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Building international partnerships for digitisation and preservation

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Abstract   For the past decade, the UCLA Library's International Digital Ephemera Project and Modern Endangered Archives Program have worked to create open access collections of international content through post-custodial partnerships. This paper details the work of those initiatives to support communities, archivists, librarians and researchers around the world to set priorities, understand complex legal issues and provide training and technology for cultural heritage preservation where content is at most risk. This paper describes how the UCLA Library works alongside a growing network of partners to preserve and present diverse voices and perspectives on global events and ensure community narratives about individual and collective experiences are accessible. This paper details both the ethic of care that informs the library's work and the infrastructure that enables access and discovery to these community collections as it improves and expands the scope of these programmes.

INTRODUCTION
An ethical framework for preserving at-risk cultural heritage

For the past decade, the UCLA Library's International Digital Ephemera Project (IDEP) and Modern Endangered Archives Program (MEAP) have worked to create open access collections of international content through post-custodial partnerships. Both initiatives support the work of archivists, librarians, researchers and communities around the world to set priorities for cultural heritage preservation. Community partners determine what is at greatest risk and most important within their collections, and the community creates descriptive terms and metadata that define the cultural context for the digitised materials. At the same time, the UCLA Library creates, sustains and updates open access web platforms that invite research, teaching and communal use of all materials. This form of partnership, between a US–based public research library and the stewards of archival content around the world, facilitates access and ensures fidelity to community context and understanding for digital collections once they are published online. At the same time, these programmes amplify voices that have historically been left out of dominant and national narratives by preserving more diverse stories and providing community-defined access to the historical and cultural record. Over the past decade, the library has refined its approach to this work by employing a broad understanding and interpretation of rights grounded in open access, investing time in building community trust, and using technology to document and publish well-contextualised primary sources.

The library has set itself an ambitious goal: to preserve and present previously hidden voices and perspectives on global events and ensure community narratives about individual and collective experiences around the world are secure and accessible. Indeed, the library feels strongly that the digitisation and documentation of voices and perspectives of everyday community participants' archival materials can shape knowledge.

In this age of COVID-19, access to broad and diverse cultural materials in digital format is essential as researchers have reduced access to the archives they would normally visit and school children have less opportunity to access museums on field trips. Similarly, in the face of global climate change, digitisation is an essential tool that allows communities to preserve and share records of traditional life lost to

extreme weather shifts, generational loss and migration.

Both MEAP and IDEP are grounded in an ethic of care that informs the library's work. Inviting communities to document their own experiences, in their own words and their own languages, brings more authentic community perspectives to the historic record. The UCLA Library uses its resources to provide infrastructure, access and discovery to these community collections as it works to improve its programmes, expand access and scale up the library's international partnership model.

CONTEMPORARY ARCHIVES AND THE LEGACIES OF RIGHTS LEGISLATION

Working globally makes legal issues complex. To help balance international law with US law, the project team draws on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which provides a framework, set of principles and aspirational goals to guide the library's work.

One of the relevant guiding principles for the library's work is Article 19, which states, 'everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers'. This right has been challenged by many regimes in the recent past, and a number of the library's grantees are seeking to document aspects of free expression that pose risks to the safety and security of speakers and the communities they represent. Also directly relevant are Article 3, which states, 'everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person', and Article 6, which states, 'everyone has right to be accepted everywhere as a person'.

How does UCLA Library translate this framework into the practice of digitisation and publication as it confronts both copyright and intellectual property concerns as well as issues related to free expression, privacy and personal safety? MEAP focuses on archival content from the contemporary period (circa 1960s forward) and there were concerns about the impact of international copyright and intellectual property law regimes. It was feared that copyright law, which covers the making of copies, distribution, public performance, creation of derivatives and preservation of original work in any fixed form, would be a very strong barrier, preventing the digitisation and hosting of cultural heritage in support of teaching, research and public engagement. Moreover, it was feared that negotiating copyright to preserve and present collections online would be highly challenging and labour-intensive. These fears proved unfounded.

