

# International and Comparative Librarianship

## A Thematic Approach

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## Preface

In 1981 Greenwood Press published the *International handbook of contemporary developments in librarianship*, edited by Miles M. Jackson (1981)<sup>1</sup>. It contained a short section on academic libraries in South Africa. This was my first "international" publication, and my first exposure to the literature of international librarianship. Not long after, I joined the staff of the State Library of South Africa in South Africa, of which I later became the director. It is one of the paradoxes of national librarianship that directors of national libraries have a greater degree of *international* involvement than most other library directors. My appointment at the State Library led to my first attendance at a Conference of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), in Munich, 1983, and a long and rewarding association with that body and with its smaller sister organization, the Conference of Directors of National Libraries (CDNL). My work as a national librarian also led to much international travel and a growing international network of colleagues. My interest in international relations among libraries and the international dimension of librarianship grew steadily and upon my retirement (2003) from what had become the National Library of South Africa, I started planning a book on this theme. Not much came of this, for in 2005 I became the Secretary General of IFLA, which enabled me to collect a great deal of material but left little time for writing the book.

Other people have written books about international librarianship. Why yet another book on this subject? In this book I intend to take a somewhat different approach from the literature published to date.

A search in bibliographic databases using the search term "International librarianship" yields a fair number of monographs that include these words in their titles. In a review of Carroll and Harvey's *International librarianship: cooperation and collaboration* (Carroll and Harvey, 2001), W.V. Jackson observed:

Although the literature of comparative and international librarianship has not flourished in recent years, one type of work seems to recur periodically. This is the anthology of articles... by various authors: such compilations generally include pieces both geographical (that is, about a country or region) or topical (for example, about co-operation, buildings and so on) in nature (Jackson, 2003:364).

Jackson's observation is apt. Most books on "international librarianship" are compilations of chapters by various authors, describing library conditions in particular foreign countries or regions, along the lines of the following (real) examples:

- The standardisation of Chinese bibliography
- University libraries in West Africa
- Public libraries in Nigeria
- Library and information services in Bermuda
- Indonesian university libraries and their reference services

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<sup>1</sup> References to works cited in the Preface are in the Bibliography of Chapter 1.

In these volumes we also find chapters on international library co-operation, the work of international agencies in the field of librarianship, and relations between countries in the field of librarianship. More real examples:

- Colonialism and the development of libraries and archives in French Indochina
- IFLA and international librarianship
- Anglo-Nordic library relationships
- International cultural exchange through libraries
- International influences in Thailand

The second group of examples comes closer to what I understand by international librarianship, but what has generally been missing is attempts to systematise or develop a conceptual framework for this field. In most cases the introduction or preface to the compilation is brief and provides only the most cursory attempt at defining what is meant by “international librarianship”. For example, Miles Jackson’s impressive volume of well over 600 pages offers no attempt to provide a systematic introduction or conceptual framework (Jackson 1981). The 1985 Festschrift for William J Welsh (Price and Price, 1985) is an example of a book with the words “international librarianship” in its title, but which does not say anything about international librarianship as such. Presumably the title, *International librarianship today and tomorrow*, was chosen because Welsh, at that time Deputy Librarian of Congress, was well-known in international circles and participated actively in forums such as IFLA and the Conference of Directors of National Libraries. The preface of the book by Carroll & Harvey (2001) referred to earlier provides only a sketchy account of what is meant by international librarianship.

A shining exception during the early period was John F. Harvey’s *Comparative and international library science* (1977). Harvey took a thematic rather than a geographic approach and assembled contributed chapters by acknowledged experts in the field, such as J. Perriam Danton, D.J. Foskett, Frances Laverne Carroll and Mohammed Aman, to cover relevant themes, including conceptual and methodological issues. Another striking exception to the general trend in books on international librarianship is *World librarianship: a comparative study*, by Richard Krzys and Gaston Litton (1983). This was an ambitious attempt to create a “world librarianship”, defined as “the abstraction referring to the status of the profession in all parts of the world during a specified period of time” and its scientific investigation, which they call “world study in librarianship”, and to develop hypotheses, theories and general laws of librarianship on the basis of an explicit comparative method. However, their work does not appear to have attracted many followers and the terminology they attempted to introduce has not been adopted by later writers.

Within the last ten years or so the term ‘global’ has come into favour in our field, with the appearance of *Libraries: global reach, local touch*, a volume of contributed chapters edited by McCook, Ford and Lippincott (1998). Whilst not presenting a coherent overview of the field, it contains good thematic chapters. Also avoiding the term “international librarianship” and thus the need to define it by using the title *Global librarianship*, Kesselman and Weintraub (2004) assembled a number of useful chapters on international library work, issues and organisations, to help “libraries and librarians to think globally” (p.x). This goes beyond the usual collection of contributions but does not advance the conceptualisation of the field. The same is true of a more

recent monograph on international librarianship, *International librarianship: a basic guide to global knowledge access* by R. D. Stueart (2007). It departs somewhat from the pattern of a compilation of chapters in that it has a single author and does not consist of contributions describing library phenomena in various countries. However, except for a brief introductory chapter and a chapter on information policies, the bulk of the book is essentially a directory of international and national library associations, organisations, national libraries and bibliographic services. The most recent major contribution to the field, *Global library and information science: a textbook for students and educators* (Abdullahi 2009) follows the trend of eschewing the word "international" in favour of "global". This is also a compilation of chapters by various authors, but authors were given clear guidelines to ensure a uniform approach and the material is organized systematically by continent or region, and within these, by type of library.

