



Decolonial ARCHIVAL FUTURES

KRISTA MCCrackEN AND SKYLEE-STORM HOGAN-STACEY
FOREWORD BY RICARDO L. FEJZALAY



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Reviewer:

Yingying Han, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, USA

Book Review Editors:

Travis L. Wagner, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, USA
Zachariah Motts, Iowa State University, USA

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I read this book on the recommendation of a professor to address a question that arose in my dissertation research design process regarding participatory description. My dissertation engages in participatory-description activities with participants who are Chinese immigrants and Chinese Americans. During my earlier fieldwork, I brought archival records about a Chinese immigrant woman detained at Angel Island to my community members. However, when designing the participatory-description research activities, I realized that most of the community members, Chinese immigrants who grew up in China, had limited knowledge about early 20th-century immigration history in the United States. Even though the archival records are about a “Chinese immigrant” and my participants are “Chinese immigrants,” the latter do not know much about the former’s information. This experience made me reconsider the nature of community-based participatory description. If the primary goal is to engage with a community to gather more accurate and appropriate information about archival records, my case may not be suitable for this approach. If there are other objectives of participatory description, what might they be? With these questions, I began reading *Decolonial Archival Futures* to explore potential answers, particularly because it includes a chapter on participatory archival description, covering case studies in America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

The authors of this book, Krista McCracken and Skylee-Storm Hogan-Stacey, are not only archivists and public historians 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 trustworthy relationship with Indigenous communities, lends significant credibility to their work. Notably, Hogan-Stacey, a descendant of the Mohawk Nation of Kahnawà:ke, brings extensive experience from her work with the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre, adding depth to the book with her cultural insights.

In Chapter One, the authors contextualize the colonial nature of archives in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand by describing how, in these western geographies, the histories and heritages of Indigenous nations were overly documented without consent. They posit that western archival practices reinforce the misconception that Indigenous people

are vanishing and long forgotten. McCracken and Hogan-Stacey remind us that archival systems are colonial in the sense that they are not designed and structured to facilitate accessibility for Indigenous communities but rather for people with power, such as rulers, governments, and associations.

The second chapter focuses on archival cultural protocols. In the United States, the First Archivist Circle developed the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials (PNAAM). Still, these recommendations initially faced significant resistance, symbolized by the Society of American Archivists' refusal to endorse them for eleven years. Similarly, in Canada, there was a noticeable silence from archival professionals towards the 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

While the authors explain Western archival professionals and organizations' resistance to Indigenous protocols, they do so only summarily. For example, in the case of the United States, the authors argue that resistance to PNAAM arose because it challenges western archival norms and colonial ethics. However, the authors could provide more detail on the politics surrounding the U.S.'s ultimate endorsement and response to Indigenous protocols. This added context would balance the scope of the chapter by focusing not just on the outcomes but also on the process of endorsement and the key stakeholders involved. For instance, identifying the main stakeholders opposing the protocols and how Indigenous communities and archivists have worked towards their implementation would enhance the discussion. While the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols for Libraries, Archives, and Information Services have been implemented in Australia, the authors also sharply highlight the ongoing lack of critical dialogue about Indigenous involvement in cultural heritage stewardship.

New Zealand is an exception because "protocol" is defined through the Treaty of Waitangi and the Public Records Act of 2005. The situation in New Zealand is particularly intriguing because, according to the authors, the interpretation of the Treaty of Waitangi varies depending on whether the language employed is English or Māori. In the English version, the articles claim British "sovereignty" over New Zealand, granting the British Crown exclusive rights to the sale of the lands, forests, and fisheries of the Māori. My reading of this is that the rights of Indigenous peoples to maintain, control, protect, and develop their cultural heritage and traditional knowledge—rights that are promised in protocols in many other countries—are not well guaranteed in New Zealand. However, the Māori people have a different interpretation of the Treaty in their own language, giving them more control over their culture and heritage. It would be great if the authors could put more effort into detailing the differences, how they influenced the Treaty's implementation, and whether the British intervened, considering the different interpretations of the Treaty in English and Māori.

