Decentering Settler Practices In Academic Repositories

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INTRODUCTION

When we imagine academic libraries and archival repositories, we as librarians and many patrons, usually do not think of these spaces as dehumanizing institutions. Traditionally academia and libraries have been viewed as spheres of objectivity, yet like any institution, it is critical that we call attention to how repositors support colonial practices and structures. Higher education's mission is to support student achievement from all backgrounds. One way to assist with this is bias-replacement strategies.

I intend to call attention to how academic archives through traditional archival approaches can decenter settler perspectives and structural racism in their collections. Some of these approaches are: restorative language and finding aids, deliberate acquisition and seeking collections that document injustice, repositories that center those silenced as the collaborators and providing adequate access to these materials. I will explain why is imperative that on campus there should be a culture of inclusivity, safety and centering silenced voices. I will describe the role of archivists and archives and why this responsibility is especially valuable in helping to present truth and reconciliation through evidence and memory. I too will offer several case studies where archives have played a critical and tangible role in repairing harm through elevating voices silenced and stories previously hidden.

The documentation of silenced human experience has enduring relevance by providing evidence, which builds the scaffolding for memory and identity. This assists self-continuity, collective memory and sustains our institutional continuity and values. However imperfect archrival standards are: fonds, original order, description, province, they can be powerful tools for for accountability and transparency to lend voice to silenced whispers and expand thought. However limited individual archivists are with their unexamined paradigms, the ambitions of

academic repositories must be fairness, equity, self-exanimation, humility and scholarly

engagement for all stakeholders. Thinking critically about whiteness and sociocultural positivity

in academic archives helps dismantle the prevailing homogeneity. This paper teases out notions

that continually asserting neutrality through archival theory has ramifications that perpetuates

harm, violence and is antithetical to the values of academia and the archrival profession.

HISTORICAL AND CLASSICAL ARCHIVAL THOUGHT

The traditional assumption within the profession of archives and archival theory is a

reflexive view of being neutral stewards of history. This model of archival thought is codified in

the now historical standard, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*, published

by Dutch trio of Samuel Muller, Johan Feith, and Robert Fruin in 1898 and translated in English

in 1940. Ironically, these important archival theories are attributed to a singular Dutch

perspective from more than a century ago. So many of classic archival edicts spring from these

author's limited experiences and therefore relates to their assumptions and bias. These authors

often had exposure only to well-documented, stable administrations and manuscripts from a

colonial lens (Cook 1997). We now accept that these classical principals are narrow in our

contemporary systems of organization. The profession has pivoted its theory and practice

("original order", "provenance") in order to adapt to the changing landscape and core

professional principals.

Twenty years after, *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*, Hilary

Jenkinson published his treaties in, *The Sanctity of Evidence Proclaimed.* Within this once

canonical text of archival practices, we encounter the notion of archives as impartial evidence.

Jenkinson paints a portrait of the archivist as a guardian of this untainted evidence (Cook 1997):

The archivist exists in order to make other people's work possible, unknown people for the most part and working very possibly on lines equally unknown to him: some of them perhaps in the quite distant future and upon lines as yet unpredictable. His Creed, the Sanctity of Evidence; his Task, the Conservation of every scrap of Evidence attaching to the Documents committed to his charge; his Aim, to provide, without prejudice or afterthought, for all who wish to know the Means of Knowledge… The good Archivist is perhaps the most selfless devotee of Truth the modern world produces (Jenkinson 2003).

If records were a natural and simple untainted byproduct of administrative tasks or records could be seen as liberated from the record creator then any post-creation interference by the archivists would corrode the neutrality of the archives. The dilemma comes with necessary archival practices such as appraisal, something Jenkinson never could rectify exactly and of course, that the original creators were never neutral. As archivist and critic, Terry Cook, opined, "His spirited defense of the evidential character of records certainly remains inspirational to archivists everywhere". Yet, despite this aspirational edict, it no longer can hold weight to how contemporary archival repositories or archivists, rightfully view their power.

