

## ■ Research Paper

# Indigeneity, an Alternative Worldview: Four R's (Relationship, Responsibility, Reciprocity, Redistribution) vs. Two P's (Power and Profit). Sharing the Journey Towards Conscious Evolution

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La Donna Harris, founder of Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO), discusses the two-decade-long collaboration between AIO and Alexander Christakis, President of ISSS, and other systems scientists. Structured dialogue processes have provided culturally resonant means through which Indigenous peoples have been able to identify and articulate their core values to broader audiences, especially the four R's (Relationship, Responsibility, Reciprocity and Redistribution). These Four R's form the core of an emerging concept, *Indigeneity*. The dynamic inclusivity of this value cluster has much to contribute to global discourse as we go about the task of constructing global *agoras*, the dialogic spaces of optimal mutual learning of the 21st century. Copyright © 2004 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

**Keywords** Indigeneity; core values; the four R's; dynamic inclusivity; globalization; governance; leadership; Interactive Management; Cogniscope<sup>TM</sup>; ILIS<sup>TM</sup>; structured dialogue processes; Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO); Native Americans; Advancement of Maori Opportunity (AMO); Maoris; Advancement of Global Indigeneity (AGI)

## INTRODUCTION

[I want to thank President Aleco Christakis for his kind invitation to submit a paper to this issue of the Yearbook of the International Society for the](#)

*Systems Sciences*.<sup>Q8</sup> It is a pleasure to be able to make this contribution in honor of AIO's 18-year relationship with Dr Christakis and his colleagues in the Systems Sciences. In reciprocal fashion (more about this later), the Systems Sciences and their structured dialogue processes have confirmed the validity of holistic Indigenous worldviews and of highly participatory decision-making practices. These dialogue

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processes have helped us Indigenous people to articulate our worldviews and practices more fully, not only to non-Indigenous people, but to ourselves as well. It is this nearly two-decade-old, highly synergistic relationship between our Indigenous and ISSS communities that brought us to Crete to participate in the 47th Annual ISSS conference.

## CONTRIBUTIONS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES TO GLOBAL SOCIETY

I believe that Indigenous peoples who maintain their core cultural values have much to contribute to the larger global society. I not only maintain that this is possible, but that it is necessary. Indigenous voices are rarely heard on the world stage, but Indigenous perspectives must not be lost in the rush to globalization. We believe that an articulation of Indigenous perspectives, of the concept of *Indigeneity*, with its inclusive management of diversity, constitutes a contribution to global discourse which has the potential of positively transforming the relationship dynamics of the 21st-century world, politically, socially, economically and spiritually.

I experienced Comanche wisdom in my grandparents who raised me. They shared with me their own conscious evolution, and it is because of them that I am able to engage in the progressive kind of work that I have been lucky enough to do. My grandfather often said that he had gone 'from arrows to atoms'. Talk about conscious evolution!

The *Dineh* or Navajo say that human beings get into trouble when they forget certain essential things. First, that there is male and female energy in the world. Second, that because of this, there is always new energy being created. Third, that, therefore, because of this constant creation of new energy, change is a constant feature of the world. Fourth, that our eternal task is the productive integration of this new energy into our world for our continued evolution.

This dynamic inclusivity, the ability to hold our core values even while we entertain and create new ideas (Sainte Marie, narrator, 1998), is what has enabled Indigenous people to survive

drastic changes and is the core feature of the emerging concept of *Indigeneity* that we are trying to articulate. In fact, other Native American thinkers have commented on this dynamism as an inherent feature of many Indigenous concepts. For instance, Alfred (1999) notes that 'the essence of [Indigenous] leadership is the governance of change' (p. 46). The key is to orchestrate, to balance, the old and the new.

## THE INFLUENCE OF MY COMANCHE BACKGROUND

This topic of core values has been an important one in my life, and I feel I cannot address it without first telling you something about my own identity and culture. I am a citizen of the Comanche Nation, of the *Nuhmuhnuh*, the People, and a citizen of the United States of America. Although there are over two million Native American people in the United States, there is no single Native American culture. The Comanche Nation is one of over 500 nationally recognized tribes. Over 200 tribes are not recognized by our federal government, but are, nonetheless, active sovereign nations. Each tribal nation has its own distinct culture, language, government and value system. I believe that it is our systems of values that sustain us, both as persons and as societies. It is adherence to our value systems that leads to and ensures our continuance. I know that throughout my life I have turned to my Comanche values and worldview to help me make decisions. In other words, I filter everything through my Comanche values.

The Comanche have always been keen students of human nature and paid great attention to constructing social spaces that reduce conflict. The whole social, governing and economic systems were based on protocols of behavior which would keep kinship and kinship-like relationships in balance. And remember, this was within a worldview in which one was kin to everything in creation. By keeping complex networks of relationships in balance, these protocols diminished discord.

Maintaining a certain level of social harmony kept everyone's energy focused where it needed

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3 to be focused, on the continuation of the  
4 community into the future. Social harmony was  
5 not an end in itself. It was pragmatic, useful.

6 One can find examples of these conflict  
7 reduction systems in the protocols governing  
8 relationships among family members. In matriar-  
9 chal Comanche society men married into their  
10 wives' households, so a potentially disruptive  
11 relationship was the one between the incoming  
12 son-in-law and his wife's mother. It was  
13 Comanche custom that the mother-in-law and  
14 son-in-law never spoke directly to each other.  
15 They always spoke through the person they both  
16 cared about, the daughter/wife. This custom  
17 encouraged all the participants in this relation-  
18 ship (and these participants extended way  
19 beyond that particular mother, daughter and  
20 son-in-law to all their extended families) to  
21 behave in ways that would maintain all the  
22 relationships involved. Thus, this attention to the  
23 maintenance of relationships and to the consis-  
24 tent lowering of potential conflict had ripple  
25 effects throughout the family and tribe.

