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Research and Teaching Statement

As a historian of information and a scholar of digital humanities, my research and teaching explores how, through the lens of information, knowledge and power have been produced over time, and connects this perspective to both contemporary debates over data and society, as well as the use of digital methods to study the past. I believe that this approach embodies the ethos of digital humanities, enabling critical and historical analysis of our digital moment, as well as envisioning and experimenting with the future of humanities knowledge production.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of digital humanities, my research ranges broadly in both its focus and intellectual frameworks, including crafting international histories of information; translating and experimenting with computational methods for studying the past; and theorizing how digital methods have and will continue to transform humanists' research practices. Drawing from intellectual and international history, as well as STS and media studies, my monograph reconsiders the history of information through the lens of decolonization and the emergence of the Third World from the 1950s to the end of the 1970s. While many decolonizing states were critical of the imbalances in international information flows, I focus on Egypt since it was one of the first to gain formal independence and to also challenge this international information order, becoming a model for other postcolonial states. Over the course of six chapters, I trace how information became a site for state intervention, from the creation of the first news agency and information department, to the growing apparatus for intelligence gathering and press regulation, to the rise of state-funded newspapers and magazines, as well as radio and television broadcasting. While many of these efforts had their antecedents in the colonial era, I argue that it was in the post-revolution moment that these previously disparate activities became absorbed into a larger nation-making project to circulate and control information. However, rather than situating this story as solely domestic or regional, I argue that Egypt's information regime was fundamentally international in its scope and vision, inseparable from the government's support for the decolonization of international news flows and the promotion of various anti-colonialisms. Excavating this history makes visible how information and anti-colonial politics were both constructed and contested in Cairo and the Third World, providing an alternative to Western-centric histories of information in this era. My next project grows out of this one, and will continue to explore these questions of how ideas and infrastructures of information become naturalized in both local and global contexts through a history of international television and satellite broadcasting as a lens into the advent of the Global South as a political identity.

My research is also motivated by the question of how information mediums and political messages are constitutive. For example, to understand how ideas of anti-colonialism and information became intertwined, I detail the rise of new state-funded periodicals published from Cairo in multiple languages and circulated across the Third World, and compare the discourses in these magazines to ones produced from other anti-colonial capitals and institutions. I argue that analyzing these publications as objects of inquiry, rather than as sources, provides new insights into how reporting on international events were inflected through local lenses and how theories of information influenced the ways in which these ideas traveled. Given that dozens of these publications were printed over the span of three decades, I incorporated digital methods to help manage both the scale and complexity of my sources. However, prior to analyzing these materials, I quickly realized that many of these publications were either partially or not digitized at all, and that commercially available software provided only a limited solution for formatting magazine layouts. Thus, I developed ImageLucida, a web application that uploads scans of historical sources and extracts their data using a combination of algorithms - optical character recognition to find the text, and computer vision to segment paragraphs and images. With these datasets, I blend statistical and historical narratives to trace how the language and imagery in these publications

transformed around events like the Congo crisis of the 1960s. In modeling these historical phenomena, I also consider more broadly the ways in which these methods can *and* cannot surface patterns, and thus, furnish new avenues for historical research. My central goal with this work is to meaningfully engage with digital humanities as an interdisciplinary praxis. Thus, how I transform my sources into data and how I choose to capture concepts in my models represent not simply a coopting of computational and statistical methods, but rather an ongoing process to understand and translate the debates in these fields into my research.

My emphasis on thinking thoughtfully about digital practices draws heavily from Miriam Posner's "What's Next: The Radical, Unrealized Potential of Digital Humanities," where she calls for digital humanists to not accept the limitations of existing tools, but instead "rip apart and rebuild the machinery of the archive and database so that it does not reproduce the logic that got us here in the first place."¹ While I have outlined how my research is motivated to denaturalize and envision these logics, my teaching also aims to help students to realize this radical potential. To this end, I developed an Introduction to Digital Humanities course that provides students with an overview of current debates in the field, along with weekly introductions to programming and data analysis. The fundamental organizing principle of the course is to introduce students to the *process* of digital humanities research. Thus, for the final project students work collaboratively to select a humanities research question, to identify and collect relevant datasets, to plan and execute the analysis and visualization of their data, and to then contextualize their results from course readings. The final goal of this project, however, is not a polished digital output. Rather, under the rubric of retrospectives, students complete both group and individual reflections, detailing how their project has changed from their initial idea and what future research directions they might pursue. Thus, students learn that research is not a direct line from initial question to interpretation, but rather an iterative process. Experiencing this process also helps students appreciate how data curation is part of their interpretative work, and reconceptualize the divide between technical and intellectual choices during the course of research.

My method for teaching humanities programming is intended to help students move beyond copy-and-pasting code from tutorials towards understanding concepts. For example, in my course on humanities programming at the University of Virginia, I used the concept of pair programming to have students work together to solve problem sets and then reviewed the code in class to explore their solutions. This approach helped students learn to work collaboratively and think of coding as more than a search for the right answer. These coding assignments are integrated with the weekly readings, such as the introduction to data visualization, which is paired with articles on the history of information graphics, recent DH research on data feminism and the ethics of data, and case studies from data journalism. The end result is that students see coding not simply as a tool, but as a way of generating knowledge that can be critiqued and contextualized. My research on international histories of information directly influences how I teach students about a concept like 'code.' For students to understand this expansive concept, I aim to situate the idea historically *and* globally, exploring how the meanings of code are constructed within international power dynamics. This perspective helps students connect with and challenge current debates over data and technology in society. But even more profound is the ways in which this perspective is crucial for digital humanists to leverage computational methods in their research and to simultaneously engage critically with digital technologies. Though the question of what is digital humanities remains debated, my end goal is for students to feel empowered to participate in these discussions to define the field, and in the process continue this work of fully realizing the radical potential of digital humanities.

¹ Miriam Posner, "What's Next: The Radical, Unrealized Potential of Digital Humanities," *Debates in Digital Humanities* eds. Matthew Gold and Lauren Klein (Minnesota, 2016), 32-41.