In the 1940s, American archivist, Theodore Roosevelt Schellenberg was active in dismantling these outdated archival theories and openly criticized Jenkinson, "I'm tired of having an old fossil cited to me as an authority in archival matter" (Rasmussen 2010). What Schellenberg prosed and was revolutionary at the time, was centering the archivist, rather than administrator. He proposed that the archivist be in command of crucial decision shaping and constructing records. He eschewed that notion of archival "purity" and advocated for a

compromise on the professional arrangement, description and acquisition of records, accepting that these processes inherently skew. (Cook 1997).

Building on this legacy of classical archival theory, today's archivists are debating alternative approaches which could reflect more globally the cultures that creates them. An early theorist in this bend towards reframing archivists' roles as a cultural preservers of societal memory was archivist Hans Booms. Booms' scholarly discussion on archivist as appraiser is seen here, "...sanctions public actions, essentially generates the socio-political process, and legitimizes political authority. Therefore, should not public opinion also legitimize archival appraisal? Could it also not provide the fundamental orientation for the process of archival appraisal?" (Booms 1987). Booms notably argued that society, rather than Jenkinson's administrators or Schellenberg's specialized professionals, generate the ethics and therefore, determines archival value and retention. Boom urges us that it is critical for archivists to, "orient themselves to the values of the records' contemporaries, for whose sake the records were created" (Booms 1987). From this framework, many in the profession started to consider how archives should reflect the core values of the culture around them, to help preserve more accurately and richly societal identity and memory. As Cook states, "Now, it may be said that archives are of the people, for the people, often even by the people." (Cook 1997).

The profession of archives is now less naive to assume the illusion of neutrality or purity when working with historical records. The very function of archives, repositories of memory and history means they serve: collective memory, the constitution of identity, and the creation of social space. Yet, there are many in the profession that are traditionalists, be it that is how they originally learned the professional principals or, this upholds their own unconscious bias and

privilege. This assumption works on the outdated principal that archivists are able to worry about the authenticity of records but not the truth of records.

Increasingly, scholars and thought leaders within the profession are calling for accountability and stressing neutrality has always been a myth and a dangerous device that prioritizes dominant culture, rather than reflecting accurately the humanity represented, or why the records were created or hidden to begin with. Professional trends are moving away from product-focused activity to a process-oriented activity. Archivists are no longer are seen as passive keepers of records, but now are active sculptures. The role of archivist as agent and influencer illustrates bias and is more easily recognized. What once was seen as immutable rules, are now a body of evolving ideas based around broader public policy. This leads us into the next discussion, how traditional archival practices have reinforced erasures, distortions of cultural memory, historical identity and now the responsibility to critically respond within the institutional setting,

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: THE HARM OF "NEAUTRALITY"

As we see in the classical analysis of some archival theory, the very act of selection and preservation, that is setting some records aside for their inherent lasting value, is not a neutral action. This is a powerful act in building public memory of societal events, or rather, what can be forgotten. Having historical records to point to, can be a potent corrective to the inaccuracies of the human mind or that which we have been trained to ignore.

One of the possibilities of archives then, is to embrace it's influence and to equitably employ it. Our challenge is to, look at the harm institutional practices have rendered and to have a more open conversation on erasure and institutionalized dehumanization of BIPOC histories,

tracing this legacy through enslaved people, Jim Crow and modern-day police brutality. When we are open to the notion that objectivity is impossible to achieve, we can see more clearly this rhetoric is built to steer conversation away from accountability and reinforce of practices that uphold the status quo.

One simply has to examine the conventions of census and labeling: "Many traditional notions of what types of primary source materials should be collected and from what sectors of the population source materials should be solicited encouraged an elitist approach to writing history, an approach that in effect ignored the history of blacks and other minorities, women, working people and the poor" (Quinn 1977). The relationship to documentation, records and power is typified in anthropologist Claude Lévi- Strauss's summery of these ideas: "The only phenomena which, always and in all parts of the world, seems to be linked with the appearance of writing… is the establishment of hierarchical societies, consisting of masters and slaves, and where one part of the population is made to work for the other part…. it seems quite clear it was connected first and foremost with power: it was used for inventories, catalogues, censuses, laws and instructions to keep check on material possessions or on human beings, it is evidence of the power exercised by some men over other men and over worldly possessions." (Lévi-Strauss 1999). Indeed, the very notion of cataloging, arranging, labeling, describing, processing can been connected to securing colonial power structures. Historian, Carollyn Steedman made this connection of archives to upholding dominate power, "The European archive came into being in order to solidify and memorialize first monarchical, and then state power" (Steedman 1999).