26 The Comanche have historically governed  
27 through consensus. Constructing consensus is  
28 another way to keep conflict at a low level in a  
29 community. In Comanche society, all views were  
30 taken into consideration. All who felt affected by  
31 a decision could take part in the decision-making.  
32 This was a manifestation of the Comanche belief  
33 that every person in the society had value, even a  
34 child—even guests and captives (many of my  
35 ancestors were Comanche captives)—potentially  
36 had something of value to contribute, some  
37 special role to play. If each person is not taken  
38 into consideration, we, in effect, short-change  
39 ourselves. We lose their contribution to the  
40 greater good. If we do not listen to each and  
41 every person, we fail to get the whole picture, and  
42 so we might make mistakes.

43 The role that any person plays is based on  
44 that person's own inner strength or 'medicine'.  
45 The Comanche concept of medicine is not just  
46 about physical health but about any personal  
47 power or strength. Each person's medicine  
48 is different, and the tribe recognizes that it needs  
49 different kinds of leaders with different kinds  
50 of strengths for different types of societal  
51 responsibilities.

This recognition of uniqueness also entails an  
obligation. This obligation is the personal  
responsibility to find a way to contribute one's  
uniqueness to society in productive ways so that  
the *Nuhmuhnui*, the People, can continue.

Someone once asked me how I could maintain  
my individuality as a member of a communal  
society. I was confused by this question. In fact, I  
could not even understand it. There is no conflict  
between person and society. My grandmother  
always said, 'Be as strong as you can so that you  
have something to give back to the community.'  
Over and over again my Comanche relatives  
demonstrated to me that a strong person  
strengthens the whole community and, vice  
versa, a strong community strengthens each  
person. Again, we should be strong so that the  
*Nuhmuhnui*, the People, can continue.

## AIO'S BACKGROUND

Thirty-three years ago, we founded an organiza-  
tion in Washington, DC, called Americans for  
Indian Opportunity (AIO), that we envisioned as  
a national advocate for the advancement of  
opportunities for Native Americans in the Uni-  
ted States. This organization was based on a  
previous state-level organization, Oklahomans  
for Indian Opportunity (OIO) that I helped found  
with my Comanche sister, Iola Hayden, in  
Oklahoma in the 1960s. OIO was the first  
organization in Oklahoma to bring all of the  
more than 60 Oklahoma tribes together into a  
state-wide organization. OIO also worked with  
the African American community to integrate  
the state of Oklahoma. Over the years both AIO  
and OIO have served as catalysts for initiatives  
that have enriched the cultural, political, social  
and economic self-determination of Indigenous  
peoples in the United States.

## AIO'S RESEARCH ON COMMON TRIBAL VALUES AND THE AIO/CHRISTAKIS RELATIONSHIP

What our activities and research have shown us  
over the last two decades is that there are  
common core cultural values shared by most

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Indigenous peoples (Harris and Wasilewski, 1992; Poupart and [Martinez<sup>Q2</sup>](#), 2003). In fact, beginning in the 1980s the Indigenous peoples of the entire Western hemisphere seemed simultaneously to begin to look at and to try to articulate their values to each other and to non-Indigenous people (Cayuqueo, 1984).

At this time AIO initiated a series of meetings to discuss common tribal values in North America. Twelve different North American tribes representing the seven major Indigenous culture areas in the United States participated in these initial meetings. Some of these meetings were part of another line of our research: research on family systems as applied to tribal communities (Rauseo, 1988, 1989; Rauseo and Wasilewski, 1989).

Most of these meetings after 1985 were conducted according to the computer-assisted, consensus-based, complex problem-solving process that was then being developed by Dr Christakis and his colleagues at the Center for Interactive Management at George Mason University in Virginia. It was in 1985 at the World Affairs Conference in Boulder, Colorado, that AIO staff had encountered Dr Christakis. (Please consult the extensive literature on this evolution, perhaps already familiar to the ISSS community; e.g., Warfield, 1994; Warfield and Cardenas, 1994; Christakis, 1996; Christakis and Brahm, 2003).

When we heard Dr Christakis' list of the features of his process, we marveled that this high-tech process exhibited some of the essential features of pre-contact decision-making processes in North American tribal communities. These features included an order of speaking, everyone having a chance to speak, no evaluative comments, the speaking going on until no one had anything else to say, etc. What was most attractive, however, was that this structured dialogue process purported to make consensus-building efficient. US officials had always told tribes that decision-making by consensus was just too time consuming. This meeting in Boulder was, thus, the beginning of the long collaborative relationship between AIO and Dr Christakis and his colleagues.

More than 70 meetings (AIO annotated bibliography, Weatherford, 2004<sup>Q3</sup>), using various forms of the structured dialogue process now

known as ILIS<sup>TM</sup> (Indigenous Leaders Interactive System) in the form of the process adapted for use by Indigenous communities, have been held since 1985. Meetings have been held in various venues (from tribal offices to the chambers of the US Senate) and have included intra-tribal, inter-tribal, and inter-governmental participants. Inter-governmental meetings have included participants from tribal, national, state and/or local governments and their agencies. Some of these meetings have been with the US Department of Energy, the US Environmental Protection Agency, the Western Governors Conference, etc., as well as, most recently, meetings between Urban Indians and among Emergency Response Teams in the United States and meetings between Maoris and Native Americans internationally.

