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Diasporic Literary Archives: A New Approach

Abstract: This essay describes the work of the Diasporic Literary Archives Network since 2012, some of the key ideas raised in the Network's meetings, and some of the projects completed and in prospect. The Network was conceived and planned by a team of archivists, researchers and scholars in the University of Reading, UK, and began work in 2012, funded by a major grant from the Leverhulme Trust. Its core membership was drawn from archivists in France, Italy, Namibia, Trinidad & Tobago and the USA, with support from UNESCO, the International Council on Archives, the British Library and others. Subjects covered in the essay include: the politics of archival location; futures for Caribbean and African literary archives; archives at risk; the ethics of archival collecting; and reasons for the typically diasporic nature of literary archives.

Keywords: Literary Archives, Diaspora, Networking, Safe Havens, Diasporic Archives, Archival Ethics, Nigeria, Namibia

The Diasporic Literary Archives Network was conceived and planned by a team of archivists, researchers and scholars in the University of Reading during 2010–2011, and came into existence on 1 January 2012, funded by a major grant from the Leverhulme Trust, with a core network membership in France, Italy, Namibia, Trinidad & Tobago and the USA, and support from UNESCO, the International Council on Archives, the British Library and many others. Although the Leverhulme Trust's financial support came to an end in 2015, the Network has continued many of its projects and programmes in the subsequent years and retains a clear identity through ongoing cooperation between its members and through regular updating of its website at <https://research.reading.ac.uk/diasporicarchives>.

From the beginning, the Network proposed to take a comparative, transnational and internationalist approach to studying literary manuscripts, their uses and their significance. It took as its prime starting-point the notion that literary archives differ from most other types of archival papers in that their locations are more diverse and difficult to predict; they may have a higher financial value which will lead to their more frequently being purchased – as opposed to being

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deposited or donated; and acquiring institutions for literary papers have historically had very little in the way of collecting policies. Collecting of literary papers has often been opportunistic, unexplained and serendipitous.

The choice of the dramatic term “diasporic” was a defining moment in the history of the Network. The established literature of racial, tribal and national diasporas provided a philosophical framework which gave a highly original set of points of reference for the study of literary archives. Concepts such as the natural home, the appropriate location, exile, dissidence, fugitive existence, cultural hegemony, patrimony, heritage and economic migration were deployed to provide new perspectives. The essential nature of literary manuscripts was scrutinised and certain key features proposed and reviewed; early conclusions stressed the difference of literary papers, and the vital importance of form as well as content:

Literary manuscripts are not like other archives. Their importance lies in who made them and how they were made, the unique relationship between author and evolving text, the insights they give into the act of creation. The supreme example of this magical combination of form and content is provided by the manuscripts of Marcel Proust, lovingly preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 171 volumes of cross-hatched text, with later additions on small pieces of paper – the famous *paperoles* – glued onto almost every page: a wonderfully dreadful conservation challenge.

Literary archives often have a higher financial value than other archives. They are more likely to be found in libraries than in archives offices. In many countries of the world literary archives are housed in private foundations (such as the Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa in Rio de Janeiro), in literary museums (such as the Museum of Japanese Modern Literature in Meguro-ku, Tokyo), or in literary houses (such as the Maison de Balzac in Paris). In countries such as the USA, Canada and the UK, university libraries play a leading role, but this is by no means true in all countries. In France, for example, public libraries (often in the author's home town) are the principal repositories, together with the Bibliothèque Nationale. In contrast with most other types of archives — business archives, medical archives, architectural archives, religious archives or municipal archives — literary archives are often scattered in diverse locations without any sense of appropriateness or ‘spirit of place’. (Sutton 2014, 295–296)

In the course of the Network's discussions, some remarkable examples of diasporic literary archives emerged. A particular favourite was the literary archive developed by the Australian Defence Force Academy, one of the most important literary collections in Australia, which was created in order to help to broaden the outlooks of young people undergoing military training. A 1988 article by Graham Rowlands with the captivating title *‘On selling literary papers to the Australian Defence Force Academy: I'd just be perfect’* is now easily found online.

