



Agents of Change: International Librarianship, Development, and Globalization Theory

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Abstract:

This paper places the development of international librarianship within the historical development of international non-governmental-organizations and advent of globalization. Viewing international librarianship and the impact of development initiatives in librarianship in this manner provides a means to view librarianship as an agent of cultural internationalism and participant in developing the conditions for modern globalization. By establishing international librarianship as an actor in these broader social developments, the paper asserts that globalization theories provide useful perspectives from which to research the impact of past and present international library development projects.

Introduction

International library activities are by no means a new phenomenon and seem to have been central to the distribution of knowledge from the time that book collecting and organizing began. Why then do we need to consider new methods to analyze critically the development, trajectory, and impacts of international librarianship and development activities?

The answer to this question and origin of this paper begins with the relatively obscure writings of Paul Perrier, who trained as an archivist and paleographer at the Ecole des Chartes and spent his career at the *Bibliothèque Nationale*. In 1931, Perrier wrote a history of human civilization entitled *L'Unite Humaine*, which was later quoted by his colleague Suzanne Briet in

her influential work on the documentalist movement, “Que es la documentación?” Or “What is documentation?” in 1951¹. In several instances, Briet uses Perrier’s work to bolster her argument of a “unification of humanity” that is supported by and created through the informational work of “documentalists” and other information professionals². Of course, the notion of a universal humanity bound together, changed, and impacted by a world-wide informational network seems very contemporary and speaks to current notions of globalization and information or network society.

Contemporary to Perrier’s writing were several important events and personalities in the history of international librarianship. This was the time that IFLA was established through a series of meetings that took place in Prague, Philadelphia, and Edinburgh in the late 1920s. It follows by only a few years the time that the American Library Association began operating the American Library in Paris and the short lived Paris Library School, which was indirectly involved in the founding of IFLA. Of course, a short train-ride north to Brussels also found Paul Otlet, co-founder of what is now the International Federation for Information and Documentation (FID) and The Union of International Associations, developer of the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC), pioneer of the documentalist movement and peace activist. Through this network emerged novel forms of international librarianship that led to a worldwide library profession and establishment of a network that continues to support library development across the globe. All this happened in the brief window between two horrific world wars.

Why were all of these international activities taking place and how did they persist through such social and economic turmoil?

Before we get to the answers of these questions, we need to first consider the broader social and theoretical context around the development of international networks and organizations in the 20th century.

In 1954, Leon Carnovsky, of the University of Chicago, assembled a conference that focused on some of these very topics, attempting to identify hurdles to information sharing, the impact of culture and society on library development in regions across the world, and the role of large international bodies such as UNESCO and national bodies such as the American Library Association in furthering development of libraries and access to knowledge (1954). This conference was aimed at developing new ways to view international trends in librarianship and form new perspectives on how to evaluate and organize future programs. During this conference, Maurice Visscher, focused on the explosive growth of knowledge and the increasing importance of non-European languages in publishing, research, and discovery as two factors that were confounding and impacting librarians. Visscher, however, emphasized that the most difficult hurdles were the fact we live in a “national practical world”³. In other words, Visscher worried about ways to mitigate the State’s power over international information exchange and library collaboration. The issues that Visscher describes are still with us today, and seem to be no less difficult to surmount.

Since Carnovsky’s conference and other attempts to describe and evaluate the impact of international library activities, new modes of historical and social analysis have emerged that focus on the rise of cultural internationalism and impacts of globalization on knowledge distribution and cultural change. In an attempt to place these questions in a new context, this paper situates historically international librarianship in the advent of cultural internationalism

¹ Briet, Suzanne. *What Is Documentation?: English Translation of the Classic French Text*. Scarecrow Press, 2006.

² Perrier, Paul. *L’unité humaine: histoire de la civilisation et de l’esprit humain*. F. Alcan, 1931.