#### THE FOUR R'S AND THEIR ENSUING OBLIGATIONS

A result of the initial meetings in the 1980s and early 1990s was the identification and articulation of four core values which cross generation, geography and tribe. We have come to call these four core values the Four R's: Relationship, Responsibility, Reciprocity and Redistribution. Each of these values manifests itself in a core obligation in Indigenous societies.

*Relationship is the kinship obligation*, the profound sense that we human beings are related, not only to each other, but to all things, animals, plants, rocks—in fact, to the very stuff the stars are made of. This relationship is a kinship relationship. Everyone/everything is related to us *as if* they were our blood relatives. We, thus, live in a family that includes all creation, and everyone/everything in this extended family is valued and has a valued contribution to make. So, our societal task is to make sure that everyone feels included and feels that they can make their contribution to our common good. This is one reason why we value making decisions by consensus because it allows everyone to make a contribution.

*Responsibility is the community obligation*. This obligation rests on the understanding that we have a responsibility to care for all of our

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3 relatives. Our relatives include everything in our  
4 ecological niche, animals and plants, as well as  
5 humans, even the stones, since everything that  
6 exists is alive. Many North American Indians  
7 refer to the subsistence triad of plants, corn,  
8 beans and squash, as the Three Sisters. Indigen-  
9 ous leadership arises from the assumption of  
10 responsibilities arising out of our relationships  
11 and the roles in society these relationships  
12 engender, not from an ability to exercise force  
13 over others. Responsible Indigenous leadership  
14 is based on an ethos of care, not of coercion. The  
15 most important responsibility of a leader is to  
16 create the social space in which productive  
17 relationships can be established and take place.

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19 *Reciprocity is the cyclical obligation.* It under-  
20 scores the fact that in nature things are circular:  
21 for example, the cycle of the seasons and the  
22 cycle of life, as well as the dynamics between any  
23 two entities in relationship with each other. Once  
24 we have encountered another, we are in relation-  
25 ship with them. The relationship I have with the  
26 woman with whom I founded OIO, Iola Hayden,  
27 began when her great grandfather captured my  
28 great grandfather in the 19th century down in  
29 Mexico soon after my great-grandfather's family  
30 had emigrated from Spain. They became social  
31 'brothers'. Therefore, our families have been 'in  
32 relationship' since then, engaging in an ongoing  
33 set of uneven reciprocal exchange obligations. At  
34 any given moment the exchanges going on in a  
35 relationship may be uneven. The Indigenous  
36 idea of reciprocity is based on very long  
37 relational dynamics in which we are all seen as  
38 'kin' to each other.

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40 *Redistribution is the sharing obligation.* Its primary  
41 purpose is to balance and rebalance relationships.  
42 Comanche society, for example, was an almost  
43 totally flat society, socially, politically and econom-  
44 ically. It had many, many ways of redistributing  
45 material and social goods. In principle one should  
46 not own anything one is not willing to give away.  
47 Possessions do not own you. The point is not to  
48 acquire things. The point is to give them away.  
49 Generosity is the most highly valued human  
50 quality. The basic principle is to keep everything  
51 moving, to keep everything in circulation.

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53 To mark one's accomplishments, one sponsors  
54 a 'give away'. Instead of receiving gifts, the

person who has accomplished something gives  
gifts to all those who have helped them along the  
way to their accomplishment. This is what my  
elder daughter, Katherine Tijerina, did in our  
home community of Walters, Oklahoma, when  
she graduated from Stanford Law School.

This obligation means sharing, not only mate-  
rial wealth, but information, time, talent and  
energy, one's total self. In the old days one could  
even give away songs and deeds in order to  
honor another person for some other kind of  
contribution they or their family had made to  
you, your family or to the whole community.  
From that point on that person could sing that  
song and claim that deed. It now belonged to  
them. You can see how this kind of sharing, of  
giving away, contributed to each person in the  
community feeling that they were valued.

Knowing the protocols of receiving, as well as  
of giving, are equally important. The Indigenous  
sense of giving/sharing should never, ever, even  
have a hint of superiority or imposition. 'Lady  
Bountiful' was not in the tribal cast of characters.  
'Charity' creates a status difference between  
giver and receiver, with the giver in the higher  
position. Creating such a status difference  
devaluates the gift. In Indigenous society every  
giver and receiver is aware of a larger context in  
which roles might be reversed in the future.  
Thus, redistribution interacts with the R for  
reciprocity.

Each of these values, as you can see, is  
integrally related to all the others and builds on  
the others. Indigenous peoples understand that  
relationships define our roles and shape our  
responsibilities. We realize that these relation-  
ships, roles and responsibilities are reciprocal in  
nature and lead to the redistribution of both  
society's tangible and intangible assets.