Over the course of the first two cohorts, representing 37 projects in 25 different countries, grantees who are creators (or who are close to the creators) have been able to obtain the requisite permissions to cover preservation and access uses, thus helping to preserve important at-risk cultural heritage. This demonstrates the importance of maintaining close community relationships and connections to the creators or copyright owners — a key advantage of relatively recent collections.

A more insidious issue is that copyright law — from its origins in the Statute of Anne in 1610 and subsequent replication in most regimes around the world — is based on Western literary culture and values and therefore many forms of creative and indigenous cultural heritage have not historically been included. The injustice of this form of colonial decree is highlighted by Professor Ruth Okijini from Harvard Law School, who states:

> Copyright law is intimately bound up in the invention of the printing press. If you look at indigenous groups all over the world, their lifestyles and works of art and poetry are often not captured by the intellectual-property system … It's as though we've created a system that says,

'It's only when you come from a Western literary culture that your work matters'.[1]

A core principle of UCLA Library's work is its fundamental commitment to centring community voices and respecting their authority in relation to the content and collections the library hosts and preserves. The library works closely with communities to identify any challenging ethical or legal questions vis-à-vis broad open access publishing on the internet, and uses the concept of 'communal rights', which again is community centred, referring to community itself and its members' agency and authority.

Another aspect of privacy law is commonly referred to as 'the right to be forgotten'. This more recent legislation provides 'If an individual no longer wants his personal data to be processed or stored by a data controller, and if there is no legitimate reason for keeping it, the data should be removed from their system' (Article 17 GDPR (65) Right of Rectification and Erasure (66) Right to be Forgotten). Critics, including historians, argue that this type of legislation could lead to the widespread and systematic removal of online content, resulting in a new form of censorship and the undermining of freedom of expression and human rights.

The alternative, less discussed, but equally important concept for the library's work is the right to be remembered. This concept reflects the library's commitment and that of its funders to preserve and make publicly accessible at-risk contemporary community histories, amplifying and highlighting previous archival silences and those omitted from the historical and cultural record. This right to be remembered is far more critical and it is hoped that future grantees can speak more directly to the importance of this as their work progresses.

COLLABORATION AND BUILDING TRUST

To secure the memory and cultural heritage of community partners, the library's role is to promote and support at-risk cultural heritage preservation that highlights and centres community voices and context in the cultural and historical record. The library facilitates access and discovery so grantees can tell their own stories to a wider community, with as few barriers as possible. Launched in 2012, IDEP officially began with an initial grant from the Arcadia Fund, which focuses on cultural heritage preservation, and continues to this day with internal funding from the library.

Over the years, the library has engaged in multiple projects with partners all over the world, including in the Middle East, Africa and the Caribbean, that aim to preserve, digitise and provide broad public access to endangered and ephemeral resources. IDEP projects are very much team efforts, and in addition to staff at partner institutions, involve many people from within the UCLA Library from departments such as International and Area Studies, the Digital Library, Conservation and Preservation, Distinctive Collections and others. This collaborative effort is essential to ensure that the library addresses not only technical issues, but also front-end curatorial ones so that the projects meet the needs of communities, researchers and other users in a sustainable, accessible way.

IDEP projects focus on preserving at-risk ephemera, broadly defining ephemera to include rare, unique and fragile materials, including flyers, meeting agendas, propaganda posters, recordings of speeches, oral histories, etc. These materials can be indispensable resources in documenting and understanding communities' everyday lives and historical events, adding richness and detail to existing narratives about larger historical events and eras. Collecting ephemera, however, poses numerous challenges to libraries. Such materials are difficult to identify and acquire, and often pose preservation, conservation, storage and access issues. With these challenges in mind, IDEP aims to systematically identify, preserve, digitise and provide broad access to ephemeral materials

from developing nations, disadvantaged or marginalised groups, or areas involved in civil or international wars.

