



“To go beyond”: towards a decolonial archival praxis

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My turn to state an equation: colonization = ‘thingification’. [para] I hear the storm. They talk to me about progress, about ‘achievements,’ diseases cured, improved standards of living. *I* am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary *possibilities* wiped out. [...p.51...] So the real problem, you say, is to return to them. No, I repeat. [...] For us, the problem is not to make a utopian and sterile attempt to repeat the past, but to go beyond.

- Aimé Césaire (1972/1955), p. 42–3, 51–2.

Decolonization “...fundamentally alters being, and transforms the spectator crushed to a nonessential state into a privileged actor...” Franz Fanon tells us in the opening pages of *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004/1961, p. 2), his searing indictment of the colonial and racist foundations of western civilization and a call to arms that provides revolutionary theory for the Afro-Asian liberation movements grounded in the Algerian experience. As Cabral (1980/1966) famously argued at the first Tricontinental Conference of the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America held in Havana, theory is necessary to any decolonization movement or liberation struggle. Decolonization, Fanon continues:

“[...] infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of people, with a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new humans. But such a creation cannot be attributed to a supernatural power: The ‘thing’ colonized becomes a human through the very process of liberation.” (Fanon 2004/1961, p.2).

Effective decolonization requires a radical transformation that can only be realized through a radical praxis. Since, as per Aimé Césaire’s equation,

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“colonization = “thingification””; since it is both material and psychological, both an ordering of space and the subjectivities of those inhabiting the (divided) space; since it relies on a racialism that systematically devalues the self-worth, culture and history of the colonized; then decolonization requires a liberatory praxis. Such a praxis centres the oppressed, those wretched of the earth, in the transformation of society, the articulation of new cultural forms, new ways of being, and new ways of ordering the world and its people. We begin with Fanon and the even earlier Césaire to gesture, even if only faintly, towards the deep histories and formidable genealogies of the theory and practice of decolonization, what Ghaddar theorized as the *Decolonial Archive* at a lecture delivered January 25, 2018 at the University of California Los Angeles’ Information Studies Department. The *Decolonial Archive* refers to those innumerable and intertwined material and immaterial traces left by anti-colonial figures and decolonial movements in the twentieth century around the globe (see also Harris 2002; Samuel 2013). This intellectual move seeks to give credit where credit is due, and to evoke the fiery spirit and defiance that imbues the earliest and, to this day, what we would argue are the best writings and thinking about decolonization. It is also a move that anchors this special issue of *Archival Science* on the theme, “To go beyond: towards a decolonial archival praxis”, within a radical tradition beyond liberal normative understandings of diversity and social justice as *inclusion, representation or recognition* towards more critical theories and practices that seek remedies necessitating social transformation rather than accommodation or incorporation (Caswell 2017; Caswell et al. 2017; Punzalan and Caswell 2016). Here, radical refers to a research and practice approach that goes to the root cause of social, cultural, economic and political phenomena; that reflects on and is transparent about the assumptions and positionalities of those producing and disseminating knowledge; and that is committed to dismantling structures and systems of oppression and domination. It is change-oriented and future-minded insofar as it helps us imagine both a different way of archiving and a different world to be archived. With this issue, we bring together scholarship that pushes our archival imaginaries and scholarly practices in new directions and encourages us to think more generously about the praxis of decolonization.

Written in the early years of the Third World Project (Lee 2010; Prashad 2007, 2012; Veric 2013) and in the midst of the Algerian War of Independence, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) was published one year after Fanon’s death, in the year before Algeria would realize what he fought so hard for, its political independence from French settler colonial rule. It would be another thirty plus years till the formal fall of the settler apartheid regime in South Africa, a cause also dear to the Pan-Africanist Fanon. His context, albeit very different than ours today, is in one regard similar; the settler colonial setting in which we write as editors of this special issue although in a North American rather than a North or South African context. As an intellectual and Third-world insurgent allied with the native struggle in Algeria against French colonialism, Fanon was deeply preoccupied with the violence necessary for western imperialism to function, and the inevitable binaries that colonial violence creates—between settler and native, white and black, European and African, French and Arab, Christian and Muslim, secular and religious, civilized and savage. We too write from within the boundaries of settler colonial states, as