This power has very real implications then to how history is told and invented. With the exploitation of public record, it is not too farfetched to see the link to many kinds of BIPOC exploitation, and a plan to exert influence on a social consciousness through what is made visible

or kept hidden. This is exemplified by black-American novelist Ralph Ellison as he draws our attention to structural inequalities, "Gradually he was recognized as the human factor placed outside the democratic master plan, a human 'natural' resource who, so that white men could become more human, was elected to undergo a process of institutionalized dehumanization." (Ellison 1995).

When confronted with these truths, we cannot deny how BIPOC lives are essential characters to the foundation of intuitions and nations and too there is a clear sense of an archival injustice, committed against black Americans. Yet, the contradictions remain knowing marginalized people are re-victimized through having their voices silenced, distorted and handled without consideration. Archivists are still debating whether an archival mission should remain institutional or be seen more broadly, as societal, to address larger cultural inequities. This sets up a false dichotomy. As Jimerson points out, "Collectively, as a profession, our mission is both. Individually, at the repository level, my response is: it depends. Some archives serve only a single institution. Others serve only a broader societal purpose. Many, server both purposes" (Jimmerson 2013). There should be no confusion that archives serve many missions, stake holders and a diversity within the profession. Yet, there is a distortional representation, which can be illustrated using just one academic repository as an example. According to University of Arizona, the Latinx, Black, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) community currently make up over 42% of the population but are only represented in 0-2% of known archival collections (Godoy 2021). This demonstrates archives as dominated by white narratives that promote white supremacy, settler colonialism, and dehumanizes Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). In this one case, historically, Arizona's BIPOC and Queer communities have been aggressively attacked by racist and

homophobic rhetoric and legislation. ASU BIPOC student's lives, what is allowed to be taught, even their family's ability to live in this country threatened. The tradition of pushing responsibility aside, distortion, exclusion and neglect within archives has the real consequences of violence, be it cultural, psychological or even physical. Who and how we memorialize people dictates how violence is enforced or modulated. If we tell the full historical records there would be less permissiveness for inaccurate narratives told on the television that allows violence by institutions on BIPOC lives. The legacy of "symbolic annihilation", a term archivist, Michelle Caswell uses to denote, when "mainstream media ignores, misrepresents, or marginalizes minoritized groups" (Caswell & Ramirez 2016), becomes within an archival context, erasure of historical events and atrocities. A natural consequence and sequence to symbolic annihilation is, of course, and tragically, actual annihilation. Such power in archives bares incredible responsibility

Given these recognitions, and that what we traditionally preserved is filled with gaps, silences and distortions of atrocities on lives mostly, less privileged, there is no ethical justification for claiming neutrality, ignoring inevitable bias, subjectivity and porous memory and perpetuating further harm. Archives exist in a politized world, therefore acknowledging this is simply accepting the condition we exist in. To continue work in the name of "neutrality" erases humanity and real people from the public record. Therefore, it is important too, to accept archives has a redemptive power when we shine light in dark corner, reimagine, reinterpret, restore our knowledge, for the potential to prevent injustice.

A CASE FOR THE POWER OF ARCHIVES

There are many examples that show the power of archives ability to disrupt and decenter settler paradigms from the speculative to the empirical, to oppose dominate ideology or exclusions and to find the "whispers", as Jeannette Bastian framed in her piece in, "Political Pressure and the Archival" (Bastian 2006). Bastian takes us through the histories of the African population in the West Indies and reminds us that, though the records retained were that of plantation owners, auctioneers, the government, the lives of the Africans exist in the records. If we know that power is exserted through archives, then there is power in making audible their whispers, naming them and refusing to normalize oppressive tactics of silence. These three case studies demonstrate the importance of elevating the whispers to a roar.

Norway's Forgotten Children

Post WWII Norway used archives to help illuminate discrimination of war children. These children were the offspring of Norwegian mothers and German occupied soldiers. The children of these unions who had traditional German names were changed to Norwegian and all documentation connected to their German fathers was concealed. As these children grew into adulthood, they requested their identities be revealed. The Norwegian government promised to support them in this, but instead impeded their requests, created new records to justify their actions and neglected the quest for truth. Rogue archivists broke the traditional "institutionalized silence" and exposed the government's wrongdoings, which culminated in legislative changes so the "war children" could finally learn their full identities.