In engaging in international collaborations, it was recognised from the beginning that traditional library and archival practice, which is historically centred on a model of institutional ownership and acquisition of well-known published and unpublished voices, was not a practice the library wanted to continue. Libraries and archives have long existed as spaces of power, where access is controlled and limited. IDEP and MEAP both break from the historic model of collecting to emphasise relationship-building and address archival silences omitted under the status quo. To that end, IDEP and MEAP are open access programmes that aim to preserve and make publicly available at-risk ephemera from around the world. Additionally, they are both post-custodial, meaning that the library does not assume physical custody of any materials, only of their digital representations. That said, the library also acknowledges the imbalances of power inherent in collaborations with the Global South, which, if left unaddressed, will continue to be exacerbated through the library's practice. Digitisation is not, in and of itself, a solution; it must be accompanied by active curation, strong partner collaboration and sustainable technological structures.

By recognising and addressing the power imbalance in the relationship, the library takes a partner and community-centred approach. Through the library's many years of partner-based work it has established a set of practices that match the library's resources to its partners' needs. For UCLA, this is the basis of trust in its relationships. From the outset of each project, the library seeks partners with compelling stories and aligned missions. Coupled with a focus on training and rich documentation, the library provides onboarding and support for the resources it provides to partner institutions. Lastly, the library centres the human labour that goes into archive-building to demonstrate

how it values the library's partners and their labour. For example, MEAP budget guidelines encourage building in salary for all project team members, including students and interns, as well as training opportunities and capacity building. MEAP has also adopted the IDEP metadata schema that accommodates local requirements and multiple languages, which has continued to strengthen relationships with partner institutions. The process is an iterative one that began with a model focused on specialised outreach, developing toolsets and technical standards, while also providing for local language and taxonomies.

Building trust is an ongoing endeavour that requires continual communication and conversation with the library's partners. The realities of international politics, constantly changing institutional requirements, budgetary restrictions and other roadblocks can make this very challenging over the long term. The library's people-to-people approach attempts to mitigate roadblocks by establishing open lines of communication so that issues are addressed in timely and equitable ways. It is acknowledged that this is a resource-intensive process that many institutions cannot sustain. Even at an institution the size of UCLA, with the resources of an American Research 1 university, the sustainability of projects is continually challenging.

POLITICAL INSTABILITY, REGIME CHANGE, GLOBAL PANDEMIC, CLIMATE CHANGE

Other challenges exist as the library establishes and sustains international collaborations. Many of the areas where the library works are subject to political instability and/or non-democratic or even repressive governance practices. The previous presidential administration and its foreign relations exacerbated many of these issues, particularly in Cuba where IDEP has sustained partnerships for many

years, and it is not yet known if the current administration will roll back any of the restrictions put in place. These political differences exacerbate trust issues, which are often already present due to the historical practices of Global North institutions. Additionally, digital infrastructure capacity varies widely among the library's partners, and many face significant staffing and funding shortages. In some places, the library's ability to assist with these issues is very limited, not just because of lack of funding but also due to government policy such as embargoes or visa restrictions. Red tape and bureaucracy remain a universal problem and can be just as difficult at one end or the other. Partnerships are particularly difficult in countries with US legal or trade restrictions and often require months of preparatory work to gain permissions from institutional oversight groups.

In light of these challenges, the library sustains trust by focusing on the strengths it can bring to the table. UCLA, as a Global North institution with access to equipment, funding and training resources, can share these with partners. In return, the library's partners bring their unique perspectives, voices, context and invaluable collections along with their own expertise in regards to materials, users and local communities and circumstances. Library partners take the lead on metadata creation, with metadata published in both English and the local language. This can be challenging when dealing with non-traditional ephemeral materials, but it is essential to fully capture local expertise.