Thus with a few by now somewhat dated exceptions, the field remains dominated by compilations of chapters about libraries in various countries. I have long felt that there is more to "international librarianship" than descriptions of librarianship in other countries. A more coherent and structured approach to the subject is needed. Rather than yet another geographically organized book about library conditions in different countries, there is a need for a book that deals thematically with international relations among libraries in a broad sense, including the systematic study of similarities and differences between libraries and library conditions in various countries, and their causes; international activities, relations and influences; and international cooperation and the role of international organizations in the field, where "international" is read as referring to two or more countries. This book attempts to fill that niche.

It does not, however, pretend to be the final and definitive compendium on the subject. My experience in South Africa and my travels in Africa have been a strong formative influence, and hence there is an emphasis on issues relating to library development in developing countries, especially in Africa. I hope that I will be pardoned for this bias, or at least, that the focus on developing regions will be of exemplary value and of particular interest to some readers. An unfortunate shortcoming of this book is its Anglo-American bias. Not only is it intended primarily for English-speaking readers, but I have to admit that it is based largely on literature in the English language, a weakness that I hope to remedy in a later book.

This book has been long in the making. It remains work in progress. In the spirit of open access I am posting it chapter by chapter on my website, <http://peterlor.com>, under a Creative Commons license. At the end of each chapter I am providing a bibliography listing all the works referred to in that chapter. Ultimately, when the book is completed, the chapter bibliographies will be replaced by a consolidated bibliography at the end.

A synopsis of the book as currently planned follows. It is likely to evolve, as will the posted chapters, which will be replaced with newer versions from time to time in response to feedback and as I gain fresh insights. Readers' comments and questions will be very welcome and can be left on my website.

Peter Johan Lor

# Synopsis

## PART I: ORIENTATION

### **Chapter 1: Setting the scene**

Origins and development of international and comparative librarianship

Motivators, values and orientations: internationalism, social responsibility, third world solidarity, etc.

Current international trends that require attention and responses from the library and information profession

### **Chapter 2: Definitions, scope and delimitations**

Definition and scope of international librarianship

Definition and scope of comparative librarianship

Distinction between international and comparative librarianship

Studying national LIS systems: external factors, regional differences, community and institutional context, LIS infrastructure

The international dimension: international relations and the global dimension

### **Chapter 3: A framework for research**

Research: definition and dimensions

Conceptual analysis for international and comparative research: Simsova & MacKee, Krzys & Litton; a faceted scheme

Challenges of international research

Sources of international data

Is there a methodology for research in international librarianship?

## PART II: COMPARATIVE LIBRARIANSHIP

### **Chapter 4: Introduction to Comparative studies and comparative librarianship.**

Comparison in science and scholarship

The comparative method in other disciplines (education, law, public administration, etc.)

Contemporary thinking on comparison

Definition of comparative librarianship

### **Chapter 5: Theory and method in comparative librarianship**

Assumptions underlying methodological decisions: the sociological, teleological, ontological, epistemological and ethical dimensions

Methodology proper: key methodological decisions in comparative studies

### **Chapter 6: International comparative studies**

Types of studies: single country studies, regional studies, international surveys, international comparisons

Explanatory theories, e.g. influence of Calvinism, climate, orality & literacy; models of scientific research and communication

### PART III: INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY AND INFORMATION RELATIONS

Part III sketches the evolution of international thinking and relations in LIS, with particular emphasis on the developing world.

#### **Chapter 7: International diffusion & influence**

International diffusion of library theories and techniques: technology transfer; adoption of innovations, adaptation, rejection.

International influences: Transatlantic, Anglo-American, Continental European, colonial, post-colonial

#### **Chapter 8: Library development aid and influence**

Development assumptions and concepts; evolution of development efforts

Development aid to libraries in the emerging and developing countries

Forms of aid: book aid, education & training, systems, etc.

Categories of development agencies active in library and information service-related projects

Government aid agencies

Intergovernmental organizations

International NGOs

National associations, NGOs, charities, foundations

Private sector

#### **Chapter 9: Critical responses to "cultural imperialism"**

Librarianship of poverty, barefoot librarians

Amadi, Mchombu, Sturges, Gasson de Horowitz etc.

Information for development and indigenous knowledge

#### **Chapter 10: *A luta continua*: international information relations:**

North-South, South-North and South-South power relations and information flows; digital divide;

Intellectual property issues, World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS), etc.;

Barriers to expression and access;

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and its aftermath; A2K

## PART IV: THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

A more descriptive overview of the current scene

### **Chapter 11: Current LIS activities of UNESCO and other intergovernmental organizations**

UNESCO: Information & Communication Programme, IFAP, Memory of the World; decline of librarianship as a focus of interest; cultural industries, book development, world book capital cities, copyright

Other international agencies: ITU, WHO, etc.

Regional organizations: European Union and Council of Europe

### **Chapter 12: International non-governmental organizations** in library and information services: the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the International Federation for Documentation (FID), regional library associations, specialized international associations. Swiss Librarians for International Relations

Relations with other “peak” international bodies, e.g. IPA, IBF, ICA, ICOM

### **Chapter 13: International co-operation and standardization in library and information services**

International interlibrary loan and Universal Availability of Publications (UAP)

Bibliographic control and Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC), role of OCLC

Preservation, microfilming, digitization, digital preservation

### **Chapter 14: Libraries under threat**

Libraries in conflict zones, deliberate and accidental ("collateral damage") destruction in armed conflict: Sarajevo, Baghdad, etc.

The Hague Convention and the International Committee of the Blue Shield

Natural disasters and international professional responses

International aspects of disaster prevention and preparedness

Freedom of access to information and freedom of expression

### **Chapter 15: International librarianship in professional practice:**

International librarianship and area studies: collection development and services.

International librarianship and library careers: international study, job exchanges, working in foreign libraries, consulting abroad

Library twinning

International work of national library associations and institutions

Progressive librarians groups, activist groups; international relations and domestic politics

## **Bibliography**

Key journals

Works cited