intellectuals and activists situated on Turtle Island/North America, where the inevitable violence of the settler states has had a profound impact on how we practise and think about archiving as professionals and scholars. From the Dish with One Spoon lands (or Gdoo-naaganinaa/One Dish; see Simpson 2008) of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee Confederacies on which rests Tkoronto/Toronto to the ancestral territories of the Tongva peoples, Tovaangar/Los Angeles Basin and So. Channel Islands, these are the Indigenous lands where our research takes *place* (Tuck and McKenzie 2015). Speaking at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Information on 13 February 2008 at *Decolonization Through Storytelling*, Sto:lo Elder Lee Maracle explained that land acknowledgements are for Indigenous peoples, so they are not made to feel invisible on their own land. When you steal something, she said, you should at least leave a note. Land acknowledgements are the starting point of recognizing our relations with the Indigenous peoples and traditional caretakers of the lands where we live and work. It indicates a recognition of our responsibilities to, and commitment to working in alliance with, Indigenous sovereignty struggles.

Talking about western imperialism, colonialism and racism on Turtle Island/North America, as in any settler setting, requires a recognition of the Indigenous peoples and their relation to the land; alongside consideration of the histories and experiences of Black communities during slavery and the afterlife of slavery (Hartman 1997, 2007); and of immigrant, racialized and displaced communities and histories. In other words, it requires that we pay attention to those who are targeted by western imperial and racial systems for dispossession, criminalization and elimination. Attuned to the *place* of research, this special issue is a testament to the urgent necessity of anti-colonial research and knowledge that counters empire in and outside the western academy, particularly here on the Indigenous land on which we as editors of this special issue write. The occupation of this land and its settler colonization by western powers has for many centuries now imbricated the land and its peoples in western imperialism so that, as Jodi Byrd (2011) argues, contemporary USA-led imperialism expands itself through a transferable "Indianness" that facilitates acquisitions of lands, territories, bodies and resources around the world (see also Lowe 2015). As editors of this special issue who reside within North American settler society, we consider it imperative to articulate an archival praxis that is thoroughly anti-colonial and works towards decolonization in alignment and solidarity with Indigenous sovereignty movements. In line with Indigenous anti-colonial critiques, this special issue refuses to engage in "settler moves to innocence" such as those that work to alleviate settler guilt and safeguard settler futurities by appropriating and abstracting decolonization to such an extent that the question of structural transformation and land reclamation is disappeared altogether (Tuck and Wang 2015). Settler colonialism, as Wolfe (1998) famously argued, is a structure and not a finite event in time. And it is one where "contests for land can be—indeed, often are—contests for life" (Wolfe 2006, p. 387). Like Fanon, Tuck and Wang (2015) insist that decolonization is a process of radical transformation, and their now famous critique that "decolonization is not a metaphor" underscores that there can be no meaningful decolonization in a settler colonial context such as North America without the repatriation of land from the settler state and its reclamation by Indigenous peoples (Tuck and Yang 2012; see also Tuck 2011). Land and repatriation are

about ancestors and children, family and community, and the possibility of a future (see, for example, Mihesuah 2000). They are about “moving towards home”, as June Jordan (2007/1982) says:

...where my children will grow without horror
...where I can sit without grief without wailing aloud
for my loved ones.

Land and repatriation are the “free[dom] to roam across my country and to sing and to live with the land of my ancestors” (Watson 2005, p. 2). Land is the sacred and the otherwise. It is “that which binds” (Ibid, p. 19).

