

Article

# Community-Driven Archives: *Conocimiento*, Healing, and Justice

Nancy Liliana Godoy

## ABSTRACT

According to the Arizona Archives Matrix, the Latinx, Black, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) community currently make up over 42% of Arizona's population but are only represented in 0-2% of known archival collections. Arizona's archives are dominated by white narratives that promote white supremacy, settler colonialism, and dehumanizes Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) living on this land for centuries. This article will share parts of my autoethnography as a Queer Latinx and archivist who is addressing this inequity and erasure by establishing the Community-Driven Archives (CDA) Initiative at Arizona State University with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Since the project's inception, I embraced a love ethic that uses Gloria Anzaldúa's path to *conocimiento* as an epistemological framework for our CDA work. In their book *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating reflect on how *conocimiento*, a Spanish word for consciousness and knowledge, can be used to decolonize the mind, body, and soul of marginalized communities. I believe BIPOC and Queer community archivists experience the seven stages of *conocimiento* as they learn how to preserve their archives, reclaim their narratives, and build a collective memory that heals historical trauma. The undeniable truth is that decolonizing is an act of deep transformative love, courage, and reflection. A predominantly white profession will never decolonize archives because the foundation of most traditional repositories is rooted in white power and systemic racism. In order to truly liberate archives from oppressive theory and practice, there needs to be a redistribution of power and resources which grants marginalized people the authority to lead community-driven archives.

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## A LEGACY OF WHITE SUPREMACY

Arizona's archives are dominated by white narratives that romanticize a "wild west" history which promotes white supremacy and dehumanizes Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) living on this land before it was a state or territory. In the 19th and 20th centuries, archival repositories, led by white administrators and archivists, were "careless with historical records" and spent their resources competing against each other for "prestigious collections" that document white conservative heteronormative history.<sup>1</sup> An example of this is the Arizona Historical Society (AHS), which was established by an Act of the First Territorial Legislature on November 7, 1864. According to their mission statement, pioneers and politicians "realized they were making history and that it was important to preserve a record of their activities."<sup>2</sup> In 2021, one hundred fifty-seven years later, we see the harmful effects of settler colonialism as the majority of repositories have erased BIPOC communities from local history.

The exclusion of minoritized communities was first officially identified in 1983 when the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) funded a statewide assessment of collections. The report provided a brief history of Arizona's archives and revealed only ten topics to be sufficiently documented: "Anglo Pioneer Reminiscences," "Arizona History before 1912," "Business Records," "Crime and Notorious Personages of the Territorial Period," "Geronimo," "Indians," "Military," "Mining," "Tombstone-Wyatt Earp," and "Traditional Methods of Viewing Arizona History."<sup>3</sup> This inequity was ignored for almost three decades until Libby Coyner and Jonathan Pringle, a new generation of archivists, established the Arizona Archives Matrix Project.<sup>4</sup> In 2013, survey data showed that the Latinx, Black, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) community currently make up over 42% of Arizona's population but are only represented in 0-2% of known archival collections.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Linda A. Whitaker and Melanie I. Sturgeon, "The Arizona Summit: Tough Times in a Tough Land," *Journal of Western Archives* 1, no. 1 (2010): 4.

<sup>2</sup> "AHS History," Arizona Historical Society, accessed June 16, 2021, <https://arizonahistoricalsociety.org/ahs-history/>.

<sup>3</sup> John Irwin, *Preserving Arizona's Historical Records: The Final Report of the Arizona Historical Records Needs and Assessment Project, A Project of the Department of Library, Archives, and Public Records, and the Arizona Historical Records Advisory Board* (Phoenix, AZ: Department of Library, Archives, and Public Records, 1983), 58.

<sup>4</sup> Libby Coyner and Jonathan Pringle, "Metrics and Matrices: Surveying the Past to Create a Better Future," *The American Archivist* 77, no. 2 (2014): 459-488.

<sup>5</sup> "Collections by Subject," Arizona Archives Matrix, accessed June 16, 2021, <https://azarchivesmatrix.org/matrix-results/collectionsbysubject/>.

Historically, Arizona's BIPOC and Queer communities have been aggressively attacked by racist and homophobic rhetoric and legislation. More recently, the Latinx community was visibly targeted by Republican politicians with the passage of Arizona House Bill (HB) 2281 and Senate Bill (SB) 1070. In 2010, HB 2281 banned the teaching of Ethnic Studies, more specifically Mexican American Studies (MAS) in Tucson Unified School District. The MAS program taught high school students of all ethnic backgrounds about Latinx history while also placing an important emphasis on teachings that humanize students and promote critical thinking as well as community building. For example, every morning Curtis Acosta, a former MAS teacher, and students would recite a Mayan inspired poem:

*In Lak'Ech, Tu eres mi otro yo. You are my other me. Si te hago daño a ti, if I do harm to you, Me hago daño a mi mismo. I do harm to myself. Si te amo y respeto, If I love and respect you, Me amo y respeto yo. I love and respect myself.*<sup>6</sup>

SB 1070, known as the "show me your papers" bill, allowed Sheriff Joe Arpaio and police to further attack, racially profile, and criminalize undocumented immigrants and BIPOC communities. According to local scholars, Arizona politicians have tried to control and wound the minds and bodies of Indigenous and marginalized communities in order to disempower communities fighting for social justice and sovereignty. "These laws seek to destroy not only the spiritual success of a people, by denying awareness of the history and experiences of their collective struggle(s), they also serve to impede the academic and economic success of targeted communities."<sup>7</sup> In the wake of these bills and the current political climate, communities do not trust the police, government, and big institutions, including universities and archival repositories.

