Participatory Archives: Building on Traditions of Collaboration, Openness, and Accessibility at the American University in Cairo

Stephen Urgola and Carolyn Runyon

The Rare Books and Special Collections Library of the American University in Cairo embraced collaborative partnerships, openness, and accessibility to create collections using Archives 2.0 principles long before the term was coined. Using participatory and inclusive strategies, the library built collections of national importance, often preserving the historical record of traditionally underrepresented groups. The university and library leveraged these skills to tackle the monumental University on the Square: Documenting Egypt’s 21st Century Revolution project in response to the eighteen days of demonstrations, largely centered in Cairo’s Tahrir Square, that resulted in the ousting of President Hosni Mubarak. This chapter explores the use of participatory models of acquisition to build modern, political archives according to Archives 2.0 principles long established in the Rare Books and Special Collections Library.

Introduction

To outside observers, archival acquisitions and heritage documentation may appear to be a closed, institution-driven endeavor undertaken by trained archivists. While professionals understand the turbulent waters to be navigated in building
important primary source research collections, including donor relations and collection development strategies, sometimes it takes a tsunami-level event to highlight all that collecting and managing archival collections involves. This was the case for archivists in the Rare Books and Special Collections Library (RBSCL) at the American University in Cairo (AUC) in January 2011. The event, of course, was the January 25 Revolution, the eighteen days of protests in Cairo’s Tahrir Square and elsewhere that ended in the removal of longtime President Hosni Mubarak. Like the rest of Egypt, AUC was thrust into the events of the uprising. The university, with its historic campus a fixture on Tahrir Square, had a uniquely central role with many of its faculty, students, and staff numbering among the participants. Emerging from these circumstances was *University on the Square: Documenting Egypt’s 21st Century Revolution*, an ongoing participatory archives project undertaken by AUC to build an open collection of resources related to the January 25 Revolution.

As the country and university looked expectantly to the future of a post-Mubarak Egypt, AUC’s president convened a group of administrators, archivists, oral historians, technology officers, journalism faculty, and other staff members to address how the events would be documented. They contemplated the photographs and videos taken using mobile phones, the banners and signs on display at Tahrir Square, the tear gas canisters littering the ground, the blogs and Facebook pages, and the memories of the participants. They worried about preserving these ephemeral digital materials and physical objects for future generations. To address these concerns, AUC’s archivists turned to Kate Theimer’s definition of Archives 2.0, which advocates collaboration and openness and argues that “archivists must be user centered and embrace opportunities to share collections, interact with users, and improve internal efficiency.” *University on the Square* also drew on the experiences of other participatory archives projects, such as the *Virginia Tech April 16, 2007, Archives of the University Libraries*, to inform processes and policies. Inspired by these models, AUC’s archivists helped build a collection of almost 15,000 photographs, videos, oral histories, written accounts, political leaflets, protest posters, and artworks. In addition to rich primary sources, the project solicited scholarly communications in the form of graduate theses, audio documentaries, undergraduate research papers, journal articles, and a biographical dictionary of the January 25 Revolution. Finally, the project archived over 700 distinct websites with their own associated links (66 million URLs comprising 3.3 terabytes), rounding out the project’s extensive multiple-format collection.

One of the main differences between Virginia Tech’s *4-16-07 Archives* and the *University on the Square* project is that archivists responsible for building, preserving, and providing access to the memorials, official responses, and videos that document the horrific campus shooting are members of the university community, share in the language, culture, and collective experiences of the people and events that the *4-16-07 Archives* memorializes. Archivists working on the *University on the Square* project are not such members. This difference in approach reflects the unique role that AUC played in the January 25 Revolution.
ty on the Square project were expatriates, trying to document a foreign revolution during a time of intense nationalism and patriotism. In response to these unique challenges, archivists relied on Archives 2.0 principles of collaboration, openness, and accessibility, which have been hallmarks of the RBSCL’s archival practice from the start.

Another important framework to consider is Max J. Evans’ take on “archives as a common and public good rather than the protected property of an institution.” While AUC has and will always dedicate efforts towards preservation, the RBSCL is especially focused on providing equitable access to materials. Building on the idea of openness, the University on the Square project adopted new methodologies including crowdsourcing accessioning and descriptive work) to build a more complete, openly accessible archive of the January 25 Revolution than possible without the help of strategic alliances. As Evans argues, archivists alone cannot cope with the massive amounts of item-level metadata without help. Archivists administering the University on the Square project leverage the experiences and interest of contributors to build robust descriptive metadata for photographs and video footage of the January 25 Revolution and ongoing political activity in Egypt.