With this issue, we signal the urgency of challenging western imperial, colonial and racial oppression within our educational, academic and professional institutions and spaces; and the need to reflect on the structure and content of the records, collections and archives we steward, the principles we espouse, and our intellectual and professional identities. We are in a moment in which conversations about how western colonialism and imperialism, or global white domination, have and continue to shape the archival enterprise are at once urgently relevant and more challenging than ever. In Canada, the archival community continues to debate the Calls to Action outlined in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), many of which implicate archives, libraries and museums, and all of which require a decolonial reimagining of our professional infrastructures and practices (see, for example, Bak et al. 2017; Fraser and Todd 2016; Ghaddar 2016). In the USA, the ascendancy of a Trump administration has led to wide concern about the implications for archivists of this resurgence of a white nationalist rhetoric that proudly owns racism and heteropatriarchy as key pillars of the project of realizing an unabashed, reinvigorated and fortified white supremacist order. The apparent global resurgence of alt-right, neo-fascist and conservative movements alongside state-sanctioned violence against racialized and (neo)colonized people; the increased policing and militarization of our societies and global order alongside the endlessly expansive conflicts and hot zones flaring up across the Global South; the forced displacement of millions of people alongside the tightening of borders and surveillance—such developments have led to heightened concern about social justice in our field, and increasing interest in moving beyond liberal understandings of diversity and multiculturalism towards more critical and transformative theories and practices. An indication of this trend is the endorsement by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) Council of the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* at its 13 August 2018 meeting after a decade of debate and some controversy (Society of American Archivists 2018; see also First Nations Circle 2007; Punzalan and Caswell 2016, p. 32–33; Underhill 2006). Also of note is the adoption by the Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers (ACARM) of a position paper calling on Britain to return archives removed from British colonies on the eve of their independence to the relevant states (ACARM 2017; see also Lowry 2017). Passed unanimously at ACARM’s Annual General Meeting in Mexico City on 25 November 2017 held in tandem with the Congress of the International Council on Archives, the position paper was drafted by Dr. Mandy Banton, who was Principal Records

Specialist (Diplomatic and Colonial) at Britain's National Archives for many years and has written extensively on the topic (see, for example, Banton 2012, 2013).

Reflecting such interrelated preoccupations, our special issue pays attention to the material as well as symbolic aspects of decolonization, to repatriation as well as re-representation, to the dynamic between the local and the global, and to the various manifestations of colonization and decolonization at sites around the world. Yet many are the gaps, absences, elisions and silences in this issue. To name only a few notable elisions, we can point to the lack of Indigenous intellectuals contributing to the discussion of the settler contexts explored in this issue; of entire regions such as the Middle East that are in the throes of mass archival loss and heritage destruction; or of refugee and migrant communities whose lives often depend on the presence or absence of a record yet are considered so little in recordkeeping processes (Gilliland and Halilovich 2017). Our special issue, like much of archival studies scholarship in the English language, continues to be focused predominantly on English speaking and western sites. Indeed, we have a long way to go until we can go *beyond*.

Archival origins, colonial histories and the critical turn

Archives have long been considered a source for writing the history of the modern nation and—along with institutions and technologies such as the printing press, railway, census, map and museum—for the forging of a national identity and consciousness (Anderson 1991/1982). The story of a nation's origin, its history and myths, serve as a vital script for citizenship and guide citizens in understanding who does and does not belong to the nation, and their place in the world. They help people to come to know and experience themselves as part of a nation with a particular population, territory and history. Given the collusion of history writing, archives and nation-building, it should come as no surprise that archival studies trace its immediate history as a field, its 'origins' to the French Revolution considered vital to the development and spread of the modern concept of the nation-state. Charles Kecskemeti (1987, p. 412) goes so far as to announce that the "history of modern archives starts with the French Revolution". Indeed, it has become something of a dictum that the French Revolution was a watershed event in the history of archival administration and in the emergence of a modern archival profession ever since Ernest Posner's seminal essay on the topic was published in 1940 in the flagship journal of the Society of American Archivists, *The American Archivist*. In it, Posner acknowledges that the field is informed by and draws on much longer histories and traditions of recordkeeping and archiving, while arguing that during the French Revolution the first public, country-wide archival system was established in tandem with the new French nation-state. For the first time, there developed a state archives and records management system that was publicly accessible, cohesive, country-wide, and brought together both historical and contemporary records into a single national administrative regime. A mere 2 weeks after the fall of the Bastille, the new French Legislative Assembly passed an act dated 29 July 1789 that decreed the establishment of the *Assemblée Nationale* as a parliamentary archives office which then, with the decree of 24 June 1794 (7 Messidor II), becomes the central archives

of the emerging nation-state with the existing provincial archival repositories now subordinate to it and, under a law of 26 October 1796 (5 Brumaire V), these become Archives Départementales (Panitch 1996, p. 38). Along with the new nation-state and its new public archiving and recordkeeping administration came new ideas about the right of the public to access records because they helped protect citizen rights and hold the government to account, and new ideas about the responsibility of the nation-state for archives and historical records as part of the heritage and identity of the nation (O'Toole and Cox 2006, p. 50).