The papers of J. R. R. Tolkien, including the manuscripts of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, represent one of the best early examples of North American curators who were able to take advantage of their strong financial position,

their freedom to acquire and their literary knowledge. William B. Ready, Director of Libraries at the Marquette University in Milwaukee from 1956 to 1963, was an admirer of Tolkien and an important figure in a rising generation of US librarians and archivists who were prepared and permitted to follow their hunches and to purchase the papers of authors who were still alive, who were fairly young and who were out of fashion. Tolkien himself was naturally delighted to be feted by an American university librarian who had substantial funds to back up his praise of the author's literary output. Although a major Tolkien collection has subsequently been developed by the Bodleian Library in Oxford, all serious Tolkien scholars know that they will have to spend a considerable amount of research time in Milwaukee.

Another example of the careful cultivation of an author, with the greatest respect for their circumstances, is presented by the papers of Chinua Achebe held by Harvard University. Regrettably, it has been and remains the case that, despite its extraordinarily rich literary culture, Nigeria has no history at all of collecting literary manuscripts (Sutton 2016). The authorities at Harvard, seeing a great opportunity in this lacuna, were able to establish an excellent working relationship with Achebe himself, inviting him and (importantly) his family to Harvard, according him appropriate honour and respect, and in due course acquiring the whole of his personal archive. Whilst some of his professional papers and correspondence are to be found in other institutions, notably his papers in connection with the Heinemann African Writers series, which are in the University of Reading Library in England, anyone who wishes to study the man described by his fellow Nigerian Ezenwa-Ohaeto as "the father of modern African writing" will expect to conduct much of their primary research in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The case of Carlos Fuentes and his literary papers in the Firestone Library at Princeton University is more complex and more controversial. Mexico does have a strong tradition of collecting literary papers and respecting its own literary culture. It does not, however, have institutions which are well funded or well placed to make these sorts of high-profile acquisition. As a writer who saw himself as a citizen of the world as well as a citizen of Mexico, Fuentes had no problem about selling his archive to an institution which would pay him very well for it and which had a strong reputation for its custodianship of the archives of Latin American authors. In Mexico, however, this particular acquisition by Princeton was widely seen as an imperialist outrage, and phrases such as "cultural theft" were used (Leovy 2001).

A more neutral diasporic example is the story of how the papers of Ernest Hemingway arrived in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. On Hemingway's death in 1961, most of his papers remained in his house in Cuba. With the improbable combined assistance of President Kennedy and the Cuban

Prime Minister (later President) Fidel Castro, Mary Hemingway was enabled to travel to Cuba and to retrieve the papers. In exchange, she donated the Hemingway family home, the Finca Vigia, to the people of Cuba. In 1962 Mrs Hemingway was deeply moved by the honour paid to her late husband at a dinner at the White House and by the continuing attention of President and Mrs Kennedy. After the President's assassination, it was an understanding reached between the two widows, Mrs Hemingway and Mrs Kennedy, which brought the Ernest Hemingway Collection to the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

In general, as would have been expected, the movement of diasporic literary archives was found to be from poorer countries to richer countries, but with this general truth being modified in ways that were highly dependent on the language used by individual writers. Whilst literary manuscripts in English by authors from countries such as Nigeria, Trinidad & Tobago and Jamaica would be actively collected by well-funded institutions in the USA, Canada and (rather later) Britain, literary manuscripts in other languages might be virtually ignored. The major market in the USA was, and remains, for manuscripts in the two principal languages of that country, English and Spanish. The archives of Nobel Prize winning authors such as José Saramago (mostly in Portuguese), Orhan Pamuk (mostly in Turkish) or Elfriede Jelinek (mostly in German) had much less market attraction in North America than the papers of authors who had written in English or Spanish. As a result Saramago's papers are almost all, appropriately, in Lisbon and Jelinek's papers are almost all in Vienna. A country like Brazil, with a proud literary culture and a wide range of institutions collecting literary papers, had experienced very little competition in the acquisition of literary archives, principally because the papers were almost all in the Portuguese language.

