

Response to Consultation Paper: Growing Esteem Information Futures
Commission: By Carmela Baranowska

I am writing this response as a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne, a Human Rights Scholarship holder and a documentary filmmaker and writer with over 15 years experience working in conflict and post-conflict countries including Burma, East Timor, Afghanistan and West Papua.

When I was working in East Timor in 1999, filming the last six months of the Indonesian occupation, I saw East Timorese university students proudly organising their small, one room "English Language Centre" at the University of East Timor. They were both the students and the librarians. The centre became a place of refuge and comfort from the Indonesian military and its proxies, the militia. When they burnt that down too, I saw one of the student-librarians sobbing uncontrollably, almost as if a part of him had also been destroyed.

My vision for the future of "Scholarly Information in a Digital Age" is that it should be closely linked to a human rights agenda. This may involve establishing a special collection. And it could also mean embarking on more study and research in how the university community can look outward to the South East Asian region.

At the University of Melbourne we are in a unique position. Our university has human rights scholarships for postgraduate students, a seminar series for postgraduates working in human rights and a Human Rights Forum. There are also countless academics, researchers and students at both undergraduate and postgraduate level working in this area.

On a more personal note I would like to encourage more discussion into the idea of the "digital library". In East Timor, for example, the "Living Memory Project" , as part of the South-East Asia Digital Library, interviews and films former political prisoners (www.sea.lib.niu.edu). These short films, financed by a consortium of North American universities, are available online. The inspiration is Stephen Spielberg's "Shoah" project documenting holocaust survivors.

While these two archives are linked to memory, history and survival I can also envision films incorporating other areas including development studies and economic history.

The idea of a digital library is an excellent way of beginning a dialogue based on understanding, knowledge and connectedness. It is not only about what we can

teach “them” but what we can learn about our neighbours – and ultimately, about ourselves.

If you'd like to discuss these ideas further you can contact me: cbaranowska@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au or at the VCA Graduate School, University of Melbourne, 234 St Kilda Road, Southbank.

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