needs. And because information managers need to be united and flexible to adapt to the problems that they will have to face precisely because of managing information.