³ Carnovsky, Leon. *International Aspects of Librarianship*: University of Chicago Press, 1954, p. 3.

and its subsequent links to other theories of globalization that focus on the role of networks and information flows on knowledge dissemination and the development of new cultural and organization forms. This places international librarianship in the context of the wider social and technological developments which contributed to the economic and cultural phenomena characterized as globalization and provides a new theoretical basis for examining the impact and flow of international library development and international library networks.

Globalization Theory and International Librarianship

Looking beyond traditional notions of library theory and research one encounters several fields of inquiry that attempt to explain the very phenomena in which librarians and international library organizations were actively participating. These phenomena are the rise international non-governmental organizations in what is called cultural internationalism, and the advent of globalization as a term to explain the interconnected condition in which humanity finds itself. Viewing international librarianship and the impact of development initiatives in librarianship through the lens of these theories of globalization provides a means to view librarianship as a historical partner or agent in what might be called the “globalization project.” In addition, by establishing international librarianship as an actor in the broader social developments of what we now call globalization, we are able to use these theories to theorize and research the manner through which international librarianship and international development projects that promote libraries, information infrastructure, and access to information mediate the flow of power, promote new organizational forms, and impact the cultures into which new practices and technologies are imported.

By focusing on developments in international librarianship in the interwar period, this paper proposes ways in which three prominent theories of globalization can be used to inform research in international librarianship and bring new light to research questions regarding the international flows of information and growth of the profession, which, of course, are not new.

The term globalization began as a buzz word in the 1980’s and has since captured the imagination of people around the world. A highly contested notion, globalization attracts strong views that differ depending upon one’s perceptions and values. Whether regarded as good, bad, novel, or something that has occurred throughout history, globalization is commonly held to represent increased interdependence among people, cultures, and societies. In addition, it is represented by an intensification of social relations across world-time and world-space through increased information sharing, communications, and mobility. Or as described by Giddens, it can be described as “the intensification of worldwide social [and economic] relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring miles away and vice-versa”⁴. Interest in these phenomena has generated a number of social theories that are relevant to the development of international librarianship. These theories focus on the cultural internationalism fostered by international non-governmental organizations⁵; the rise of what is called the network society⁶; and the development of what is referred to as a new “global cultural economy”⁷. By viewing the evolution of librarianship as a “global” profession network through

⁴ Giddens, A. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford U Press, 1990, p. 64.

⁵ Iriye, Akira. *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

⁶ Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Malden MA.: Blackwell Publishers, 2009.

⁷ Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large*: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

the lens of these theories, it is clear that librarians have actively participated in the process of globalization. In addition, it provides a new perspective through which to view the success and failures of international library development projects.

Global History, Cultural Internationalism, and Rise of International Non-Governmental Organizations

Historians are increasingly interested in the rise of internationalist activities in the early 20th century as an alternative to a focus on the rise of the modernist nation state and the nationalism that fueled two world wars⁸. Much of this work focuses on developments such as the international peace movements, international women's organizations, and attempts to cooperate in medicine and health. These activities served as the initial roots of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs). The study of INGOs, provides understanding of one aspect of the phenomena of globalization and of the historical processes that has created transnational and global forces that define today's world.

Akira Iriye places the origins of what he describes cultural internationalism in the period between World War I and World War II. This new variety of internationalism that focuses on the "variety of activities undertaken to link countries and people through the exchange of ideas and persons, through scholarly cooperation, or through efforts at facilitating cross-national understanding."⁹ This is distinct from the political and economic internationalism seen in the formation of the League of Nations and international trade agreements. Central to the idea of cultural internationalism is the notion that the key to a sustained peace is cultural understanding. In addition, these notions focused on the growing sense of "global community in which all nations and people shared certain interests and commitments"¹⁰. As we'll see later in the paper, this sense of this global community clearly existed among librarians in Paris across Europe and in North America in the 1920's.