This chapter explores the RBSCL’s commitment to Archives 2.0 principles and crowdsourcing as well as its adoption of Web 2.0 technologies used to support these activities in the case of the University on the Square project. It also discusses how the RBSCL builds on longstanding traditions of collaboration, openness and accessibility with efforts to document cultural heritage on a national scale. Another focus is the way the library has concentrated on revolutionary content, such as manuscript collections that document Egypt’s influential feminist movement and contemporary politics often at odds with the prevailing regime.

Background

Founded in 1992, the AUC’s RBSCL combined the Main Library’s Special Collections unit, which maintained university records and assorted rare books and maps, and the library of the university’s Center for Arabic Studies, which focused on Islamic art and architecture. These libraries were brought together in a restored nineteenth-century villa at the Tahrir Square campus, but the RBSCL moved with most of the university to a new campus in the suburbs of Cairo after 2009. With a mission to support teaching and learning at AUC, including programs in Islamic art and architecture and Egyptology, the library houses extensive collections of rare books such as the Napoleonic expedition’s Description de l’Egypte and volumes depicting the country by nineteenth-century artist David Roberts. Photography, such as images of the architecture and landscape of Egypt dating to the late nineteenth century, represents another core area of the collection. In the mid-1990s, the RBSCL began to acquire collections of personal papers, like those of Egypt’s leading twentieth-century architect Hassan Fathy. Since that time, the
library has made steady acquisitions of archival resources documenting Egyptian history and society, with special strengths in the country’s culture and arts. The RBSCCL also serves as the official memory of AUC, managing the university’s archives of administrative records, student publications, and other materials.

It is important to note that the American University in Cairo’s model—that of a university special collections library documenting national heritage—is the exception in Egypt; university libraries do not play a major role. Private universities, a relatively new feature on the Egyptian educational scene, have not made hosting special collections a mission for their libraries. Government institutions predominate—ranging from the Egyptian National Library and Archives to Bibliotheca Alexandrina—and represent the main entities holding archival resources. These are supplemented by holdings at smaller institutions and museums, like the Museum of Modern Egyptian Art. Several kinds of private institutions do maintain collections of archives in Egypt—including archaeological centers like the German Archaeological Institute—holding records, including photographic collections, related to their excavations and other antiquities research about Egypt. The oldest and most famous of this kind was the Institut d’Egypte, whose library at Tahrir Square burned during protests in late 2011. Some Catholic institutions also maintain archives and related primary source materials, among them the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies (commonly known by the acronym for its French name, IDEO) and the Jesuit Collège de Sainte Famille, both in Cairo. In the years prior to the January 25 Revolution, there emerged small, independent initiatives to assemble archival material or produce documentation—groups like the Cairo-based Women and Memory Forum, which had for a number of years served as a research center and conducted oral histories documenting the contributions of Egyptian women. Another, the Downtown History and Memory Project, was dedicated to preserving traces of downtown Cairo’s storied past.

The role played by AUC’s RBSCCL in documenting national heritage, given the size of the parent institution, would be unusual in the United States or Europe: many more institutions would be performing that function, and the impact of Cairo’s dominant role in national political, social, and cultural life is another factor. In addition, the presence of collections of key importance in several collecting areas—the architectural archives of Hassan Fathy, the Islamic monuments photograph collection of K.A.C. Creswell, the papers of pioneering Egyptian feminist Huda Shaarawy—have resulted in the library attracting the collections of other major national contributors in those fields. The RBSCCL’s Regional Architectural Collections division, for example, claims comprehensive archives of most of the key figures in twentieth-century Egyptian architecture.

Collaboration

In the same way that the University on the Square project had been framed as a
participatory project, collecting of heritage materials at the university relied upon collaborative partnerships with alumni and faculty, scholars, artists, architects, politicians, and other members of the greater Egyptian community. The RBSCCL has long relied on collaborative relationships with alumni and faculty to solicit collections of national importance. Aziza Hussein, a 1942 AUC graduate and longtime proponent of improving conditions for women in Egypt through bodies like the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, donated her papers to AUC in 2006. Her papers include documents from time spent in Washington D.C. in the 1950s accompanying her husband Ahmed, the Egyptian ambassador to the United States under Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Egypt’s most prominent twentieth-century studio photographer, Van-Leo, was an AUC alumnus who donated the corpus of his work, numbering some 10,000 negatives and prints of Egypt’s artistic and cultural elite (including the first portraits of actor Omar Sharif).

