Grant Report
2014 Columbia University Libraries Research Award Recipient
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I am at present at work on a book, "Rooted Cosmopolitans: Human Rights and Jewish Politics in the Twentieth Century." This study will offer the first major survey of the history of Jewish participation in the modern international human rights movement. Looking across Europe and the United States, I chronicle a network of Jewish legal scholars, political activists, and communal leaders who invented the modern human rights NGO; envisioned a new kind of international law and transnational criminal justice; and helped to construct the modern United Nations human rights program. My research centers on a cast of individual political activists, lawyers, communal leaders, and scholars, all linked to non-governmental organizations, who span Europe, the Middle East, and the United States across a period from the opening of the twentieth century to its end. It also includes a sustained focus on the history of NGO work at the United Nations.

Much of the source base for this research project is comprised of the papers of the human rights organizations Amnesty International. The institutional history of this organization offers vital access to primary sources. Alongside that source, I have found oral history interviews to be a superb way to reconstruct the texture of political life and the dynamic meaning of human rights advocacy in the years under study. Finally, I also make use of rare Yiddish and Hebrew print periodicals that survive in only one or two copies around the world. I have therefore been delighted

to take advantage of the generous grant from the Columbia University Libraries System in order to pursue my in-depth research in their holdings.

During 2014, I conducted research across several collections of the Columbia University Library System, including Special Collections, the Center for Human Rights Documentation and Research, the Oral History Office, the Judaica print holdings, and the Jewish Theological Seminary of America library holdings. What was particularly remarkable was the pioneering effort to build a specialized archive of materials related to human rights history, an extremely young field in the American academy, which is generating a rapidly growing demand for additional primary sources.

My largest research endeavor was a close survey of the papers of Amnesty International's USA branch (Amnesty International USA Archives, Amnesty International of the USA, Inc. National Office Records, 1966-2003 [Bulk Dates: 1974-1993], held in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library Collections as part of the the Center for Human Rights Documentation and Research. Along with these papers I also used the Ivan I. Morris papers, 1931-1976, which contain supplementary and original information. These collections yielded a rich bounty of information, including thousands upon thousands of rare documents unavailable anywhere else, including in the other main repository of Amnesty International's history, at the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Using these sources, I tracked the organization's gestation, its relationship to its European parent body, its interactions with Israeli representatives and its grappling in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s with fundamental questions of bias and

selectivity regarding its positions and advocacy in the Arab-Israeli conflict. I also found the archiving comprehensive enough to allow me to trace in detail this group's interactions with American Jewish community representatives, again adding a rich layer of human drama and interpersonal color to the story I am telling about human rights and international politics in the twentieth century. I supplemented this research with an examination of the papers of Moses Moskowitz, another leading participant in the story I am documenting.

Working with these archival collections convinced me of the value of extending the chronological range of my narrative to include events of the 1980s an 1990s. I found that I could actually say more about how the events I chronicle in the Middle East and at the United Nations impacted Jewish communities across the United States through the rich correspondence archived in the Amnesty International USA collections. My work with the Ivan Morris Papers also left me convinced of the value of archiving personal papers alongside institutional papers for the purposes of giving a complementary set of materials related to the same organization. To that end, I am in contact with the family of another major figure, the founder of AIUSA, Mark Benenson, about accessing his papers which are still in private hands. I have raised the possibility of a donation to the Center for Human Rights Documentation and Research.

Alongside this work on manuscript sources, I also delved deeply into the oral history collections held by the Oral History Office of the Columbia University Library. I was very happy to make ample use of interviews conducted with Joseph Proskauer, Jacob Blaustein, and many others. Most remarkable for me was the

discovery of a massive interview conducted with one of my principal subjects, the rabbi, human rights activist and Zionist leader Maurice Perlzweig. I am particularly pleased that in collaboration with Ms. Erica Fugger of the Center for Oral History Archives and Ms. Suzi Peel, granddaughter of Maurice Perlzweig, we were able to secure full family permission for the entire interview transcript to be posted online. This opens up a significant primary source for the history of the United Nations, human rights, non-governmental organization culture, international law, and the history of Jewish politics.

A third area of inquiry was the immediate pre- and post-World War II Jewish press. I was happy to find at Columbia and also JTS several obscure Jewish periodicals in Yiddish and Hebrew, that allowed me to track the dissemination of ideas by major figures in the history of anti-genocide and human rights work, including Raphael Lemkin, Hersch Zvi Lauterpacht, and others. These articles, no less than the large-scale manuscript collections and lengthy oral history documents, have proven crucial in reconstructing the intellectual genealogies in this project.

The funding from Columbia University allowed me to significantly advance my research. Equally crucially, the richness of the collections allowed me to expand my field of inquiry to include additional materials and topics, further augmenting the quality of my project. Beyond research travel, the funds allowed me to reproduce large quantities of documents for closer analysis. In some cases, I used the funds to employ research assistants to increase my productivity in terms of accessing the processing documents from the collections. I was happy to use two doctoral students in Jewish Studies, one from Columbia University and one from the

Jewish Theological Seminary, for this purpose. This allowed me to transform what might have been a solitary scholarly quest into a collaborative research endeavor.