The English language archival studies literature tends to tell this 'origin' story about the field, which emphasizes the foundational connection between public governance, democratic accountability, national historiography, and the forging of a national or collective identity. Yet, crucially for our purposes, these national archives and the principles underpinning their management are always already colonial and imperial, always already white supremacist (Drake 2016; see also Dunbar 2006). By way of example, Haitian anthropologist and historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) complicates our understanding of this period in French history by bringing to our attention what professional archival 'origin' stories tend to obscure or elide—the colonial and imperial character of the pre and post-revolutionary French state and archives. The French Revolution was not contained within the borders of France or Europe but, rather, involved contest and war in global sites and colonial arenas such as Haiti, which is the subject of Trouillot's exposition. The archives, Trouillot explains, were crucial to the process of silencing the Haitian Revolution. He argues that silence is the result of uneven power in the production of history at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance). These four aspects of historical production feed on each other so that "any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process" (Trouillot 1995, p. 27). At its strongest, archival power is the power to decide what is and what is not a serious object of research, and, therefore, of mention or thought. That which is excluded becomes impossible to think or notice; the archival threshold can demarcate the limits of historical knowledge and thought itself (Spivak 1985a). To illustrate his point, Trouillot traces the silencing of the Haitian Revolution in western historiography through a complex process that starts, first, with the inability of the French intellectuals, military personnel, missionaries and chroniclers producing records at the time to see the revolution as a revolution because of their racist views of Haiti and republicanism. From there, the written record is produced such that only a particular way of talking about the revolution could emerge in the documentary heritage that would be gathered into archives and, from there, be used in the writing of history. To this day, centuries after it happened, the revolution remains largely unthinkable in the west.

Trouillot's account of the silencing of the Haitian Revolution in western historiography is part of a larger corpus of research that shows how France, in articulating and renewing its nationhood and identity, has to forget the challenges that anti-colonial revolt and insurgency in colonies such as Haiti and Algeria pose to the classic conceptions of French values and history (see, for example, Shepard 2006). More

specifically, France has to remember to forget the violence of its origins when creating and perpetuating celebratory rhetorics about the nation that depict it as progressive, egalitarian and committed to freedom. At every point, the archival and records systems and classification regimes of western states such as France and their colonial administrations served to reinforce and institutionalize categories of difference and logics of governance that led to western historical, legal and memory traditions that disavow and erase the violent origin of the western nation, and the racism and colonial predation at its core. As Trouillot (1995, p. 107) notes, the Haitian Revolution was so completely outside French racial and geographic understandings of what Haiti was, who could organize a revolution, and what geographies could be host to republicanism that “what happened in Haiti also contradicted most of what the West had told both itself and others about itself”. It is difficult if not impossible for the white supremacist order glossed over with terms such as the ‘west’ to consider places such as Haiti sites of political opposition or republican revolution. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods (2007, p. 4) point out that, “Black geographies disclose how racialized production of space is made possible in the explicit demarcation of the spaces of *les damné* [*de la terre*/the wretched of the earth] as invisible/forgettable at the same time as the invisible/forgettable is producing space—always, and in all sorts of ways”. Black geographies are bound up in racial-colonial systems that disappear them even as these systems shape, and are shaped, by them. In a Canadian context, for example, the erasure of Black geographies facilitates, along with other historical fabrications and forms of settler amnesia, the appropriation of the history of the Underground Railway into a narrative of national racial tolerance that presents Canada as a safe haven for Black people (McKittrick 2006).

The national archives model that emerged during the revolutionary period in France was spread to most other European countries in the decades to come, and all these new public archival institutions were rationalized and promoted “as bastions of citizen and state rights and laboratories of history” (MacNeil 2010, p. 8). They were created and designed to serve the needs and interests of law, administration and history. As new national public archives administrations were created alongside or soon after the establishment of the new European and neo-European nation states, the practices, manuals and scholarship of the archivists in these new national institutions would lay the conceptual, methodological and ideological foundations of the field known today as archival studies. Through various colonial and imperial processes, this model would spread from European and neo-European sites to colonial spaces and, after the Second World War when over 100 newly independent states were created through political decolonization across Africa and Asia, it would be further globalized and more widely adopted. At its core, the archival body of knowledge that emerged in this period and into the twentieth century was oriented towards the state and so deeply concerned with the needs and preoccupations of historians that archivists would come to be known as “handmaidens of history” (Cook 2009). Archivists would adopt claims about themselves as neutral custodians and about records as impartial sources of history that paralleled the western historians’ claims about their neutrality as scholars and the objective basis of the knowledge they produced about the past through records. Their conceptualizations of the nature and treatment of archives developed accordingly. In that regard, dominant notions of

archives and the archival profession have been indelibly shaped by western imperial and colonial ventures. These intertwined pursuits that began over five centuries ago continue to animate and structure every aspect of life on a global scale, as does the racism, heteropatriarchy, ableism and classism crucial to their operation.