#### THE ENCOUNTER AND COLLABORATION WITH THE MAORI AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE CONCEPT OF INDIGENEITY

In 2002 another fateful meeting took place in the  
history of AIO. That was our meeting with Maori  
leaders in New Zealand as part of our leadership  
development program endowed by the Kellogg

Foundation that we call the Ambassadors' Program. As part of that program young Native American leaders have the opportunity to meet with Indigenous leaders elsewhere in the world. In this encounter it was as if the 'medicine' of the young Native Americans and the *mana* of the Maoris ignited in a nearly instantaneous synergistic bond. The result has been the creation of a Maori counterpart organization, AMO (Advancement of Maori Opportunity), a Maori Ambassadors' Program and the initial plans for the development of a new international organization, Advancement of Global Indigeneity (AGI). The purpose of this new organization is to advance Indigenous perspectives in the world. The Wisdom of the People Forum we did during the conference (Laura Harris, and Christakis and Harris, in this volume) addressed the next steps in bringing this new organization into being.

We have now held four structured dialogue sessions with Native American and Maori participants, and we have begun to articulate a comprehensive construct, *Indigeneity*, which will capture the cluster of concepts that Indigenous people have to offer global *agoras* in the 21st century.

#### INDIGENEITY: A GLOBAL CONTRIBUTION

Indigeneity is rooted in core values based on communal life handed down from our many grandfathers and many grandmothers. Indigenous peoples see everything through the filter of community. This common Indigenous worldview and its associated 'deep logic' has an asset base arising out of the intangibles of cultural identity, communal wisdom, values, philosophies and their resulting alternative worldviews.

Indigeneity assumes a spiritual interconnectedness between all aspects of creation and affirms that everything created not only has the right to exist, but also has the right to be able to make a positive contribution to the larger whole. Therefore, all peoples have a right to exist, and it is imperative to our coexistence, to our ability to live together, that each group find their own self-determined ways to share and contribute their communal wisdom to global society. Comple-

mentary coexistence relies on the ability of all peoples' voices to be heard, and to be heard equally. The pursuit of this type of coexistence entails continuously recreating a harmonic balance. This pursuit stands in opposition to the pursuit of dominance, exclusion and exploitation.

Indigeneity is, thus, a very ancient global paradigm of sustainability, spiritual interconnectedness and coexistence—of *convivencia*—of living together. This is a worldview that up until now has been undervalued.

Indigeneity involves the practice of relational politics, that is, of creating relationships between diverse elements, not eliminating them. Even though the Indigeneity concept is culturally—which means communally—grounded, it is neither culturally neutral, nor is it culturally exclusive. Rather, it is culturally inclusive and relational. The practice of Indigeneity creates dynamically inclusive dialogic space.

#### INDIGENEITY'S DIALOGIC SPACE

Actually, nothing exists except *us* in this moment in time, engaging in this interaction, in this dialogue. 'Us' includes you, me, all of our relationships, taking place in our various personal, social, political, cultural, physical and spiritual contexts. This is a vast, interacting, overlapping—constantly changing—network. (By now you can perhaps see how much the systems approach is central to the concept of *Indigeneity*.) All our identities are honored when we are in positive relationships with each other.

If, when we interact with each other, we are in a state of valuing all of our relationships, these relationships will take care of us, and we will have things to share, to give back. One gives because it is right. It will come back to you.

If we value each other in a way that we simultaneously, for instance, value the Earth, it will take care of us. Our set of overlapping relationships will always take care of us. This was why there were no orphans in Comanche society. Children were the responsibility, not just of the mother, but of the mother's entire family and, ultimately, of the tribe as a whole. This is another example of responsibility emerging out

of a set of relationships. It was well understood that unless the children were cared for, there would be no future.

This sense of caring interconnectedness assumes the need for all things to coexist. Thus, this dynamic valuing of the other is inseparable from true dialogue. Such dialogue involves, as poet Joy Harjo (1996) says, 'a venturing out through listening and learning'. Through caring enough for each other to engage in true dialogue we enable ourselves to be ourselves together.

In fact, we can *only* be ourselves together. We can only be a 'self' in community. We are simultaneously *both* autonomous and connected. There are no private truths. We have to let the realities of others into our conceptual and emotional spaces and vice versa.

In social space constructed according to the principles of *Indigeneity*, I would like to reiterate that strong individuals contribute on the basis of their uniqueness to strong groups which, in turn, contribute to strong nations and to a strong international community. Uniqueness and strength are inherent in this dynamic from the beginning. All the uniqueness and strength, all the 'truths' in the system, have to be brought into complementarity, into some kind of accord.

#### INDIGENEITY: A DYNAMIC SPIRAL

Bringing our disparate realities into complementarity, however, involves inevitable differences that somehow have to be transformed.

The shape of this transformation is an upward spiral, like the flight path of the sea bird the Maori call *kuaka*. In this spiral dynamic there is no domination. Rather there is a reiterative moving forward into the future together which involves, again in the words of Joy Harjo (1996), the ability 'to understand the shape and condition of another with compassion', to value them.

This spiral movement potentially includes all communities. It is moving, spinning upward through time and space. Through the energy created by the interaction among the Four R's and their resulting obligations as described above, our collaborative work spins out in ever larger and further-reaching spirals to include

others in constantly evolving, productive relationships.

Thus, the ability to transform is the ability to balance, to bring disparate elements into complementarity. Not 'balance', a static noun, but 'to balance', a dynamic verb. This is the Indigenous form of respect. We care enough about others to include them in our world.

This is a dynamic, emergent, creative, collective process which demands everyone's participation. Through this process, somewhat like the improvisational jamming of a jazz ensemble, as Dr Christakis once said, 'We keep track of ourselves through constant communication.'