The archivists made public the original Lebensborn Norwegian HQ records that had been covered up for political control. The Lebensborn Norwegian HQ records contained

incredibly valuable information. When a woman became pregnant with a German soldier, she and the assumed father individually answered questionnaires about themselves and their relationship, and information about the woman's health condition and race was collected and registered. This coverup was a means to manipulate biological records and keep people from receiving reparations. Without these records, and for them being shared by archivists some 40 years later, the Norwegian authorities would not have had access to any accumulated national register of war children, as Norwegian birth registration at this time was decentralized and no national registers were kept. The existence of this archive made it possible to identify the individual war children, to treat them as a specific social group and provide public restitution. This is a case for archivists to confront their own histories as tools for the state and amplify the voices of those who are hidden. Archivist's role is to supply documentation, put this into societal and administrative context and to act as intermediaries between the public and the records themselves. ("Norwegian war children's work for Justice – the role of the archives," n.d.).

Japanese American Internment

The ugly truth of WWII Japanese interment on American soil was kept initially hidden from public purview, until several archivists made visible the records. The role of archivists in this, propelled a National movement for reparations. The impact of this in American archivist history was much later, a need for the archival profession to address our own compliancy and ability to be used as tools for injustice. In this specific case it was not professional archivists who exposed the reign of government abuse, but rather, untrained archival researchers, former camp internees. The fore leader in this was Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga. Yoshinaga began looking into the

records of the government agencies responsible for the internment that had been made public in the National Archives. While not formally trained as an archival researcher, she examined thousands of pages of documents and developed cross-referencing and indexing to follow the paper trail of evidence through collections at the National Archives. This research revealed a pattern of abuses by multiple agencies. This evidence formed the basis of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, which concluded that Japanese-American internment had been caused by, "race prejudice" and failure of political leadership. Japanese-Americans also began to establish their own repositories, where oral histories were collected, thus filling in the gaps of records and artifacts destroyed, shifting the distorted narrative, generating their own records and making audible their once muted whispers (Ulanoski 2006).

Bracero Justice Movement

Bracero referred to the guest-worker initiative for Mexicans to come to the United States between 1942-1964. The purpose for the workers was to make enough money to send back to their families for retirement and living. However, the workers were never told their wages were being garnished. It was not until years (early 2000's) later that the Bracero's discovered this, that they asked to be compensated and the Bracero Justice Movement (BJM) was founded.

The BJM recruited archivists to make their claim and the records found, substantiated their goals. This was also an opportunity for the Bracero's to re-define their own identities, not to be stigmatized, mislabeled as undocumented and criminal further. Archivists were tasked with creating a digital archives of Bracero documents and oral histories. This archives contributed to the national conversation about labor an immigration. The contemporary conversations of guest workers during the Bush administration, collided with the historical memory produced by

Bracero communities. Ultimately the archivist's and public historian's mediated memory, helped shape public collective memory and the ex-Bracero's to create a narrative that distinguished them from undocumented workers and recoup the pay they were owed. Unlike the individual memory, the collective memory highlighted the uniqueness of the guest worker experience y focusing on the dehumanizing practiced (Loza 2016).

While these case studies above are macro-scale for amplifying the hidden. distorted and neglected narratives, they fundamentally point to what the profession as a whole must contend with, even on a smaller scale: on campuses, departments, institutions. No matter the scale, we must be redress the ways archives are implicated in bias, racial violence, harm and acknowledge that our institutions are built upon structural racism.

ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN SUPPORTING: EQUITY DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ON CAMPUS

So, where does higher education and academic collections fit into the professional and self-reflexivity within the archive's community? For one, archives will always connect back to the mission and values of the instruction they are housed in. Campus libraries and their repositories function by building relationships with various stakeholders; admirative, faculty, students and alumni, primarily. One of the chief missions of all higher educational instructions is to, "promote achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access. Integral to furthering that mission is supporting efforts to create diverse and welcoming campus communities for all students." ("Advancing diversity and inclusion in Higher Education" n.d.). Higher education cannot honestly address these reasonability's without locating themselves in the narrative and legacy of systemic oppression through segregation, exclusion policies and often inadequate diversity polices.