One surprising example of what might be regarded as "reverse diasporism" – an English-language author whose papers have ended up in Spain – is provided by the satirical comic author Tom Sharpe, whose archive arrived in the Universitat de Girona in 2015. Sharpe had lived in Catalonia for many years, although he notoriously refused to learn either Spanish or Catalan. In his will he left all his literary archive to Doctor Montserrat Verdaguer and she in turn passed them on to the university in Girona, which has a very strong and varied collection of literary papers, but is not the first place where one would expect to look for the manuscripts of the *Porterhouse Blue* and *Wilt* novels.

A final example brings us closer to the primary meaning of "diaspora", and forms part of the expanding work on "archival safe havens" in which the Network has fully participated. The archive of the Syrian poet Ali Ahmad Saïd Esber, known by the splendid cognomen of Adonis, has been acquired and housed at the Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC) in Caen, where it has a place of honour alongside the archives of Jean Genet, Louis Althusser, Irène Némirov-

sky, Michel Foucault and Erik Satie. Whilst the exact terms of the deposit are not in the public domain, it has been widely reported that the acquisition was a form of safeguarding of literary heritage and left open the possibility of a return of the archive to Syria at a time when its safety and the safety of its rights-owners there could be assured.

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In establishing the Diasporic Literary Archives Network our idea was to explore the implications of improbable and unpredictable locations such as these: the power of the market, the power of serendipity and the magical attractiveness and collectability of literary manuscripts themselves. The intention was not to indulge in lamentations, in the style of Philip Larkin and others, about the loss of UK heritage materials to wealthy North American institutions with no apparent ethical collecting policy, but rather to formulate a set of definitions and truths about literary manuscripts and literary correspondence and then to look at desirable actions, activities and acts of solidarity.

It was important for the emerging Network to engage with other languages and other continents. The recruitment of partners from France, Italy, Namibia, Trinidad & Tobago and the United States made possible a much wider and more varied set of perspectives than had been usual in previous literary and archival research partnerships, and the Caribbean and African perspectives within the Network were to prove particularly original and enriching.

Whilst the “hub” of the Network was scholarly and archival work on the diasporic nature of literary manuscripts, a number of “spoke” projects developed as the Network’s wide-ranging workshops explored related issues. As the Network brought in a rich variety of experts from around the world, a number of unforeseen work-programmes evolved, notably joint work with UNESCO and PEN International on “archives at risk”; joint work with swisspeace and UNESCO on “archival safe havens”; and joint work with the Society of Authors and The National Archives on creating guidance for authors considering disposing of their personal archives.

The work on archives at risk began in a francophone context, from the work already begun by the Network’s IMEC and ITEM partners (Institut Mémoires de l’édition contemporaine and Institut des textes et manuscrits modernes), but also drew upon good working relations with the Endangered Archives Programme, based at the British Library. It quickly became clear that there were numerous projects, actual and proposed, mostly based in Europe, working devotedly and altruistically on ways of saving endangered archives and the archives of dissident authors and developing proposals on archival safe havens. Some of these proposals were presented in 2014 on behalf of the Network to the governance bodies of the International Council on Archives, where they caused some controversy and concern. It was clear to the core members of the Network that all of this

work needed to be brought together under a single validating umbrella organisation (the obvious candidate being UNESCO), probably with another organisation providing the office support and driving the project forward. This model finally began to take shape in 2017, with UNESCO in the validating role; swisspeace (a “practice oriented peace research institute”, based in Bern) in the dynamic organising role; and the Diasporic Literary Archives Network playing a facilitating role.

The Network’s commitment to working with professional colleagues in the Caribbean region and in eastern and southern Africa has been sustained. From the acquisition of the Monique Roffey Archive by the University of the West Indies (St Augustine) in 2014 to the acquisition of the Anthony C. Winkler Archive by the National Library of Jamaica in 2017, the Network played another facilitating role which has been generously acknowledged by our Caribbean partners.

The work with colleagues in the National Archives of Namibia on Namibian literary archives (beginning in 2015) was very consciously designed as a template which could be adopted and adapted by other colleagues and partners in the region, and it led naturally to a second mini-project (beginning in 2018) on Cameroonian literary archives in the National Archives of Cameroon. The working assumption has been that every country with a strong literary tradition owes it to itself to develop a programme of collecting literary manuscripts as well. Best-practice models have been publicised by the Network, and range as widely as Brazil, Uruguay, Finland, Austria, France, South Korea and Hong Kong.