A decolonial archival praxis begins from this understanding, that western colonialism, empire and race are much more pervasive aspects of our field than is usually considered. Indeed, they are inextricably enmeshed with all facets of how we think, talk and work in the field because they are defining features of modernity everywhere, including in neoliberal form today. Neoliberalism is just another gloss for empire anyway, for the expansion of capital through the colonization of bodies and lands, of hitherto unpenetrated regions and domains of life. In David Harvey's (2005) terms, neoliberalism is a counterrevolutionary political project devised in the 1960s and 1970s by the corporate capitalist elite to defend and consolidate their domination in the face of the rising tide of anti-colonial insurgency and labour revolt around the world. To give such little consideration to these colonial and imperial issues within the field entails a discursive move that erases the foundational role of white supremacy, violence, genocide, slavery, exploitation, conquest and plunder in the making of modern Europe and the entire edifice of the west. Hence, a decolonial archival praxis considers how archives emerge through multifaceted global processes and structures, and are embedded within larger discursive formations, in which multiple cultural sites, texts and contexts are active. It pays attention to the multifaceted and complex connections between our archival records, collections, institutions, and traditions, on the one hand, and the histories and contemporary structures of empire and white supremacy, on the other hand. By identifying and reflecting on what colonial legacies, ideas and practices require dismantling and transformation, we can push the archival field towards a deeper commitment to a decolonial praxis. In other words, we need an intellectual history of our profession that broadens the scope of our gaze outside of the west, and is committed to building solidarity with those impacted by the symbolic and material violence of archives. We need, in Edward Said's terms, a *contrapuntal* re-reading of our history and discourse that uncovers their complicities and involvement in the colonial process while revealing new and alternative narratives or voices through an exploration of their social and cultural realities (Said 1994, p. 59). A *contrapuntal* re-reading acknowledges that for every theme sounded by an imperial power, there were a multiplicity of answers and counter-themes sounded by subalterns. As Said recommends, we need to look back at the cultural archive to "reread it not univocally but *contrapuntally*" (1994, p. 51). Excavating the history of the other within the archival field means challenging ideas about record-ness and temporality so crucial to the content and pace of archival institutions and work, as Tonia Sutherland as well as Kim Christen and Jane Anderson call on us to do in their respective articles in this special issue. It means rethinking our notions of evidence when Indigenous nations are navigating settler bureaucracies and legal systems, as Maria Montenegro does in her article. And, among other things, it means a critical rethinking of the colonial origins of archives and collections to inform contemporary debates and contests over the ownership and custodianship of record, as the articles by Daniel Agostinho and James Lowry do. Indeed, attention to colonialism and decolonization compels

us to acknowledge, rethink and dismantle the theoretical foundations on which dominant western archival theory and practice is based.

With the archival turn that began in the mid-twentieth century and continues to expand across the academy, a rich multidisciplinary scholarship has explored how archives, as touchstones of memory and sources for the writing of history; as places of knowledge classification, organization and standardization; and as institutions from which these emanate to the rest of the world; are technologies of empire and state (Dourish and Mainwaring 2012; see also Manoff 2004). Reading the colonial archive(s) and the records of western imperial states against (for example, Guha 1988) and along (Stoler 2002) the grain has revealed the archival encounter as a fraught and ambivalent site for the co-constitution of the west and its many colonized, racialized others both within and outside European and neo-European borders (Bhabha 1994). Archives are part of the “worlding” of the Third world, of the process whereby the First world defined the Third or Fourth, whereby colonial and imperial actors from soldiers to statesmen to anthropologists to housewives to archivists constructed a representation of the colony—be it India or Iraq or Canada or Guatemala—that would become the reality of the colony (Spivak 1985b). In constructing its racial and colonized others, the First world defined itself. Even colonial archives that are an instrument for overseas rule serve to reaffirm national identity in the western metropolitan (Richards 1993). In settler nation states such as Canada and the USA, the archival classificatory boundaries usually found between the national and the colonial disappear altogether so that the records pertaining to Indigenous peoples are engulfed within the settler state archives (Ghaddar 2016). The systematic collecting of facts and information about colonized and racialized lands and people is a means of reassuring the imperial centre and metropolitan population of the mastery and superiority of the imperial state, while defining the metropolitan society in contrast to the many others of the empire. As Richards wryly observes, unifying an empire’s territories is not as easy as trying to unify records and manuscripts into the archive(s), although generally it proved as difficult for the British Empire, the focus of his analysis, to unify the knowledge it collected as it was to gain mastery over its many territories (Richards 1993, p. 4).