As an archivist and Queer Latinx, I am further marginalized and dehumanized by the archives field and academia. I am constantly told there is no room for my lived experiences and emotions and that I need to be more "scholarly" when sharing my thoughts, especially about equity and inclusion. As a response, I want to honor my heart by sharing how I feel when I examine the power structures that rob Black, Indigenous, People of Color and the Queer community of their humanity and voices. After almost ten years, I am extremely angry and frustrated with a profession who has never collectively acknowledged the legacy of erasure, violence, and genocide in the United States or their

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<sup>6</sup> Curtiz Acosta and Mir Asiya, "Empowering Young People to Be Critical thinkers: The Mexican American Studies Program in Tucson," *Voices in Urban Education* 34, no. Summer (2012): 15-26.

<sup>7</sup> Jessica A. Solyom and Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy, "Memento Mori: Policing the Minds and Bodies of Indigenous Latinas/os in Arizona," *California Western International Law Journal* 42, no. 2 (2012): 476.

role in this crime. In the past and today, archivists advocate for “professionalism” and “neutrality in record-keeping” while always centering whiteness as the superior or only narrative. They cling to “core values and a code of ethics” while remaining complacent and unbothered about the harassment and racism BIPOC and Queer archivists and communities face at work and in this country. On a daily basis, my heart aches as I deeply mourn the loss of archival material and stories our ancestors could have left behind. I frequently fall asleep with this heaviness in my chest, racing thoughts, and an urgency to preserve history.

Simultaneously, I find the comfort and strength to keep laying a foundation for change when my ancestors visit me, especially in dreams. My grandmother Norberta Godoy De Lucas, an Indigenous woman from Sierra Morones in Zacatecas, often comes to me with memories and lessons about planting and growing life. My father Gonzalo Godoy, during his brief periods of sobriety, was the first community archivist and historian in my life. On the days he feels nostalgic, he says I have my grandmother’s eyes and sees her determination in me as I follow my vision and path. Like Joy Harjo, I remember when I think about my grandmother that “she exists in me now, just as I will and already do within my grandchildren. No one ever truly dies. The desires of our hearts make a path. We create legacy with our thoughts and dreams.”<sup>8</sup> My heart desires justice, peace, and wholeness, for myself and the communities I belong to and serve, as I acknowledge the generational trauma and wounds that live in my lineage and body because of homophobia, sexism, and racism within Mexico and the United States.



Figure 1. My grandmother Norberta with her children in a corn field, circa 1955.

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<sup>8</sup> Joy Harjo, *Crazy Brave: A Memoir* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012) 149.

According to Audre Lorde, the BIPOC and Queer community is expected to prove their humanity to cisgender straight white people, while “the oppressors maintain their position and evade their responsibility for their own actions. There is a constant drain of energy which might be better used in redefining ourselves and devising realistic scenarios for altering the present and constructing the future.”<sup>9</sup> Instead of trying to change a profession who refuses to take action, I have used my energy and privilege in academia to create a community-driven archives initiative and framework that empowers community archivists as they reclaim their history. In other words, I envisioned and created an intergenerational and intersectional safe space where individuals, driven by justice and a deep love for themselves and their communities, can use and transform archival knowledge as they dismantle the power structure that have dehumanized them.

## NOW LET US SHIFT...CENTERING BIPOC AND QUEER COMMUNITIES

When I look at the archival literature and the evolution of social justice in the field, the work of white historians and archivists is often recognized and cited. In this paper, I want to center the voice and liberation work of BIPOC and Queer communities who have been leading efforts to preserve their own history for generations while our profession overlooks their theory and labor. More specifically, I want to honor the mind and visionary work of Gloria Anzaldúa, a Queer Chicana writer, activist, and teacher who transformed my life by introducing me to concepts like “*mestiza* consciousness,” *el mundo zurdo*, and *autohistoria*. For those interested in her work, the *Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* does an exceptional job in explaining thirty years of her life, writing, and activism.<sup>10</sup> When I applied for my current position at Arizona State University in 2012, the cover letter included a quote by Anzaldúa: “I want the freedom to carve and chisel my own face.”<sup>11</sup> As a Knowledge River scholar and daughter of a migrant farm worker, I shared how deeply committed I was to preserving Latinx history, especially the labor and stories of people like my father who give their bodies to the land to see it bloom. Anzaldúa’s work, which uses Indigenous and Aztec mythology and personal storytelling, has the power to stir my memory, imagination, and passion. She reminds me to breathe when I am scared and anxious and gives me the language to describe the loneliness and restlessness in my heart as a Queer Latinx in this profession, in academia, in this world.