#### THE MAORI CANOE METAPHOR

Finding this kind of balanced coexistence, or what Edward Said (2003) termed 'deep coexistence' in his last lecture before his death, is tough to achieve. It takes a great deal of energy and strength to create the necessary coordination. A Maori canoe provides a metaphor that captures the central features of the dynamics I am trying to describe; that is, how each of us can contribute our individual energy to collective forward movement, to the upward spiral.

Indigeneity features outcome-oriented thinking which creates a kind of solution-oriented, value-driven solidarity. In this environment each person can contribute effectively to the whole from their place of belonging so that we can all move forward into the future together. To reiterate, this dynamic is solution oriented, as with the focus of the *Nuhmuhmuh* on the continuation of the People.

#### DYNAMIC INCLUSIVITY: ALL WORLDVIEWS MUST BE VALUED, INCLUDING THOSE OF THE 'ENEMY'

We Indigenous people think dynamic inclusivity is greatly needed in the world today. Valuing cultural diversity is crucial to both the building and sustaining of any civil society. Actually, merely respecting diversity is not enough. A truly civil society must accept, encourage, and



ultimately insist upon the participation of all the diverse peoples of that society.

To return to my Comanche culture, the Comanche word for respect, *mabitsiaruh*, combines the feelings of respect, honor and to care for into a single construct. It literally means to honor the other as a good person. For respect to exist between us we have to value each other. At the conference, for instance, I wanted you to value Indigenous ideas as much as I value the ideas of the systems sciences.

One should behave in a way that values both self and other simultaneously in order to be respectful. It is one of those paradoxical aspects of human existence that if we do not value ourselves, we find it very difficult to value others.

In fact, this kind of respect-as-value circles around and in turn designates one of our primary responsibilities as Indigenous people, and that is to honor our tribal identities. In order to honor what our ancestors went through and died for, we have a responsibility to want to continue as members of our tribe and carry on (Roslyn Ing in Alfred, 1999, p. 36).

You can even value your enemies. Utes and Comanches were traditional rivals. We warred against each other. But we never wanted to exterminate each other. How could we be 'brave' if we had no worthy opponents? (My grandfather even admired the Texas Rangers who eventually captured him and ended the reign of 'the Lords of the Southern Plains'!)

However, in Comanche society, any fight had to be a fair one. How could you gain honor if the fight was not an evenly matched one? This is what is wrong with the fights currently going on between Israel and Palestine and between the United States and Afghanistan and Iraq. To prove their worthiness according to the Comanche standard, Israel and the United States could do the functional equivalent of any of the following. They could ride backwards into battle. They could enter the enemy camp and 'count coup'—that is, touch the enemy while he is sleeping. Or they could enter the enemy camp and stick their spear into the ground with their leg tied to it by a leather thong and fight off all comers.

## AN INCLUSIVE RATIONALITY, A COMMON HUMAN STANDARD

Taiiike Alfred (1999) notes in his book, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, 'a deep reading of tradition points to a moral universe in which all of humanity is accountable to the same standard' (p. 21). This standard, this potentially inclusive rationality, is based on a natural flow, on this logic of human behavior situated in caring relationships.

In the last years of the 20th century and during the first years of the 21st century, international society has put much effort into trying to identify 'universal human rights', a standard of justice which is universally accepted. Indigenous people perhaps have special insight into this effort, particularly since they have often been denied basic rights.

Also, 'Indigenous societies are the repository of vast experience and deep insight on achieving balance and harmony' (Alfred, 1999, p. 21), and not only regarding the environment. Justice, for instance, is 'the achievement of balance in all...relationships, and the demonstration in both thought and action of respect for the dignity of each element in the circle of interdependency that forms our universe'.

This statement echoes Lakota Medicine Person, Black Elk's, famous vision of the Sacred Hoop:

for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and starlight... (Black Elk<sup>Q4</sup>, 1931, p. 43)

Finding patterns of effective interaction where we can discover, share and coordinate our mutual value is, thus, our primary task. Relationships, responsibilities, reciprocity and redistribution form dynamic spirals out of which responsibility, reciprocity and redistribution are manifestations of caring relationships. The hoop of each community begins to spin as it incorporates the energy emerging from new relationships.

The image of the spiral captures the dynamic nature of this kind of inclusivity. This dynamic of



ever-expanding spirals of care is our ID, the main feature of the Indigenous democracy we are interested in sharing with the rest of the world. This dynamic of care creates the dialogic space where relational politics can be practiced.

## POWER AND GOVERNANCE

Indigenous philosophies of governance provide examples of [Foucault's \(1980\)](#)<sup>Q5</sup> 'non-disciplinary forms of power'. In Indigenous governance personal autonomy has precedence over collective sovereignty. There is no coercion, only 'the compelling force of conscience' (Alfred, 1999, p. 45) based on the Four R's described above.

Leadership in an Indigenous system is non-coercive. Leadership does not consist of 'power wielding' (Burns, 1978, in Alfred, 1999, p. 45), of individual triumph, competitiveness, debate, majority rule, winners and losers or of power and control over others. Rather, leadership involves taking responsibility, not control. The leader's major task is to be able to knit together and orchestrate the energy that enables each person to contribute effectively to the whole. Thus, a key responsibility of a leader is to create social spaces in which we can come to value each other.

In the 21st century this requires the continuous construction of ever more inclusive social spaces. This is a kind of community building. It can also be likened to orchestrating or networking human energy towards a holistic vision or goal—towards a preferred outcome that is good for everyone. Since strong individuals make strong groups, whether local or global, leadership is shared responsibility and is exercised by enabling 'individuals to pool their self-power in the interest of the collective good' (Alfred, 1999, p. 25).