These notions provided fuel for the growing trend toward international cooperation through INGOs. These organizations by-passed the State driven agendas of intergovernmental organizations and nations, by working from the assumption that "cultural and social questions knew no national boundaries and that they required an international framework for solution"¹¹. During the interwar period many INGOs formed to promote the exchange of knowledge and ideas. These INGOs proliferated. According to the League of Nations 1929 *Handbook of International Organizations*, 90% of the 478 groups listed were private INGOs. These included the International Confederation of Students, International Federation of University Women, and World Association for Adult Education, International Research Council, and International Council of Scientific Unions. Had IFLA been established sooner, it too would have been included in this list. In addition, comparable service organizations began to take root, including the International Council of Women, Save the Children International Union, and Service Civil International. By the late 1920's, when nationalism was again on the rise, these INGOs

⁸ Hopkins, A. G., ed. *Global History*: Interactions Between the Universal and the Local: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

⁹ Iriye, Akira. *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, p. 3.

¹⁰ Iriye, Akira. *Global Community*: the Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002, p. 19.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 25.

represented the “conscience of the world” and became the core tool for the networking of individuals and ideas that became the basis of some theories of globalization¹².

Castells and the Network Society

Castells describes the networked social structure as the “interaction between the revolution in information technology, the process of globalization, and the emergence of networking as the predominant social form of organization”¹³.

Within Castells’ conception of a global society, cultural life, policy making, technical standards, and economic exchange are increasingly organized in a network structure. Castells states that within this network, “society is constructed around flows, the expression of processes dominating our economic, political and symbolic life”¹⁴. These flows are amplified by technology; principal geographic nodes like universities, global cities, and financial centers or universities; and highly mobile social groups.

Castells’ network society consists of an open network that can expand indefinitely. As the network grows the importance of belonging to the network increases. At the same time, the penalty for being outside the network becomes greater. The network surrounding knowledge production that Castells describes is particularly relevant to the development of international librarianship¹⁵. Castells asserts that knowledge is primarily located in universities and the public research system, and this “system is global, depending on continuous communication in the form of publications, conferences, journals, seminars, academic associations as well as Internet communication”¹⁶. Although global in form, Castells acknowledges that knowledge production is skewed by the priorities of advanced countries with issues such as cures for malaria or treatment of HIV often neglected. Castells acknowledges that the flow of power in this knowledge production network is asymmetrical, however, through shared modes of communication and an expansion of network membership, power still flows in both directions. In other words, the flow of ideas, cultural forms, and technology is never simply in one direction; these transactions impact all members of the network to varying degrees.

It is through this exchange that one sees the transnational cultural hybridity described by Appadurai.

Appadurai and Cultural Economy

In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai also focused on the notion of being connected to a wider network and the flow of power through globalization. Appadurai argues against the notion of globalization as leading to ‘Americanization’ or cultural homogenization of various forms. Instead, Appadurai, argues that these homogenizing forces of globalization are “absorbed into local political and cultural economies, only to be repatriated” to create new and

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Malden Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2009, p. 548.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 442.

¹⁵ Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Malden Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2009, p. 124.

¹⁶ Witt, Mary. *Shifting Tides in Global Higher Education: Agency, Autonomy, and Governance in the Global Network*. New York: P. Lang, 2011, p. 20.

unpredictable landscapes¹⁷. Appadurai describes structures of global flows that include rapidly changing technology, mobility of people, increased trade, the ability to produce and disseminate information digitally, and the movement of ideas¹⁸. For Appadurai, these scapes of globalization do not constitute a single, homogenizing process, but rather opportunities for diversification as ideas, people, and technologies are shared. Appadurai asserts that homogenization is weakened, and even the State is powerless in controlling the impacts of a free flow of “people, machinery, money, images and ideas”¹⁹.

Appadurai clearly views the origins globalization as much more dynamic and complex than the analysis asserted by theories of economic and cultural hegemony. Appadurai’s view of globalization is also useful when analyzing the development of international exchange of cultures and ideas for the development of new cultural forms and the agency of indigenous cultures. At the same time, it acknowledges the social experiment in which we are engaged when we share ideas and engage other cultures to create new landscapes.