For this paper's purposes I will just be looking at how fostering an environment of inclusion and diversity can close the equity gap, help students be seen and supported in their academic careers. One way we can look at a disparity is through quantitative studies. In 2019, the National Center for Education statistics found.

> The 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began their pursuit of a bachelor's degree at a 4-year degree-granting institution in fall 2010 was highest for Asian students (74 percent), followed by White students (64 percent), students of Two or more races (60 percent), Hispanic students (54 percent), Pacific Islander students (51 percent), Black students (40 percent), and American Indian/Alaska Native students (39 percent), ("Advancing diversity and inclusion in Higher Education" n.d.).

These numbers, while clinical, point to real human experience. Higher education is the key pathway in this country for social mobility ("The NCES Fast Facts Tool provides quick answers to many education questions" n.d.). There are so many solutions for how to level the playing field and create a more just environment that supports marginalized students and their graduation rates. But for this paper I will be drawing a bridge for how archives can help support the universities mission for promoting success and fostering inclusion for students.

Of course, education can be a catalysis for change and intuitional; policies also exacerbate social difficulties and be microcosms for structural exclusion; pushing students already othered to the margins, reinforcing their feelings of otherness in ways that connect back to the inequities of culture as a whole. As social policy scholar Nicole Kabalkin puts it, "The cumulative effect is that to disadvantaged students (colleges and universities) feel like a place that—both intentionally and unintentionally—works against affirming them as full members of

the college community", (Kabalkin 2021). In the 2016 study conducted by the Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, research found that students reported less discrimination or bias when they saw more representations of themselves, both in the student body, their professors, the research materials accessible to them, as well as the curriculum. Students also reported less feelings of institutional bias when they perceived a strong commitment to the diversity and inclusion through programing that promoted cultural competency, ("Advancing diversity and inclusion in Higher Education" n.d.).

One way for campuses to support cultural competency is to expose all students, not just BIPOC or black student, to alternative narratives and histories of BIPOC histories, which includes white settler exploitation. Cultural competency asks of us to have critical self-reflection first. In order to understand others, contemplate our social, ethical or historical location we must examine our intersectionality, both our privilege, responsibility, and marginality (Engseth 2018). University archives can be a loci for potential evidence, memory making, and identity. As Kabalkin reminds us

> *Achieving equity in higher education isn't simply a matter of removing barriers or closing opportunity gaps. It's also about creating a more socially relevant curriculum that acknowledges: the exclusion of voices, histories, achievements, traditions and perspectives from existing curricula, it is reconsidering canonical and noncanonical texts, documents, records and interpretations in light of the growth of knowledge about colonialism; slavery; the construction of race, gender, disability, class and age classifications; and earlier misuses of the social and natural sciences* (Kabalkin 2021).

An attractive option to support students in feeling seen, known, reflected in the curriculum, faculty and mission, is to ensure that our libraries and collections are culturally responsive, questioning master narratives and established canons, decentering dominant voices, interrogating normative hierarchies and integrating alternate epistemologies and perspectives. Universities can and should do more to consider how historical and current policies serve as barriers to diversity goals, intellectual freedom, student reported comfort, and ultimately to supporting and retention of diverse administrators, faculty and students for a welcoming campus.

A CALL FOR REPAIR, STEPS MOVING FORWARD

Now that we have acknowledged that archivists are not neutral or passive in the relationship of history, memory and identity, where does the academic archival community go from here in embracing their power and social and cultural responsibility? One way for archivists to possibly commit to the cultural responsibility in academic repositories, is through the lens they are most familiar; the expression of the archival mission and functions.

APPRASIAL

The first expression archivists identify with is appraisal (or campaigns of re-appraisal). Appraisal is "the process of determining the value and thus the disposition (retention or destruction), of records." (Hunter 2003). This crucial step is marked by the archivist determining enduring value of records and thus, what should be preserved for potential research value. When an archivist makes a judgment on this, we also determine what will be destroyed and thus, what is remembered and what is forgotten. When we then can put ourselves better in the Kantian notation of "universal sense", while making such choices, we are better in the position to

appraise based on enlarged thought, beyond our own subjective, private conditions and can make

a macro-analysis of appraisal. The very acknowledgement that we are limited in this, allows us

to ask others, and consider the needs of all stakeholder, both presently and future scholars,

students and public. Archivist's thus, might shift the theoretical framework of appraisal from

individual documents to the functions and process of these documents to be created for

generations to come.