Scholarship on the colonial archive(s) has been a central component of subaltern studies and the postcolonial critique that work to deconstruct European cultural reason with the aim of the decolonization of representation and the west’s theory of the non-west (Prakash 1994; Scott 1999, pp. 12–13). They have also been concerned with affirming the agency of the colonized and racialized, and with addressing the need for the recuperation or reconstitution of a collective memory and historical consciousness that decentres Europe, and allows for the possibility of a future beyond the horizon of European progress (Chakrabarty 2000). Such inquiries have intersected with and been permeated by a range of politicalized bodies of knowledge such as critical race, feminist, disability/crib and queer studies that emphasize the gendered-sexed nature of race thinking and colonial systems, and their classist and ableist underpinnings. These served to ensure the global domination of straight able-bodied white men of property, they remind us. This theorizing has elucidated that race, gender, sexuality, ability and class are interlocking systems of oppression so that every western colonial enterprise or imperial venture, every nation-building

project or articulation of law and order, along racial lines is already anchored in structures that differentiate and govern people according to their ability, gender, sexuality and class (Combahee River Collective 1983/1977; Razack 1998, 2008). And, as Sherene Razack (2016/2011) reminds us, race thinking operates through liberal concepts such as multiculturalism, diversity, individualism, western feminism and human rights: “Behind these seemingly benign concepts is an unabashed structure of racial rule where difference becomes the reason to exclude”. Engaging these critiques and ideas compels a consideration of how a decolonial archival praxis must attend to the interlocking character of systems of oppression, and how the classificatory schemas underpinning societal and global hierarchies are grafted onto colonial formations.

Responding to and engaging the archival turn, scholars in archival studies began increasingly to talk about social justice in the latter parts of the twentieth century, and to explore themes of memory, human rights, identity, diversity and pluralism. Some have explored how colonial legacies and structures complicate claims over the ownership and custodianship of archives; raise questions about the necessity for archival repatriation and reclamation; call for more expansive notions of creatorship and provenance or a dispensation with provenance entirely; and encourage participatory and community-oriented archival approaches to key archival functions such as appraisal, access, and arrangement and description. While dominant western archival theory was developed largely to meet the needs of western imperial and colonial regimes, bureaucratic administration in formal institutional and organizational settings, and the western scholarly profession of history writing, this strand of archival scholarship has elaborated a more inclusive agenda for the field committed to addressing broader societal needs and reflecting on the ethics of archiving and recordkeeping. An especially sharp strand of literature on the archives-Indigenous nexus, averse to liberal frameworks of accommodation, inclusion and recognition that serve assimilationist and statist agendas, has sought to respond more directly to the multifaceted calls of Indigenous peoples for a decolonization of the archive(s). Shifting the terrain of the conversation from western frameworks towards Indigenous ones, this literature explores the potential of repatriation and reclamation processes to reshape the archives. It also calls for an openness to epistemic diversity, and a relinquishing of the grand archival narratives and progressive historiographies that would confine Indigenous peoples to a lost past, and consign them to a contemporary state of disappearance and irrelevance. Against this background, there have been calls over the last couple of years for more critical approaches that shift the still predominantly liberal ethos of the field towards a more radical approach, and that incorporates and is conversant with critical bodies of knowledge in the humanities and social sciences. Our special issue critiques and extends this multifarious scholarship while continuing to shift the archival conversation away from liberal frameworks and beginning to elaborate the need for and contours of a decolonial archival praxis that is historically-grounded and future-minded. The authors included in this special issue push us beyond the current state of archival studies, asking us to imagine a different future from the one to-be-realized by our current dominant trajectories. They ask us to rethink assumptions and taken-for-granted ideas and approaches in archival studies. And they call on us to consider alternative approaches that

engage and incorporate ideas, insights and critiques from the literature and bodies of knowledge outside our field.

