Literary & Archival Research

By Julian Creutz
For the MLS “Borderless Seed Stories” Project
01. Gathering

How I arranged resources under each theme + vice versa!
Theme Exploration: What Is It?

The process I used for gathering was termed “Theme Exploration,” or TE. For each of the five themes (1. geopolitical and colonial borders, 2. reclamation and rematriation, 3. seed sharing, 4. seed literacy, skills and community knowledge, and 5. seed sovereignty), three panels were produced that roped in articles, books, poems, and more to flesh out the themes that complimented SJ’s community conversations and oral history collection features.
Methodology

**Collecting**
I then looked through my bookmarks, reading notes, etc. to find sources that I felt particularly passionate about.

**Researching**
I read a variety of books and articles, some from the team, other librarians, or my own personal searching.

**Organizing**
I proceeded to pull out themes that I found salient across the materials and slot them under each theme.

**Consolidating**
Together with the team, I solidified the themes we wanted to explore and reorganized the sources to slot under them.
02. Narrative

How I strung the quotes together!
Finding Story

After collecting the quotes I wanted to use for each section/theme, I asked myself: What story are these quotes telling? For the most part, the story was clear. Next...

Mind to Matter

I had to take the story I envisioned in my mind and make it tangible. I reordered quotes and added text to explain, connect, and make everything flow.
I started with quotes that I felt would be topical, taking them in their entirety with little paring-down.

“The modernization of agriculture, based on the industrialization of farm inputs, was deemed the ‘Green Revolution.’ Though credited for saving the world from hunger, the Green Revolution led to the monopolization of seed and chemical inputs by Northern companies, the loss of 90% of the South’s agricultural biodiversity, the global shift to an oil-based agricultural economy, and the displacement of millions of peasants to fragile hillsides, shrinking forests, and urban slums” – Eric Holt-Giménez and Raj Patel, “Food Rebellions!"

“More recently, German chemical company Badische Anilin und Soda Fabrik (BASF) sent out a letter to regional seed companies in the United States that made broad claims about plant varieties and genetic traits covered by their patents. Titles for the patents listed included ‘drought tolerant plants,’ ‘onions with high storage ability,’ and ‘seedless fruit producing plants.’ The letter warned recipients, some of whom had never even purchased BASF seed, that the unauthorized use of ‘germplasm covered by one or more of claims’ would be a violation of its intellectual property rights. Further, the letter claims that using the traits in the listed pending patent applications would be a violation of the company’s IPR, which is untrue as patent applications are not defensible until they are granted. The letter used this assertion to encourage seed companies interested in germplasm listed to request non-exclusive licenses in order to use the claimed technology.” – Paulina Jenney, "A Guide to Seed Intellectual Property Rights"

“Process Example: Beginning

QUOTES *starred indicates most likely to use*

“Today, just four companies control more than 60% of proprietary seeds worldwide.” - Paulina Jenney, "A Guide to Seed Intellectual Property Rights”

“In 1996 Via Campesina, a world-wide peasant, pastoralist, and fishers federation, launched a global call for food sovereignty—the human right of all people to healthy, culturally appropriate, sustainably grown food, and the right of communities to determine their own food systems.” – Eric Holt-Giménez and Raj Patel, “Food Rebellions!”
I then drafted all of the text I might incorporate on the panel.

The article “A Guide to Seed Intellectual Property Rights” by Paulina Jenney outlines the confusing and contradictory nature of seed patents and the creation of an oligopoly in the seed market resulting from the production of seed patents and genetic modification, powerfully stating “Today, just four companies control more than 60% of proprietary seeds worldwide” (Jenney). This is confusing because seeds by their very nature defy patenting, as they reproduce on their own, leading to many small seed holders becoming fearful of planting seeds that might lead to retribution from major seed companies who claim to “own” certain seeds and even certain traits. Jenney exemplifies this issue with the following scenario: “German chemical company BASF sent out a letter to regional seed companies in the United States that made broad claims about plant varieties and genetic traits covered by their patents... The letter warned recipients, some of whom had never even purchased BASF seed, that the unauthorized use of ‘germplasm covered by one or more of claims’ would be a violation of its intellectual property rights. Further, the letter claims that using the traits in the listed pending patent applications would be a violation of the company’s IPR, which is untrue as patent applications are not defensible until they are granted...” – Paulina Jenney