The University on the Square project similarly took advantage of alumni connections, acquiring donations from over two dozen former AUCians to build a repository of photographs and video footage of the of the eighteen days of demonstrations that culminated in the ousting of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. AUC actively collects faculty papers, and at AUC these papers can reflect matters of wider national significance than individual research interests—as in the case with the papers of Saad Eddin Ibrahim, whose civil society activism prompted his arrest in 2000. Faculty with noteworthy relatives have contributed their family’s papers. The papers of mid-twentieth-century feminist Doria Shafik were donated by her daughters who are members of the faculty at AUC.

The RBSCCL has a history of collaboratively building collections by networking with alumni, faculty, and students, and the success of the University on the Square project is a direct result of these same connections. In the months following the Revolution, the library reached out to alumni and faculty to encourage donations of memorabilia, photographs, scholarship, and creative works. The project also relied heavily on the university connections to conduct over 325 oral histories with demonstrators, political figures, and bystanders. In fact, two-thirds of interviewees were staff, faculty, or students of the American University in Cairo. While the online collections system and born-digital nature of the records collected as part of the University on the Square project was a departure from the established acquisitions practices and formats in the RBSCCL, the participatory nature of the archive is a tried-and-true strategy for the repository.

A program of oral history interviews was a key feature of the project. Early on it became apparent that there were a wide range of AUC community members who had participated in revolutionary events and would have experiences to relate. Beyond alumni and faculty activists, vivid experiences could be contributed by students and staff members: the university security guards on duty at the Tahrir Square campus during the demonstrations, administrators involved at
the highest level of politics, deans and center directors who served on a national political advisory group, the Committee of the Wise. The oral history program has been one of the project’s most enduring aspects, continuing to the present day, with over 325 interviews conducted. The RBSCL collaborated with faculty and staff oral historians and journalism professors to develop question scripts and policy documentation like interviewee agreements. With equipment procured and recording locations and other procedures arranged, teams of student interviewers were assembled and trained. Early in the project student interviewers took part in connection with independent study work with AUC journalism professors, but the greatest number were work-study program participants.

*University on the Square* built on collaborative successes in acquisitions by working with dozens of project volunteers, mostly students, who managed booths on campus equipped with laptop computers to take in digital material, as well as donated artifacts like tear gas canisters, flags, stickers, and other souvenirs. In addition to collecting donations, project volunteers also attended the demonstrations that persisted at Tahrir Square throughout 2011 (and 2012 and 2013) to collect banners, signs, and leaflets that were prominent means of communication at those events. In keeping with the RBSCL’s tradition of developing collections by taking advantage of alumni networks and faculty donations, *University on the Square* followed Archives 2.0 principles to further engage students as project volunteers, work with faculty and staff to record and develop questions for oral histories, and solicit alumni donations.

Engagement with participants beyond AUC also enriched the project. Since spring 2011, individuals from abroad pursuing documentation, writing, and artistic initiatives about the Revolution made connections with *University on the Square* team members. A mutual exchange of information and interviewee contacts typically took place, and sometimes the AUC project lent recording or other equipment for the outsiders’ usage. Among the partners the library engaged were Canadian and German documentary filmmaking teams and a University of California honors scholar capturing images of street art and graffiti and interviewing the artists. *University on the Square* benefited when these visitors donated interviews they recorded or images or items they collected.

Other partnerships emerged as well. The professor leading University of California Santa Barbara’s study-abroad program at AUC taught classes for which the students conducted oral history interviews for the project. Some individuals who had been interviewed volunteered to become oral history interviewers themselves, or to photograph demonstrations and graffiti. International researchers using the *University on the Square* project archive also became documentation partners. Several writers and students preparing dissertations at universities abroad used AUC’s oral histories or images. They then contributed to the project by donating their own interviews and other research material, conducting oral history interviews, photographing collected project artifacts, and even preparing item summaries and
other forms of metadata. In a twist on these—*University on the Square* offered scans of political leaflets collected at protests to *Tahrir Documents*, an initiative by foreign Arabic language students in Cairo who made English translations available on their project website.

Openness to the contributions of individuals and entities beyond institutional boundaries is becoming an increasingly important way to address the enormity of tasks at hand for archivists, from collecting to describing material. A prime example of these kinds of outsourcing efforts is the British National Archives’ invitation to the general public to describe documents and images in its collections. *University on the Square* likewise benefited from its openness to expanding the nature of the traditional library-donor or library-researcher relationship to one of a partnership.