The library has also had a lot of success, particularly in Cuba, with sharing training and knowledge through local networks of librarians, archivists and curators. This is not always possible as such networks are not often present, but they can be an invaluable source for building capacity — one of the main goals of both IDEP and MEAP. One example of this is the formal and informal IDEP workshops held in partnership with the Instituto de Historia in Havana. Through

these, the library has reached far beyond its official partners to entities such as the Museo de la Musica, Estudios Abdala and other local cultural heritage institutions without additional funding. While the library has enjoyed much success with its Cuban partners, it is also constantly battling regulatory and political realities that make continued support of its partners difficult and frustrating. However, the library feels an ethical responsibility to continue to find ways to support the development of a sustainable infrastructure that gives Cuban researchers and other community members continued access to their own cultural heritage.

The library has also been discussing how it defines open access, both within UCLA and with the library's partners. The aim is to provide the broadest possible access while still being respectful of privacy issues and any local cultural issues, including the 'right to be forgotten'. Although the library has not yet directly faced political pressures on its ability to provide IDEP or MEAP materials by open access, it recognises that this is a reality, still, in many parts of the world. The library is also aware that some of its partners have real infrastructure problems related to internet access and technical infrastructure and is exploring ways to address this. Finding funders who are interested in solving these technical barriers is one way, but it may be possible to mitigate the issues in other, easier, more localised ways, and the library is always open to ideas or experiences. Part of building and maintaining relationships of trust involves a long-term commitment that may expand beyond the boundaries of individual projects, which is challenging even during periods when health and budget crises are not at the forefront, but the library is committed to finding a way.

TECHNOLOGY: CASE STUDY OF THE GREEN MOVEMENT

How do these questions of technology, policy and content and collections play

out in international individual projects? How does partnership work to preserve, transform, document and safeguard material that remains politically sensitive or personally resonant? The case study of one collection of mobile-phone video footage draws out these concerns.

Hossein Derakhshan is an Iranian blogger jailed for six years due to his online activity. Upon his release he lamented how the internet had changed from a place where open and free discussion was deemed so dangerous that the government would jail its people over online content to a medium that looks and behaves more like television. Indeed, the dominant online forums in Iran today are Instagram and WhatsApp, which are not regulated by the Iranian government. This says a lot about where the web is today.

What is missing from earlier days is the plethora of information hubs that once defined the internet. The modern internet is convenient and inexpensive, but it makes preservation more difficult when trying to preserve content from the 'old web'. The original open design of the internet is being usurped in important ways by a small cohort of technology companies, device manufacturers and governments. The result is that dissenting opinions and views have been driven further from the frontlines of the internet, making them harder to find and difficult to collect. Additionally, the currency of popularity has led to a copy-paste narrative that can drown out non-conformist or dissenting views. The activists on the frontlines have had their words misinterpreted by Western press and those interpretations spread in news stories across the globe.

The library's efforts around collections have resulted in the growth of content like the Iranian Green Movement's collection of thousands of mobile-phone videos in 2009. The protests were widely reported in the press and it was one of the earliest protest movements to find its online fame largely misinterpreted and twisted to

meet the narratives of competing interests. The protestors saw their videos show up in western news outlets only to have the words and context missing. The IDEP project stepped in to fill the void by giving a platform for activists to interpret words and add context to the protests that were largely missing previously. The library worked with activists, volunteers and students to provide multilingual access to both time-based media as well as curated born-digital content. This process of 're-curation' provided the context necessary to give those activists who had fought for the right to be remembered insurance that the narrative presented online had personal perspectives.