In Chapter Three, the authors explain how concepts like "provenance," "respect des fonds," and "original order" are deeply rooted in colonial practices and perpetuate an extractive system by removing Indigenous knowledge from archival arrangement and description. In contrast, the authors introduce alternative approaches to understanding provenance, including societal provenance, parallel provenance, and community-driven models. In their description of these alternatives, they do not stop at the conceptual level but have done an excellent job listing and articulating examples of Indigenous people's cultural heritage practices. These practices challenge the Western creator-centered provenance organization, where, in most cases, the creators are colonizers, churches, and settler governments. Instead, the authors effectively articulate the needs of Indigenous people in terms of accessing and searching for Indigenous

materials and how to centralize these needs in provenance information within archival systems.

Chapter Four extensively discusses examples of participatory description in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The chapter emphasizes the importance of building and maintaining a trustworthy relationship with Indigenous peoples in this type of research. Through various examples, the authors explain how Indigenous worldviews and knowledge are reflected in their descriptions and how participatory descriptions could potentially empower Indigenous communities. For example, the authors discuss the Koorie Heritage Archive (KHA), where Koorie users and community members can “provide their own perspectives, context, and knowledge on government records about the community.” According to the authors, the KHA creates a space for the Koorie community to speak back to colonial records and offer interpretations based on their worldview and knowledge. It is an excellent resource for researchers like me who are interested in learning how to conduct community-based participatory description research.

However, chapter four could be further enriched if the authors showcased more complexities about description activities. In the examples provided, a community-based description often involves inviting Indigenous participants to share personal and place-based names in their language, along with the contexts and perspectives of the records. Yet, what if the descendants, even with archival documents, do not have much information and knowledge about their earlier generations? Does this make them less capable of contributing to archival description? I would argue no. As I questioned earlier, what are the objectives of participatory description beyond having a more accurate and contextual description from a community’s perspective? I argue that a participatory, democratic, and engaged relationship between archival practitioners and community members through description is as important, if not more so, than the final product of description. In this sense, participatory description is more a process than a product. As such, we should discuss the process of building and maintaining a sustainable relationship with marginalized communities more. In this chapter, the authors could include how trust and reciprocal relationship. As a reader, I expected the authors, who are experts in community-based scholars working with Indigenous communities, to offer a more thorough exploration of the participatory elements within the description process. By doing this, the authors would have significantly enhanced our nuanced understanding of community engagement in archival work, particularly regarding description. This could include how trust and reciprocal relationships are established before beginning the description, methods for identifying participants and understanding the diversity within Indigenous communities, exploring the types of knowledge provided by participants, and detailing the decision-making process for incorporating Indigenous peoples’ knowledge into current archival systems, including who makes these decisions. Participatory description is fundamentally about the process, and transparency regarding these procedural details is crucial.

Chapter Five serves as a strong and concise conclusion to an imagined future of 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 did happen. They provide ten solid recommendations to progress toward those imagined decolonial archival futures. For example, they argue that building engaged and participatory relationships and practicing intergenerational decolonial archival work are essential for transforming archival practices. These recommendations will guide future decolonial archival work with Indigenous people and various marginalized communities.

Decolonial Archival Futures is a small book that offers an insightful critique of the colonial nature of archives, archival scholarship, and archival practices in western geographies. It is an indispensable choice for those who want an overview of ways that decolonization of archival spaces benefits all heritage-based communities and collections. This book is also a good reference for researchers with specific interests in archival concepts like provenance or practices such as participatory description. Furthermore, the insights provided in *Decolonial Archival Futures* are relevant not only to archival researchers but also to information professionals engaged in community-based projects involving diverse communities and collections. As an archival scholar specializing in the study of Asian migrants and the preservation of Asian American heritage, I have found a wealth of new research concepts and motivations in McCracken and Hogan-Stacey's foundational work, which will significantly influence discussions within the fields of library and information science and archival studies on a global scale.

Yingying Han (yh17@illinois.edu) is a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Information Sciences at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Her research intersects digital preservation, critical archival studies, and community engagement. Ms. Han is writing her dissertation on community archives and archiving as agency: documenting Chinese/American experiences in the United States. She brings archival records related to Chinese Americans to the community through her dissertation work. Han critically engages with the Chinese community to build dialogues and understand their perspectives on the past, their lived experiences, and their vision for a more just future. Additionally, she actively engages with community members to understand their experiences with systemic oppression. Ms. Han seeks to contribute to LIS discourse by researching how community archives could serve (or fail to serve) as instruments of agency for transformative change.