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<sup>9</sup> Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 115.

<sup>10</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1999) 44.

In a recent publication, Dr. Michelle Caswell and Dr. Marika Cifor introduced the concept of “radical empathy” to the library and archives field. This theory draws from a feminist ethics of care approach that identifies archivists as caregivers who need to center the lived experiences of communities and build relationships.<sup>12</sup> In order to discourage a “white savior” complex that is already prevalent in our profession, I believe an Anzaldúa or BIPOC and Queer lens needs to be used when implementing this practice of radical empathy. This means all archivists need to move beyond merely *feeling* empathy to direct action that redistributes the power and resources needed for BIPOC and Queer communities to lead archival projects and storytelling. Truth be told, we are not victims but powerful sacred human beings who deserve more than this world offers. We witness and experience the worst of humanity on a daily basis, yet we survive because we are the living archive of generational wisdom, love, grief, and strength.

In their book *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating reflect on how *conocimiento*, a Spanish word for consciousness and knowledge, can be used to decolonize the mind, body, and soul of marginalized communities. Due to colonization and oppression, we forget that we carry history and ancestral knowledge within us, and it molds our identities and purpose in life. Since its inception, I embraced a love ethic that uses Gloria Anzaldúa’s path to *conocimiento* as an epistemological framework for our community-driven archives work. I believe people experience the seven stages of *conocimiento* as they learn how to preserve their archives and build a collective memory that heals historical trauma. According to Anzaldúa, “to be in *conocimiento* with another person or group is to share knowledge, pool resources, meet each other, compare liberation struggles and social movements’ histories, share how we confront institutional power, and process and heal wounds.” In her chapter “Now let us shift... the path of *conocimiento*... inner work, public acts,” Anzaldúa outlines the seven stages:

- *Arrebato*
- *Nepantla* state
- *Coatlicue* state
- *Compromiso*
- *Coyolxauhqui*
- Clash of Realities
- Spiritual Activism<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, “From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives,” *Archivaria* 81, no. 1 (2016): 23-43.

<sup>13</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, eds., *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (New York and London, UK: Routledge, 2002).

This journey queers conventional ways of knowing and healing by promoting a holistic approach that is non-binary and non-linear. All stages are connected and “occur concurrently, chronologically or not. Zigzagging from ignorance (*desconocimiento*) to awareness (*conocimiento*), in a day’s time you may go through all seven stages, though you may dwell in one for months.”<sup>14</sup>

### *Arrebato and Nepantla*

For decades, archivists have held archival theory and collections hostage as paternal gatekeepers. As a result, the vast majority of BIPOC and Queer communities, especially outside of academia, are not familiar with the traditional definition and function of a repository and do not recognize the historical value of their personal archives because of past exclusion. Since 2012, I have developed and implemented a series of community outreach and collection development strategies that introduce the Latinx and Queer community to archives and preservation work.<sup>15</sup> As the Associate Archivist of the Chicano/a Research Collection, Arizona’s largest Latinx archival collection, I invest my time and energy on building partnerships that support and benefit local communities.



Figure 2. Community archivists, like Carlos Dominguez, proudly bring their family archives to workshops in order to share their history and material with us. Carlos and his mother donated their family archives to ASU in 2019.

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<sup>14</sup> Anzaldúa and Keating, *This Bridge We Call Home*, 545.

<sup>15</sup> Nancy L. Godoy-Powell and Elizabeth G. Dunham, “21st Century Community Outreach and Collection Development: ASU Chicano/a Research Collection,” *Journal of Western Archives* 8, no. 1 (2017): 1-20.

Established in 2017 with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, ASU Library's Community-Driven Archives (CDA) Initiative is empowering community archivists as they reclaim and preserve their history for future generations.<sup>16</sup> Under the leadership of Project Archivist Alana Varner and myself, our CDA Initiative centers BIPOC and Queer lives, promotes life-long learning, and advocates for equal ownership of archives and shared stewardship responsibilities. We use the language "community-driven archives" and "community archivist" because it gives marginalized people the respect, authority, and power they deserve. We do not use "citizen archivist" because the term is triggering for communities who constantly face discrimination and violence for being immigrants or undocumented. Most importantly, we provide the tools needed for communities to lead current and future preservation projects with or without us.

During our Community History and Archives Workshop, people learn how to be a community archivist, making them agents of change in Arizona. In the span of two hours, individuals are introduced to archival theory, including appraisal, arrangement, and description. With hands on activities, they learn how to appraise their material for historical value, how to arrange and organize it by subject, date, or size, how to create a finding aid using Microsoft Word or Excel, and how to analyze a photograph by identifying people, places, and dates. In addition, they receive an Archive Starter Kit that contains a bilingual preservation brochure (Spanish and English), and archival supplies including an acid-free box, folders, mylar, and gloves. The workshop also offers affordable storage solutions, like Ziploc bags or plastic bins if they cannot afford additional archival supplies. In programs for Scanning and Oral History Days, attendees learn how to scan archival material, like letters and photographs, and how to conduct an oral history interview using StoryCenter Listening Stations or other technology. At these events, we have three to four scanning and listening stations, depending on the size of the location. Each station, managed by a library staff member or student worker, includes a laptop, flatbed scanner, and USB drives. Before we think about collection development and digital collections, we need to think about community building and introducing communities to technology and digital literacy skills. Throughout the day, we offer free scanning consultation and scan material for people as time permits. In order to create an approachable and welcoming environment, we provide free food and host events at various public locations, including community centers, bookstores, and public libraries.