The Interwar Period and the Dawn of a Global Profession

From the early 20th century, centers of international librarianship began to emerge with the establishment of organizations such as the Palais Mondale, the International Federation of Library Associations, and the League of Nation's Committee on Intellectual Cooperation²⁰. These established an organizational center for international librarianship from which sprang efforts in international development aid in library and information science (LIS). These activities are often characterized with a focus on the profession responding to outside forces with international development in LIS representing everything from agents of Euro and American-centric colonialism to simply taking advantage of social unrest to advance the discipline of librarianship²¹.

These international development activities revolved less around major forces such as the nation state and more around non-state actors and sentiments of internationalism. By viewing this history in the context of notions of the network society, the development of a global cultural economy, and the move toward decentered power structures, it becomes evident that the organizations and activities at the “center” of international LIS development programs were active participants in shaping and creating what can be considered a global library profession and an important episode in the current era of globalization. This suggests that international development aid in LIS has the potential to continue to serve as a catalyst for substantial social change, providing support for new forms of development work and broadening its impact into

¹⁷ Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large*: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996., p. 42.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 33.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 37.

²⁰ For further description of the founding of these organizations and their impact see the work of W. Boyd Rayward: “The Evolution of an International Library and Bibliographic Community.” *The Journal of Library History* (1974-1987) 16, no. 2 (April 1, 1981): 449–462; and Rayward, W. Boyd (Translator and Adapter). “Mundaneum: Archives De La Connaissance”, April 2010. <http://hdl.handle.net/2142/15431>.

²¹ See Kesselman, Martin Alan, and Irwin Weintraub. *Global Librarianship*. CRC Press, 2004.

Krzym, Richard, Gaston Litton, and Ann Hewitt. *World Librarianship: a Comparative Study*. M. Dekker, 1983.

Wiegand, Wayne A. *An Active Instrument for Propaganda: The American Public Library During World War I*. Greenwood Press, 1989.

the proliferating INGO community, which represents the fastest growing segment of the international development world.

Paris Library School

One example in the development of librarianship as an international or global profession is the Paris Library School, which existed from 1922-29. In 1922, Jesse Carson, an American librarian who directed the American Committee for a Devastated France's (ACDF) library focused programs, sought to develop a summer course, which would train French men and women to carry on the libraries [developed by the ACDF] when they were taken over by the French communes."²² To carry-out this training, Carson turned to the ALA and the American Library in Paris for assistance. In late 1922 and early 1923, Miss Carson worked to establish support from within the ALA to allocate "war funds" to establish the Paris Library School. Beginning as a summer training program aimed at providing a limited number of French women with the skills needed to manage American styled public libraries built in France by the ACDF, the program was a quick success, training 29 students in "modern librarianship" its first summer.

Initial demand for the program led Carson and ALA leaders, who had worked to support the war effort in France, to pursue a permanent American library school in Paris. The ALA took on the challenge of running such a school as an opportunity to promote the American ideals in librarianship, which were perceived as providing superior professional technique approach to public libraries. When the ALA executive committee approved the plan, it was placed in the context of wider library developments in the region and the need for American librarianship to be represented. Charles Milam, Secretary of the ALA, noted that the school coincided with the establishment of the American Library in Paris, the six ACDF libraries, the newly established League of Nations Library in Geneva, and other libraries in Belgium and France being built through Carnegie support on the "American Plan." He also asserted that the ALA is "naturally interested in making certain that library training which represents America shall really represent the best American library practices." Milam also establishes that the "proposed connection with the library school will result in personal contacts which should help American librarians to profit from the experiences of their European colleagues."²³

Through this, the ALA established a clear motivation that placed the ALA at the center of promoting the American model of librarianship to the world while advancing the notion of reciprocal learning and exchange through work with colleagues abroad. These objectives remained at the core of the school as it evolved and expressed themselves as the ambition to "raise the technique of librarianship in Europe" and promote international cooperation within the profession for the purpose of building peace and understanding. This clearly places this development with the scope of the developing cultural internationalism described by Iriye. It also suggests that the growing global network of librarians was expanding and generating the need for access to the benefits of membership, and the ALA didn't want to be left out.