In Native American society, this 'good' is usually evaluated on how today's decision will affect the future, the seventh generation, the children's children's children and, thus, the ability of the community to continue. Another evaluation point when evaluating any kind of behavior is the answer to the following question: 'What if everyone behaved that way, would the world still work?'

However, the collective, whether family, community or state, does not have precedence. 'Individuals alone determine their interests and destinies' (Alfred, 1999, p. 54) Some relationship can be seen here to Western concepts of 'personal and popular sovereignty' (p. 54).

## A CHANGE MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVE TO THE MODEL OF REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

Q5

Alfred also notes that these ideas around power and coercion provide an alternative model to the revolutionary one as to how change can occur in society:

[The] focus is not on opposing external power, but instead on actualizing [one's] own power and preserving [one's] intellectual independence... this conception of power is not predicated on force. It does not involve coercing or inducing other beings to fulfill imperatives external to their own nature; thus, it is not inherently conflictual. (Alfred, 1999, p. 48)

... it focuses on whether or not power is used in a way that contributes to the creation and maintenance of balance and peaceful coexistence in a web of relationships... power is the force needed by all to achieve peace and harmony. (Alfred, 1999, p. 49)

Thus, these governance and power concepts are similar to

...the original principle of federalism... achieving a relationship between peoples founded on the principles of autonomy and interdependence... the notion of respectful cooperation on equal terms... of cultivating relationships that allow for ongoing dialogue (Alfred, 1999, p. 53)

However, we must also remember that the very concept of federalism was borrowed by 18th-century Western European observers from the 1000-year-old Iroquois Confederacy (Johansen, 1982; Weatherford, 1990).

Indigenous ideas about governance are, thus, based on a set of power relationships in which

we all acknowledge that we are all permanent features of our social and political landscapes. Because we exist, we have a right to exist, and we are, thus, due honor, respect . . . and care.

#### SELF-DETERMINATION VS. IMPOSITION/CONVERSION

We are all looking for our place in the sun. Cultural and ethnic strife exist on this planet because those in power deny the desire of others for political and cultural autonomy. But what if values collide? What about the present apparent collision between the values of various fundamentalisms, Jewish, Christian and Islamic, that we are presently experiencing in the world?

Again, my Comanche background comes to my aid in trying to understand these dynamics. Comanches know that what is good for me is not necessarily good for you and vice versa. Power resides in the ability of each of us to choose. But good choice and, therefore, the ability to coexist and to be truly self-determining, relies on two things. First, each person/group has to be allowed to speak for him/her/themselves. In fact, it is a human responsibility. Second, each voice has to actually be heard. It is not enough simply to give voice, although that is one step. One has to actually be listened to and heard.

If you do not value a voice, you cannot hear it. And conversely, you have to give voice in a non-threatening way, so that your voice can be heard.

The Maori say that 'dialogue is the food of chiefs'. We might even consider words as a kind of 'social grooming mechanism' used in establishing relationships. (A 'debate', on the other hand, is characterized by the Maori as 'a war of words'.)

What one's words articulate, however—one's views—are based on experience. In the Indigenous perspective it is assumed that we have each had different experiences, so, of course, there are multiple realities. We have to be able to hear the experience on which a point of view is based. If we can mutually do that, then we are able to construct a shared set of experiences (not to be confused with identical ones) on which to base our next set of actions.

This is how our strength is increased by sharing. We can affirm our view, expand our view, or sometimes alter or even give up our current view when we encounter a new one. We can also allow others to have contrastive views as long as they do not impose their views on us and vice versa.

My grandfather and grandmother exemplified this radical self-determination also in the area of spiritual practice. My grandmother was the second Comanche converted to Christianity. My grandfather practiced his traditional Eagle Medicine for his entire life. In addition, he was one of the pioneers of the peyote way, later institutionalized as the Native American Church. They each recognized that each was following the appropriate path for themselves.

In Comanche culture children belong to the maternal line. Therefore, we were all raised as Christians, and my grandfather drove us all to church every Sunday and sat outside in the car and waited for the service to be over. Every sunset my grandfather sat on the front porch singing his Eagle Medicine songs.

However, when it came to be our turn to choose our own spiritual paths, we were also allowed to choose the path appropriate to our own circumstances. This experience taught me how our interconnectedness allows us humans, and all things to which we are related, to coexist by respecting everyone's rights to determine their own futures.

#### AGORAS: DISCURSIVE DEMOCRACIES FOR CRAFTING COEXISTENCE BASED ON VALUING SELF DETERMINATION

The huge contribution of the ISSS community to 're-cognizing' and realizing this alternative set of power relations in 21st-century society is, of course, all the experimenting being done by ISSS community members with all the structured dialogue processes (at least 35 different varieties were shared at this conference alone!). That this very ancient dialogic 'social technology' has so many contemporary manifestations is reason for hope. Both Indigenous and contemporary practice constitute a treasure box of resources for the

cultivation of dialogic relationships through which 'discursive democracy' (Alfred, 1999, p. 45) can be enacted.