ACQUISTION

Archivist's need to orient themselves in the value of the records and who they are created

for, not just the institution, though that is useful too. After appraisal an intuitional functional

analysis for acquisition is needed so that as Helen Sammuals states, one can, "intelligently

engage in a wider, interinstitutional 'documentation strategy' to locate related personal records

that might complement or supplement the institutional archives" (Brichford 2013). Another

important factor to consider in the acquisition process, for a more honest record, is not simply

blindly accessioning (or transferring records to preserve) alternative BIPOC narratives but

recognizing we must honor marginalized communities as rich and complex. Therefore, the

appraisal, and rea-appraisal process should take into consideration marginalized community

needs and nuance.

PRROVENANCE

This notion of "universal sense" or enlarged thought too can assist with the archival

arrangement theory of provenance. This is the classical tenant still used as a standard where the

records must not be intermingled with that of other record creators and the original records

creator and their judgments are privileged. In expanding this idea of "universal sense" we can attempt to understand the creator, creation of records and recognize the provenance of a diverse population. This means to assign provenance to those originally excluded from records creation, amplifying the "whispers", as Bastian instructs us. The names on ledgers, or in stories not given a voice can then be carried forward. This also acknowledges that many times the creators of the records were oppressors of people, rather than normalizing the harm they inflicted. Elevating these stories to a roar helps us move towards a more just record. We fail at this and enlarged thought when we succumb to tradition, limiting ideas and ignoring unchecked power.

CULTRUAL COMPETENCY

On way we can check our power is through cultural competency. As Ellen Engseth urges us to do from an archival lens, "Cultural competency begins with an awareness of self; this self-cultural analysis reveals biases and values, among other things." (Engseth 2016). When we begin to examine our own bias, privileges and marginalization we can know our intersectionality on the continuum. As Engseth motivates us:

> *Attitude begins with self-awareness and then extends to awareness of cultural heritage and context of others; self-assessment, and comfort with difference, are key elements, as are valuing identities and intersectionality. Knowledge in their context means librarians' awareness of systemic barriers affecting users and users' information-seeking requirements. Skills include cross-cultural communication abilities, building alternative roles for the librarian (such as ombudsperson or consultant), and honoring indigenous or existing information providers and system,* (Engseth 2018).

When we invest in cultural competency training within the archivist's profession, we can better recognize the role culture within our own lives and especially those we serve. This recognition is key to respecting diverse histories, needs and experiences. We, as librarians and academics, must integrate many cultures and user needs to provide services that enhance the lives of those in our community.

DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE/ FINDING AIDES

To circle back to archival theory, we cannot ignore a key process for influencing structures of power and enhancing the lives of community on an institutional and individual basis for an archivist is through descriptive language and finding aids. Archival description plays a tremendous role in representation of records, shaping how collections are discovered, navigated and understood. This of course, directly influences memory and identity through our preserved history. Archivists decide which names and subjects will be omitted or included to contextualize the subject(s) of the records. Thus, is it vital for archaists to consider what role their words have on perpetuating marginalization and archival erasure, who is harmed, how they can protect the academic values of equity and inclusion and how has colonialism affected the origins and records being described. This call for restoration of descriptive practices is considered reparative language.

To repair language, it may be appropriate to ask related communities about preferred terms and identities. For outdated and harmful language, it may also be useful to add footnotes to what was once used and now what is preferred. Some examples of non-inclusive language are: Asian, African American, Hispanic, man, woman, parent, Indian. Feedback made following Black Lives and Archives forums was that inclusive language first starts with how the person or