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY
The book “Food Rebellion: Forging Food Sovereignty to Solve the Global Food Crisis” by Eric Holt-Giménez and Raj Patel was published in 2009 and discusses the global food crisis at the time, pointing out that hunger is almost entirely a social problem and has been manufactured by companies motivated by profit above all. They discuss the Green Revolution, saying “Though credited for saving the world from hunger, the Green Revolution led to the monopolization of seed and chemical inputs by Northern companies, the loss of 90% of the South’s agricultural biodiversity, the global shift to an oil-based agricultural economy, and the displacement of millions of peasants to fragile hilltops, shrinking forests, and urban slums” (Holt-Giménez and Patel 24). In fact, the Green Revolution caused as much if not more hunger in the world as it claimed to solve.

Still, even with these disheartening realities of corporate greed and increasing injustice, much is being done to push for seed and food sovereignty and justice. La Via Campesina, for example, has been doing incredible work in these areas since 1993, organizing countless protests and holding membership in 81 countries around the world. More and more research is being done on sustainable organic farming methods, and it has been found that a return to these methods (as proven by a 2007 study by University of Michigan researchers, who compared alternative and conventional agriculture in 293 examples from 91 studies [Holt-Giménez and Patel 107]) can produce just as much if not more food as we are currently producing, with a much more positive impact on people and the planet. Food Policy Councils are popping up around the country to advocate for food justice (including one right here in Washtenaw County!). There is much more work to be done, but the movement for seed and food sovereignty and justice is strong and proves that we have the power to change our circumstances.
Seed Sovereignty

The thesis: ‘Seed Sovereignty: Proprietary Seed Sovereignty to Solve the Global Food Crisis’ by Eric Holt-Gimenez and Raj Patel was published in 2009 and discovered the global food crisis at the time, pointing out that hunger is closely linked to a societal problem and not necessarily a problem of scarcity of food. The World Food Programme, unable to match the demand for food, and the underperformance of traditional seed systems has led to the development of a new model of seed systems called ‘Seed Sovereignty’.

Gold Revolution

The modernization of agriculture, based on the industrialization of farm input, occurring in the mid-20th century

Useful Terms

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Termed by La Via Campesina in 1996, the human right of all people to healthy, culturally appropriate, sustainably grown food, and the right of communities to determine their own food systems.

GREEN REVOLUTION

The modernization of agriculture, based on the industrialization of farm input, occurring in the mid-20th century

Process Example: Mock-Ups

Following guidance from SJ’s exhibit visioning, I mocked up the panels in Canva. As you can see, it ended up being really dense and text-heavy! After these mockups, we pivoted our exhibit design to include three panels for these “Theme Explorations” instead of the one panel we initially planned for to allow more space for images and readability.
03. **Difficulties**

The things I struggled with through the process!
This was hard.
The Struggle Bus

Anxiety
Is this “allowed?”

Thinking
So much time just figuring things out!

Timing
Everything takes at least twice as long as I expect.

Concision
This is an exhibit, not a research paper.

Brain Fog
Intense creative work – what a challenge!

Balance
Negotiating rest with myself while I still have so much to do!
However!
This is by far the most fulfilling work I have ever done. To be able to take part in putting something tangible together to show other people for years to come is immeasurably rewarding.

The team. Is. AMAZING!!! It has been an absolute joy and pleasure to work with everyone; you are all so so talented and skilled and have taught me so much.
Recommendations

04.

What else!
Longer program time - longitudinal hours allotment
  - An exhibit is a lot to plan in 3 months! Having more flexibility in program “ending” times might be beneficial.

More networking/connecting to library staff and university resources
  - More entrenched mentor and/or program-facilitated connections (like meet and greets/coffee chats) considering the impact of internships on career development and the importance of networking within that – both connecting to librarians within U-M and also connecting with relevant people outside of U-M
  - More cohort bonding opportunities → What are other people up to? Consider monthly cohort lunches, biweekly Zooms, etc. This would help in building continuity and connection across projects!
Thanks!

Questions? Comments? Concerns?
creutz@umich.edu

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