A significant output from work begun by the Network was a document entitled *Authors and their papers*, jointly created with representatives of the Society of Authors, the National Archives and the Group for Literary Archives and Manuscripts (GLAM). The document assumes that many literary authors are interested in the eventual disposal of their personal archive, but have little idea of the practicalities which might be involved. It provides a step-by-step guide for authors, under headings such as ‘Rationale’; ‘What to keep’; ‘How to keep it’; ‘Transferring papers to an archives service: gift, bequest, permanent loan or deposit’; ‘Sale of papers and archives’; ‘Valuation’; ‘Offsetting value’; ‘Terms of transfer: storage’; ‘Terms of transfer: copyright’; ‘Terms of transfer: digitisation’; and so on.

The identification of the characteristic problem of split collections was a fascinating exercise, full of delightful anecdotes and strange puzzles and mysteries, but the Network is determined that it should lead on to work on best-practice protocols for sharing and cooperating with collections in the best interests of archival researchers. Clearly, in the digital era there are already more options for cooperation than there were in the past, and the likely development of collecting born-digital literary archives at some future time and storing them in “the cloud” opens up the intriguing possibility of a literary archive having two permanent homes, not following the Bodleian-Marbach Kafka model of an archive regularly

in transit, but rather a stored and searchable digital archive which could be simultaneously fully available in two countries (say, Mexico-USA; Namibia-South Africa; or Jamaica-UK).

Discussion about digital futures in respect of literary archives has formed an important, if not necessarily thus far inconclusive, part of the Network's deliberations. An early shock, at the very first workshop in 2012, was to receive the clearest possible expert opinion that in the present decade the valuation of digital literary collections is largely based on guesswork and hoping for the best. In the case of hybrid paper and born-digital archives, the paper component would be carefully valued and then a notional sum added on for the digital part. The absence of valuation criteria derives from an absence of precedents; an absence of information about likely users; an absence of a private market for archives in this format; and a certain lack of trust in the verifiability of the digital archive. If an author deposits a copy of a hard disk, rather than the hard disk itself, as seems to be happening in the majority of cases, how will the purchaser be able to assess what has been removed before deposit? Thus whilst the future value of email collections is absolutely certain (and from a biographer's perspective the two-way nature of email threads can make them much more useful than traditional correspondence collections), the future value of born-digital literary manuscripts remains a matter of speculation and uncertainty.

At the conclusion of the fifth workshop of the Diasporic Literary Archives Network, at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, in November 2014, there was agreement by general acclaim that the Network should seek to continue its work and its partnerships into the future.

Examples of future work-programmes for the Network (say from 2018 to 2025) would potentially include:

- “Archives at risk”: new protocols for collaboration on endangered collections worldwide (working with UNESCO and swisspeace).
- “Archival safe havens”, a subset of archives at risk: cases of archives in extreme danger which may, as a last resort, be physically moved to a safe location or be digitally copied and the copies transferred to a trusted repository.
- The dispersal of literary papers through publishing and business archives.
- Protocols for collaboration between repositories with “split collections”.
- Mapping split collections: a cartographic approach.
- The diaspora of digital literary archives: best practice and digital solutions.
- The literary archives of Namibia: a case study and model for other African countries.
- Caribbean archives in Caribbean institutions: a new future.
- “Hidden archives”: the uncatalogued troves: locating uncatalogued collections and finding shared solutions.

- Further work with the Society of Authors, the National Archives and the Group for Literary Archives and Manuscripts (GLAM) on guidance and encouragement for literary authors in respect of their personal archives.
- Locations of literary collections: creation of a world-wide list (joint work with ICA's Section for Literary Archives).
- Examples of diasporic literary collections: maintenance of an online database.

This exciting and diverse range of ongoing and future projects will keep the Diasporic Literary Archives Network itself active into the 2020s, and it is hoped that a good number of them will be adopted by other funders or consortia, by some or all of the existing six partners, or by the Section for Archives of Literature and Art (SLA) within the International Council on Archives.

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