I have witnessed the *arrebato*, or the "earthquake," the first stage of the *conocimiento* journey, when we begin our events by sharing the results of the Arizona Archives Matrix Project. According to Anzaldúa, the *arrebato* is "an awakening that causes

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<sup>16</sup> Emma Greguska and Amanda Goodman, "ASU Awarded Mellon Grant to Develop Community-Driven Archival Collections," *ASU News*, June 04, 2018, <https://asunow.asu.edu/20171011-arizona-impact-asu-awarded-mellon-grant-develop-community-driven-archival-collections>.



you to question who you are, what the world is about.”<sup>17</sup> As individuals realize they have been almost erased from local history, they are usually emotionally and mentally shaken. At the heart of our project is creating a safe space for people to process and share any feelings that emerge as a result of the *arrebato*. For example, at our first event, a Latinx community member spent fifteen minutes explaining how angry and disgusted she was with our university because of its role in gentrifying historically Black and Latinx neighborhoods. As I listened to her, I felt every bit of her anguish and realized she was not “attacking” the university or our project; rather she was speaking her truth and grieving a loss of memory and belonging. It is extremely important for archivists and academia to acknowledge and honor the grief that BIPOC and Queer communities carry in their souls and lineages.

Individuals enter the second stage, “*Nepantla* state,” when they begin to question their own beliefs and are torn between different directions. *Nepantla*, a Nahuatl word for “in-between space,” is a transitional position from which to see past physical and mental borders. It also allows people to “see through the fiction of the monoculture, the myth of the superiority of the white race.”<sup>18</sup> This stage encourages people to analyze their identity and culture, their place in this world, and how it intersects with others. This stage is painful and can occur more than once in a journey or lifetime. Those who successfully leave this stage and eventually embrace the final stage of spiritual activism become *Nepantleras*, or “threshold people, living within and among multiple worlds” who develop “perspective[s] from the cracks.”<sup>19</sup>

Before we expect BIPOC and Queer communities to donate material, we need to empower individuals and build strong relationships that cultivate mutual respect and trust. Our Community-Driven Archives Initiative moves beyond just focusing on collection development to ensuring that marginalized people are truly able to engage at all levels of the preservation process. We never pressure community members to donate their material to ASU or other repositories; however, when and if an individual wants to, their collection will be processed, thus decreasing backlogs for repositories. Unlike traditional repositories who only measure success by how many collections they acquire, we are measuring our success by how many people attend our events, how many new partnerships we create and sustain, and how many people or organizations are able to establish their own archives.

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<sup>17</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 125.

<sup>18</sup> Anzaldúa and Keating, *This Bridge We Call Home*, 549.

<sup>19</sup> AnaLouise Keating, “From Borderlands and New Mestizas to *Nepantlas* and *Nepantleras*: Anzaldúan Theories for Social Change,” *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 4, no. 3 (2006): 9.

### *Coatlicue State and Compromiso*

The third and fourth stages, *Coatlicue* state and *Compromiso* respectively, are a space where individuals can fall apart, feel emotions like depression and trauma, and accept or resist knowledge and wisdom. Anzaldúa uses the image of Coatlicue, an Aztec goddess of life and death to describe these stages as people try to make sense of their past and painful experiences. In Arizona, historical trauma has been transferred from generation to generation like traditions and resilience. At our Community-Driven Archives events, we meet people who are triggered while doing research or when they encounter a lack of documentation or traumatic events like slavery and rape, Japanese American WWII concentration camps, Indian boarding schools, gentrification and segregation, mass repatriation and deportations, racial profiling and police violence, and English-only policies and movements designed to rob people of their language.



Figure 3. Community History and Archives Workshop at Harmon Library with Black Family Genealogy and History Society of Phoenix.

At the same time, BIPOC and Queer organizations are leading community healing projects that embrace traditional holistic medicine and knowledge. Other community members are always on survival mode and do not have the privilege or insurance to process trauma with a therapist. Within my own family, I have seen individuals disconnect from their thoughts, feelings, and memories rather than confront the legacy of emotional and physical trauma. The women in my life, especially my mother and her mother, have experienced episodes of dissociation, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The men, including my father and brother, have fallen victims to alcoholism and a few

relatives have followed a path of violence because *machismo* has taught them this is the only acceptable form of release. I frequently see myself in my immigrant parents, in their tired minds and bodies, and in their courage and willingness to sacrifice everything for the survival of the next generation. As a Queer Latinx on my own healing journey, I am passionate about destigmatizing healing and therapy as we support community projects and truth telling.