**Openness**

Beyond the Rare Books and Special Collections Library’s reliance on collaborative partnerships to build collections, the repository has also become a destination for collections whose donors considered AUC a more appropriate match than public institutions. These collections range from the papers of artists with controversial visual works and turbulent personal histories to materials produced by foreign communities and institutions in Egypt such as Voice of America’s Cairo bureau, which donated its full sound archive. The library’s open collecting tradition is rooted in donor preference. AUC’s entry into the area of special collections began in the early 1950s when leading Islamic art and architecture scholar, K.A.C. Creswell, sold his meticulously assembled book collection to AUC (he later added over ten thousand photographs of Islamic monuments in the middle east). Creswell’s donation was accelerated by his fear that his library would be sequestered by the Egyptian government during the Suez Crisis of 1956.

In a similar way, the *University on the Square* project offered an opportunity for telling stories or contributing evidence of Egypt’s revolutionary events and that they would rather not be maintained by public entities. These included donated videos reportedly depicting shootings by state security snipers or police interrogations. In the area of oral histories, it is hard to imagine that many of those interviewed by the project would have contributed their testimonies to a public entity—certainly not the student activists who raided the files of state security intelligence offices in March 2011, journalists who resigned their positions in protest over state media outlets’ coverage of the protests, politicized ultras football fans, or those who fought the police forces. Add to these hundreds of photographs depicting security forces clashing with protesters, images of graffiti and street art critical of Egypt’s military authorities, and signs and leaflets produced by the suppressed supporters of ousted Muslim Brotherhood President Mohammed Morsi. The project archive also features many posters and other printed items supportive
of General and current President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. In collecting material like this from a variety of perspectives, AUC can preserve and disseminate national heritage without necessarily hewing to a certain narrative.

Its nature as a private institution thus gave AUC an important degree of freedom in how it carried out its documentation project, as has been the case with other RBSCL collecting activities. This is highlighted by the goal of Egypt’s National Archives to document the eighteen days of the January 25 revolution with the creation of an image and oral history archive. Despite the vigorous efforts of historian Khaled Fahmy (then chair of the history department at AUC), institutional pressures at the National Archives—in part related to a lack of internal consensus on the extent to which the material to be collected would be open to researchers—the project lapse. There were internal politics surrounding the development of University on the Square project especially at the start. As the project team began to spread the word about the project through university-wide email announcements, some faculty and students raised objections. These are mostly related to the university administration’s decision to resume classes in the days following President Hosni Mubarak’s removal. Such criticisms over the university’s perceived failure to support Egypt’s revolutionaries did not derail the project. Nor did the project or the RBSCL face internal pressures for taking in and making accessible uncomplimentary or controversial documentation, whether it be oral history interviews critical of the university or footage allegedly showing state security forces snipers atop campus buildings. With its long-established place in Egyptian society and education, AUC could be more steadfast in allowing such material to come to light.

**Accessibility**

AUC’s RBSCL has always boasted open accessibility to collections, welcoming researchers from Cairo, Egypt, and around the world to make use of the library’s invaluable resources. This accessibility has only improved in the digital age. In fact, the RBSCL had a number of initiatives already in progress that facilitated its documentation efforts for the 2011 Revolution. The library had entered a revolutionary era of its own, before the 2011 events, with its move into the digital age. The efforts of its staff set the stage for a number of University on the Square activities with projects to digitize and provide online access to holdings like photographs and architectural drawings. Building on this work, the Digital Collections Archivist set workflow and metadata standards for hosting digital images from donors, which was critical for the preservation and access mission of the University on the Square project.

These efforts were applied first to AUC’s DSpace institutional digital repository (the original means of hosting project material). The digital repository—established in 2009 through a partnership between the RBSCL and AUC’s academic
computing unit (originally to house student theses)—became a means of preserving and providing access to student classwork related to the Revolution, much of it prepared for specially-themed courses at AUC in the spring of 2011. The Digital Collections Archivist also supported another student effort, the wiki-based “Biographical Dictionary of the Egyptian Revolution, 2011.”

The emergence of the University on the Square project, with requirements for digital storage, metadata, and online access beyond what the library previously had in place, prompted the need and offered the opportunity for the library to upgrade its digital infrastructure and methods. At the outset of the project, this involved expanding the partnership between the library and AUC’s academic computing department, as that unit developed a project website and module permitting the public to upload their digital photographs or videos of Revolution-related events, as well as writings or artwork or even recommended websites to be preserved. In addition to the digital objects, project contributors uploaded important descriptive information, such as location, events, people pictured, and more. These details formed the basis of the digital collection’s metadata, giving archivists invaluable details about the materials submitted. In some cases, data embedded in the digital files (such as date) were more accurate than the data provided by contributors. Archivists worked to verify the accuracy of the donor-provided metadata using primary sources, such as newspaper articles, to determine when specific demonstrations took place in various locations in greater Cairo.