We may yet create [Habermas' \(1971\)<sup>Q5</sup>](#) 'ideal speech situation' in global practice. Such a 'speech situation' is

a discussion in which participants express themselves freely, forthrightly, and truthfully; therefore, they put aside external power relationships and address each other on an equal footing. In such an ideal discussion, every viewpoint and argument is heard, and decisions are made by the force of the better argument. (Bausch, 2001, p. 64)

The synergy created between these ancient and contemporary dialogue practices has huge potential. It can enable us to actually create new social spaces, global *agoras*, where we can act with the care and patience necessary to mutually discover the value each of us and our communities of belonging have to contribute to our collective well-being. We can create new problem-solving and decision-making spaces where, in the words of a Cook Island Maori woman speaking to an environmental conference in Vanuatu on the eve of the First Gulf War, 'the voices of hummingbirds are listened to with as much respect as the voices of eagles'. These dialogue practices, ancient and contemporary, have the potential of enabling us 21st-century human beings to share our collective wisdom with each other effectively in a global context.

#### THE VICTIMIZATION CAUSED BY GLOBALIZATION

I am not anti-globalization per se. Proactively, I just want to take the word back. I want to be a 'globalist', not a 'homogenist'.

In fact, what is currently meant by globalization is really just a distorted and unilateral form of interconnectedness. Globalization should not only mean being able to buy a MacDonalds hamburger everywhere in the world. It should mean having all kinds of increased choices everywhere.

I want to redefine globalization in a way that reflects increased participation in all the systems

that surround us. Understood in this way, participation also implies the ability to make contributions to society at a global level. For instance, for artists the Internet increases distribution possibilities.

Q5

However, the global system should not just be about the increased production of things. It should not just be about increased consuming. The global system should feature an increase in ideas and positive relationships as well.

The concept of Indigeneity has much to offer in the construction of a new dialogic global system. Informed by Indigeneity, this planetary social space, this global *agora*, would be one in which everyone who wants to could participate and to which everyone could contribute from their place of belonging. They would not have to give up who they are in order to participate. In fact, I want the emerging global system to be a vast array of such dialogic spaces, as Black Elk saw in his vision, 'a hoop of hoops'.

Notice the key phrase above, that such a dialogic space is one in which everyone *who wants to* can participate. Therefore, a key aspect of any true dialogic process is that it is consensual. There is choice—for everyone—to participate or not in the conversation. These kinds of dialogic processes are non-coercive, free, voluntary, proactive. There are no gatekeepers, but also no forced participation. Globalization in its present form, however, is more about imposition, about forced participation, than an open invitation to participate.

Amish people in the United States, the so-called Pennsylvania Dutch, can participate in those aspects of mainstream society in which they wish to participate. They are not forced to participate in all aspects of the larger society. Native Americans, however, have only just recently wrested back from the central government this ability to *self-determine* their participation.

Dee Hock, the founding CEO of VISA International wrote a book entitled *The Birth of the Chaordic Age* (1999) in which he identifies a number of the features of sustainable global organizations. One was that existing members should not be unevenly disadvantaged by the participation of new members. If we think of all

of us as members of the global order, we could rephrase this notion, in the following way. No person or group should be unduly disadvantaged by participation in the emerging system.

The current form of globalization, however, is a threat to cultural and political autonomy. At the same time it also serves as a galvanizer of local cultural, economic and political forces against the external forces. Many times those who resist the negative forces of globalization and of economic, political and cultural domination are labeled terrorists. Unfortunately, sometimes overwhelming external forces that threaten local autonomy force people to feel that they have no other means to resist except through violence (Castells, 1997).

My grandfather could have been considered a 'terrorist' at the end of the last century. He was one of the last 'wild' Indians to be brought in for 'pacification' at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Thus, in my personal and communal lines of history I carry stories with me about what it has been like to have had an alien system imposed on oneself and one's community. It is a painful thing.

As we look at the world around us, we have to recognize that existing systems based on Western models of governance are not working. The imposition model continues to cause great pain. We need to establish respectful, caring relationships of responsibility with each other.

This is what is wrong with the present 'free market' economic system. It is devoid of care. It is devoid of responsibility mechanisms. It has no such mechanisms at all *vis-à-vis* communities, whether they exist on the local, regional or even the national level. The present economic system does not care if any of these communities, or if the Earth itself, exists into the future.

As Dionne wrote in the 6–12 October 2003, *Washington Post*, National Weekly Edition:

Having grown up in Fall River, Massachusetts, a place whose job base was once rooted in the apparel industry, I've always felt that writing off an industry as 'old' is a lot easier for people who never depended on it. . . .

The Institute for Supply Management, which keeps some of the best numbers on manufac-

turing, pleased the stock market early this month with a report showing that economic activity in manufacturing grew. . . . But its manufacturing employment index actually fell and remained below the 50 percent break-even point for job creation for the 35th consecutive month. . . .

Our tax and social policies are supposed to respond to inequities as they arise. But our current approach seems based mostly on begging China to fix its currency and praying for 5 percent growth. . . .

The evidence suggests that we're not in the New Economy anymore but in a New New Economy with problems that weren't supposed to arise. The real lagging indicator is our economic thinking. (p. 27)

This is a decontextualized system. There are no feedback mechanisms, save one: maximum profit.

Without feedback we are simply operating on unfounded assumptions and prejudices.

Except for the saints in our midst, everyone has prejudices, including the well educated and well-to-do. But when upscale folks have prejudices, they usually call them ideas, convictions or principles.

So how can you tell when a principle is merely a prejudice? When someone keeps making an argument even though the facts suggest it no longer holds up. (Dionne, 2003, p. 27)

The present econo-centric global system cannot self-regulate on the basis of profit alone. A new global order (and not just an economic order) has to be constructed based on the obligation of equitable exchange, an exchange system which nurtures the communal relationships out of which our identities, our human selves, grow.