As individuals learn how to preserve their archival material, they are entering and leaving the Coatlicue state and processing personal and collective memory. For example, in 2018, members from the Black Family Genealogy and History Society of Phoenix started to spontaneously sing “Lift Every Voice and Sing” as they learned to scan an old document with the lyrics.<sup>20</sup> Another example includes our student archivist Preetpal Gill, who shared the heartbreak of sorting through family photographs:

In between my fingertips is when I spend my nights dreaming of the streets of India. It is under the restless moon, when I think of my lost country. I hold the vibrancy of my mother’s home careful in my possession. I trace the outline of what I could feel and what I could not hold.<sup>21</sup>

When I read Preetpal’s words, it reminds me of my own humanity and triggers a desire within myself for home and belonging.

### *Coyolxauhqui* and Clash of Realities

During the fifth and sixth stages, *Coyolxauhqui* and Clash of Realities, people begin to remember that we are the original storytellers and keepers of memory. Even though settler colonialism and white supremacy reinforces the idea that BIPOC cultures and traditions are inferior or extinct, individuals start to develop personal narratives that speak to their truth and reality. Anzaldúa uses *Coyolxauhqui*, the Aztec moon goddess, as a “symbol for reconstruction and reframing, one that allows for putting the pieces together in a new way.”<sup>22</sup> Historically, BIPOC and Queer scholars and community archivists have led efforts to create community archives in repositories and academic institutions that do not fully support them or recognize the enormous worth of these

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<sup>20</sup> Written by James Weldon Johnson and John Rosamond Johnson at the turn of the twentieth century, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” is often referred to as the Black national anthem. For more information about the history of this song and its cultural significance, see Andrew R. Chow, “A History of the Newly Resurgent ‘Black National Anthem,’” *Time*, July 13, 2020, <https://time.com/5864238/black-national-anthem/>.

<sup>21</sup> Preetpal Gill, “I Will Find You in Photographs,” *ASU Library* (blog), January 14, 2019, <https://lib.asu.edu/communityarchives/news/I-Will-Find-You-Photographs-Preetpal-Gill>.

<sup>22</sup> Anzaldúa and Keating, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 20.

collections. For example, ASU Library's Chicano/a Research Collection only exists because of student activism in the 1970s and the forty years of advocacy work led by my predecessor Dr. Christine Marin. Similarly, community archivists like Dr. Maria Cotera, founder of the Chicana por mi Raza Digital Memory Project, inspire me to co-create the tools and resources needed to "reimagine the archive not as a static repository but as an active site of knowledge production that could realize the emancipatory potential of its central subject."<sup>23</sup>

Through workshops and critical reflection, our Community-Driven Archives team and community archivists are challenging the way historical records are created as they redefine what an archive is, what should be included in their archive, and who should have access. For instance, we have co-hosted Day of the Dead – *Día de los Muertos* events with Trans Queer Pueblo, an independent organization that cultivates leadership skills in LGBTQ+ migrants and people of color in Arizona. This holiday, traditionally celebrated by the Latinx community, allows people to remember and honor their ancestors by creating altars with offerings and family archives. During the events, people share their personal photos, ephemera, artifacts, and stories as they learn how to preserve. Within academia, we are bringing together student archivists, communities, and interdisciplinary partners with diverse knowledge sets in order to create an efficient and sustainable way to preserve non-traditional archives and narratives. In 2019, we began to collaborate with Grisha Coleman, Associate Professor in ASU's School of Arts, Media and Engineering, on a pilot project to develop a Movement Portrait Archives for BIPOC and Queer communities using mobile digital motion capture technology.

In addition, we engage community members of all ages and educational levels by digitizing and making publicly accessible BIPOC and Queer archival collections in ASU's Chicano/a Research Collection and Greater Arizona Collection. Our goal is to incorporate these important resources into K-12 curriculum and higher education. Sharing and teaching with rare historical resources promotes tolerance and empathy, allows communities to see themselves in a positive way, and builds the trust needed for future collaborations. In 2018, project archivist Alana Varner led student archivists and volunteers as they digitized parts of the Bj Bud Memorial Archives, Arizona's largest LGBTQ collection.<sup>24</sup> The CDA team added over 10,000 digital items to the ASU Digital Repository and will be working with community members to improve metadata. Our student archivist Claudio "CJ" Garcia shared how important this project is to him as a Queer Latinx:

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<sup>23</sup> Maria Cotera. "Invisibility Is an Unnatural Disaster': Feminist Archival Praxis After the Digital Turn," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 114, no. 4 (2015): 783.

<sup>24</sup> Emma Greguska and Kirsten Kraklio, "ASU Library Archivists Make Marginalized History Accessible to All," *ASU News*, November 1, 2018, <https://asunow.asu.edu/20181024-arizona-impact-asu-library-archivists-make-marginalized-history-accessible-all>.