Uploaded images, digital materials solicited from donors in person (by transferring photographs and video footage from computers and thumb drives), and audio files created by the oral history team were housed on a storage area network (SAN) maintained by AUC’s technology infrastructure unit. Once reformatted to file types appropriate for preservation and access, and renamed according to standard naming conventions developed for the project, image and sound files were kept as preservation masters. The original file formats provided by the donors were retained and converted to the best possible formats, resolutions, and other settings as recommended by the Federal Agencies Digitization Guidelines Initiative. In most cases, videos and photos were taken on smart phones, providing us with less than ideal capture specifications; however, since the Rare Books and Special Collections Library did not control the digital capture environment, archivists agreed to provide access to the best quality images possible. For example, in the digitization lab, archivists usually create digital photographs with high quality DSLR cameras, saving in both JPEG and RAW formats. Since University on the Square is a crowdsourced project, the preservation masters are not always up to the usual standards. The oral histories are the exception. They are conducted and digitally captured as .wav files by trained volunteers and University personnel, and later edited and made available online as .mp3 files. For digital photos and videos access files are also derived from the original submissions, again according to the guidelines provided by the Federal Agencies Digitization Guidelines Initiative.
The imperative to make project material available online on a timely manner, given the substantial worldwide interest in the revolutionary events in Egypt, prompted the library to adopt online tools better suited for providing access to its holdings. The *University on the Square* archive became a flagship collection for the new Rare Books and Special Collections Digital Library. Structured along the lines of several collections featuring high-profile library holdings, the *University on the Square* section was distinctive for including the largest number of digital items and the only one populated by born-digital material. Another distinguishing feature of the *University on the Square* digital collection is that it is a contemporary collection that documents a current social and political movement. In short, it is unique in that it is cultural heritage in the making.

The digital library (powered by a hosted installation of OCLC’s CONTENTdm software) takes advantage of Web 2.0 technology such as tagging and commenting, but also makes use of powerful sharing standards such as the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting. Archivists built on contributor-supplied metadata by applying best practices described in Resource Description and Access (RDA) and Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS), and controlled vocabularies, such as the Library of Congress Name Authority File and Getty Research Institute Thesaurus of Geographic Names, to promote successful harvesting and crosswalking of Dublin Core metadata to MARC formats. As a result of adhering to descriptive standards and taking advantage of widely-used controlled vocabularies, the RBSCL was able to easily harvest and crosswalk metadata and thumbnails from the digital library for inclusion in WorldCat, increasing discoverability not only in Egypt, but around the world. In fact, materials available in the *University on the Square* digital collection have been viewed 8,779 times from March 1, 2011 to May 31, 2015. One hundred thirty-nine theses, dissertations, and interviews were self-archived by students in AUC DAR Repository, the university’s DSpace institutional repository. Efforts to harvest and make content openly accessible transform local resources into a globally available content.

Web archiving represented another initiative already in place that supported the mission of *University on the Square*. A subscription to the Internet Archive's ArchiveIt service was originally adopted in 2009 to archive the university’s own website. Websites related to Egypt's heritage were also captured from time to time, but the captured. The immediacy of the challenges and importance of archiving web content became apparent in January 2011. During the several days in which Internet service in Egypt was drastically curtailed by the government, the library’s outgoing Digital Collections Archivist (working remotely from her home in the United States) used the library’s ArchiveIt subscription to preserve websites reflecting the events in Egypt.

Like *University on the Square*, other initiatives emerged in 2011 and beyond to document Egypt’s revolution. An oral history project focusing on the experiences of women in the Revolution by the Women and Memory Forum recorded over one
hundred interviews. *18 Days in Egypt* was a collaborative documentary project by a group of filmmakers and digital media specialists who collected images and testimonies (via online crowdsourcing) and conducted video interviews. Its website offers thematic slide shows displaying the photographs, videos, Twitter feeds, and other material from contributors. *Mosireen*, self-described as a “non-profit media collective in Downtown Cairo” was formed by a group of filmmakers and activists in early 2011 to provide online access to videos taken by participants in the Revolution, and to train and equip citizens to make their own films. It now maintains over ten terabytes of video footage related to the Revolution. While *18 Days in Egypt* and *Mosireen* have been able to maintain access to their content, some of the documentation projects that emerged could not be sustained. For example, *Qomra.org* was an ambitious attempt at a web-based geospatial presentation of the Revolution. Photographs or videos contributed by members of the public were to be plotted on an interactive map where events related to the Revolution took place; at these physical locations, passers-by could use their phones to read *Qomra’s* QR code stickers to link to a databank image of an event that took place there. As of this writing, that project’s website is no longer active.