Although labeled by French detractors as the "Chartist School of the Far West,"²⁴ the Paris Library School assembled a cohort of French collaborators, who were keen to fill the need

²² See Maack's *American Bookwomen in Paris* for a full description of the achievements of librarians such as Maack and Bogle during this period.

²³ Letter from Milam to ALA Executive Committee. ALA Archives, University of Illinois Library, Urbana, IL.

²⁴ Poulain, Martine. "Philanthropy, Benefaction, and Libraries in France, 1916-1929." *Libraries & Culture* 31, no. 2 (April 1, 1996): 447-465.

for trained library staff in libraries across the country. Librarians such as Eugene Morel, of the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* (BNF) and former President of the ABF, and Ernest Coyecque, ABF President and *Inspecteur des Bibliothèques de la ville de Paris et de la Préfecture de la Seine*, provided essential support and advice on successfully establishing the school. Morel, for example, warned the school's resident director, Parsons, of opposition from the *Ecole des Chartres* "because the school has had the monopoly in placing its graduates in government library posts" and advised that if the Paris Library School focused its curriculum on technical training for subordinate posts within libraries, opposition would disappear.²⁵

Like the ALA's dual desires for the School to help promote the American public library ideal and encourage cross-cultural exchange, the French participants had two visions for the School. Initially, Coyecque viewed the school as principally for French students.

Gabriel Henriot, who was the director of the Forney Library and later joined the school's faculty had much broader ambitions for the School, emphasizing the opportunity for the school to become "International" and to work in conjunction with his interest in Paul Otlet's *International Institute of Bibliography* in Brussels. The Resident Director of the School, Mary Parsons noted that she had never "talked with anyone of any nationality who showed more vision than Mr. Henriot ... both about the work of his own library and about international library ideas"²⁶. Henriot would soon join the faculty of the Paris Library School and become the President of the ABF, using these posts to further his ambitions for international librarianship.

Although as Poulain notes, the school was clearly conceived and directed initially with American library methods presented as superior, when the Paris Library School opened in 1924 it was no longer a purely American project to export its version of the library profession, and had become a hybridization that provided for both American and French needs²⁷. Coyecque was Consulting Director and over ten prominent French librarians providing lectures and directing courses in topics ranging from bibliography to reference work. In addition, many curricular changes were implemented to serve French needs.

One other element that developed through this hybridized form, was the prominence of the international nature of the school. Over time, it was this element that dominated discussion of the school's importance and contributions to the profession. By 1924, the ALA appointed Director of the School, Bogle, claimed that "there is no question but that the school is at present the leading factor in international library development."²⁸ The international character increased annually with a total of twenty-five nations represented among the alumni by the time of the school's closure²⁹. The increase in international students and the international nature of the school was to a large degree credited to the efforts of French faculty, such as Henriot, who requested that the original quotas limiting the number of non-French and non-American students be eliminated³⁰. It is during this development and through the necessary collaboration with French librarians to make the School a success that the homogenizing forces of American librarianship were repatriated to France, transforming the school in the manner described by Appadurai.

²⁵ Mary Parsons to Sarah Bogle, December 21, 1923, ALA Archives, University of Illinois Library, Urbana, IL.

²⁶ Parsons, Mary, May 8th 1924. ALA Archives, University of Illinois Library, Urbana, IL.

²⁷ Poulain, Martine. "Philanthropy, Benefaction, and Libraries in France, 1916-1929." *Libraries & Culture* 31, no. 2 (April 1, 1996): 447-465.

²⁸ From Sarah Bogle to Carl Milam, October 17th, 1924. ALA Archives, University of Illinois Library, Urbana, IL.