I could only imagine how I might have been affected—how much loneliness and disconnection I might have been spared—if I had known about such a project in my own youth. While many queer youth, tragically, still lose their culture and their families, projects like this make it possible for them to find a new culture to connect to. Anyone with an internet connection can quickly find themselves immersed in a rich history of defiance and resilience, inspiring them to be themselves.<sup>25</sup>



Figure 4. ASU student archivists (from left to right, Victoria Perez Carranza, Preetpal Gill, and Claudio Garcia) who helped digitize Bj Bud Memorial Archives.

Among our CDA teams, we use the phrase “archive glow” to describe the feeling of deep connection between archives, memory, and community. On the days I feel drained or question the worth of my tenderness in a world that values cruelty, I think about the archive glow, all the people I have met, and that we are spiritually connected now. I remember the eyes of a Queer elder who cried tears of joy when he saw a scanned photo of his partner who passed away from AIDS. I remember the warm hugs I have received from community members who are so thankful that we are preserving their

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<sup>25</sup> Claudio Garcia, “Humanizing Queer History in the Archives,” *ASU Library* (blog), October 16, 2018, <https://lib.asu.edu/communityarchives/news/Humanizing-Queer-History-Archives-Claudio-Garcia>.

stories. I remember the cautious excitement and smiles of youth and adults who receive archive starter kits and quickly fill them with their own archives.

## Spiritual Activism

At the final stage of *conocimiento*, an individual embraces “spiritual activism” and becomes a *Nepantlera*. After deep reflection and learning, they have the tools to confront historical trauma and empower their communities. I believe our Community-Driven Archives Initiative is creating an active site that generates the growth of community archivists and future generations of healers. Exemplary of *Nepantlera* is Irma Payan, a retired Latinx teacher, who attended our first event in 2015 and now teaches others how to preserve their archival material. Irma shares, “I’m not sure how, but I have had the fortune of being the legacy keeper of photos and articles from my mom, school, and church. I am still captivated by the untold story of family and history.”<sup>26</sup> Based on collected data, 98% of individuals want to be included in Arizona history and feel prepared to be community archivists after attending our events. Qualitative data shows people are attending because there is an urgency to preserve history. As one community member describes, “I have photos, letters, and objects. Some of them are degrading. No one will know I existed because I’m the last in my branch of the family tree. It would be nice for our people to know about us and our contributions to the world.”

My decolonized mind and spirit finally see my purpose in this world and that my ancestors have waited for someone like me who is gentle and brave enough to break cycles of pain and injustice. I have spent the majority of my life alone and scared until I started to see the power of my love, my voice, my story, and community archives. Today, I am a passionate *Nepantlera*, a memory healer who has gone through the *conocimiento* process several times: when I stopped suppressing my queerness and came out to my religious family; when my broken heart grieved the loss of romantic relationships and friendships; when I gave birth to my son Nico and started healing my mother wound because he deserves more than generational grief as his inheritance. Each journey lasted a few months or years as I moved from stage to stage in a non-linear way that was complex, painful, and beautiful. In 2016, I started a new journey when I felt an *arrebato* as I prepared my continuing appointment tenure dossier. After five years in academia, I acknowledged how I barely survived, my burnout and depression, as well as personal and historical trauma. The last few years I have moved back and forth between *Nepantla*, *Coatlicue* state, *Coyolxauhqui*, and spiritual activism as I heal with community and see my dreams coming true.

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<sup>26</sup> Irma Payan, “Why I Dig Deeper,” *ASU Library* (blog), May 3, 2018, <https://lib.asu.edu/communityarchives/news/Why-I-Dig-Deeper-Irma-Payan>.

As we engage with BIPOC and Queer communities and colleagues within the profession, I am reminded of the importance of intersectionality and solidarity. Like Anzaldúa, I believe we are “agents of awakening (conocimiento)” who “reveal how our cultures see reality and the world... model the transitions our cultures will go through, carry visions for our cultures, preparing them for solutions to conflicts and the healing of wounds.”<sup>27</sup> As a Queer Latinx, I have learned that our spiritual activism should always be rooted in collective care and learning, in dismantling white supremacy, in demanding Black liberation and reparations, and in defending Indigenous sovereignty and knowledge. Above all, I have learned that we need to acknowledge and change patterns of racism, homophobia, transphobia, all diseases and products of colonialism, within BIPOC and Queer communities. We need to uplift the voices and lived experiences of Black and Indigenous communities as well as individuals with multiple identities because they are further marginalized, silenced, and attacked.