A key move to establish this more equitable order would be to hold a series of global *agora* to investigate the control of all 'transformational processes', including all economic mechanisms that perpetuate asymmetry (Isackson, 2003). This would include investigating the control of financial markets and investment funds, of

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3 production, the marketing of technology and the  
4 easy access to raw materials.

5 My country, the United States, to which I am  
6 extremely loyal, is at war and, to my shame,  
7 disregards the collective voice of the United  
8 Nations. Nobody wants to work with us any-  
9 more because we have abused our relationships,  
10 even those with our old Allies.

11 Paradoxically, the United States currently  
12 perceives itself as the victim of terrorism. The  
13 terrorists simultaneously see themselves as the  
14 victims of US policy in the world.

15 Post 9/11 we have re-created Israeli/Palestinian  
16 dynamics worldwide. In the 1980s I was invited  
17 to the West Bank and Gaza to address a  
18 Palestinian conference. Encountering the arr-  
19 rangement of physical space in Israeli-controlled  
20 Palestine, as a Comanche American whose  
21 people had been at war with the United States  
22 for more than 100 years, I recognized this  
23 particular spatial arrangement immediately. It  
24 was a spatial manifestation of the 'fort mentality'  
25 during the Indian Wars in the United States.  
26 Anyone in the world who has seen a 1950s  
27 Hollywood cowboy and Indian movie would  
28 also immediately know what I am talking about.

29 In any case, the anti-American sentiment  
30 around the world caused by this overarching  
31 victim mentality deeply hurts me as a patriotic  
32 Comanche American. Conscious evolution can-  
33 not take place within this victim mentality.

### 34 35 36 37 38 39 CREATING SOCIAL SPACES WHERE 40 OPTIMAL MUTUAL LEARNING CAN 41 TAKE PLACE

42  
43 As a Comanche American, I could probably see  
44 myself as a victim. However, surprisingly,  
45 neither of my grandparents ever saw themselves  
46 as victims, and I have never perceived myself as  
47 powerless. The Comanche 'managed' three  
48 empires, the Spanish, French and English, for  
49 more than one hundred years and prevented  
50 these empires from expanding across the South-  
51 ern Plains. It was only when the United States  
52 Cavalry and the Texas Rangers were outfitted  
53 with repeating rifles that they were able to beat  
54 'the Lords of the Southern Plains'.  
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My grandfather and grandmother constantly  
learned from those around them, but not in a  
self-deprecating way. Simply, if there were a  
better idea, they would use it, just as long as it  
did not conflict with their basic integrity.

This constant learning from those around me,  
even inviting them to teach me what I do not  
know, and creating new social spaces in which  
this learning can take place, is my core political  
strategy and talent. These spaces are not 'my'  
space or 'your' space, but 'our' space.

To learn more about how to design such spaces  
for collective learning was what drew me to  
Professor Christakis' work in the first place.  
(Take note, that it was we at AIO who invited Dr  
Christakis to participate in our work, not,  
initially, the other way around! All teasing aside,  
this is just to emphasize that the initiative for new  
projects does not exist only in the academic  
sector. We all have ideas to offer.)

Like my Comanche ancestors in the 16th  
century, when they saw the Spanish horse  
appear on the Southern Plains and decided that  
that horse could transport their goods a damn  
site better than a dog, so, in 1985, when I  
encountered Dr Christakis' Interactive Manage-  
ment structured dialogue system, I decided that  
it was a more powerful vehicle for productive  
dialogue than anything I had encountered  
before. However, it was also a vehicle that was  
consistent with my core values, and, not only  
that, but this vehicle had the potential of being  
able to make those core values available to an  
even wider set of participants.

Syst. Res. 21, 1–15 (2004)

## CONCLUSION: STEPS FORWARD

I am happy to be a part of constructing global agoras in order to work with others and explore all the possibilities for true democracy through active participation. It is, in fact, my obligation, as an Indigenous person, that as part of my relationship with each one of you, I will work to create social spaces where we can gather and come to value one another.

So, that is why we came to Greece. Systems thinking resonates with us Indigenous people. The structured dialogue processes developed by ISSS members have helped us Indigenous people intensify, make more profound and contemporize our Indigenous problem-solving and decision-making processes.

When we first used Dr Christakis' process back in 1985, it was like coming home to the future, to a 20th-century version of very familiar meeting dynamics. On the other hand, Dr Christakis had never found such receptive participants. He did not have to explain the idea of decision-making by consensus to anyone present.

On our side, it felt so comfortable, so good, to be able to enact ancient core values in a totally contemporary form that not only made the construction of consensus efficient but also enabled non-Indigenous people to work according to those values. This enables us to fulfill our obligations to our multiple relationships by creating social spaces, dialogic spaces, in which we can all have an authentic voice.

In return, we hope that we have been able to reveal to you some of the ancient human roots, some of the 'deep logic' of these dialogic processes that up until now were out of your awareness. The structured dialogue processes inspired by the systems sciences are but the current manifestations of a very, very old, and profoundly human, 'social technology'.

It is so timely that we were joined together in this forum to explore participatory systems that engage the diversity of humankind in conscious evolution. We humbly propose that, as part of that journey, you include in your view of the future of the world the ideas and values embodied in the concept of *Indigeneity*.

Now that we are all together in this big canoe on the voyage of conscious evolution, we look forward to moving into the future in your company.

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Q7



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