²⁹ Henriot, Gabriel. *Des Livres Pour Tous*. Paris: Durassié, 1943.

³⁰ General Correspondence, 1927, Paris Library School Files. ALA Archives, University of Illinois Library, Urbana, IL.

The school soon began to serve as a clearing house for information on library techniques, receiving numerous requests for advice on organizing libraries, especially special libraries serving industry, from across Europe. What developed out of Paris and the School can be described in the language of Castells as a hub in the growing network of international librarianship. As Castells theorized, as the network expanded, so did demand and benefits of membership. When this happened, the international aspects of the program were emphasized in communications and promotion of the program.

This growing internationalism took on multiple forms and evolved over time in the direction of cultural internationalism. In a guest lecture to students given by a Mr. Varran, an alumnus who managed an industrial library in Oslo, Varran remarks that the chance to earn a professional diploma has been helpful, but “but also it gives a feeling of solidarity among librarians in different parts of the world...next year I shall be writing for instance to Jerusalem and to other class mates in other countries.³¹”

By the time the program ended, the international aspects of the School or power of the network dominated discussions related to whether and how to sustain the program. In ALA discussions, the promotion of American library techniques and values no longer resonated in conversations. The benefits provided by the international exchange afforded by the school dominated the conversation. As noted by the Dean at Columbia University’s Teacher’s College

the Paris Library School, in the long run, is going to be a flat failure if its primary purpose is to give to France, or to Norway, or any other country, something that we (American’s) know. In the same way, I think, it is going to be a flat failure as far as international relations are concerned if it is primarily an institution to give American something that [Europeans] have.³²

In this same conference, the Chair, ALA President Carl Roden, summed up the tenor of the group’s position on the school.

We have, if I state the position of the conference correctly, arrived at a point where we have less interest in the present performance of that library school in the present and the past than we have in its activities and its important and obvious possibilities as an instrument for international, or for the promotion of international culture, if not international relations.³³

Although the Paris Library School ceases to exist, the international network it fostered continues to flow throughout international librarianship today. The increasing cultural internationalism of the School, its expanding international network, and the new organizational form that it took when “repatriated” in France, were essential to the founding of the International Federation of Library Associations. In reports from the congress in Prague, it was the vision of Henriot that propelled this international group toward founding a permanent international non-governmental organization that would “take care of the international relations among libraries

³¹ General Coorespondence, 1925, Paris Library School Files, ALA Archives, University of Illinois Library, Urbana, IL.

³² Conference on the Paris Library School, December 3rd 1927. ALA Archives. University of Illinois Library. Urbana, IL, p. 23

³³ Conference on the Paris Library School. ALA Archives, University of Illinois, Library. Urbana, IL, p. 48

and create the necessary conditions for the mutual international co-operation of librarians”³⁴. Henriot is attributed with having proposed and led the discussions to establish the permanent organization that would become IFLA.

Conclusion

By viewing the short history of the Paris Library School through the lens of globalization theories that emphasize the development of INGOS, the role of networks, and the development of new transnational cultural forms, it is clear that we can gain new understandings of international librarianship and library development through the use of these theories. Phenomena that could easily be explained as simple cultural imperialism, the pursuit of nationalistic goals through professional bodies, or simply training in librarianship become far more complex and nuanced when viewed through these theories. In addition, one can see how these international networks and projects provide space for cultural exchange and systemic change that moves well beyond the power structures and seemingly one-way flows of knowledge that appear at the surface. The use of globalization theories has the potential to shed new light on the impacts of long-standing international library organizations while helping to guide the development of new projects by ensuring that the flows of funds, technology, and culture happen in a manner that allows for positive repatriations and the development of new professional forms that contribute to successful outcomes within the globalized library profession.

³⁴ Malek, Rudolf. “On the Origin of the International Organization of Librarians (IFLA): The Congress of Librarians in Prague 1926.” *Libri* 20, no. 3 (1970): 222–224.