According to the Arizona Archives Matrix Project, Indigenous history has been properly documented and is considered one of the top six preserved subjects in Arizona.<sup>28</sup> But when these collections are examined, they clearly document the perspective of white researchers who went into reservations to study communities or steal artifacts. In 2018, we started to engage and empower Indigenous communities that were not originally included in our grant project by supporting Alexander Soto, Director of ASU’s Labriola National American Indian Data Center, as he established a community-driven archives program. By 2019, ASU Library endorsed and adopted the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials.<sup>29</sup> This builds on the work conducted by archivists and librarians in northern Arizona with Indigenous communities.<sup>30</sup> Over the last few years, we have also worked with the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, more specifically their Meth/Suicide Prevention program managed by Bridget Bravo, who believes in community healing, *nau te inetene* or “together we heal.” At the annual Arizona Tribal Libraries Digital Inclusion Summit, we have met and collaborated with local library staff like Nicole Umayam, a Digital Inclusion Librarian, and Melissa Rave, a Salt River Tribal Librarian. It has been a tremendous honor to dream and build alongside all of these advocates as well as Marshall Shore, Dr. Jamie Lee, Founder of Arizona Queer Archives at the University of Arizona, and Jessica Salow and Charmaine Bonner, current CDA archivists.

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<sup>27</sup> Anzaldúa and Keating, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 83.

<sup>28</sup> “Native American Collections,” Arizona Archives Matrix, accessed June 16, 2021, <https://azarchivesmatrix.org/matrix-results/top-subjects/nativeamerican>.

<sup>29</sup> “Protocols for Native American Archival Materials,” First Archivist Circle, April 9, 2007, <http://www2.nau.edu/libnap-p/protocols.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Naomi Bishop, Jonathan Pringle, and Carissa Tsosie, “Connecting Cline Library with Tribal Communities: A Case Study,” *Collection Management* 42, no. 3-4 (2017): 240-255.

When I reflect on BIPOC and Queer solidarity, I think about our unique stories and cultures as well as our collective memory and resistance. In order to survive and exist in this country, our communities have always assembled and led social justice movements in environments that are extremely violent and spiritually toxic. With the blessings of our ancestors and support of our communities, our CDA teams are now collectively and strategically preserving the past as we manifest a liberated future. At ASU, I have dedicated the last ten years of my life to building a sacred queer home and collective. A place that rejects this world, especially white colonial constructs that dehumanize, and allows our communities to implement radical acts of love, rest, and decolonizing. When we are triggered by injustice, violence, and erasure, my colleagues, students, and I center our feelings, personal stories and ancestral knowledge. We remind each other to be present, to be gentle, to be patient with our minds and bodies as we process the waves of personal and generational trauma. We give each other the permission to be soft, vulnerable, and publicly grieve the things previous generations have not. Above all, we celebrate our collective strength and inspire each other to live and speak our truth especially when we face barriers in this profession and academia.

## REDISTRIBUTION OF POWER AND RESOURCES

In Arizona and the United States, archival erasure has led to systemic oppression that favors whiteness, heterosexuality, and conservative rhetoric. As we analyze and discuss power structures that dehumanize BIPOC communities, we need to acknowledge that the majority of archivists are white (86%) and female (73%) according to a 2015 survey conducted by the Society of American Archivists (SAA).<sup>31</sup> Almost ten years ago, this was clearly obvious when I attended my first conference as a young professional and felt very unwelcomed, especially when two white women demanded to see my name badge because “I looked lost and out of place”. For self-preservation, I avoided SAA conferences and the profession for many years until I agreed to be on a Diversity Forum panel in 2017.

Inspired by fellow archivist Mario Ramirez and his examination of whiteness, I have identified four personalities I have encountered so far in my career.<sup>32</sup> One is the proud racist archivist who makes ignorant statements like “that communist didn’t deserve to be included in Arizona history” when talking about Cesar Chavez, a Latinx civil rights and labor leader. These archivists have a deep desire to control memory and space because they know how powerful it is. The second is the archivist who is “colorblind” and

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<sup>31</sup> “SAA Employment Survey Data Now Available,” Society of American Archivists, last modified June 16, 2015, <https://www2.archivists.org/news/2015/saa-employment-survey-data-now-available>.

<sup>32</sup> Mario H. Ramirez, “Being Assumed Not to Be: A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperative,” *The American Archivist* 78, no. 2 (2015): 343.



believes archives should “remain neutral.” They are passive about the legacy of white supremacy because they are numb to reality and do not see how they have benefited from a system that has dehumanized others. When they are asked to confront this issue and engage in conversation about racism, they feel “white guilt” or exhibit “white fragility.”

The third is the “liberal” archivist who supports equity and inclusion initiatives because it makes them feel “woke” but they quickly develop a “white savior” complex that feeds their ego and further silences BIPOC and Queer voices. Since 2012, I have witnessed an eagerness to use “progressive” terms like “cultural competence” or “decolonizing” with no real action, only empty promises that mean nothing to me or the communities I serve. I have seen white colleagues use vital funds on events that help them reach their yearly outreach quota instead of thinking about strategy and community needs. Before receiving a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, I was constantly mentally and physically exhausted because I struggled to find the resources to establish the Community-Driven Archives Initiative since it was not a priority for my department or the university. Furthermore, I regularly experience the anger of white people who accuse me of discrimination because I respectfully point out that they need to relinquish control and allow BIPOC archivists and communities to lead projects that focus on community archives or healing work.