group self identifies. Second asking oneself if the person's races, gender, sexual ordination is necessary for understanding the story and if it is, explain why. Finally, be clear who you are speaking of, illuminate diversity within groups and be transparent on what the terminology means. If one is to analyze the non-inclusive language examples above, specifying BIPOC might be preferred, as so many people are not African in origin who are mislabeled as 'African American'. Making blanket statements like Arab too, can be harmful if speaking on Kurds, for example for example. Using Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) has been adopted by some within the community as opposed to 'Asian'. 'Hispanic' only refers to people of Spanish descent which many in the Latinx community are not. 'Latinx' is an inclusive term to avoid gendering. One should familiarize themselves with gender pronouns such as nonbinary, cisgender and transgender, if denoting any gender is important. The term 'parent' can seem benign, but even terms like this can be troublesome in historical context. For instance, many indigenous children were separated from their families and can be seen filmed with their adult caretakers instead, labeling them 'parent' could be offensive and hurtful. 'Indian' is widely known as a racist and outdated term; however different tribes embrace the term while others prefer 'indigenous', 'first nations' or more commonly their specific tribal name. What this points to is descriptors are complex grey areas that must be considered on a per-document basis with time and sensitivity and continuously re-evaluated ("Society of American Archivists Council Meeting" 2021). Pushing back against outdate descriptions centers archivists in their attempts to create descriptions that are respectful, accurate, and clear, while also supporting the institutional mission of equity.

As Jennifer Douglas states in her influential writing, "Towards a More Honest Description", archival action shapes records and one way to have more accountability in the descriptive practices is to use a more honest description of appraisal and other archival decisions:

> *By using the passive voice, archivists do not have to take responsibility for the acts of arrangement in which they engage but can instead maintain the illusion that they are not actively shaping the fonds. While the use of the passive voice in description might be attributed to convention, that is, to one archivist following a previous archivist's example, it might also be argued that by using the passive voice, archivists are able to allay or disguise any anxiety they might feel over the disturbances they inevitably provoke as they carry out their work. In cases where archivists are aware of and concerned about their impact on a fonds* (Douglas 2016).

This harkens back to our need to be self-aware, honest and accountable in the ways in which we influence and shape history. We are not passive. When we can be more honest with ourselves and our interpretive role, we can contextualize decisions made and help others understand themselves and how memory is created, preserved or destroyed. With self-accountability and writing, we can also have built-in checks and balances for ourselves to seek to be a voice for others through a "universal sense".

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS- HIRING

There are also some core academic library strategies and solutions outside of archival theory that should be employed. Decentering settler perspectives does not begin or end with archival description. In fact, one of the places we ought to start from is in the hiring process of archivists. Since whiteness is the comparative point of reference to so much within the world,

notably archives, then the cornerstone to decentering this hegemony is inclusion and hiring

BIPOC archivists. One has to look no further than professional archival statistics where we see

the majority of archivists are white (86%) and female (73%) according to the 2015 survey

conducted by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) ("The archivist's Task force on

Racism" 2021). We need to keep these facts close at hand to analyze the power structures that

dehumanize BIPOC communities. It does not end with inclusion in hiring but ensuring the

environment someone steps into supports their voice, contributions and retains these valuable

members. No matter how well intended a repository is, without having more diversity an

inclusion, the possibility of dialogue and affecting systemic change is limited. Closed spaces

alienates the community we have committed to serving and narrows the professions ability to

change.

ACCESS

But this begs the question, why do we not have as many BIPOC archivists within the

profession. It is not as simple as merely preference given to hiring BIPOC identified people we

need to recognize the link between the whiteness of the profession and access. Access to

knowledge about archives, experiencing archives and what archivists do, begins with exposure

educationally. A core institutional goal then within academic libraries should be to examine the

structural inequities and develop programs for BIPOC students of color. As the Pluralizing the

Archival Curriculum Group (PACG) suggested, it is essential to acknowledge the systemic

challenges involved in striving to diversify the profession, "diversifying the student population

without expanding pedagogy and practice perpetuates a lack of awareness and consideration of

the perspectives, behaviors, and needs of many different communities." (Caswell & Ramirez

2016). If archivists are committed to giving voice to the "whispers" then, professional obstacles such as, racism and white privilege need to be confronted, questioned from the root up and honest dialogues about how we perpetuate this in our own lives invited. Part of this is not replicating structural inequities in the access to archives and archival education. Access, or lack thereof, has been a gatekeeper to records and understanding of archives. Archivist as a profession must be committed to access, bringing them to students, explaining how archives can empower and tell their stories through engagement with historical sources and partnering with organizations, like PACG, that advocate for radical changes in the education system and promote scholarships for archival students of color.