In addition to the Green Movement collection, the UCLA Library was also able to gather content collected during and after popular demonstrations of the 2011 Egyptian revolution. The content, consisting of flyers, newspapers and other ephemera was obtained from and around Midan Tahrir, the epicentre of the revolution. The collection contains over 500 items in the Arabic language, including poetry, personal essays, advertisements, missives, political party communications, protest flyers and activist newspapers. Approximately 90 volunteer translators located in Egypt and abroad worked to translate collected documents with the aim of sharing them with the public, allowing for search in a multiplicity of languages (English, Farsi and Arabic, as well as Spanish, Chinese, etc. in other collections) to support accessibility for scholars as well as the general public. As the library continued to collect around the Arab Spring content, the ephemeral nature of modern discourse was a constant pressure.

Even as modern collecting tools are becoming more sophisticated, the nature of the social media and the currency of the medium to the hosting services themselves mean that the embedded media can have a very limited life expectancy. What this means is that some of the widely shared images collected by the library were

no longer available within a few weeks. To add provenance to its collecting, the library used volunteers to georeference and timestamp social media posts for academic use. This technique was dubbed 'SoLoGlo' to highlight the social, local and global nature of collecting. Extensive collection efforts around social media demonstrate the need for the profession to take action for history's sake.

The IDEP mission was always about ephemeral content. In libraries there is a tendency to think of ephemera as non-traditional and often unpublished materials that help set the context of a research subject. As the IDEP project was transitioning from its initial grant funding to programmatic work, the library began envisioning a new grant-funded programme focusing on modern ephemera, from nitrate negatives to Betamax to the born-digital media currently taking centre stage. While cultural heritage has always been at risk, modern creations from film to Facebook all have technical challenges, with a climate crisis and global pandemic turning the pressure up another notch. The globe is covered in VHS recordings even though the last VCR was manufactured in 2016. It is not as simple as shining light through film. From this pressure the MEAP programme was born. As a global preservation programme, it is important not only to make the technology as accessible as possible, but also to be inclusive in terms of discovery (as of this writing, the library has over two dozen languages in its metadata) and collaborative in developing the library's rights framework. The library's partners have been comfortably able to add their cultural heritage to the library's archives in a hyper-localised fashion.

CONCLUSION

Pushed by this urgency and the demand for ethical approaches that meet the needs of different community practices, the UCLA Library has developed and shared documentation and best practices that can be

implemented around the world; the library has built local networks that continue to work together — across institutions and across national borders; and the library has published thousands of documents from a broad range of creators and collections, providing access to film posters from Armenia, mobile-phone video footage from the Green Movement protests in Iran and the Commission of Enquiry report about the Sharpeville Massacre in South Africa. Over the past ten years, the IDEP team has built and sustained partnerships based on shared trust and distributed expertise.

The IDEP team affirmed the viability of a post-custodial model to create robust documentation and vital, in-demand digital collections. The one-to-one relationships built through IDEP and the expertise refined through experiences with archives around the world positioned the UCLA Library to launch the Modern Endangered Archives Program. The library works now to expand the scale, supporting more projects around the world through grants. Nonetheless, the library remains committed to engaging with its partners, learning from them and refining its practices as the global context for digital archives shifts.

Modern memory faces real danger at the start of the 21st century. Technology is rapidly evolving and the planet is rapidly heating. Pandemics, global politics and climate change are adding stresses and additional challenges to communities and their ability to steward precious cultural heritage. The programmes at UCLA strive to focus energy and resources in support of the most at-risk cultural heritage as we meet one of the oldest promises of the internet: to provide a platform for expression of viewpoints and narratives from all communities in local languages with native terminology. The UCLA Library's work with international partners and collaborators around the world makes the expansion of the historic and cultural record not only possible, but also more authentic and reflective of the

diversity of perspectives, languages, cultures and histories that otherwise are not broadly preserved or accessible. This work is ongoing and long-term, and by centring ethical approaches it is possible to ensure long-term sustainability and community engagement.

AUTHORS' NOTE

The IDEP Toolkit is available from https:// uclalibrary.github.io/ideptoolkit while the digitisation planning guides for print, audio and video content may be downloaded from https://meap.library.ucla.edu/meap–project –resources.

Reference

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