Finally, I have encountered a few archivists, like Alana Varner, who constantly reflect on their white privilege, genuinely listen to communities, create safe spaces and projects based on community needs, and find the resources to follow through with promises and commitments. She is not a passive ally but a humble and strong advocate for social justice and an accomplice in dismantling white supremacy. As the project archivist of our Mellon grant, Varner builds real relationships that empower communities. Even if she makes mistakes along the way, she reflects on the situation, talks to community members, and tries again. She educates other white people and speaks up when entitled individuals complain about our project because they do not understand why we are using our resources to help BIPOC and Queer communities. Most importantly, she uses her privilege to amplify my voice as a Queer Latinx and the voices of marginalized communities.



Figure 5. ASU's Community-Driven Archives team in 2019. Back Row: Nancy Liliana Godoy, Heather Boardwell, Alana Varner, Myra Khan. Front Row: Denise Mosso Ruiz, Jessica Salow, Preetpal Gill. Not Photographed: Kenia Menchaca Lozano, Elise Daniells, and Kate Saunders.

In a recent publication, Lae'l Hughes-Watkins, a remarkable archivist and social justice advocate, asked our profession, "what would an example of a roadmap for a reparative archive look like that contains voices highlighting the intersectionality of race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, and all the voiceless communities that have been integral to the human experience?"<sup>33</sup> I believe our Community-Driven Archives Initiative, led by BIPOC and Queer professional archivists and community archivists, is an example of a reparative archive in action. Moving forward, all archivists, especially white archivists, need to reflect on their privilege and how they can support BIPOC and Queer communities as they reclaim their place in history and transform archives. In addition, white archivists and administrators need to hold their institutions accountable for the legacy of systemic racism, silence, and passiveness. Most importantly, repositories and academic institutions need to promote BIPOC and Queer archivists to leadership positions and financially support community-driven archives projects.

A predominantly white profession will never decolonize archives because the foundation of most traditional archives is rooted in white power and supremacy. This foundation continues to promote a hierarchy that deprives marginalized communities of

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<sup>33</sup> Lae'l Hughes-Watkins, "Moving Toward a Reparative Archive: A Roadmap for a Holistic Approach to Disrupting Homogenous Histories in Academic Repositories and Creating Inclusive Spaces for Marginalized Voices," *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 5, no. 1 (2018): 5.

dignity and sovereignty. In order to truly liberate archives from oppressive theory and practice, we need a redistribution of power and resources which grants marginalized people the authority to produce their own narratives. In *This Bridge Called My Back*, Anzaldúa reminds us of an undeniable truth which is that decolonizing is an act of deep transformative love, courage, and reflection. “We must be motivated by love in order to undertake change—love of self, love of people, love of life. Loving gives us the energy and compassion to act in the face of hardship; loving gives us the motivation to dream the life and work we want.”<sup>34</sup> Every morning, I wake up with a profound love in my heart as I make a spiritual promise to build bridges and activate healing circles that center the knowledge and resistance of communities. I daydream about our freedom and sacred journey back home to ourselves as we heal from the colonization of our minds, spirits, and bodies.

If you are a Black, Indigenous, person of color, and/or Queer, I recognize how bravely you survive the injustice and violence in this profession and world. Every day, we are silenced and tokenized, face aggression and discrimination, and experience heavy workloads and burnout while we serve as the moral compass of our institutions. We work for libraries and repositories who nurture institutional racism and lack the vision and leadership needed at an administrative level to allow a reparative archive to exist. When you read my words, I hope you see yourself, our collective power, and that we are the ones worthy of telling and preserving our stories. I hope you see how we can cultivate sacred and safe spaces that promote community-driven archives, solidarity, healing, and justice. We are the scars, the open wounds, and the medicine that will continue to free our ancestors and future generations by breaking cycles of trauma and erasure. Believe me when I say that I love you and our communities immensely and wholeheartedly. Remember to rest and dream with me. Love and heal with me. Resist and reclaim with me.

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<sup>34</sup> Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (New York: SUNY Press, 2015).

APPENDIX. POEM: HOME (or evidence) by Kate Saunders<sup>35</sup>

Sometimes a body can be  
a future genealogy, a tether  
enough to find each other.

Sometimes distance can be a house fire.  
Sometimes shame can be a house fire  
slow burning the attic that lives  
in your ribs.  
Sometimes safety also includes a flood,  
water damage.

Sometimes a chosen family can be  
an archival home,  
repository  
a keyword search  
lineage of 'here'.

All the places we go looking:  
A song  
An outfit  
A list  
A feeling  
Can be a story we belong to.  
A timbre of voice  
finding aid.

A gesture  
a desire to inherit.  
To keep safe  
a keepsake

A sacred place.  
The "please don't take this from me.  
let this stay,"  
remains.

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<sup>35</sup> Kate Saunders, "Final Reflection – Kate Saunders," *ASU Library Community Driven Archives Initiative News and Blog*, June 8, 2021, <https://lib.asu.edu/communityarchives/news/Final-Reflection-Kate-Saunders>. Poem reprinted with permission by the author.

A burial of resentment.  
Sometimes a name.

A movement  
a hymn  
a dance  
of all the quiet places.

A joy that lives in the same flesh as anger. All of this is housed here.

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