COMMUNITY ARCHIVES

Finally, academic archives can think broadly towards partnerships with community. It is understandable after a legacy of colonial power; many would not trust intuitional archives to properly represent their story. Self-determination through community archives, with collaboration from intuitional archives that have resources and knowledge of archival practices, can help marginalized communities document their own heritage. Academic archives can foster community collaboration by partnering with community organizations too. This can help increase collections and more accurately document the communities often silenced. By partnering within those communities, the nuances, internalized prejudices and blind spots, can be acknowledged. For diversity and inclusion to be successful a full historical record on cultural issues often ignored or misunderstood must be privileged. A wonderful example of this is the. Community-Driven Archives (CDA) Initiative at Arizona State University, established in 2017. This archive fulfills ASU's mission for equity, while supporting various stakeholders, and for

Indigenous peoples it also allows them to control and maintain access to traditional knowledge. It has been a nexus to engage decolonial work in tribal communities (Godoy 2021)**.** As Nancy Godoy, Director of the Community-Driven Archives (CDA) states, " Seeing yourself in history, probably for the first time, and then reflecting on it leads to personal and collective healing. We humanize ourselves and others when we work with archives and share our stories, (Godoy 2021). Through ephemera material and audiovisual recordings, the Indigenous people on campus have reported a revitalization of Indigenous cultural customs and Indigenous languages. This has helped with identity, sovereignty and tolerance. It is the responsibility of each archive to be aware of diverse perspectives, even obscure ones, to be truly in collaboration and striving for inclusion, equity and diversity.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This paper supports the idea that the problem is not politicizing archives, rather it is the acknowledgment that archives have always been politized and centers of power within larger systemic and intuitional spheres. Archives since their existence have been used as tools for the dominant powers who control how history is told, and thus our access and understanding of identity and collective memory. When we strip people of their inherited identities, the presumption of the concept of neutrality becomes corrupt.

Archivists must arch towards more an equitable and just record through accommodating all ideological perspective, histories and underrepresented voices within their collective holdings. The myth of neutrality within academic archives is a threat to the marginalized students and complex identities that the archives serves, and therefore a real threat to their lives.

In Howard Zinn's address to the Society of American Archivists annual conference, Zinn urged archivists to reconsider neutrality as a proxy to professionalism;

> *The archivist, even more than the historian and the political scientist, tends to be scrupulous about his neutrality, and to see his job as a technical job, free from the nasty world of political interest: a job of collecting, sorting, preserving, making available, the records of the society. But I will stick by what I have said about other scholars; and argue that the archivist, in subtle ways, tends to perpetuate the political and economic status quo simply by going about his ordinary business. His supposed neutrality is, in other words, a fake. If so, the rebellion of the archivist against his normal role is not, as so many scholars fear, the politicizing of a neutral craft, but the humanizing of an inevitably political craft,* (Zinn, 1970).

In archives neutrality is a dangerous idea that prioritizes those who seek to control others. This paper outlined guidelines for archivists to reform their methods of identifying records for enduring value. There are also solutions on how to reassess or repair inequities in language, collaboratively and transparently. Yet too, there are calls for more systemic changes, such as disrupting whiteness and distorted histories through hiring practices and recruiting BIPOC archival students. Without giving space for more BIPOC people in roles of archival leadership, surface solutions only serve to reinforce social and political inequalities. In academic institutions too, the need to center BIPOC student's lived campus experiences and organizational efforts for diversity and inclusion are priority. There is a call for an ongoing process of learning, advocating, and understanding through cultural competency. This self-examination helps us to then look at where our students are coming from, not simply in the present but understanding their past. The challenges they experience to get to college, and how to help them navigate their

four, or more, years there. By accounting for racist and exclusionary practices, we can help support student outcome, both on campus, and their lives beyond. The first step in doing this is acknowledging that entrenched inequities pervade, and we must name them and push back against them. Within the sphere of archives on campus, choosing to give voice to alternative perspectives, giving voice to groups, providing access for educational opportunities and clearing a path for divergent views, is the correct path in dismantling harm. It is my hope, as we move through this era of reexamining our own myths and construction of whiteness, that archivists will bend towards expanded thought, spaces, access and raising up the whispers.

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