A stable institution like AUC can offer better prospects for a sustained collecting and access; four years on, collection of Revolution-related artifacts and digital images continues and oral history efforts are quite active. The library also possesses the resources to make its holdings available into the future via its Rare Books and Special Collections Digital Library, Digital Archive and Research Repository, and Web Archive, along with facilities with conditions to properly maintain physical items. According to website traffic statistics, openly accessible *University on the Square* resources earned 40,270 page views from January 25, 2011 to December 31, 2014. The institutional commitment to preserving and making accessible cultural heritage resources empowers the RBSCL to continue to provide access to materials online and in the library’s state-of-the-art facility.

**Conclusion**

The Rare Books and Special Collections Library at the American University in Cairo has long valued many principles advocated by Archives 2.0: collaboration, openness, and accessibility. New digital tools have improved workflows and user experience, but adopting an open attitude towards collection development and donors, collaborating with networks of university community members, and promoting access have always been key tenets of the library’s philosophy and practice. *University on the Square: Documenting Egypt’s 21st Century Revolution* helped the library imagine fresh ways to collaborate with new constituencies.

Some of the ways the library pursued this, which other institutions could adapt in launching their own participatory archives project, included:

- Soliciting material for the archive from members of the institution’s
community (faculty, staff, administrators, students, alumni, etc.), whether it be seeking donations of photographs or artifacts or conducting oral history interviews with them.

- Developing and extending partnerships with individuals or units able to lend support or special expertise, such as faculty members with contacts or specialized subject knowledge or skills, and university academic computing and technology infrastructure units.

- Enlisting students (through a component of classwork, under a work study program, or as volunteers) or other volunteers, for tasks that contribute to building the project archive such as oral history interviewing, audio editing, or writing digital image descriptions. These are jobs interesting for students that enable them to build skills and allow them to learn about some of the behind-the-scenes work of archives and special collections repositories.

- Incorporating participants in the events being documented as part of the project team participants in the events being documented: inviting individuals who were interviewed to become interviewers; seeking donations of documentation from researchers using the project archive (i.e., their own interviews, photographs, etc.).

Moreover, *University on the Square* stresses open access, making student and faculty scholarship on the topic of the January 25 Revolution available to researchers around the world using a variety of digital asset management systems. Students who authored the *Biographical Dictionary of the Egyptian Revolution, 2011* in wiki format and the professors who graded the work, not only learned to write and cite articles, but also how to edit wikis, encouraging AUCians to interact with social media on a scholarly level. For visitors who come to the library, the banners and signs rescued from the protest sites and donated souvenirs (like a locally-produced “Monopoly” board game centered on Tahrir Square) rank as highlights of their tour of the RBSCL.

The success of the project can be partially measured in numbers: more than fifteen thousand photographs, videos, physical objects, print ephemera, scholarly works, websites, and other contributions accessed more than forty thousand times. More importantly, *University on the Square: Documenting Egypt’s 21st Century Revolution* reveals the potential for a special collections repository, like AUC’s RBSCL, to document events that are complicated to record but critical to national heritage. The project clearly demonstrates the importance of collaboration, openness, and accessibility for developing a participatory archive, and the value of AUC’s longstanding traditions in these areas for building a collection of international importance.

3. Ibid, 393.

**Additional Resources**


**Biographies**

Stephen Urgola has been University Archivist at the American University in Cairo since 2001, where he manages the university's historic records, records management program, and collections of primary sources in the Rare Books and Special Collections Library. He has been coordinating various aspects of AUC’s *University on the Square: Documenting Egypt’s 21st Century Revolution* project, especially its oral history efforts, since 2011.

Carolyn Runyon is the Director of Special Collections at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. From 2011 to 2013, Carolyn was the Digital Collections Archivist in the Rare Books and Special Collections Library of the American University in Cairo where she was instrumental in developing the digital collection and scholarly communications content for the *University on the Square: Documenting Egypt’s 21st Century Revolution* project.