Kimberly Christen and **Jane Anderson** open the special issue with a powerful challenge to the colonial—and colonizing—temporalities that dictate the pace of dominant archival collecting practices. Insisting, instead, on “temporal sovereignty”, the authors propose the potential of “slow archives” to build reciprocal and restorative relationships based on respect and trust. In a much-needed corrective to the current conversation about care ethics in libraries, archives and museums, Christen and Anderson add the “decolonial politics of refusal” to the web of mutual relationships catalyzed by archives, calling for archival logics, structures and practices that support Indigenous sovereignty and land reclamation. Their convincing call for a “slow archives movement” suggests new pathways ahead that dislodge us from our current stasis, propelling us into liberatory futures, with wide-reaching implications for archival theory and practice. Archivists and archival studies scholars will be wrestling with their provocations for decades to come.

Providing a contemporary example that illustrates how archival logics rooted in settler colonialism have dire material consequences on Indigenous communities, **María Montenegro** examines how evidence is legitimated in the US federal recognition process for tribal nations. By relying solely on dominant western notions of evidence that privilege the fixity of written records, the US Office of Federal Acknowledgment makes it virtually impossible for some tribal nations to prove their historic existence under the logics of settler colonialism. As Montenegro argues, the resulting dispossession of land and sovereignty enacts epistemic violence as genocidal erasure. She calls on archivists to support anti-colonial conceptions of evidence based on Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, histories and current realities.

Daniela Agostinho calls into question the ethics of digitization and access regarding Danish records of the colonial administration of St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John. The transformation of these records into digital data mirrors the racist logics of quantification, which, she argues, are inseparably built on colonial demarcations of who counts as human. Agostinho points towards a postcolonial critique of care as a framework for thinking through and against these digital colonial records, transforming inequitable power relations even as it centres them. By highlighting the entanglement of colonialism and care, the author reframes current ethics debates in archival studies and crucially demands a reckoning of past harms with present inequities.

Tonia Sutherland rethinks dominant western definitions of records through a skilful analysis of the African diasporic dance work of anthropologist, dancer and choreographer, Katherine Dunham. Recognizing gesture as document, Sutherland lays out a decolonial archival praxis based on an assertion of the record-ness of embodied and codified movements such as the Dunham Technique. By intervening on a foundational definition in the field, the author both exposes how anti-Black racism has been codified into archival praxis and gives us the language to discuss “embodied gestural records” alongside written and oral records. In so doing, Sutherland enables us to conceptualize a world of possibility for archives of the African diaspora.

James Lowry turns our attention to archives displaced by the forces of colonialism from their communities of origin. How, he asks, can recent theoretical developments in archival studies inform ongoing claims for the restitution of colonial records? Using the suppressed records of the Mau Mau movement in Kenya as a launching point, Lowry calls for the development of a critical theory and decolonial praxis for displaced archives. Thinking through and moving beyond legal and political solutions, the author examines the possibilities for—and limitations of—affect in resolving international disputes over the custody of colonial records.

We are delighted to conclude with a coda from **Jeannette Bastian**, without whose work we could not imagine this special issue. Drawing on the metaphor of her mother-in-law's porch, Bastian points to new futures for decolonization in archival theory and practice.

We hope this special issue challenges us to more thoroughly think through archival studies' colonial pasts and the continuation of colonialism in the archival present. Thinking through these articles together, we can imagine and enact decolonized archival approaches that challenge, resist, and redirect, and that work towards futures that *go beyond*.

[...] the complicated visual effigies in the archive have taken up residence within me like marvellous secret agents of love, sadness, healing, and heroism. Their shapes have insinuated themselves as armatures for carrying on, brave imaginaries for the mind and heart. They have become ethical reference points in the seeping disfigurements of trauma, rage, cruelty, and death. They speak figuratively. The echo of their voices is an epiphany of repair, assurance to lost children of their place in worlds to come.

- Patricia Williams (Aug 20, 2018)

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