Rethinking Archives in the Indigenous Knowledge Ecosystem of the Global North

Emilio Aguas Rodríguez

International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (Giessen)

Emilio.Aguas-Rodriguez@gcsc.uni-giessen.de

English Abstract:

Decolonial Archival Futures offers a comprehensive exploration of the development of Indigenous knowledge management within a colonial past, culminating in a critical assessment of the imperative for new ethical management practices for Indigenous records. In the context of the decolonial turn, the text elucidates the multiple possibilities, constraints, and the key role of archival practices for and by Indigenous peoples.

Überdenken der Archive im Ökosystem des indigenen Wissens im globalen Norden

Abstract:

Decolonial Archival Futures bietet eine umfassende Untersuchung der Entwicklung des indigenen Wissensmanagements innerhalb der kolonialen Vergangenheit und gipfelt in einer kritischen Bewertung der Notwendigkeit neuer ethischer Verwaltungspraktiken für indigene Archive. Im Kontext des *decolonial Turns* beleuchtet der Text die vielfältigen Möglichkeiten, Einschränkungen und die Schlüsselrolle von Archivierungspraktiken für und durch indigene Völker.

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When a researcher, or any person in society, is concerned with their past and its implication for the present and possible futures, they turn to archival work and how archives work to make use of it. Many people are unaware that archives are open to the public and that most of the archival collections are not restricted, but if you are a person with a non-Western academic background, and your ways of seeing the world are different and you are part of a marginalized and excluded group, you may not find answers in these repositories of 'knowledge' and you may not want to approach them.

In order to change the aforementioned perceptions and the ways of doing and being from the archives, Krista McCracken and Skylee-Storm Hogan-Stacey, authors of *Decolonial Archival Futures*, propose a rethinking of the notion of the archive. They are not only archivists, but also dedicated researchers in the field of Indigenous archives and public history. Their expertise in community archives and heritage preservation, coupled with their commitment to developing and maintaining a trusting relationship with Indigenous communities, lends considerable credibility to their work.

The book consists of five chapters that show us the past, current state, and possible futures of archives and archival practice. In order to demonstrate the current problems of archives, the authors take a historiographical and diachronic approach to the cases of the nation-states of the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and how these countries have developed public policies and binding rules for the expansion and notion of archives, records management and knowledge management.

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In chapter one, the authors locate us in the colonial nature of archives and explain why their decision to analyze these nations as case studies of knowledge production and historical development goes beyond the common colonial and linguistic background of the British Empire. McCracken and Hogan-Stacey argue that Western archival practices have reinforced misconceptions of a vanished and long-forgotten Indigenous peoples, and remind us that archival systems are designed for people with power, such as rulers, governments, and associations. As has been established by Walter Benjamin in his seventh thesis on the concept of history, "[t]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (1942). Therefore illustrating that the truth and memories of those who have been subjugated by power tend to vanish if they are not protected, cared for, and transmitted.

In chapters two, three, and four, the authors take us into specific contexts, situations, and institutions in each of the four countries to see how archivists are facing a paradigm shift in their profession regarding the capacities of the archive for records management, specially the description and cataloguing of documents concerning ethnic 'minorities,' but also how communities and their archives are a source of change in the academic practice of information sciences. In this way we are introduced to the practices and guidelines of the Protocols for the Native American Archival Materials (PNAAM), the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library, Information and Resource Network (ATSILIRN) and TeTiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi). As Michelle Caswell has argued "there is no neutral in archives" ("Owning Critical Archival Studies: A Plea," UCLA (2016), p. 2), the active role of the archivists should therefore aim to have an impact on everyday practices in the archives as a transformation of public policies of data management, as the aforementioned entities do.

In chapters three and four, the authors emphasize community work, the evolution of the role of elders, oral history and traditions within Indigenous communities, dialogue, and the crucial practice of attentive listening by archivists trained in a Western academic perspective. Employing such an approach, they aim to expand the concept of archiving through participatory description. In these chapters, they confront what might be the cornerstones of archival science such as: provenance (p. 31), original order (p. 31), and description (p. 45),

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which are addressed through practical examples from social initiatives such as Mukurtu, an open source content management system designed around the needs of Indigenous communities and cultural protocols (p. 38).

However, McCracken and Hogan-Stacey only partially succeed in broadening the concept of the archive because of their extremely positivistic view of digitization, the Internet, and connectivity as tools and mechanisms that are the solution to infrastructure and public policy problems. While the work of civil society is impressive and the openness and receptiveness of academics in the information sciences is remarkable, they disregard that communities might not be interested in maintaining servers and learning how to code. This suggests that there is still a gap between community work to construct ethnic memories and digital solutions for archive management; perhaps the problem lies in codes and signs that are still embedded in a Western logic and do not allow us to look beyond it and move towards more community-oriented concepts, such as the notion of the 'archivo vivo' (living archive). An example of a living archive approach has been developed by the Dutch archivist Eric Ketelaar with the concept of archival activation ("Tacit Narratives: The Meanings of Archives," *Archival Science* 1 (2001), p. 131–141). He argues that each time a creator, an archivist or a user interacts, interrogates or interprets the documents, they are actively configured, so that each activation leaves its trace and contributes to unveiling the infinite meanings of the archive. It is perhaps in Ketelaar's invitation that we can find the way to connect living archives, such as the memories of elders, and new archival practices within the digital and archival turn.

While the authors have placed much emphasis on demonstrating processes of rapprochement and communication between Indigenous communities and institutions dedicated to 'knowledge' management (state archives mainly), the authors seem to neglect to thoroughly address the issue of technology dependence. The example of Mukurtu is valuable in this regard, as it discusses digital products created with a vision of Indigenous data sovereignty. However, a deeper exploration of the challenges that arise during the transition from documents to data would help to understand the risks and dangers of relying solely on digitization as a solution, also because in countries under development these solutions should

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be provided by how indigenous communities relate to their use of digital devices and the access to the goods and services that enable all these solutions provided by the authors.

The final chapter serves as a concise conclusion to an imagined future for Indigenous archives. McCracken and Hogan-Stacey discuss how new ways of knowing and new narratives of the past might emerge if Indigenous archives were not colonized or if transformative change occurred. They provide ten concise recommendations to progress toward these decolonial archival futures that consider issues such as:

> 1) Include decolonial archival frameworks in archival education; 2) archival work needs respectful relationships and recognize that relationship building is an ongoing process that takes time and effort; 3) decolonial archival work should be intergenerational; 4) respect ceremony and cultural protocols; 5) Indigenous right of _reply_, which "is the ability to challenge the depiction of individuals, objects or events presented in records; 6) acknowledge that multiple forms of provenance and ownership exist. (p. 64–66) Among others.

Finally, while the book's primary strength does not lie in illustrating the complex relationship between documents and data management, the authors' work brilliantly establishes a critical view of archives, archival science, and archivists. The book's clear and concise examples serve as a valuable resource, enabling readers from diverse geographical regions, particularly those in 'developing' contexts, to draw parallels and contrasts with practices observed in other community archives in relation to state archives that do not subscribe to a digitization-centric perspective on knowledge management. _Decolonial Archival Futures_ is a valuable read for anyone interested in the expansion and redefinition of knowledge production and management of Indigenous records, material and documental heritage; and offers a vision of the potential of new forms of knowledge and their return to their origins.